

EARLY NORTHWESTERN: WHAT STUDENTS STUDIED AND WHY

THE COLLEGE CURRICULUM FROM 1855 TO 1900 BY WILLIAM N. HAARLOW

When a backpage chart on changes in the curriculum (Spring 2002) brought a flurry of responses, we decided the subject was worth a closer look. After all, the history of the College can be told by highlighting curricular changes and evolving conceptions of what constitutes an educated individual. Some issues deep in Northwestern's past are remarkably similar to those hotly debated today. We are pleased to present this first of a three-part series.

Ten young men, required to be at least fifteen years of age, made up the first class at Northwestern when it opened on November 5, 1855. In that inaugural year the new university consisted entirely of what was to become the College of Arts and Sciences. The whole university fit into Old College Hall, the institution's sole building, situated among the oaks that dotted the low bluff overlooking Lake Michigan. Because only gentlemen, scholars, and ministers sought a college education (training for law, medicine, and business in those days came primarily via apprenticeship), fewer than two percent of Americans went to college at that time. College men—college women were extremely rare—experienced a curriculum concerned far more with the development of character and piety than with the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

CLASSICAL COURSE WAS THE "GOLD STANDARD"

Northwestern's original curriculum in the 1850s reflected the latest thinking on undergraduate education. Like other antebellum schools, Northwestern offered two courses of study: a classical course for the Bachelor of Arts and a scientific course for the Bachelor of Science. The classical course had been offered in North America since the founding of Harvard College in 1636. According to

historian Frederick Rudolph, the colonial curriculum was part medieval with its scholastic concerns, part Renaissance with its interest in producing a governing class and a gentlemanly refined culture, and part Reformation with its dedication to Protestant Christianity. During the 18th century the addition of belles lettres, modern languages, history, and especially the sciences increasingly crowded the classical study of Greek, Latin, and mathematics. By the early 19th century an ever-increasing number of subjects meant that important choices had to be made. Although the old classical—and prescribed—curriculum for the Bachelor of Arts had expanded, the trend could not continue unchecked. Gradually antebellum colleges and universities developed parallel programs that emphasized practical knowledge. Completion of these new scientific or "English" (vernacular) programs was recognized by a Bachelor of Science degree, but the classical curriculum remained the gold standard in higher education.

LITTLE CHOICE IN EARLY CURRICULUM

From 1855 until the 1880s students in the classical course at Northwestern studied a prescribed curriculum consisting of Greek, Latin, mathematics, physics, chemistry, anatomy, physiology, ancient history, natural history, political science, elocution, belles lettres, philology, aesthetics, and proofs of Christianity. Students concluded their four years with a capstone course in moral philosophy, usually taught by the college president, intended to demonstrate the unity of knowledge and God's designs. Initially, all these subjects were taught by five faculty members, headed by the Reverend Randolph Foster, President of Northwestern and professor of moral philosophy and logic, who held the highest degree





All Images: Northwestern University Archives

in the land: Doctor of Divinity.

GREEK AND LATIN BUILT CHARACTER

The famous Yale College Report of 1828 had argued that study of the classics provided both “the discipline” (pedagogy) and “the furniture” (subject matter) most appropriate for a gentleman citizen, irrespective of vocation. Antebellum faculty believed the mind had to be exercised, like a muscle. Latin and Greek were the languages of scholarship, of course. But learning to parse them in their written form was also beneficial because of its difficulty. The difficulty of the exercise meant that classical languages built character, like a coat and tie on a young boy. Reading and parsing were supplemented with oratory and elocution, which were developed through declamations, or student speeches, sometimes given in Greek or Latin, sometimes in the vernacular.

BACHELORS OF SCIENCE SIT IN THE BACK OF THE CHAPEL

The 1858 Circular of what was then called the “North-Western University” noted that the degree of Bachelor of Arts was conferred “only on those who complete the Classical Course.” The Scientific Course was thought inferior. Students seeking the Bachelor of Science degree at Northwestern studied French and German instead of Latin and Greek, as well as more mathematics and science. At this stage, the B.S. degree was perhaps more practical, and was initially offered in the United States as an accommodation to those who clamored for greater relevance in higher education. Yet when these courses had been introduced in the early 19th century, they did not command much respect from educators. Students who were studying for the B.S. at Yale, for example, had to sit in the back of the Chapel, behind the B.A. students, during daily prayer. B.S. students

at Northwestern were afforded greater regard, but as late as the 1870s the Catalog had to note that although “especial attention” was “given to practical knowledge” in the Scientific Course, pursuing that course was legitimate: “The old culture courses hold the first place in order of time; but the courses for the application of science are equally honorable.”

CHAPEL EVERY DAY AND TWICE ON SUNDAY

Pursuit of all branches of knowledge in the College was greatly enhanced in 1868 with the completion of University Hall, “a substantial and elegant edifice.” In addition to lecture halls, it housed a chemistry lab, rooms for various societies, a chapel, a library, and even its own museum of natural history. By this time the “College” was known as the Department of Science, Literature and the Arts. Central to all these pursuits was a dedication to Protestant Christianity. While the emphasis on religiosity may strike modern



TOP OF PAGE: OLD COLLEGE, NORTHWESTERN'S FIRST BUILDING, FACING SOUTH CIRCA 1874. ABOVE: THE SYLLABUS BOARD, CLASS OF 1889.

readers as quaint or at least extracurricular, in fact, most 19th century colleges, including Northwestern, cannot be understood outside of their deeply religious character and mission. The early curriculum at Northwestern reflected this dedication, as did its policies and publications. The 1866-67 Catalog noted that "devotional services are held daily in the University Chapel. All students are required to be present, and also attend public worship twice on Sabbath." While Northwestern's mission as a college was to add "luster" to the Methodist Church, the modus operandi of the university was pan-Protestant. A signal piece of evidence of the College's dedication to Christian ideals was that "students preparing for the Christian Ministry are admitted to instruction, without charge for tuition."

EVANSTON "FREE OF IMMORAL INFLUENCES"

In addition to prescribed chapel attendance and specific courses such as moral philosophy, proper moral character was developed by Northwestern's location and faculty. According to the 1872 Catalog, Evanston "is as free from immoral influences as any in the land; and nearness to the city of Chicago affords the advantages, without the moral dangers, of city life. The

high character of the people, churches of several denominations, and the social advantages, add much to the educational value of the University." Likewise, the faculty could be counted on by anxious parents to serve dutifully in loco parentis. The 1878 Report of the President noted that the faculty comprised "generally Christian men. We believe that the moral difference between the influence of the instructions of a man of deep religious convictions, and the instructions of a skeptical man, on the life and the character of the pupil is immense..."

