

INTRODUCTION

William J. Bennett

When the first edition of *Choosing the Right College* appeared in 1998, it struck a surprisingly responsive chord. Despite a minimal publicity and advertising budget, *Choosing the Right College* became the bestselling essay-style college guide in America. Readers appreciated its honesty, its independence, and its narrative structure. No other guide evaluated the adequacy of institutions' core curricula for the provision of a liberal arts education worthy of the name; no other guide concerned itself with the level of political correctness on campus; no other guide pointed out the worst departments and the best professors; no other guide spoke to the level of crime on or around campus; no other guide evaluated the extent to which institutions had abandoned the last vestiges of their former *in loco parentis* obligations.

In other words, no other guide brought to its task the educational vision explicitly advocated by the ISI guide: to wit, that a core curriculum that introduces students to the best that has been thought and said—especially the best that has been thought and said by those Western thinkers whose ideas have formed our political, religious, and cultural landscapes—is what best serves students, even in this age of multiculturalism and globalization. In ISI's view, classic texts and the fundamental questions they raise should, as far as possible, be approached on their own terms. Rather than insisting that the disciplines be approached from the narrow perspectives of race, gender, or ethnicity (or whatever), a genuine liberal arts education should attempt to liberate students from the prison houses of such provincialities. And the ends of education are best served when there is a campus atmosphere marked by intellectual freedom, a healthy sense of community and tradition, and relative safety.

As it turns out, this unfashionable educational vision still appeals to a sizable public. Not only have students, parents, and grandparents purchased tens of thousands of copies of the first three editions of *Choosing the Right College*, but the critics have loved it as well. Hundreds of articles, reviews, and columns devoted to *Choosing the Right College* have appeared in magazines and newspapers of all sizes across the country. Dr. Laura Schlessinger, Michael Medved, Walter Williams, Thomas Sowell, John Leo, John Silber, Richard John Neuhaus, William Kristol, Christina Hoff Sommers, Midge Decter, Cal Thomas—they all have praised it. The *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Charlotte Observer*, *Arizona Republic*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Denver Post* and *Rocky Mountain News*, *Detroit News* and *Free Press*, even the *New York Times*, heralded its publication. It is heartening to see just how widely appealing *Choosing the Right College's* commitment to a non-ideological liberal arts ideal is.

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A few things have changed since I contributed the introduction to the first edition of this guide. For one thing, with success has come imitation. Other guides now also claim to steer students toward the “best professors” and “best courses.” And other guides now also venture to comment on each campus’s “political atmosphere.” But since these guides are not informed by a coherent educational philosophy—they often read as though they were written by the schools’ admissions offices themselves—their evaluations are not particularly trustworthy.

More importantly, the atmosphere of higher education itself has shifted subtly during the last six years. When the ISI staff put together the first edition of this guide, extreme political correctness—as manifested in speech codes, secret and unconstitutional tribunals, the refusal to grant the right of due process to students and faculty with unpopular views—still seemed to be spreading unchecked. Today, although extreme manifestations of political correctness still occur, they are at least a matter of public ridicule. Having been made aware of the draconian measures being taken in the academy to promote a tendentious ideological vision, observers of all political stripes—including cartoonists, pundits, lawyers, comedians, speechwriters, politicians, editorialists, even journalists—are quick to make fun of academic nonsense. And why not? When an instructor uses his written course description to warn conservative students not to take his course (see the University of California at Berkeley entry), or when a university administrator offers counseling sessions to students at a purportedly Catholic school because they may have been traumatized by their exposure to Catholic doctrine (see Georgetown University)—well, it certainly makes for sensational copy.

During the last few years, racial and ethnic preferences in admissions have been successfully challenged in several high-profile cases. Student and faculty victims of politically motivated retribution and censorship have found a ready ally in organizations like the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education and the Student Press Law Center. Religious student groups have had their rights reaffirmed by the Supreme Court.

But what hasn’t changed is the politicization of the curriculum under the guise of those ubiquitous headings, multiculturalism and diversity. Though the majority of colleges and universities cannot rouse themselves to require of their students a grounding in Western civilization or American history, these same schools are adding “cultural diversity” course requirements at a dazzling pace. They also continue to use “diversity” as an excuse to water down standards in the traditional disciplines. For example, a recent study of the English departments at twenty-five prestigious liberal arts schools by the National Association of Scholars (NAS) found that between 1964 and 1997, the number of English electives offered in these departments had increased 74 percent. Many of these additional courses focus on racial, ethnic, sexual, or other nonliterary themes, so that the proportion of foundational courses offered has dropped from 58 percent to 35 percent. While in 1964, 48 percent of departments had required a course on Shakespeare, in 1997 only 16 percent did. And just four departments still required survey courses in English and

American literature; in 1964, more than half had such requirements.

Nor has there been any detectible trend toward the restoration of genuine core curricula. Yet there is some evidence that such a curriculum measurably contributes to the quality of a student's education. A recent study conducted by Alexander W. Astin, director of the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, reports that "[a]ttending an institution with a true core curriculum (that is, one that requires all students to take exactly the same courses in order to satisfy general education requirements) has positive effects on several satisfaction measures." On the other hand, general education distribution requirements have little discernible direct impact on such measures. "Only a true core curriculum," writes Astin, "seems to have distinctive effects on student development: high satisfaction, and positive effects on leadership in particular." Astin concludes with what the alumni of liberal arts schools with strong, integrated cores already know: "having students take exactly the same general education courses provides a common experience that can stimulate student discussion outside of class and facilitate the formation of strong bonds among student peers."

Finally, our college graduates continue to display a dismal lack of cultural literacy and a troubling grasp of ethics. Here again, polls commissioned by NAS have provided some devastating data. Item 1: Today's college graduates fare little or no better than a sample of 1955 *high school* graduates on questions covering literature, music, science, geography, and history (a subject on which they appear to know considerably *less* than the high schoolers of half a century ago). Item 2: Graduating seniors from Arizona's public universities failed to average a passing score in seven of eleven subject areas. Only 14 percent knew that James Madison was the U.S. Constitution's principal author. Item 3: 73 percent of college seniors reported that their professors taught them that "what is right and wrong depends on differences in individual values and cultural diversity." Only 25 percent said that they had been taught that "there are clear and uniform standards of right and wrong by which everyone should be judged."

