

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 four 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 nonideological liberal arts ideal is.

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 calls the victims of 9/11 “little Eichmanns” (see the University of Colorado at Boulder 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, 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 non-literary 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 2006 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 134 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 Reason Institute, and Mark C. Henrie, author of *A Student's Guide to the Core Curriculum*, respectively. John Zmirak, editor in chief of *Choosing the Right College 2006*, 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 ap-



INTRODUCTION

pendix 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, a Distinguished Fellow at the Heritage Foundation and the Washington Fellow of the Claremont Institute, 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 bestselling 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 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 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 ap-



THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HUMANITIES

proaches 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.

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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 PhD 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 MA years of graduate school.

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 sci-

ences, PhDs 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 PhDs 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 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 science, 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.

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.

MARK C. HENRIE

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.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

John Zmirak

This is not your average college guide. If you're looking for a collection of the nation's "party schools," you won't find it here (except by way of warning). Nor do we tell you how to write a crack admissions essay, win scholarships, or score additional financial aid—though we do report which schools are generous with grants and loans, so that needy, worthy students aren't scared off by high ticket prices. (You might be surprised to learn, for instance, that smart blue-collar students will pay less at Princeton than at many state universities. And Princeton could use them!) Our book won't bombard you with statistics and factoids about thousands of colleges, covering everything from the number of computers available to the number of companies recruiting on campus. We don't even rank schools, since we know that different colleges are suited to different students. Many highly selective colleges are presented here—check the average SAT scores and percentage of applicants admitted—alongside many excellent schools that admit a wide range of students. Then, too, some state schools with virtually open admissions harbor excellent honors programs that rival any experience one might have at the Ivies.

There are plenty of reference books out there that do all of these tasks which we decided not to fool with, and do them well. The one thing these guides don't really help with is . . . well, picking the best college *for you*. This is probably the toughest choice you've had to make so far in your life, and it may well make a huge difference in how the rest of it turns out. Colleges can form your character—or twist it. They can challenge, enrich, and deepen your treasured beliefs—or trash them and leave you with nothing. They can help you find lifelong friendships, professional contacts, and intellectual mentors—or drop you back into the world with not much more than a degree and a load of debt. It all depends on which one you choose, which in turn depends on who you are. We don't assume that there's just one college (or even a list of 10 or 20) which is right for everyone. The truth is that there's a wide range of schools with strengths and weaknesses that might complement your own, schools with vastly different atmospheres and codes, some of which would suit you well but might tend to stifle others, and vice versa.

It's our job to tell you which is which. Reading through these essays, you'll see, side-by-side, comments by current students, professors, and graduates, selections from research studies and investigative journalism, analyses of curricula, fond reminiscences and horror stories. Each essay has been compiled by a team of reporters who consulted a wide range of sources to give you the most candid, comprehensive, and up-to-date



description of what life is really like on campus, what you'd learn there, where are the treasure troves and where the pitfalls. You'll find in these pages entries devoted to the elite Ivies and other prestigious liberal arts institutions, where world-famous scholars deliver lectures to hundreds of ambitious activists, essays on tiny religious colleges that study the great books and the Bible, and write-ups on workaday state universities, each of which has at least a few excellent programs—and a lot of programs to avoid. You'll learn which colleges have strong sports teams, vital, faith-filled chaplaincies, and good systems for providing academic advice. And also which ones have coed bathrooms, by the way.

Unlike some other guides, this one is independently researched, written, and funded. Believe it or not, some books make schools pay in order to be included. Others let schools write their own profiles. How helpful is that? If you want to know what a school says about itself, check out its Web site. Or call its public relations department. (They sometimes call us, complaining about our candor.)

We're also upfront about our point of view. We have an agenda, and it's laid out right here in these introductory pages. That agenda is determined by our view of what constitutes a good education. There are many different views out there on this topic—many more than when John Henry Newman wrote his classic *The Idea of a University*—and most of them are partial or just plain wrong. Is a “good education” one that gives students the best chance to land a high-paying job? One that gives them entrée to the highest circles of cultural power? One that drenches them in “diversity” ideology, introduces them mainly to foreign and marginalized cultures, and teaches them to undermine the “status quo”? And how should a truly good education be structured? Like a Shonee's breakfast, where students pick and choose every item on their plate? Or like a thoughtfully constructed prix-fix menu at a fine restaurant—with a careful balance of meaty and flavorful, fresh ingredients prepared in a classic style? We think that once you think about it a bit, the answer is obvious.

In fact, while it may seem un-American to say it, we don't believe in the absolute virtue of choice. Not every high school kid comes into college knowing what he needs to learn, or even prepared to learn it. It's a sad fact that U.S. secondary education does not compare to what is offered in Europe or Japan. The mass-egalitarian ideology that pervades our secondary schools has dumbed most of us down. To expect every American teenager to take responsibility for planning every detail of his or her education is to guarantee that most of them will fail. They will emerge with a few specialties, a grab-bag of information, a pile of fashionable prejudices, and little else. This is what happens when we treat the fragile, multifarious fruit of thousands of years of human culture as a pile of consumer goods to be handled, sniffed, and accepted or rejected, according to whim.