WOMEN ADMITTED, EVENTUALLY BECOME HALF OF STUDENT BODY

In the decades following the Civil War, however, the old college curriculum and its philosophical assumptions were increasingly challenged, at Northwestern and across the country, by coeducation, public land-grant institutions, the German research model of university education (and its baby, the Ph.D.), and the introduction of the elective curriculum. Northern social proscriptions against women's education began to relax and Northwestern's trustees voted to admit women in 1869, although the number



of female students remained small. Then in 1873, a separate institution, the Evanston College for Ladies, presided over by Frances Willard, consolidated with Northwestern. With Willard as dean of the Women's College of Northwestern

University, coeducation on a significant scale became a reality. Further, education itself, gentility, and social status had always been part of the reason that a fortunate few women attended college in the antebellum era. During the 50 years after the war, social service, the feminization of elementary teaching and other job opportunities outside the home, such as working as a "typewriter," had become additional reasons that young women pursued higher education. By 1900 fully half of Northwestern's undergraduates were women.



research and professional emphases of the newly founded and expanded universities were inspired by German higher education ideals and fueled by philanthropic largess as well as increased public funding.

Both the land-grant institutions, made possible by the Morrill Act of Congress in 1862, and the newly emerging research universities gained acceptability in a society increasingly impressed by claims made for practicality, social service and scientific investigation provided by higher education. These changes eventually broadened the appeal of higher education in an American society that,

throughout much of the 19th century, had not considered higher education to be of much practical value. These changes also created a clash between curricula

ELECTIVES: A REVOLUTIONARY IDEA

The rise of the large public university, with its largely practical curriculum, brought challenges to the established collegiate order. The pure and applied

ABOVE: CLASS OF 1880 IN OLD OAK TREE. BELOW: AN ENGRAVING OF EVANSTON AND THE CAMPUS IN 1874. MOST PROMINENT BUILDING IS UNIVERSITY HALL.



RIGHT: THE MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY, ON THE TOP FLOOR OF UNIVERSITY HALL, ENHANCED INSTRUCTION IN THE EXPANDING SCIENCE CURRICULUM IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY.



with mostly prescribed courses and ones in which choice was encouraged.

Although the elective system had first appeared at Jefferson's University of Virginia in the 1820s, electivism was not widely accepted until the 1870s, under the promotion of Harvard president Charles W. Eliot. He believed that Harvard was doing American higher education a great service by allowing students to select some of their courses from a set of options, that such freedom was the mark of a true university, and that by relieving the student of curricular mandates, he or she would learn self-discipline. Reaction throughout higher education was swift. Most educators, led by President James McCosh of Princeton, vehemently opposed the idea. McCosh and others put forth the perennial arguments that electivism assumed a maturity that students did not possess, that students would avoid essential subjects not to their liking and, in the process, lose the unity of knowledge that colleges had always sought to provide.

At first the older ideal held sway at Northwestern. When the College changed its name to the College of Liberal Arts in 1880, Acting President Oliver Marcy suggested that "this change expresses a conviction of the Faculty in regard to the object for which this College should be maintained...liberal learning." It was a widespread belief in the older colleges, and Northwestern considered itself in this group by 1880, that practical skills were rightly attained through apprenticeship and on-the-job training, not learned pursuits. Marcy continued:

To teach the trades, to make artisans, engineers, book-keepers, merchants and farmers is not directly the purpose of this College. It contributes to this end,

indirectly, by developing the mind of the pupil, by giving him language, which is the greatest instrument of thought and expression, by making him acquainted with the laws of matter and the laws of mind, which every practical man must understand whether he be in the senate or in the shop, by training the logical faculties, exercising them vigorously in the deductive processes of mathematics and metaphysics, and in the inductive processes of the chemical and physical laboratories, and in psychology. Liberal learning trains the pupil for no one occupation in particular, but tends to make him a more successful man in any occupation than his uneducated fellow. Liberal learning differs from special or scientific learning so much in vogue at the present time in that it develops the whole man.

Many of Marcy's arguments in favor of a liberal education are still made today.

Marcy posited "a college of liberal arts should cultivate all the faculties" of the human mind: the intellectual, the moral, and the aesthetic. Although only a few elective choices were offered to upper-classmen, Marcy could rightly claim, "The scope of the College of Liberal Arts of the Northwestern University is much wider than the scope of any of the colleges in the country thirty years ago."

That wider scope meant that, while there was intense debate at colleges around the country about what constituted a proper college education, the old-style required curriculum with its emphasis on the discipline of the classics and the moral emphasis of its pieties was losing sway. Marcy was followed by Joseph



“LIBERAL LEARNING DIFFERS FROM SPECIAL OR SCIENTIFIC LEARNING SO MUCH IN VOGUE AT THE PRESENT TIME IN THAT IT DEVELOPS THE WHOLE MAN.”

—ACTING PRESIDENT OLIVER MARCY, 1880

Course of Study.	
FRESHMAN CLASS.	
FIRST TERM.	
<i>Greek.</i>	Homeri Ilias, (2 books)—Felton, or Owen. Prosely—Anthon.
	Antiquities, (weekly)—Eschenberg's Manual.
<i>Latin.</i>	Livius—Lincoln.
	Grammar—Zumpt, or Stoddard.
	Antiquities, (weekly)—Esch. Manual.
<i>Mathematics.</i>	Algebra, (to Binomial Theorem)—Loomis.
<i>History.</i>	Ancient, (semi-weekly)—Putz and Arnold.
SECOND TERM.	
<i>Greek.</i>	Hom. Ilias, (2 books.) Grammar—Crosby.
	Antiquities.
<i>Latin.</i>	Livius, (continued.)
	Grammar.
	Antiquities.
<i>Mathematics.</i>	Algebra, (completed.)
	Geometry, (commenced)—Loomis.
<i>History.</i>	Ancient, (semi-weekly.)
THIRD TERM.	
<i>Greek.</i>	Herodotus—Johnson.
	Testament, (weekly.)
	Antiquities, (weekly.)
	Grammar.

Cummings, Northwestern's last minister-president, who in 1883 began to introduce more electives—especially in history, the sciences, and German—at the expense of requirements in Greek and Latin.