If students wish to obtain a genuinely liberating education—one that provides the inward freedom that only develops by having wrestled with the great minds, ideas, and questions, and by having had dedicated teachers who could help make sense of it all—they must know what they are getting into. This guide attempts to provide the foreknowledge that will allow students to make good choices and become truly educated citizens.

You hold in your hands the 2005 edition of *Choosing the Right College*, now published annually. Compiled under the direction of Jeffrey O. Nelson, this edition includes revised and updated entries on 125 schools. Essays on the importance of the humanities and on the relationship between the core curriculum and the liberal arts have been contributed by Robert Royal, president of the Faith and

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Reason Institute, and Mark C. Henrie, author of *A Student's Guide to the Core Curriculum*, respectively. Jeremy Beer, editor in chief of *Choosing the Right College 2005*, discusses the volume's guiding philosophy and its contents, including a unique feature, first introduced in the 2004 edition, in which students are told what specific courses they can take in order to create their own core curricula at colleges that do not provide one. Finally, a helpful appendix titled *Asking the Right Questions* advises parents and prospective students on what questions to consider when making a decision on where to go to school. All parents and college-bound students will want to review these questions before making campus visits.

Forming a citizenry educated for liberty has been the mission of the Intercollegiate Studies Institute for fifty years now. ISI has more than 50,000 student and faculty members, an influential and growing book imprint—ISI Books—and a nationwide educational program that includes hundreds of lectures, seminars, and conferences on college and university campuses throughout the country each year. Few organizations are as well positioned to analyze and interpret trends in higher education, and even fewer are as equipped to help students and parents choose the right college. I invite you to learn more about ISI and the state of higher education today at this guide's companion Web site, www.collegeguide.org.

William J. Bennett, the co-director of Empower America, is one of the nation's most tenacious advocates of bold education reform. He served as the secretary of education and chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities under President Ronald Reagan and director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy under President George H. W. Bush. The author of the best-selling The Book of Virtues among many other volumes, his current book is Why We Fight: Moral Clarity and the War on Terrorism.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HUMANITIES

Robert Royal

Nearly everyone who has gone to college, or is thinking about going, has experienced the excitement of entering a larger world. That feeling is a clue to something quite important. It is a natural reaction to the prospect of broader social life and intellectual vistas, usually at an age when we are just reaching adulthood. But at whatever age a person decides to pursue serious study, the excitement stems from a sense that personally, socially, and intellectually, institutions of higher learning are places where, if we are fortunate, we may come into living contact with what being more fully human is all about.

The humanities are about being human. In a technological age such as our own, we may decide to study at a college or university so that we can pursue a career in the sciences or get a good job. There is nothing wrong—and much that is right—in these goals. But specialized technical schools or even educational programs sponsored by private companies can do those things for us, and they will probably become the common route for that kind of education in the future. The humanities, however, have always aimed at something quite different, something that many people feel is particularly lacking in twenty-first-century America. *Choosing the Right College* is written to show where you can still find this knowledge on America's campuses.

As Plato, one of the great sources of the Western humanistic tradition, once put it:

It is not the life of knowledge, not even if it includes all the sciences, that creates happiness and well-being, but a single branch of knowledge—the science of the good life. If you exclude this from the other branches, medicine will remain equally able to give us health, and shoemaking shoes, and weaving clothes; seamanship will continue to save life at sea, and strategy to win battles; but without the knowledge of good and evil the use and excellence of these sciences will be found to have failed us.

Plato's goal here is not to make a highbrow argument about the need to study ethics or pursue abstruse philosophical investigations, though ethics will inevitably come into the humanities, as will hard thinking. As Plato shows by comparing it with other kinds of knowledge, the science of the good life is valuable for its own

sake as well as for its practical value. It aims at discovering the truths that tell us both who we are and what we need to know if we want to use our other knowledge to make us more fully human. Put briefly and in a modern idiom: at their best, the humanities can teach us how to live.

Human beings are in a unique condition compared with other living things. The higher animals may teach their young a few survival techniques. But we have to teach and learn about many things in order to flourish. No other being that we know of has the intellectual capacity and relative freedom that we humans possess. These two powers make it impossible for us to live by instinct, as most animals do. We have entire ranges of understanding and action that go far beyond anything in the rest of nature. Consequently, both our minds and wills need to be properly formed if we are going to live up to everything that is in us. *Choosing the Right College* will help you find the resources you need to develop your talents fully.

Most talk about freedom today suggests that freedom means liberation from constraints. The older humanistic tradition agrees that we need to be freed from certain external constraints, but even more from internal constraints like unfocused passivity and a slavery to ignorance, habit, emotion, or impulse—our natural condition prior to education. Indeed, without freedom from inner bondage, mere freedom from outward limitations is likely to turn into utter disaster. We need to understand and train ourselves to pursue not only *freedom from* evils and limitations but also *freedom for* what is good. The kinds of human beings most of us typically admire combine a lively spontaneity with well-formed habits of rationality and self-mastery that make it easy for them to both know and do what is good for themselves and others.

How do we make ourselves into the kinds of people we admire? Such things are not achieved without good external guidance and firm internal discipline. Even the very finest university can only offer a beginning to what is, by its very nature, a lifelong pursuit. A good college experience may open us up to the prospect of unlimited opportunities and intellectual stimulation; a bad one may condemn us to perpetual frustration and narrowness. The difference is not merely a matter of individual psychology, but the result of a successful or unsuccessful attempt to encounter, and to get some understanding of, the fundamental questions about human existence. Human societies always exist in a state of no little confusion about basic truths. That is one of the reasons why higher learning, which is also a clarification, is necessary. Getting down to basics has never been easy, but in our time it is further complicated by the fact that even many colleges and universities have become confused about what an education in the humanities means. Any student who wants what humanistic studies can give today has to search carefully for guides and work hard with them when they are found. This college guide points the way to a genuine education in the humanities on 125 of America's best campuses.

Contrary to the impression given by most course catalogs, the subjects students need to confront are not very numerous, though they may be approached

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from many different perspectives and in no little detail. Historically, they have centered around questions about God and man, virtue and vice, heroism and cowardice, tyranny and freedom, truth and untruth. Study of those questions was intended to produce a similarly small number of exemplary human types: the saint, the philosopher, the hero, the statesman, the artist, the scholar, and the scientist.