If you think that a college education is just a ticket you have to get punched before you find a cozy cubicle, 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 university; to get access to power, go to one of the top 20 or so liberal arts schools in the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings; for soft relativism, thoroughgo-

ing multiculturalism, and the “freedom” to pick your own courses at random, go virtually anywhere.

But if you want to get a little more out of the four most expensive years of your life, if you’re inclined to grow as a person and tap into the wisdom of the ages, sages, and saints, then please read on. And be forewarned: the *New York Times*, with its usual perceptiveness, has called this guide “biased.” What they mean is that we don’t pretend to neutrality about what constitutes a serious education for an adult in Western society. We agree with what Newman wrote in 1852 when he described the ideal university in this way:

An assemblage of learned men, zealous for their own sciences, and rivals of each other, are brought, by familiar intercourse and for the sake of intellectual peace, to adjust together the claims and relations of their respective subjects of investigation. They learn to respect, to consult, to aid each other. Thus is created a pure and clear atmosphere of thought, which the student also breathes, though in his own case he only pursues a few sciences out of the multitude. He profits by an intellectual tradition, which is independent of particular teachers, which guides him in his choice of subjects, and duly interprets for him those which he chooses. He apprehends the great outline of knowledge, the principles on which it rests, the scale of its parts, its lights and its shades, its great points and its little, as he otherwise cannot apprehend them. Hence it is that this education is called “Liberal.”

One good test of a college is whether it teaches all its graduates—not just its English or philosophy majors—how to read and comprehend such a paragraph. Another is whether its curriculum partakes in this broadly traditional vision of the mission of education as something that forms the self, trains the mind, disciplines habits, and connects the student as one more link in the chain of civilized liberty that ties us to the ancient citizens of Athens, the prophets of Israel, the fathers of the church, and the founders of our nation.

The philosophy of education that informs this college guide is further explained by William J. Bennett, Robert Royal, and Mark C. Henrie in our introductory essays. In short, we agree with Newman’s contemporary John Ruskin that there is “an education which, in itself, is advancement in Life.” A genuine education, like sanity, holiness, happiness, love, or good health, is an end in itself. While it may well enhance one’s opportunities to advance in the world—to become productive and prosperous, to pursue a rewarding career—it does even more than that. An education teaches us how to decide what we want from life, how to weigh all the many trade-offs and face the moral challenges that will confront us throughout our lives. It teaches us how to be more fully human.

Now, it is widely argued, especially among conservatives, that American higher education is being held hostage by tenured radicals, professors blinded by unexamined, unchallenged ideologies of the left who transform their courses into catechism sessions propounding politics and imparting a corrosive, anti-Western view of the world that treats with reverence every civilization but our own. This view travels under the name of “multiculturalism,” and the buzzword used to promote is “diversity.” These words are cleverly chosen, since for most well-meaning people they suggest a broad range of views, imparted in a tolerant spirit, to students from a wide variety of ethnic and social backgrounds. If that were what these terms signified in practice, only bigots would oppose the agenda of the academic left. But in practice, as you will see if you read further, these terms too often refer to something quite different—to a systematic training in prejudice against the achievements of the West and a romanticized, neo-Marxist embrace of favored “victim” groups. These groups’ cultures are rarely viewed with critical respect and objectivity. Instead, they are used as cudgels with which to abuse a teacher’s least favorite aspect of our intellectual, political, or religious heritage. One great writer spoke of the past as a “far country.” If that is true, then the professors who view it with moralistic condescension, and the students who never bother to learn about it, are xenophobes and chauvinists. They desperately need the broadening experience of travel—but they believe, with the father depicted by Nancy Mitford, that “abroad is bloody, and foreigners are fiends.” We disagree.

Tragically, many schools are afflicted with the attitude described above. In the following pages, the reader will be warned at which schools current students warn Christians or conservatives to keep a low profile if they wish to receive fair grades or make any friends. But there are other problems as well in academia, problems that cannot be blamed on the left. Too many who are not in the grip of radical ideologies are simply pragmatists who view an education simply as a form of technical or preprofessional training, so that a school’s success could essentially be judged by looking at the incomes of its graduates. If this were true, then universities would not be essentially different from schools that teach students the skills of a court stenographer or refrigerator repair man. We would not lavish them will billions of dollars of private philanthropy and taxpayer subsidies. Few of their alumni would gather at intervals of 10 and 20 years or speak of their schools as “alma maters,” nourishing mothers.

The place that colleges still hold in our culture tells us that we remember, albeit dimly, that they are meant to do something more—to form the free citizen, prepare the future parent, and fortify the soul. Universities train us to think and argue for ourselves, but also to listen to older and wiser authorities, to question but also to take seriously the wisdom of other periods and peoples, to learn from our contemporaries and serve as mentors to the young. Most of us carry with us memories of one or two faculty members who stand in our minds as models of how to teach, how to counsel, how to correct, memories that guide us when we have children or students of our own. Schools also teach how to wisely spend our time, how to choose among the myriad political, cultural, and social options that a free society offers. That—and not keeping the kids entertained—is the secret function of a university’s extracurricular activities.