GREEK NO LONGER AN ADMISSION REQUIREMENT

In 1890, at the age of thirty-seven, Henry Wade Rogers became president, and during the next 10 years Northwestern's curriculum began to enjoy significant growth. The manifestations of this change are numerous. In 1892 the College dropped Greek as an admission requirement. In 1895 college advisers, who acted effectively as major advisers, were introduced. Whereas the College of Liberal Arts offered only 41 courses in 1890, by 1900 fully 177 courses were offered, and almost

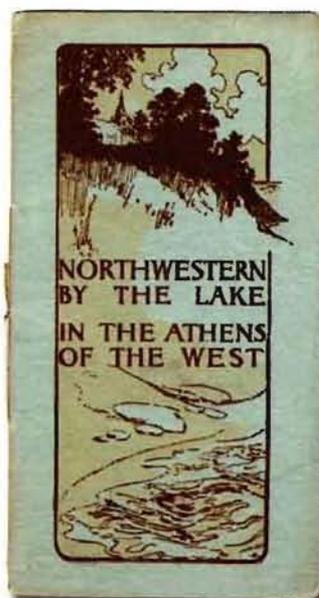
all of them were elective, including the courses in Christianity. Rogers did not take exception to religion, but he did want to move Northwestern in concert with changes being made by other leading universities.

THE MODERN NORTHWESTERN BEGINS TO EMERGE

By the time Rogers retired in 1900, Northwestern had begun to take the shape that would be recognizable to today's viewer. In 1901 a large banquet was held at the Auditorium Hotel in Chicago to celebrate the Fiftieth Anniversary of the signing of the University's charter. Acting Northwestern President Daniel Bonbright, who had been one of the original five faculty members in 1855, presided over the dinner. Of Northwestern's enormous progress Bonbright noted: "That every year more than two thousand young men and women gather to the University, in its various schools, to fit themselves for whatever they may find to be their work in after-life, is a tribute to the wisdom that founded the institution fifty years ago; it is a reward and incentive

also to those whom the good work of the founders has come as an inheritance and a trust."

Bonbright's speech marks the close of Northwestern's collegiate era. While the university, with the College of Liberal Arts at its core, moved into the twentieth century with a strong sense of its past, it was clear that the new century would bring great opportunities.

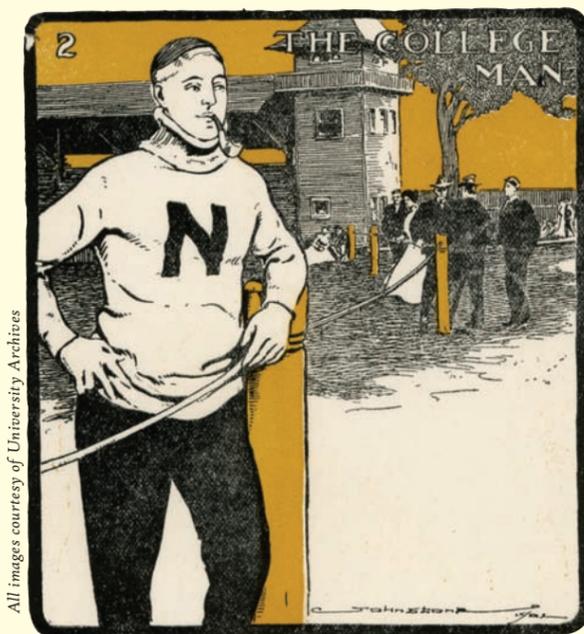


ABOVE LEFT: A PAGE FROM THE FIRST CURRICULUM GUIDE
ABOVE: BROCHURE FROM 1901 PROMOTING NORTHWESTERN

WHAT STUDENTS STUDIED AND WHY: PART TWO

THE COLLEGE CURRICULUM FROM 1900 TO 1950 BY WILLIAM N. HAARLOW

In 1931, Addison Hibbard, Dean of Northwestern's College of Liberal Arts, wrote that: "We must recognize that the College is entering upon its third stage of development. The first period, that of a simple curriculum consisting of 'logick,' 'rhetorick,' and the 'classicks' is gone; the second, that of a complicated curriculum offering almost complete freedom of electives, is passing...." Part One of this article (*Crosscurrents*, Spring 2004) recounted the growing freedom offered students in choosing their courses of study between 1854 and 1900. The story of the next half century tells a very different tale; of a period when monumental social change and political events, especially World Wars I and II, propelled an increasing propensity toward curricular prescription. Ironically, it was often in the name of promoting education for freedom—to secure the hard-won victories of the wars—that course options were increasingly restricted. To understand the paradox of the College's curriculum during its second fifty years, one must begin with the relative curricular liberty of the early 1900s.



All images courtesy of University Archives

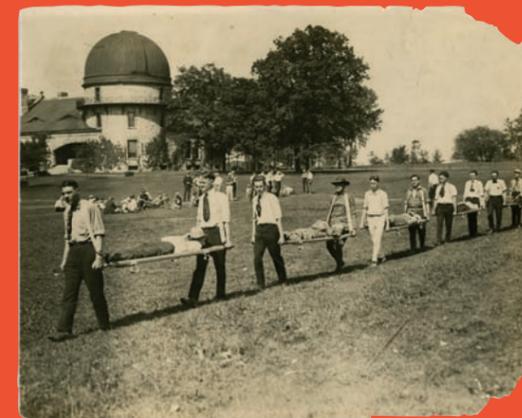
THE TWILIGHT OF BROAD STUDENT CHOICE

Nationally, only five percent of white men ages 18 to 21 pursued higher education in 1900; all other groups, including women, remained a minor presence. Northwestern students, especially the young women, thus belonged to an elite group of young Americans. Northwestern's College of Liberal Arts underwent tremendous enrollment growth early in the new century. College students, who

numbered 600 in 1900 but over 1500 by 1917, were educated in increasingly crowded quarters until the opening of Harris Hall in 1915. These students were able to choose from several hundred courses—most of them elective. Northwestern had begun wading into the elective ocean in the mid-1880s, and curricular options had continued to expand for College students after 1900. There were, of course, degree requirements. In 1903 the successful BA candidate in the College of Liberal Arts had to complete one course in mathematics, two in English, one in science, one in history, economics, or philosophy, and master two foreign languages: one had to be classical, but the second could be modern. The particular course, or courses, in these areas were at the students' discretion. The BS student had the same requirements, with two exceptions: additional work in mathematics and science was required, but a classical language was not. He did, however, have to possess reading knowledge of both French and German, the languages of modern science. All other courses were elective, although students pursuing either degree had to have both a major and a minor as well. If this does not seem overly liberal

in terms of choice, recall that all courses were prescribed when the College opened in 1854. Abram Winegardner Harris, who served as president from 1906 until 1916, captured the elective spirit of his time when he wrote that these requirements provided for a strong course of study, "while still leaving the student large liberty in the choice of subjects."

That choice was abetted by ever-more subjects. The College had only five departments (and five professors!)