The basic humanistic subjects—and they must be very basic now because elementary and secondary education today hardly prepare us for them—at any given institution are crucial to whether we will preserve the old authentic thrill of learning to be human beings, or will find ourselves in backwaters of mere information. Most students of the humanities today will have to encounter the essential subject matter in disciplines such as literature, history, politics, and languages. (Philosophy and theology are also crucial subjects. But like mathematics, relatively few people can do the kind of abstract thinking they require to any great extent.) Wherever we choose to begin, however, each of the humanistic disciplines deals with the multiple values a thinking person will encounter over the whole course of his or her life. Hence, they are subjects that can never finally be outdated, superseded, or finished.

Literature provides us with an imaginative re-creation of life that enables us to see things, thanks to the author, that we would be unable to see on our own. A novel like *Moby-Dick*, for example, contains a good deal of sea lore and local color. For many readers, that in itself will open their eyes to a larger world. But few people, even those who did whaling in the period in which that novel is set, ever thought as deeply as Herman Melville did about the human struggle with God and nature, good and evil, and what it means for all of us, even landlubbers. After we return from that voyage, we stand on very different ground.

History provides a similar expansion of horizons but has the added advantage of leading us to reflect on what has actually happened in the human past. Human beings change over the course of their lives, and the human race has changed as well. But there are some basic human features that we can observe in the most distant regions of the earth among peoples far remote from us in time. Knowledge about those permanent human things gives us a better perspective on who we are. History also allows us to understand that our own age is not merely the natural order of things. It took great human efforts to build up our civilization, efforts involving intellectual discoveries, backbreaking physical labor, and, often enough, the heroic sacrifice of life itself.

For example, every schoolchild has heard the words from the Declaration of Independence: “We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness—That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men. . . .” Like any of the truths of the humanities, these principles can be lazily passed over as truisms only useful for Memorial Day speeches and other ceremonial occasions. But if we begin to look at them carefully, a number of questions of central importance to human life jump

out at us. Do we need to refer to a God to understand beings who have rights? What kind of God would that be? Does liberty mean I am free to do whatever I want or, as the Founding Fathers warned, do we need to distinguish sharply between liberty and license? What is this Happiness that we are to pursue? Such questions are the culmination of centuries of struggle to understand individuals in society and to build up a civilized order that makes our relations with one another as productive of the common good as possible.

Just to begin listing such questions helps us to realize how quickly even the most common sentiments lead us out into deep waters. The kind of learning the humanities convey to us is not a matter of knowing a little bit about this and that so that we can take part in polite dinner-table conversations. The range of subjects we encounter in every serious humanistic pursuit goes to the heart of the question of whether we will live well and in good societies, or, like most of the human race for most of history, we will not. As such, these subjects are not a matter of annoying “distribution requirements” or of whimsical “electives” that we can choose at will. Each of us has aptitudes and interests that will lead us to focus on one or more particular areas in the humanities. But to understand even our own favorite areas well, we need very broad views of human beings—and we need to acquire them by looking hard for how and where to get them.

Some people who recognize this have a partly mistaken impression of the problem on campuses today. The most notorious cases have even appeared in newspapers: an English department that no longer requires students majoring in English to read Shakespeare, or a university with few or no requirements for graduation. An even more difficult problem is the *way* the great humanist thinkers are often taught, even when they are present in the curriculum. The great texts of our culture have endured because they have repeatedly revealed their value to all kinds of people over centuries in very different cultural settings. There is a presumption in favor of ideas with that kind of life in them. But often today they are approached—when they are not merely dismissed—as instances of past prejudices of various kinds. These are alarming signs and the parent or student who wants a concrete evaluation of what such signs mean will want to read the following pages very closely.

Like ourselves, even the greatest figures of the past were imperfect human beings and their prejudices ought to be corrected. But we need to be cautious that our desire to counteract prejudice does not turn into a narrowness and prejudice of its own. One of the ways that often happens today is through a movement called multiculturalism. Spurred by the alleged biases in Western thinking against women, the marginalized, and non-white races, multiculturalism offers non-Western cultures as an antidote. On the surface, this appears utterly benign and even necessary. Who could possibly object to a wider acquaintance with the world or to correctives to our Western ideas from the outside? Properly pursued, these are part and parcel of a true humanism.

Unfortunately, they are not often properly pursued. To understand another culture we have to study its languages, history, great people and events, and then

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come to a proper appraisal of them, just as we might some earlier period of Western culture such as Ancient Greece. Too often, however, multiculturalism stops at the surface, presenting a few selected dimensions of another culture as a weapon with which to attack our own ways and the long social and intellectual traditions on which they are based. Furthermore, on closer inspection, these claims usually prove to be Western values pushed to extremes without proper attention to other truths. Most multicultural approaches to the humanities challenge very little of the culture with which students arrive on contemporary campuses: in fact, they are usually used to enforce ideas already present without opening up any new vistas at all. As such, they should not be allowed to obscure one of the West's great cultural achievements.

So if you want an education in the humanities today it will require work—and vigilance. One reason that the initial excitement of going to college soon dies down for most people is that it seems so difficult to find institutions, departments, or individual teachers that can help in orienting us to the tasks at hand. More typically, our desire for humane learning is thwarted by educational institutions themselves that cannot seem to make up their minds what a humanistic—and human—education should be. The great value of the present guide is that, without concerning itself with any question other than which institutions best provide an education in the humanities or which professors or departments do so in otherwise inhospitable institutions, it provides some practical suggestions for entering the perpetually exciting world of discovering how we may be free, responsible, and ever more human beings.

Robert Royal, who holds a Ph.D. in comparative literature from the Catholic University of America, is the president of the Faith & Reason Institute in Washington, D.C. Among his many books are 1492 and All That: Political Manipulations of History and Dante Alighieri.

FINDING AND FOLLOWING THE CORE

Mark C. Henrie

Faithfully following the strictures of the contemporary ideology of multicultural diversity, American university curricula today resemble a dazzling cafeteria indifferently presided over by an amiable and indulgent nutritionist. There are succulent offerings to suit every taste, and the intellectual gourmand can only regret that he has but four years to sample the fare. Never in history have there existed institutions providing such an array of fields of study—from Sanskrit to quantum mechanics, from neoclassical microeconomic theory to Jungian psychology, from the study of medieval folklore to the study of 1950s billboards. Everything which can repay study is studied, however small the dividend. The only constraint on the diversity of offerings is a financial one, which, given the truly astonishing wealth of American universities, is hardly a constraint at all.