Of course, colleges ought also to train us in particular disciplines and instruct those of us who intend further study in one of the arts or sciences. The workload imposed should be sufficient to engage the bright and awaken the lazy. A university must challenge us to succeed and prod us to get up again when we fail. Our institutions of higher education ought to be, in every sense, schools of life. It is by these criteria that this book judges a college.

Needless to say, we are often disappointed.

But after one recovers from the initial shock of seeing how far many schools have strayed from their founding missions—be they religious or classically humanist—it is possible to adopt another view. Once one admits that the great edifice of traditional education has crumbled, that the Roman aqueducts and Gothic arches are broken, it is possible to look for what one poet called “love among the ruins.” Few schools still fully embody a vision of liberal (that is, liberating) education that Newman would recognize. (Any such schools that we could find we have included and commended them to your attention.) But in many colleges and universities, there are still significant remnants, even some recent growths, of excellence—brilliant scholars, dedicated and fair-minded teachers, extraordinary libraries and museums, and intellectually motivated fellow students. Some places more than others have clung to their traditions (see Hampden-Sydney, Providence College, and the University of Chicago, for instance); some have even begun to remember the deeper reasons why they were founded (see Seton Hall, Baylor, and Villanova); still others have sprung up to fill the void created by the great catastrophes of the 1960s and 1970s (see Christendom and Thomas More colleges). And even on many of the campuses that saw the most—and most destructive—changes in that great period of anti-intellectualism, one can piece together a first-rate education by choosing carefully among professors and programs. In fact, there are very few prominent schools in America at which this is not possible.

An old joke tells of a traveler through the South who asks directions, only to be told, “You can’t get there from here.” The news here isn’t that bad. The far country of intellectual adulthood, civilized discourse, and a liberated intellect is certainly within reach—and you can get there by many different routes. However, there is plenty of rough and dangerous terrain ahead. Think of this volume as a sort of travel guide, one that identifies the major landmarks, watering holes, and pitfalls of 134 distinct regions, telling the traveler what to expect while there, what (and whom) to seek out, and what to avoid.

In selecting the 134 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 40 most selective national universities and the top 35 most selective liberal arts colleges according to the objective selectivity rankings used by *U.S. News and World Report*. We have then chosen 59 more schools from different regions of the country, institutions that have special emphases, unique virtues, or distinctive missions. This

edition, for the first time, includes the three U.S. service academies, which offer excellent educational opportunities for those willing to risk life and limb in defense of their country. We have also added several more small colleges renowned for their intimate social interaction and intellectual seriousness, as well as some lesser-known schools with serious curricula.

We couldn't fit every school—even every worthwhile school—in a single book and hope to do any one of them justice. So if you're considering a place not included in this volume, do your own research using the sort of criteria we lay down here. (See the appendix of this guide for a list of specific questions 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 two sections: “Academic Life” 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. Each essay has been updated and revised to reflect the latest changes at each college covered.

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). 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 the world around them and the core beliefs encoded in our culture and Constitution. And if you don't understand your own culture, you'll make a poor student of anyone else's. (As Socrates famously insisted, "Know thyself.")

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 a semblance of a true liberal arts education. That means they will have minds that are free to go on learning all through life from a vast variety of sources, minds supported by hard-won skills and guided by a sure intellectual compass.

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? (Some are Gothic gems, others Stalinist monoliths.) 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 school traditions still create a spirit of cohesion. There is much else in this section besides, depending on the character of the institution, including everything from controversial mascots to quaint customs, school songs, and curious but telling facts. (Did you know, for instance, that in the chapel of Washington and Lee, General Robert E. Lee is actually buried under the main altar? That Louisiana State University keeps a live tiger on campus? That Caltech freshmen are encouraged to try to vandalize the dorm rooms of seniors—who fortify them like bunkers to weather the siege?)

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 2004–5 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.



JOHN ZMIRAK

As Mark Twain once quipped, “There are lies, damned lies, and statistics.” We agree. Statistics can be spun like sugar into almost any shape. Take the “courses taught by graduate TAs” question, for example. While this number—which many schools are unwilling to give or even calculate, by the way, most probably because they would be embarrassed by it—provides 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. Not that all TAs are necessarily bad teachers. But it’s important to realize that you will probably spend a lot more of your time at some schools talking to harried graduate students than to the Nobel Prize winners featured on the front of the college viewbook.

Our hope is that *Choosing the Right College 2006* will do a better job than ever of informing students, parents, grandparents, teachers, and guidance counselors about the state of higher education at 134 of our nation’s top schools. We offer it with our sincere belief that it is the most incisive and compelling critical college guide on the market.

John Zmirak took his doctorate in English literature from Louisiana State University and his BA from Yale. He has worked as a journalist for over 10 years at periodicals such as Investor’s Business Daily. He is the author of Wilhelm Röpke: Swiss Localist, Global Economist and The Bad Catholic’s Guide to Good Living and serves as a contributing editor at the American Conservative.