OPPOSITE PAGE: IMAGE OF THE COLLEGE MAN ON FLYER ANNOUNCING ANNUAL SPRING "TRIG" CELEBRATION, 1902. FAR LEFT, AMBULANCE DRILL ON NORTH CAMPUS, 1917. LEFT, WORLD WAR I RECRUITING. BELOW, FACULTY WIVES WORKING FOR AMERICAN RED CROSS IN FISK HALL, 1917

in 1854, but by 1910 the College of Liberal Arts comprised departments in: Biblical Literature, Botany, Chemistry, Economics, English Language, English Literature, Geology, German, Greek, History, Latin, Mathematics, Philosophy, Physics, Romance Languages, and Zoology. Curricular choices also came with the growing number of students not of Yankee stock. More students of German descent prompted the College to establish the American Institute of Germanics in 1903. Growth in the number of students of Scandinavian descent led to a Department of Scandinavian Languages which offered courses in Swedish, Norwegian-Danish, and Old Icelandic. In the interest of promoting liberal culture in all its students, the College also added courses in Art History in the early years of the 20th century.

WORLD WAR I: MEN MARCH OUT, MILITARY SCIENCE MARCHES IN

When America entered "the Great War" in spring 1917, over 200 men left the university for national service. In the 1917-1918 school year over 500 men signed up for courses in infantry drill and the elements of military training offered by the newly created Department of Military Science. At the request of the War Department in Washington D.C., students around the country were encouraged to stay enrolled, "with a view to making them more valuable to the nation either as soldiers or as citizens." Increasing enlistments in 1918, however, necessitated dropping the time required for a Northwestern bachelor's degree from four to three years for those students planning to enter national service. After the war, the NROTC, Military Science, and Physical Education and Hygiene were all made permanent features of the college curriculum so that students would be better prepared for military service.

RAMIFICATIONS OF THE GREAT WAR

The First World War brought wide-ranging changes to curricula nationally, and to Northwestern. While the

Allies had been victorious in 1918, there was widespread concern among faculty, administrators, and alumni in the early 1920s that the values of freedom, responsibility, and moral rectitude so painfully defended during the war were receding with the spread of Jazz Age nihilistic hedonism. In response, the Victorian leaders of Northwestern, like



their counterparts around the country, came to believe that greater structure was needed in the curriculum—a structure which would highlight the values of western liberal democracy. The resulting effort was manifest in several ways around the country: in the rise of concentrations and distribution requirements, the development of honors work, and in the promotion of a common general education. The victim of these developments was the widespread electivism that had been gaining in collegiate curricula since the late 1800s with its implication that all subjects and courses were of largely equal value to the undergraduate.

As a Methodist institution, Northwestern's first response to post-war culture was to establish in the College in 1919 a new department of Religious Education, funded in part by the Methodist Church. Combined with the existing departments of Biblical Literature and the History of Religion, this new department, which had significant enrollments, built on Northwestern's ability "to offer instruction to both undergraduate and graduate students who may have in mind religious and social leadership as a life work."



CLOCKWISE, ON THESE TWO PAGES, FROM LEFT, DEBATE TEAM, 1924; MORE THAN 1,000 NAVY MEN PARADED ON DEERING MEADOW FOR VISITING OFFICERS IN 1944; WILLY THE WILDCAT'S WARTIME LOOK ON A FOOTBALL PROGRAM; STUDENTS ON CAMPUS, 1938; LUNT LIBRARY INTERIOR, 1932



The College also started to offer honors courses and guided independent study for the strongest students—and adopted selective admission—beginning in 1925. The first honors programs had been tried at several Ivy League colleges prior to the war, but none had survived. The honors program established by Swarthmore College in 1922, which exists to this day as an Oxbridge-style tutorial program, was the first to persevere. Northwestern's decision to follow Swarthmore's lead, coupled with the implementation of selective admission (which meant that not all the students who could pass the entrance requirements could be matriculated), placed it in the forefront of schools interested in developing courses of study for the superior student. Although it is true that these innovations in one sense increased the College's curricular offerings, these courses nevertheless established formal, prescribed programs of study, rather than open election, for the upper-class years. Honors work was the capstone to an otherwise overhauled undergraduate curriculum that would, as noted by Dean Kent in his 1927 report, provide training in oral and written expression, economics, proper



physical care and mental health, citizenship, and aesthetics, as well as promote a cogent philosophy toward life. These courses illustrate the College's increasing concern with its graduates' role in the world—not just in developing a cultivated life for its students.

INNOVATION IN THE DEPRESSION

University enrollment fell by almost 20 percent during the early years of the Great Depression. In partial response to this decline an early 1930s College curriculum committee proposed changes which suggested "a time of individualized curricula and of coordinating many diverse and specialized fields." Adjusting to new needs, such as providing for honors courses, reading periods, and independent study, while avoiding the compartmentalization of knowledge represented by departments, had to be done "without giving up those values in the liberal arts college of a hundred years ago which were permanent." As a direct result of the committee's work, and in response to the general education and liberal arts movements of the time—both of which argued that a liberal arts education was the best preparation for any career (not an insignificant matter in those years)—in 1932 the College added survey courses to the curriculum. The faculty also instituted Honors and Pass degrees to emulate the prevailing pattern at Oxford and Cambridge: another typical manifestation of the liberal arts movement. And, in an attempt to break down departmental barriers and promote a more holistic conception of the curriculum, starting in the 1933-34 school year the College departments were grouped into three divisions: the Natural Sciences, the Social Sciences, and the Humanities—the same divisions the College uses today. While enrollments recovered by the late 1930s, most of the curricular innovations made during the decade were



retained as sound advances in curricular organization, even as gathering signs of impending war suggested even greater changes in the curriculum were in the offing.

WORLD WAR UPENDS THE CURRICULUM AGAIN

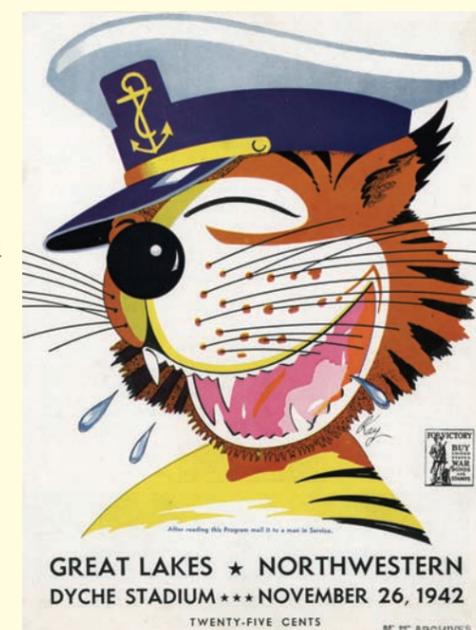
As had been the case with the Great War 25 years earlier, the approach of war had turned a bright light on the university's mission. President Franklin Snyder recorded in 1941 that "in a world which is fast becoming habituated to brutality, and in which material force sits at the controls, [universities] must reassert and reestablish those spiritual values which give life its highest meaning." At the same time, the national emergency made specific demands on the university, and the university was eager to do all it could to help the nation achieve victory. After Pearl Harbor, Northwestern lost hundreds of faculty and students to the armed services. To these dislocations were added dramatic shifts in registrations. The mathematics, physics, and chemistry departments saw enormous increases in student enrollment as the College set up special courses to give young men the background needed for wartime careers as aviators, bombardiers, and meteorologists, among others.