But as every parent knows, children seldom choose to eat what's good for them. They seem irresistibly drawn to high-fat foods and sugary desserts. Or, sometimes, they develop a fixation upon one particular dish and will eat no others. Parents do what they can to ensure a balanced diet, and in years past, the university, standing *in loco parentis*, likewise made sure that the bill of fare, the courses required for graduation, were also “balanced.” Various dimensions of intellectual virtue were each given their due: the basic cultural knowledge by which an educated man situates himself in history, a broad exposure to various methods of inquiry, the mastery and command that are the fruit of disciplinary specialization. Programmatically, this balance was achieved by a core curriculum in the literary, philosophical, and artistic monuments of Western civilization; a diverse set of requirements in general education; and a carefully structured course of studies in a major.

Things are rather different today, for we live in an era when the idea of a university—and therefore the university's institutional expression—has been transformed by the cultural currents that erupted in the 1960s. Commentators make much of the “tenured radicals” who have “destroyed” the traditional curriculum, and after reading so much about these depredations, we are apt to approach such views with skepticism: Can it really be *that* bad? How can we reconcile such doom-saying with

the fact that American universities are the envy of the world, drawing the most talented students and faculty from around the globe? Are not American universities at the forefront of research in virtually every field? Are academia's critics perhaps pining nostalgically for a world that never was?

Such skepticism is not unwarranted, especially with regard to the most extreme claims of the critics: the American university is not on the point of collapse, and it is still possible to acquire a genuinely fine liberal arts education. Nonetheless, we can trace quite clearly the effect that the 1960s generation has had on the American university. That generation rebelled against their parents, and so, against the very idea of anyone or anything standing *in loco parentis*. Enthusiasts for various forms of Marxist and post-Marxist critique, they understood themselves not as inquirers standing on the shoulders of giants but rather as change-agents striving to overcome an inheritance of injustice. Like Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*, their sense of outraged injustice drove them to the moral relativism we now call postmodernism. But this very relativism led only to the dead end of self-contradiction, for it required them to deny that there could be any *true* standard of justice by which injustice could be admitted. Famously, they enjoined themselves to trust no one over thirty: obviously, the great works of the Western tradition, hundreds and thousands of years old, could not be trusted. They were instead to be deconstructed. Locked into an indiscriminate stance of questioning authority, they found themselves at length well over thirty and in the awkward position of being university authorities. What have been the effects on the curriculum?

The Major. The system of majors still flourishes, reflecting the still high prestige of the disciplinary model of the natural sciences—reflecting, as well, the guild-like structure of the Ph.D. system, which credentials faculty and serves as the basis for their institutional authority within the university. Yet outside the natural sciences, the structured sequencing of courses within the major—one course building upon another and probing to a deeper level—has been largely abandoned. For reasons associated with careerism, professors today are often more committed to their research than to their teaching obligations, and so they resist or reject a “rigid” curricular plan that would make frequent and irregular sabbaticals difficult. Moreover, faculty themselves have fundamental disagreements about the very nature of their disciplines and so find it impossible to reach a consensus about the “end” toward which a course of studies should be directed. The faculty's solution has been to avoid direction.

Students in a major are thus largely free to pick and choose as they please, and as the current course offerings allow. Consequently, many students experience their major in a rather aimless way: the major does not “progress” or “culminate” in anything. Graduating students often do not understand themselves to have achieved even preliminary mastery of a discipline. Whereas “critical” methods of teaching and learning have been “pushed forward” to earlier and earlier years of study in the past generation, mastery of a discipline (in fields outside the natural sciences) has been “pushed back” to the M.A. years of graduate school.

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General Education and Distribution Requirements. A system of distribution and other general education requirements also persists. Commonly, students will find that they are required to reach a certain proficiency in a foreign language, that they will need to demonstrate command of written English, and that they will be required to take a prescribed number of courses in a range of fields of study. Sometimes these last, “distribution,” requirements are vague: for example, they might prescribe twelve credits each from the sciences, humanities, and social sciences. Sometimes, the distribution requirements are more specific: e.g., two courses in math, one in the physical sciences and one in the life sciences, a course in history, a course in a non-Western subject, etc.

The theoretical justification for requirements in general education is *broad* exposure to various bodies of knowledge and approaches to understanding. There is an echo here of John Henry Newman’s argument in his famous book *The Idea of a University* that a university is “a place of teaching universal knowledge,” and that failure to take the measure of all areas of inquiry results in a kind of deformity of the intellect. Some students may grumble at these requirements, which take them away from pursuing their major subject with single-mindedness: in the university cafeteria, they want nothing but the lime Jell-o. Frequently, faculty members sympathize with such complaints. After all, the professors have themselves undertaken graduate studies in increasingly narrow fields; their liberal education is many years in the past, and their self-esteem depends on their standing in their particular disciplines, not on their reputation for the synthetic skills of the generalist. But Newman’s argument about the humane value of broad learning remains compelling. Students should approach their general education requirements as a serious opportunity for intellectual growth.

Consider, for example, the requirement of mastery in a foreign language. Americans are notoriously bad at foreign languages; ambitious students may fear that their GPAs will suffer in language courses. But it really is true that some thoughts are better expressed in one language than another. Acquiring a foreign language can open up whole new *worlds*, and when kept up, a foreign language is a possession for life. Similarly, it is only through distribution requirements that the “two cultures” of science and the humanities are forced to engage each other in the modern university. Without this encounter, the student of the sciences risks falling into a value-free technological imperialism. Without this encounter, the student of the humanities risks falling into an antiquarian idyll, cut off from one of the major currents of the modern world.

There is also a simply practical advantage to distribution requirements. Today, about two-thirds of all students will change their major during their college career: many will change more than once. What students will “be” in life is almost certainly not what they thought they would “be” when they set off for college. Distribution requirements offer an opportunity to view the world from different intellectual perspectives. Who knows but that an unexpected horizon may prove to correspond to the heart’s deepest desires?

