

DRAFT

THE SEARCH FOR A NEW EDUCATIONAL IDEAL:

Interdisciplinary Programs in the Humanities, Science and Technology

The purposes of a modern university are easy to define. The university should prepare the student for essential vocations, give him some understanding of the universe, some understanding of man, and encourage him to continue his intellectual interests. Universities are most successful in their vocational or pre-professional training; they are largely a failure in the other respects. To gain an understanding of the nature of the world depends upon many different departments (such as astronomy, chemistry, geology, physics, etc.). Even a student who took "all the courses" would still have to make a synthesis of the materials offered, but in this he gets little or no guidance from his professors. The situation is even worse with regard to an understanding of man. Again, many different specialties are taught in different departments. But, in addition, the humanities are almost totally divorced from the sciences relating to man, and in many fields teachers do not communicate with one another. In the natural sciences communication and agreement are developed to a degree, though not sufficiently to counteract the effects of specialization. In the humanities and social sciences communication is less well developed and often agreement is difficult or impossible to achieve. Finally, intellectual stimulation should be a major purpose of the university. As a result of education, people should want to continue some intellectual or artistic interest throughout their adult lives. It should enrich their spirit to live in a world that is at least partially understood and appreciated, even though understanding and appreciation have their darker side as well. But a university concentrating on pre-vocational, specialized training, marking students down for their performance every quarter, makes little room for the enjoyment that can result from the life of the mind.