In addition to the temporary changes necessitated by the war, there were three major curricular innovations in the College of Arts and Sciences during the 1940s. The first was switching from semesters

to the quarter system in the autumn of 1941 so that students could take a greater number of courses, and thereby achieve a greater general education. The second major change was the introduction of a new BA curriculum for the 1944-45 school year. "This widely discussed program," wrote President Snyder, "eliminates the trivialities that sometimes intrude themselves into a liberal education, and focuses the students' thinking upon fundamentals." Like many of their colleagues around the country, the College faculty at Northwestern became increasingly convinced, as put by Dean Addison Hibbard, that "it is the responsibility of the faculty to define what constitutes a liberal education" and not, by inference, be left to the elective caprice of students. Around the nation some colleges had instituted completely prescribed curricula; others had introduced great books courses of study and extensive survey course requirements. At Northwestern the College faculty decided to restrict further student choice for those pursuing the BA and ensure that students were introduced "to the great currents of ideas which over the years have proved of greatest interest to men and women." Out of sixteen "year-units," BA students had six prescribed general education survey courses, such as "Modern Society" and "The Nature of Language," six elective units in their

major, and four entirely elective units. Similar plans for the BS were likewise being entertained by the faculty by the end of the 1940s.

The end of war in 1945 brought burgeoning G.I. Bill enrollments, and Quonset huts, to Evanston. Yet the G.I. Bill, which flooded America's colleges and universities with returning war veterans, was not viewed as the path Northwestern wanted to take long-term. "By refusing to compete with state universities in their great task of mass education," stated President Snyder, Northwestern could instead



GREAT LAKES ★ NORTHWESTERN
DYCHE STADIUM *** NOVEMBER 26, 1942
TWENTY-FIVE CENTS

AT RIGHT: REGISTERING
FOR CLASSES, 1947.
BELOW: STUDENTS IN
CLASS IN 1949



concentrate its efforts “on a relatively small group of men and women in whom we see the capacity for intellectual and spiritual leadership.” As early as 1947, College dean Simon Leland noted happily that the incoming College freshman class had decreased to only 644 out of a total enrollment in the College of 2811. The large enrollments fostered by the G. I. Bill represented, not Northwestern’s future (so it seemed), but an aberration.

Finally, during the 1940s the College implemented a third major innovation: a Common Freshman Year curriculum, which was designed to provide young undergraduates “with the tools and basic knowledge needed by all educated men.” This knowledge included a year of: Freshman English; a modern or classical language; basic science, or mathematics, or a laboratory science; and Modern Society or other humanities or social science course, including Western Civilization. The rise of the Cold War



had shown that defeat of the Axis in 1945 had not guaranteed victory in the realm of ideology; indeed post-war political developments prompted beginning Russian to be offered for the first time in the fall of 1948. Underlying these curricular changes was the increasingly urgent belief that undergraduates needed, as had been the case after World War I, renewed instruction in citizenship and the values of western liberal democracy.

THE COLLEGE REACHES ITS CENTENARY

As the University reached mid-century the College of Liberal Arts comprised two dozen departments. Since 1910, Anthropology, Art, Astronomy, Geography, History and Literature of Religions, Home Economics, Naval Science, Physical Education, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology had been added to the College’s departmental offerings. College students still chose between the BA and the BS degrees. But while there were more departments and subjects, the opportunities for free-ranging choice had been dramatically reduced with the implementation of the new BA curriculum and the Common Freshman Year. Not since the 1880s had so much of the College’s curriculum been prescribed for students.

At the close of President Snyder’s administration in 1949, his pressing concern was to maintain a balance between the humanities and social sciences on one hand and the laboratory sciences on the other. “We will not neglect or disparage science,” wrote Snyder, “...for it lies at the heart of some of our most distinguished work. But I hope we will emphasize, especially to our undergraduates, the values to be found in literature and philosophy and art history, and in all the other disciplines which deal with man in his relation to his fellow men, even though practical people sometimes fail to understand the enduring significance of these ‘useless’ subjects.”

In spite of these challenges Snyder concluded his presidency optimistically, opining that the University’s second 100 years “will be better in every way if, as Dante put it, we follow our star and remain true to our destiny as a center of humane learning.”

Bill Haarlow is Director of College-Admission Relations and Lecturer in the American Studies Program. His book, Great Books, Honors Programs, and Hidden Origins: The Virginia Plan and the University of Virginia in the Liberal Arts Movement, was published by Routledge-Falmer in 2003.

WHAT STUDENTS STUDIED AND WHY: PART THREE THE COLLEGE CURRICULUM FROM 1950 TO 2008

BY WILLIAM N. HAARLOW

On December 2, 1951, under the leadership of Roscoe “Rocky” Miller, who had assumed the presidency in October of 1949, Northwestern celebrated with a Centennial Convocation. The University, which had weathered the disruptions of the Great Depression, World War II, and the G.I. Bill, emerged into its second century eager to reclaim at least some of the relative normalcy, prosperity, and curricular growth last enjoyed during the 1920s. In 1950, the College enrollment stood at 2900 students and there were 240 full time College faculty members compared, respectively, to 4000 and 500 today. Kresge Centennial Hall, which was completed in 1955, was able to house many of the College’s classrooms and offices. Most of the science buildings that now stand on North Campus did not exist; the same is true of the lakefill additions.



CENTENNIAL SEAL, 1951

While all the curricular changes from the mid-twentieth century to the present are too vast to recount in detail, some signal events and important themes nevertheless emerge when looking back over the past 58 years. One important theme is the stunning rise of interdisciplinarity: a curricular approach which seeks to break human knowledge out of the traditional silos into which academic disciplines had been compartmentalized in the second half of the 19th century. A second theme is the continuing desire to preserve, and indeed grow, the liberal arts college and its curriculum within the broader context of a complex research university.