The Core Curriculum. It is the core curriculum, a survey of the great works of Western civilization, which has fared the worst in the curricular reforms of the past generation. With few exceptions, the core curriculum has been simply eliminated from American higher education. Those of a suspecting cast of mind may speculate that this change has occurred for structural reasons. Following the model of the natural sciences, Ph.D.'s in the humanities are awarded for original "contributions to knowledge." But the great works of Western culture have been studied for centuries. What genuinely "new" insights can be gleaned there? Have aspiring Ph.D.'s perhaps turned, in desperation, to other subjects in which there is still something "original" to be said? If so, how can they be expected to teach the great books, which were not their subject of study? But then, the elimination of the core is also surely the result of a moral rejection: the generation of the 1960s, which admired the Viet Cong and cheered U.S. defeat in Southeast Asia, viewed their own civilizational tradition as a legacy not to be honored but to be overcome. The "privileging" of the great books of the West therefore had to end.

A more positive justification for the demise of the core is frequently given, however. In order to prepare students for the Multicultural World of Tomorrow, it is said, students must be exposed to the *diversity* of world cultures. A merely Western curriculum would be parochial, a failure of liberal learning. Moreover, since our modern or postmodern technological civilization is characterized by rapid change, it is more important to be exposed to "approaches to knowledge," to "learn how to learn," than it is to acquire any particular body of knowledge. Education then becomes nothing but the cultivation of abstract instrumental rationality, divorced from any content and divorced from any end. Consistent with these arguments, many universities now call their *distribution requirements* a "core curriculum." They claim to have undergone curricular development rather than curricular demise.

As a practical matter, this multicultural transformation of the curriculum can have two curious results. In the worst cases, what passes for a multicultural curriculum is nothing but a peculiar kind of Western echo chamber. Students are given over to studying Marxist critics in contemporary Algeria and neo-Marxist critics in contemporary Brazil and post-Marxist critics in contemporary France. All that is really learned are variations on the "critique of ideologies"—a legacy of one great Western mind, that of Karl Marx. In other cases, however, students really are exposed to the high cultures and great works of non-Western societies; but their encounter with Western high culture remains slight. We thus are presented with the spectacle of many students today who habitually associate high ideals, profound insight, and wisdom with every culture but their own.

What, then, is the abiding justification for the traditional core curriculum in Western civilization? Why is it a major premise of this guide that a university lacking a

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core curriculum is educationally deficient—even as we stand at the dawn of the Multicultural World of Tomorrow? The purpose of the core is *not* to inculcate any kind of Western chauvinism, certainly not any ethnocentrism that would prevent a student from exploring and learning from non-Western cultures. Indeed, one expects that it will be precisely those who have delved most thoughtfully into the wisdom of the Occident who will then be in a position to learn the most from the wisdom of the Orient—rather like Matteo Ricci and the other Jesuits who encountered Chinese civilization with such sympathetic results in the sixteenth century. Lacking a foundation in the depths of our own civilization, a student can approach another as little more than a tourist.

There are really two arguments for the traditional core. They concern the importance of high culture and the importance of history.

High Culture. A not uncommon sight on a university campus during freshman week is a group of students sitting on the grass in the evening, one with a guitar, singing together the theme songs of vintage television sitcoms. In a society as diverse as America at the dawn of the twenty-first century, this is to be expected: television is one of the few things that young people from all walks of life have in common. But what are we to think when the same scene is repeated at senior week, four years later? Has higher education done its job when the only common references of those with a baccalaureate degree remain those of merely popular culture?

The core curriculum is the place in university studies where one encounters what Matthew Arnold called “the best that has been thought and said.” Such a view of education is hierarchical, discriminating, judgmental: it reflects the fact that the high can be distinguished from the low, and the further understanding that the high can comprehend the low whereas the low can never take the measure of the high. By spending time with the best, with the highest expressions and reflections of a culture, the mind of the student is equipped for its own ascent. Without such an effort, the student remains trapped in the unreflective everyday presumptions of the current culture: the student remains trapped in clichés. The high culture of the traditional core curriculum is therefore *liberating*, as befits the liberal arts.

Throughout history there have been countless thinkers, poets, writers, and artists; the vast majority of all their labor has been lost, and most of them have been entirely forgotten. What survives are the truly great works that have been held in consistently high esteem through the changing circumstances of time and place. Thus, the traditional canon of great books—the common possession of educated men and women across the centuries of Western history—is not an arbitrary list, nor does the canon reflect relations of “power”; rather, as Louise Cowan has observed, the classics of a civilization “select themselves” by virtue of their superior insight. The presumptions and presuppositions of our lives, which lie so deep in us that we can scarcely recognize them, are in the great works made available for inspection and inquiry. High culture is a matter not of snobbish refinement but of superior understanding.

It is here that the core curriculum is indispensable. For every student brings to college a preliminary “enculturation”—we have all by the age of eighteen absorbed certain perspectives, insights, narratives, stereotypes, and values that communicate themselves to us in the prevailing popular culture. This enculturation is the common possession of a generation, whatever the diversity of their family backgrounds by class or ethnicity. But the artifacts of popular culture are always mere reflections of the possibilities glimpsed and made possible by works of high culture. The traditional core curriculum provides a student with access to that high culture; its *higher* “enculturation” provides a student with a vantage point from which he can grasp the meaning and implications of his everyday cultural presumptions. And he begins to hold something in common with the educated men and women of past ages; they become his peers.

One of the peculiar presumptions of our time is that novelty is good: social and technological transformations have given us a prejudice against tradition and in favor of “originality.” But it is the great works of the traditional canon that constitute the record of true originality: that is why they have survived. Only by becoming familiar with them are we enabled to recognize just how derivative is much of that which now passes as original insight. A university that does not orient its students to high culture effectively commits itself to a project of deculturation, and thereby traps its students in a kind of permanent adolescence.

History. George Santayana famously asserted that those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it. Centuries earlier, Cicero observed that to know nothing of the world before one’s birth is to remain always a child. These cautionary aphorisms are perfectly and pointedly true, and in the first instance they constitute one justification for the historical studies undertaken in a core curriculum. Practically speaking, there is wisdom to be found in experience. This wisdom is never more fully appreciated than when we experience the consequences of our actions at first-hand. But because human affairs exhibit certain recurring patterns, knowledge of history provides a stock of experiences at second-hand from which more general “lessons” may be drawn as well—at least, by those with ears to hear and eyes to see.