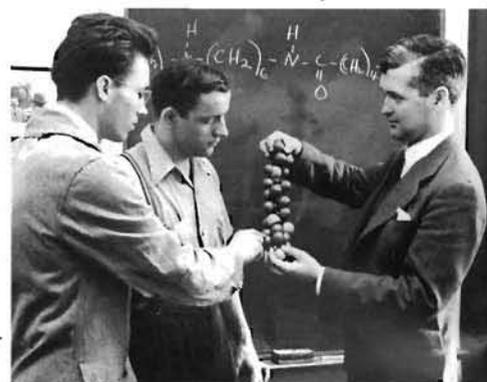
WESTERN CIVILIZATION AND SPUTNIK

Similar to the curricular emphases which had followed World War I (*Crosscurrents*, fall/winter

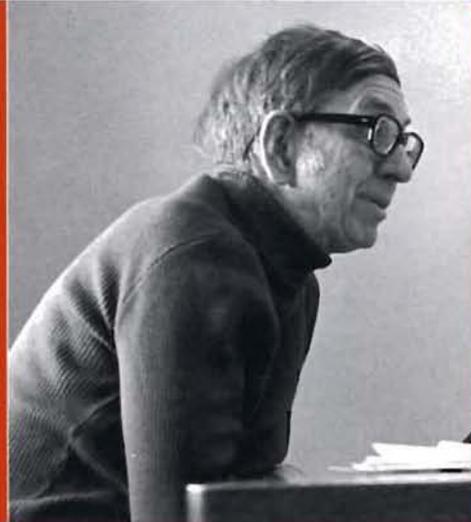
2006), World War II and the rise of the Cold War prompted a renewed interest in promoting citizenship and the values of western liberal democracy through the liberal arts curricula—understood since Periclean Athens as the elemental education for free men and women—at college and universities around the nation. History Professor Emeritus T.W. “Bill” Heyck notes that Western Civilization and American Civilization courses were “big business” at the Northwestern in the years between World War II and the Vietnam War. Such courses promoted western values as a counter to both fascist and communist ideologies. While fascism had been defeated in 1945, the outcome of the struggle against communism was still very much in doubt in the 1950s.

This emphasis on educating for democracy came about in part due to the creation of the faculty’s General Education Committee in 1954 by Dean of Faculties Payson Wild. The Committee recommended that the breadth component of the undergraduate curriculum be expanded so that all Northwestern undergraduates, including those outside the College of Liberal Arts, could take more courses in four

general areas: mathematics and science; the social sciences; history, philosophy, and religion; and art, literature, and music. While courses in these areas had long been available to liberal arts students, by 1957 the greatly increased presence of undergraduates from the pre-professional schools served to expand course offerings, enrollments, and student intellectual diversity within the College. Likewise, Northwestern’s quarter system, which had been



CHEMISTRY PROFESSOR MALCOLM DOLE (RIGHT) WITH MODEL OF NYLON MOLECULE IN AN UNDATED PHOTO



FAR LEFT, CLARENCE VER STEEG IN FRONT OF NEW LIBRARY, FEBRUARY 1970

AT LEFT, JEAN HAGSTRUM TEACHING A FRESHMAN SEMINAR, "WOMAN AS HEROINE AND VICTIM," JANUARY '79.

Photo at left by Alice Snyder. All photos, pages 16-20, courtesy of Northwestern University Archives.

implemented in the 1940s, ensured more courses than a semester approach and thus allowed room for language, major, and general education requirements in the three divisions (natural science, social sciences, humanities) for College students by the early 1960s.

College Dean Simeon Leland (1946-66) made particular efforts in the 1950s to improve the quality of both teaching and research in the College. The general imperatives of the Cold War, and especially the launch of Sputnik by the Soviet Union in 1957, promoted the view that the natural sciences—especially the physical sciences—were of vital importance to the nation. While curricular emphasis on democratic values in the post-war period remained critical and necessitated continued investment in the humanities, nevertheless a national sense of urgency vis a vis the Soviets served to propel the sciences within both the College and the Technological Institute, to a new level of investment on the part of the University. This emphasis on the sciences was likewise manifest in the symbolic name change in 1963 back to the College of Arts and Sciences from the College of Liberal Arts, which had been its name since 1880. This practical consideration was supported by President Miller, arguing that “It is felt that the title will be more descriptive of the work and interests of the College.”

FRESHMAN SEMINARS AND NEW REQUIREMENTS

Starting in 1962, history professor Clarence Ver Steeg, who had come to Evanston in 1950, led what came to be known as the Faculty Planning Committee which undertook over the next several years the most ambitious academic planning in Northwestern’s history. With the completion of the “lakefill” in the mid-1960s, Ver Steeg’s committee made a new university library a top priority. The University had outgrown its 1933 Deering Library and the opening of the new facility in 1970 symbolized the expansion of intellectual inquiry that was occurring at Northwestern.

Along with English professor Jean Hagstrum ’38, Ver Steeg’s Faculty Planning Committee issued a comprehensive two-part examination of the undergraduate experience at Northwestern in 1968 and ’69 in a report officially entitled “Community of Scholars,” but known on campus as the Hagstrum Report. In brief, the Hagstrum Committee agreed that a genuine community of scholars “would best be able to inculcate the key qualities of an educated person—competency, general education, and civility. Competency meant mastery of a discipline or major; general education meant breadth of learning; and civility—a wonderful eighteenth-century



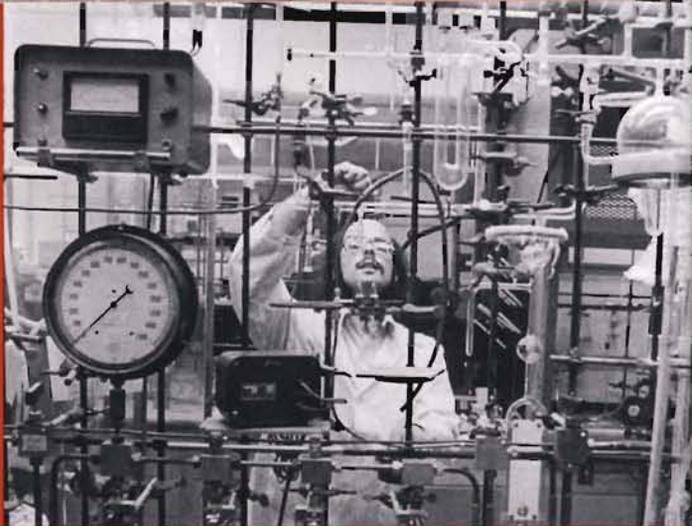
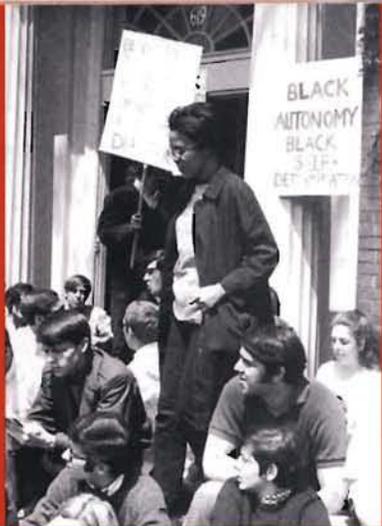
PLAYING CHESS AT VOGELBACK COMPUTING CENTER AGAINST A FAST-THINKING OPPONENT, THE CDC 6400 COMPUTER

term—the traits of an effective and responsible member of a civil society.”

While the Hagstrum report offered a thoughtful reconsideration of liberal education at Northwestern, its recommendations, which tended to be broad in scope, were soon overshadowed by more pressing campus issues including the push to increase enrollments, the promotion of research, and the student unrest of the late 1960s and early ’70s. Comprehensive curricular reform during this

AT RIGHT, PROTESTERS DURING THE MAY 1968 TAKEOVER OF THE BURSAR'S OFFICE

FAR RIGHT, IN CHEMISTRY LAB, 1980



turbulent time was difficult to achieve and the changes being made were often driven by many forces, not just reflections by the faculty. Perhaps the most notable curricular development during this time was the creation of the Department of African-American Studies in 1972, which demonstrated the political imperatives of the times and which made manifest the desires of an increasingly diverse student body and increasingly receptive faculty.

As the era of unrest passed, attention turned again to the larger arts and sciences curriculum, which was in "chaos," according to Bill Heyck. Indeed, the College's distribution requirements, which were set up along divisional lines, resembled a "Chinese menu" of choices, said another, former Associate Dean Bob Coen. College administrators thought this lack of structure necessitated change. Following relatively brief tenures by Robert Strotz, Laurence Nobles, and Hanna Gray, Rudy Weingartner was named Dean of the College in 1974. Under Weingartner's direction, the College applied for and received a grant from the Lilly Foundation to support the restructuring of the general education requirements in the interest of greater curricular coherence. The funds were useful in encouraging faculty to design both freshman seminars, with an emphasis on dialectical rather than didactic pedagogy (the first freshman seminars had been implemented by the history department in 1969 "to encourage history majors to be more engaged and less passive"), and new courses appropriate to the goals of a revised distribution scheme based on the major areas of intellectual inquiry in the arts and sciences.

Offering freshman seminars across all College departments was "a Northwestern innovation," notes Chemistry professor Joseph Lambert. The seminars were to be small discussion courses that emphasized written argument. Faculty, not graduate students, were to lead the seminars, serve as advisers, and introduce students to the techniques of analysis in, and philosophical perspectives of, a given discipline. Moreover, and perhaps uniquely

among schools of Northwestern's stature, first-year students would take two freshman seminars, not just one as became the case at many colleges and universities, assuming they were offered at all. To the College's foreign language proficiency requirement, defined as the completion of two years of college level work in a foreign language, was added the writing proficiency requirement. By replacing the old Freshman Composition course with writing intensive freshman seminars, the College mandated that students demonstrate their ability to write in order to receive their degree. The Writing Program was also established at this time, both to provide students with help in their writing and to aid freshman seminar professors, who were serving as writing instructors as well. Taken together, the introduction in the mid-1970s of freshman seminars, freshman advisers, and the writing requirement made the College's freshman year distinctive both in the '70s and today.

It was also during the mid-1970s that the College's distribution requirements took on their current form of two courses in each of six broad intellectual areas. The driving philosophy behind the distribution requirements was that students ought to have exposure to the full spectrum of the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences and to the different methodologies used in various disciplines, e.g., textual criticism, archival research, and scientific method. Importantly, only courses that were foundational in nature could satisfy the distribution



NORTHWESTERN STUDENTS IN '40S OR '50S DISCUSS ADVERTISING.



FAR LEFT, PHYSICS AND ASTRONOMY STUDENT AND INSTRUCTOR IN 1984.

AT LEFT, AERIAL VIEW OF O.T. HOGAN BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES BUILDING (IN FOREGROUND), COMPLETED IN 1967. AT LEFT IS FRANCES SEARLE BUILDING AND AT REAR IS THE LINDHEIMER OBSERVATORY.

requirements, i.e., they were to be broad in their coverage of subject matter in a way that gave students a philosophical perspective of a discipline, in addition to introducing students to the essential techniques of analysis in multiple academic fields. Increased faculty debate about whether survey courses achieve this goal, and enrollment pressures over subsequent years, have reduced the emphasis on survey courses in the last decade.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY STARTS IN '40S, BOOMS IN '70S

Interdisciplinarity in the college curriculum first emerged, somewhat ironically, with the completion of the Technological Institute in 1942, when it was decided that chemistry and physics were to be part of Tech, which serves primarily as the home of the McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science. That engineering, chemistry and physics ought to be taught in the same building to promote research conversations among faculty was a novel idea, and it pointed to the idea behind interdisciplinarity; namely, that the organization of subjects and fields in different ways ought to be based on changing conceptions of human knowledge. This arrangement at Northwestern effectively bridged science and engineering and allowed for the development of materials science—a Northwestern invention, according to chemistry professor Mark Ratner. The interdisciplinary program in African Studies was likewise established in 1948, yet the majority of the undergraduate interdisciplinary programs familiar to students today were first introduced in the 1970s.

The Integrated Science Program (ISP), founded in 1976, presented a new way of looking at undergraduate science education in that it comprised a general natural sciences curriculum integrated with mathematics, as opposed to focusing on a single traditional science discipline. Importantly, ISP also required its elite scientific generalists to complete the College's distribution requirements.

True to the College's tradition, ISP students were to be as well-versed in the liberal arts as their collegiate peers; ISP was not to be an MIT-style program for specialists. As a selective interdisciplinary major, ISP also served as a model for Mathematical Methods in the Social Sciences (MMSS), a program founded in 1978 combining the study of social sciences with mathematics and statistics, and Mathematical Experience for Northwestern Undergraduates (MENU), a program for students with especially strong mathematical skills who are interested in mathematics, both pure and applied. Interdisciplinarity was also fostered between the social sciences and the humanities, and indeed across the university, with the development of the selective entrance American Studies program in 1974. The ultimate sign of interdisciplinary work, the College's ad hoc major, was introduced during this time as well. Just as the qualities of the freshman year made the Northwestern collegiate curriculum distinctive, so too the College's efforts to break down disciplinary barriers, and thus promote intellectual cross-fertilization among different academic subjects, helped to distinguish the College's curriculum from those at other institutions of higher education during the 1970s.