Nevertheless, these admonitions of Santayana and Cicero do not constitute the truly decisive historical reason for embarking on the traditional core curriculum. After all, insofar as human affairs exhibit patterns, and insofar as we approach history merely in search of the generally applicable “laws” or “rules” of human interaction, one may as well find one’s stock of lessons in any given civilization as in any other. Anyone’s history would be as good as anyone else’s. It is because the contemporary academic mind views the matter in just this social-scientific way that it is necessarily driven to understand the traditional core curriculum’s Western focus as nothing but the result of chauvinism or laziness.

But the core curriculum’s particular emphasis on Western history is not the result either of ethnocentrism or of sloth. There is something far deeper going on here. Indeed, when history is approached merely as the raw material of social sci-

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ence, historical study in itself loses any *intrinsic* value; all that really matters in such a scheme are the “laws” that are abstracted from the pool of historical “examples.” The core curriculum, however, does mean to value history *in itself*. How so?

All of us are born into a natural world governed by laws not of our making. Some of these laws are the laws of human nature and of human interaction, laws that apply in every time and place. But all of us are also born into the historical world at a particular time, and there is a certain *unrepeatable* (and unpredictable) quality to each historical moment, the result of free human choices. What is more, the historical moment we inhabit *now* is the outcome, in part, of the contingent history of our particular community, both recently and more remotely. In order to answer the first question of every true inquirer—*What is going on here?*—it is necessary to uncover the historical narrative of the present: that is, it is necessary to answer the question, *What is going on now?* To answer this question in any profound sense, it is necessary to understand the historical narrative of one’s own civilization—to understand, as well, what was going on *then*. Consequently, the traditional core curriculum is not simply the study of the great books of the Western world isolated from their historical contexts; rather, that study proceeds side-by-side with an inquiry that locates those works in history. While the great works articulate the great human possibilities, not all human possibilities are equally available to us today. In effect, to understand the meaning of that relative availability (and unavailability) is to understand one’s place in the stream of history, and this is the second argument for undertaking a core curriculum.

Typically, when a core curriculum has been poorly constructed, it reads history in a Whiggish way, or “progressively.” In the Whig narrative, Western history tells the simple tale of how the world has progressed ever upward until it reaches its highpoint, the present (and in particular, me). Moreover, such a facile historical sense anticipates a future that is a straight-line extrapolation of the present. When the core is structured well, however, it leaves open the question of whether the present is the outcome of progress or decline. (The truth, it has been said, is that things are always getting both better and worse, at the same time.) A student who has learned the deep historical lessons of a core curriculum is as alert to the possibilities of historical transformation just ahead as he is to the possibility of continuity.

Today, it is extremely common for a college student to reach the end of four years of study with all requirements met but with a profound sense of disorientation and confusion, even disappointment. What’s it all about? Usually, there will have been no sense of progression in the student’s plan of study, no sense of mastery, no perspective touching deeply upon many connected subjects that might serve as the basis for ever-deeper inquiry with the passing of the years. There will have been no ascent to a truly higher culture, and no cultivation of historical consciousness.

MARK C. HENRIE

What a lost opportunity!

The bad news is that it is most unlikely that we will see a return of the core curriculum in the next generation, and certainly not in time to benefit most of the readers of this guide. The good news is that much of the substance of the old core is still available, scattered across various courses in the departments. The eight courses that may constitute a “core of one’s own” are here listed for each of the universities covered in this guide (excepting only those schools which still offer a true core); the rationale for these eight courses—what each contributes to the comprehensive perspective of the core—is given in my monograph, *A Student’s Guide to the Core Curriculum* (ISI Books, 2000). Thanks to the elective system, the benefits of the core are not entirely beyond reach. The very best dishes are still available in the contemporary university-cafeteria: you simply have to choose them. Alas, that may entail occasionally passing on the chocolate cheesecake.

A curriculum is a “course”—like the course that is run by a river. A curriculum should take you somewhere. After four years of college, a graduating senior should be a different and better person than his former self, the matriculating freshman. Instead, most students today find themselves merely lost at sea, swamped by the roiling waters of various intellectual enthusiasms. Undertaking the *discipline* of a “voluntary” core curriculum today offers the prospect for the most profound of transformations—and the most delightful of journeys.

Mark C. Henrie holds degrees from Dartmouth, Cambridge, and Harvard. He is editor of the Intercollegiate Review and senior editor of Modern Age, both published by ISI. He recently contributed the introduction to a new edition of The Politics of Prudence, by Russell Kirk.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Jeremy Beer

There is no shortage of volumes to fill the shelves reserved for “college guides” at your local bookstore. These guides come in four distinct, if sometimes overlapping, types. Type One purports to tell our nation’s high school seniors how to write a crack admissions essay, win scholarships, and score additional financial aid—in other words, how to get into college and how to pay for it. Type Two primarily serves to overwhelm prospective collegians with hundreds of statistics and factoids, most of them completely irrelevant, about thousands of colleges, covering everything from the number of computers available to the number of companies recruiting on campus. Type Three guides focus on ranking schools according to this or that set of criteria—their overall quality, their reputation, the SAT scores of their student bodies, their dedication to multiculturalism, etc. And a final kind of college guide, Type Four, promises to deliver the inside scoop and provide a critical view on what it’s really like to go to Liberal Arts College or State U.

The book you hold in your hands most certainly does not belong to the first three categories. It does not provide advice on how to get into the college of your choice, nor does it attempt to guide you through the financial aid process; enough reference books do that and do it well. But such guides assume that choosing the right college is the easy part. After all, Type Three guides have already ranked schools for you, haven’t they? What is left but to go down the list and pick off the top five or ten schools where one’s test scores make admission possible and one’s financial resources make enrollment feasible? And to make such determinations one need only refer to one of the many Type Two guides.

This guide, by contrast, takes as its guiding principle that choosing the right college is the most important—and hence the most difficult—decision the prospective student and his or her parents face. About *where* to go to school those Type One “how-to” guides have little to say, those Type Two guides with all the statistics are valuable but insufficient, and those Type Three “ranking” guides are misleading—sometimes drastically misleading.

As for those Type Four guides—the genre to which *Choosing the Right College* belongs—well, it all depends on their philosophy. The first question to ask about a college guide is whether it is independently researched, written, and funded. Believe it or not, some guides make schools pay in order to be included. Others allow schools to write their own profiles. Either strategy greatly compromises the objectivity, not to say usefulness, of the “inside scoop” allegedly being provided.