THE HEYCK REPORT ANTICIPATES CONTEMPORARY COLLEGE

In 1988 a new comprehensive report was issued by the Task Force on the Undergraduate Experience. Under the chairmanship of Bill Heyck of the history department, the report, which became known colloquially as the "Heyck Report," undertook to review "the full range of the undergraduate experience, including curriculum, pedagogy, student support, and student life." Regarding the curriculum, especially in the arts and sciences, the report authors argued that, in addition to breadth and depth of knowledge, the University should ensure that all Northwestern students attain superlative levels of competence in three areas: writing and oral communication, natural science, and quantitative analysis. As the

AT RIGHT, BILL HEYCK WITH STUDENTS IN WILLARD CAFETERIA, DECEMBER 1986.

FAR RIGHT, SIGNS IN FRONT OF MULTICULTURAL CENTER BECKON NEW STUDENTS TO JOIN CLUBS IN 2008.

Photo by Jim Zir



authors stated, “Matthew Arnold put it best more than a hundred years ago: a liberal education is the study of the best that has been thought and said in the world, but it is also the effort to make the best that has been thought and said effective—as he put it, ‘to make reason and the will of God prevail.’” In short, argued the task force, the mission of the College of Arts and Sciences is “to graduate students who have knowledge of the world and the ability to acquire that knowledge, and who have analytical skills, an appetite for learning, the ability to think rigorously and to communicate clearly and forcefully, and a sensitivity to that which is beautiful and that which is good.”

To manifest these ideas in the college curriculum, the task force made recommendations that are still being realized today in the 21st century. One recommendation was to create a common experience for Northwestern undergraduates. This goal has been achieved in part through the adoption of liberal arts distribution requirements by Northwestern’s undergraduate pre-professional schools. The University’s “One Book, One

Northwestern” program, which was launched in 2006 with Shakespeare’s *Othello*, has provided an opportunity for all undergraduates to engage in common intellectual exploration. James Baldwin’s *Go Tell It On The Mountain* was followed in 2008 by *The Reluctant Mr. Darwin*, by David Quammen, chosen to celebrate the

150th anniversary of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*.

Within the College, another task force goal has been increasingly realized as well in the ever-increasing number of students who engage in research, especially

seniors writing theses. This type of work, which draws on the 19th century German tradition of encouraging faculty and graduate students at the cutting edge of research and knowledge, has been matched with equal development at Northwestern of the even older British “Oxbridge” model of residential college life. Starting in 1972 with five residential colleges, today the program boasts more than two dozen residential colleges, both thematic and not. Dean Rudy Weingartner had stated in the 1970s that universities no longer taught moral philosophy—the old capstone course of the 19th century college—because no one on the faculty felt qualified to do so. While the emphases of the residential colleges may be different, together they share the perennial goal of the old moral philosophy course, to develop students of character, albeit through residential rather than classroom experiences.

THE ACTIVE INTELLECT AND THE COLLEGE TODAY

The College of Arts and Sciences Plan for the 1990s, known as “The Active Intellect,” was issued in October 1991. The report offered a sobering view of higher education nationally: the number of high school seniors had shrunk; the number of natural sciences majors had “declined seriously;” the demand for business-oriented programs had increased; the public was concerned about “political correctness” and rising costs. In short, argued the report, “a number of conditions have conspired recently to constrain institutions of higher learning, limit their aspirations for the near term, and raise public eyebrows about the nobility of their cause.” By contrast, the report authors suggested that at Northwestern, “many of the national anxieties over teaching, funding, and political pressures are minimized here by our sense of stability, vision, and tolerance.” The College’s mission, argued the report, was:

To provide a superior undergraduate liberal arts education, in which breadth is assured by courses introducing diverse modes of inquiry and by selected interdisciplinary programs, and depth is achieved in specialized courses, independent study, and student research organized into major concentrations and cer-



CHAPIN HALL RESIDENTS, 1987



Photo by Estelle Ure

tificate programs.

In the 21st century, the Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences has realized the mission set forth in the 1990s. Weinberg students, who number approximately 1000 per class, choose a major, or increasingly, majors—many of them interdisciplinary—from more than 25 departments and 28 programs across the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. The 45 courses required for the B.A. degree, the College's sole degree, are comprised of major requirements, electives, and distribution requirements which include at least two courses in each of six intellectual areas: natural sciences, formal studies (such as mathematics and logic), social and behavioral sciences, historical studies, ethics and values, and literature and fine arts. Students in the College must also take two freshman seminars and demonstrate proficiency in both writing and a foreign language.

To the more traditional courses in aspects of western civilization have been added courses in many international subjects, including cultural studies and languages such as Arabic and Chinese. This prolific growth has been promoted by both a top-down interest of faculty in internationalizing the curriculum and bottom-up demand from students who are increasingly diverse (incoming freshmen in 2008 hail from 27 different countries) and who desire ever-greater course offerings in formerly absent areas, such as Asian-American Studies. Expanding study abroad options, including those in Global Health, have attracted hundreds of students. New programs, such as the Kaplan Humanities Scholars Program for freshmen, inaugurated in 2007, continue to promote interdisciplinarity in, and the internationalization of, the college curriculum. Likewise, the role of research has been greatly aided by the Weinberg Undergraduate Research Grants Program, established in 2000, which now provides over \$200,000 annually to college students in the form of academic year grants, conferences presentation grants, and summer research grants. Students across all three collegiate divisions use these funds in support of their independent scholarship—often thesis or honors work—in Northwestern's labs and libraries, and sites further afield, both in Chicago and abroad. In an effort to help students navi-

gate the far-ranging choices in today's curriculum, the Weinberg College Advisers Program was established in 2001 to provide additional guidance and support to students from the time they are handed off by their freshman year advisers until they graduate. Indeed, freshman seminars, small classes, faculty teaching, and the advising programs have all served to maintain the advantages of a liberal arts college education in a major research university setting.

It is perhaps fitting that 2008-09 represents the inaugural year of the interdisciplinary Brady Scholars Program in Ethics and Civic Life. With an emphasis on leadership, the program at first appears to respond to a contemporary societal need, and it does. Yet at its core the Brady Program is fundamentally concerned with competencies and character, the foremost concerns of Northwestern's founding curriculum in the 1850s. This



STUDENTS IN FALL '08

is not to suggest that somehow the collegiate curriculum at Northwestern has come full circle to its antebellum roots. Rather, the collegiate curriculum at Northwestern remains committed both to cutting edge research, which advances the outer bounds of human knowledge, and to fundamental knowledge grounded in a liberal arts education—an education at once thoroughly contemporary and, at the same time, timeless.

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