Just as important is a guide’s view—always present, but usually implicit—on what constitutes the essence of a good education. Is it one that gives students the

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best chance to land a high-paying job? One that will introduce them to the people and ideas with which they must be familiar in order to move in the circles of the prestigious and powerful? One that exposes them to a great deal of racial and ethnic diversity, foreign and marginalized cultures, and heretofore ignored thinkers and texts? One that teaches critical thinking skills? One that allows students virtually complete freedom in making their own curricular, extracurricular, and residential choices? One that focuses on the development of the technological and research skills necessary for, as the official language has it, Success in this Fast-Paced, Rapidly Changing World?

For most guides, as for most educators and administrators in higher education today, the best education comprises a magical combination of some or all of these factors. If the reader agrees, there is no reason to purchase this guide—or any other, really. For a high-paying job, get a technological or research-oriented degree, preferably at a prestigious state university; to get access to power, go to one of the top twenty or so liberal arts schools in the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings; for soft relativism, thoroughgoing multiculturalism, and lots of curricular freedom, go virtually anywhere.

But if you, dear reader, have so much as an inkling that higher education has, or ought to have, nobler, less utilitarian purposes, then by all means read on. And be forewarned: the *New York Times*, with its usual perceptiveness, has called this guide “biased.” We’ll go further: it is absolutely prejudiced. That is, it advances from a preconceived judgment or opinion—not with regard to any particular school, but about the purposes of education and the responsibilities of educators.

I receive many letters from parents respecting the education of their children. In the mass of these letters I am always struck by the precedence which the idea of a “position in life” takes above all other thoughts in the parents’—more especially in the mothers’—minds. . . . They never seek, as far as I can make out, an education good in itself. . . . It never seems to occur to the parents that there may be an education which, in itself, is advancement in Life;—that any other than that may perhaps be advancement in Death; and that this essential education might be more easily got, or given, than they fancy, if they set about it in the right way; while it is for no price, and by no favor, to be got, if they set about it in the wrong.

— John Ruskin

The philosophy of education that informs this college guide is aptly delineated by William J. Bennett, Robert Royal, and Mark C. Henrie in this guide’s introductory essays. In short, we agree with Ruskin that there is “an education which, in itself, is advancement in Life.” In other words, we believe that a genuine education is its

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own end, and that while a good education may well enhance one's opportunities to gain power and prestige, a high-paying, exciting job, and all that the word "success" entails, it also brings into focus the very meaning of such words, limning them within a fuller, richer, deeper perspective.

Now, a current argument asserts that American higher education is being held hostage by tenured radicals, ideologically obsessed professors who teach the narrow dogmas of the academic left as objective truth, even as the truth they purport to teach is the truth that there is no truth—at least, there is no universal or objective truth, as opposed to what is true for you and what is true for me. Untroubled by this contradiction, these professors, supported by craven administrators, have systematically set out to subvert and deconstruct their students' cultural and religious heritage by debunking those Dead White European Males allegedly responsible for creating and transmitting that heritage.

There is a great deal of truth to this view, which explains why it has gained broad acceptance—to the great discomfiture of education elites. But it is not quite the whole truth. Threats to the liberal arts educational ideal come from a variety of directions. For one thing, Ruskin's complaint is as valid today as it was in 1894: the majority of parents too quickly reduce the question of an education's value to its material benefits. If judged solely in this utilitarian light, liberal education fares little better than it does in the hands of the academic debunkers. If some enlightened employers actively seek out graduates with solid backgrounds in the liberal arts, too many others care not a whit about the deformities produced by narrow, specialized degrees. The days when a degree in English or art history will pay as well as a degree in engineering, computer programming, or business are simply not on the horizon. No doubt a liberal arts education does prepare students for a "position in life," in Ruskin's phrasing, but that is not its proper end.

Nor can education be considered as just another consumer good and a university as just another corporation, as is often proposed by civic and business leaders. As a consumer item, a liberal education is unique in that its value cannot be properly appreciated unless one already possesses it (at least in part): in economic terms, the conditions of "adequate information" do not obtain. Seeing the university as a corporation is inadequate, then, because it would seem to require institutions to give the customer what he wants. If no one wants instruction in the classics, the thinking goes, well, that is tough cheese for the classics: we certainly ought not *make* students take such courses. And the university-as-corporation model usually comes freighted with a host of other problematic assumptions and prejudices—for example, a fascination with the wonder-working powers of "technology" and an overemphasis on the value of new "research." As a basic good—that is, as a good upon which the rest of our cultural infrastructure rests—it would seem unwise, to say the least, for our leaders to regard higher education as just another item for sale in the economic and cultural marketplace.

Finally, there is the Platonic dictum that education is necessarily dialogic. In our view, that means that the best setting for higher education is a residential one.

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The spontaneous discussions, debates, and arguments that take place between students—and better yet, between students and faculty—in the dorm room or hall lounge, at the student union, on the quad lawn, at the coffeeshop, or in the neighborhood bar provide a setting for the sharpening and interplay of ideas that not only transcends what can occur in a more formal classroom setting, but presents a major challenge to those who see distance learning and the Internet as technological panaceas to the grave problems of higher education. To be sure, some students may find it necessary to avail themselves of such measures as alternatives to the high costs and tiresome politics of the contemporary academy, if not for other reasons. But we should not let ourselves be fooled into believing that Internet education is anything but a highly problematic, if sometimes marginally preferable, alternative to the traditional residential college.

Unfortunately, residential life is not what it once was. The dorm rooms are more physically comfortable and inviting than ever, but for some students they have become psychologically taxing arenas of political and sexual combat. Teenage men and women share showers and bathrooms at elite schools like Williams, Wesleyan, and Vassar. Politicized residential advisors make it their business to attempt to program students with correct, liberationist views as soon as they arrive. Whether such efforts actually work is less important than how irritating they are. And crime, even violent crime, is a not insignificant problem on many campuses.

A distinctly anti-intellectual brand of radical politics, the consumer mindset, and the deterioration of campus life have conspired to make a genuine liberal arts education more difficult to obtain than ever. Nevertheless, at virtually all of our nation's top institutions such an education *is* still available. It is just that, at times, there is a lot of rough and dangerous terrain to be navigated. Think of this volume as a sort of travel guide, one that identifies the major landmarks and traditions of—and controversies afflicting—125 distinct regions, telling the traveler what to expect while there, what (and whom) to seek out, and what to avoid.

In selecting the 125 schools to be profiled in this guide, we have been careful to include those institutions generally considered to be “America’s top schools.” Thus, we have included the top forty most selective national universities and the top thirty-five most selective liberal arts colleges according to the objective selectivity rankings reported by *U.S. News & World Report*. We have then chosen fifty more schools to add regional, institutional, and curricular breadth to our coverage. We think that many of these schools have adhered impressively to the unfashionable concept of liberal education in which we believe, and we therefore wanted to be sure to commend them to our readers’ attention. Nonetheless, it should be noted that for lack of space many solid institutions are not included. Thus, when considering any school, readers are encouraged to do their own research using the sort of criteria we lay down here. (See the appendix of this guide for a list of specific ques-

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tions to ask when visiting a college or university.) We also encourage readers to keep an eye on www.collegeguide.org, where we will be posting, as opportunity allows, shorter essays on schools not covered here.

Each institutional profile is divided into three sections: “Academic Life,” “Political Atmosphere,” and “Student Life.” In writing and editing these profiles, we have examined school literature and Web sites, researched magazine and newspaper articles, and most importantly, talked to thousands of administrators, professors, and students.

In the Academic Life section, our team of researchers and contributing editors gathered information pertaining to the following questions: What is the school’s academic reputation? Is a genuine core curriculum in place? If not, how good a job do the general education requirements do in ensuring students graduate having received a broad liberal arts education and having taken foundational courses? Who are the best professors and which are the best departments or programs? Which programs or departments are the weakest or most politicized? What kind of academic advising do students receive? How strong are the relationships between faculty and students? How large are classes, typically? To what extent are graduate students relied on for teaching and grading? How bad is grade inflation?

A word is in order here about what we are attempting to do when we recommend professors. When we list an institution’s “top professors,” we are certainly not pretending to present an exhaustive list, nor are we applying a political test. Some of these professors are known to be conservatives, others liberals, and some radicals, but we have no idea where most of them stand politically. Rather, these are those individuals who were most often nominated by their colleagues and students as being fair, nonpoliticized, and pedagogically committed and talented.

An exclusive feature of *Choosing the Right College* is the inclusion, in each institutional profile, of an inset box that tells students how to build their own core curriculum. In this box we highlight eight specific courses that cover the eight areas we believe together make for a decent substitute for a traditional integrated core. These areas are:

1. Classical literature (in translation)
2. Ancient philosophy
3. The Bible
4. Christian thought before 1500
5. Modern political theory
6. Shakespeare
7. U.S. history before 1865
8. Nineteenth-century European intellectual history

The rationale behind this vision of the core curriculum is explained in detail in Mark Henrie’s book, *A Student’s Guide to the Core Curriculum* (which, by the way, may be purchased at www.isibooks.org or downloaded for free at www.collegeguide.org).

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In essence, this grouping of courses reflects the input of dozens of distinguished professors from a wide variety of disciplines as to what a brief but genuine core curriculum ought to cover. If taught well—and especially if taught using primary texts—these courses will help students obtain a broad and sophisticated understanding of the West, that is, an understanding of the narratives, beliefs, events, thinkers, and institutions that have shaped not only the world around them, but their very selves. And self-understanding is an essential prerequisite to the understanding of others.

In short, if students take the eight courses we recommend, and especially if they can contrive to take them from professors we recommend, they should graduate with at least the semblance of a true liberal arts education.

The Political Atmosphere section attempts to convey a feel for the dynamics of campus politics and the extent of campus politicization, or good old-fashioned political correctness. Thus, these sections speak to, among other things, the state of freedom of speech on campus, the extent to which unfashionable ideas are tolerated or welcomed, the pervasiveness of multiculturalist and other academic ideologies inside and outside the classroom, and the characteristic political attitudes of the student body. This is the section in which readers will find out about controversies such as Yale's "Sex Week," cosponsored by an adult film company and featuring a female porn star as a keynote speaker, Harvard's new student-run porno mag, and the filming of an "adult" video in an Indiana University dorm. Do you detect a theme? One needn't be a prude to be troubled by the pornographication of the contemporary university scene. But we cover plenty of non-sex-related controversies as well.

The Student Life section tries to give readers an idea of what it's like to go to each school. Here is where we go into detail about each institution's residential life: Are all dorms coed? If so, are there coed rooms? Coed bathrooms? Does the school guarantee housing for all four years? Would you want to live in the dorms in any case? In this section we also try to give some idea of how students spend their time outside the classroom. Is this a service-oriented school? Do the kids party five nights a week or are they a studious, intellectual bunch? In addition, we discuss whether campus crime is a problem, the extent to which athletics, particularly intercollegiate athletics, shapes the campus atmosphere, and whether there are unique traditions that help create a sense of school spirit and cohesion. There is much else in this section besides, depending on the character of the institution that is being assayed.

Finally, we provide some "vital stats" that we believe help bring into focus the character of each institution. These statistics reflect the best and most up-to-date information available as we went to press. Beware: the costs of tuition and room and board reflect 2003–04 rates; the reader ought to expect each number to be a bit higher for subsequent years. Also note that the precise metrics provided by schools for some statistical categories are not always the same—this is especially the case in schools' reported standardized test scores and average class sizes.

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And let it be said that we heartily assent to the proposition that statistics are often even worse than damned lies. Take the “courses taught by graduate TAs” question, for example. While this number gives a rough idea of how much TAs are being used, it is almost always deceptively low. Typically, it does not include the discussion sections attached to large lecture courses, which are usually taught by TAs. Nor does it accurately reflect the percentage of *students* taught by TAs over the course of a semester, a statistic that we have never seen reported. Moreover, universities sometimes refuse to disclose or simply do not keep track of the “percentage of courses taught by TAs” statistic, probably to save themselves from embarrassment. In such cases, we rely on student and faculty reporting to give us an idea of the extent to which a school relies on TAs.

Our hope is that *Choosing the Right College 2005* will do a better job than ever of informing students, parents, grandparents, teachers, and guidance counselors about the state of higher education at 125 of our nation’s top schools. We offer it with our sincere belief that it is the most incisive and compelling “Type Four” college guide on the market.

Jeremy Beer took his doctorate in psychology from the University of Texas at Austin. He is the editor in chief at ISI Books, where he has been the principle editor of Choosing the Right College since 2001. He is also the editor of ISI’s series of Guides to the Major Disciplines.