

Crossing Boundaries: Globalization & Liberal Arts Education¹

I. Introduction

Inaugurations are an interesting mix of the personal and the institutional. I have watched with pride, gratitude and no small amount of embarrassment as many in our community have worked so hard and with such apparent enthusiasm to organize “my day,” as they put it. But this is certainly much more than “my day”. Inaugurations are principally about the institution itself: its identity, its history and the making of its future. As my fellow presidents in the audience today know so well, presidencies call upon us to be more than ourselves, to activate and voice the essence and potentiality of the college community. It is an experience that is heady and humbling – mostly humbling.

And this ceremony takes on added significance today because of the tragic events this week in New York, Washington, DC and Pennsylvania. Hiram College has remained open and we are here today because, in the absence of a direct threat to our community, we wish to take a stand in defense of civilization and democracy against terrorism. That is the fundamental mission of education: to educate citizens and perpetuate the benefits of civilization, especially civilized discourse among ourselves.

As we think about the role of higher education today, I invite you to reflect on the seal of Hiram College. Our motto, “Fiat Lux” - “Let there be light” - comes from the opening lines of Genesis on the creation of the world. And poised above an image of the Bible is a dove, symbol of peace, bearing an olive branch. Our seal tells a story about education and the development of humankind. The bird is the dove bearing an olive branch, the ancient middle eastern symbol of home and rootedness, which signaled to Noah that the waters of the great flood were subsiding, that the terror and tragedy had ended and a new covenant had been established.

With this seal, Hiram College positions itself not in the Eden before man’s fall and mortal existence, but in the fullness of man’s struggle with evil and error, holding before itself the role of light-giver, of guide to wisdom and understanding in a world that knows fear, loss and darkness. The events of this week remind us that our role is to be the light-givers and to persist, as did Noah, in the face of terror and destruction.

In my remarks today, I have a topic and I have a continuing metaphor. My topic is the correspondence between liberal arts education and globalization, the phenomenon that has transformed our world over the last 20 years. My metaphor is one image that ties the many aspects of my topic and this event today together. It is the metaphor of crossing boundaries. Let me add that my purpose today is not a defense or promotion of globalization, though I certainly recognize many benefits in it. I am dealing with it as a fact of life to which we must respond; its social, political and economic pros and cons are a topic for another day. Now back to my subject.

¹ This article was originally delivered as the author’s inauguration speech at Hiram College on September 14, 2001. Welcoming remarks and acknowledgments that preceded the body of the text have been deleted.

The metaphor of crossing boundaries characterizes not only the transformational nature of globalization but also the transformational nature of liberal arts education. I am a beneficiary of liberal arts education and its transformational power; so, it is only fitting that I recall a few of those who have guided me through my career by citing them to mark the stages of my remarks. In addition, it is fitting that I recognize Hiram's great tradition of mentoring: from James Garfield's encouragement and counseling of Burke Hinsdale, his close friend and presidential successor at Hiram, to the guidance and inspiration generously shared by the Dooley's and the Vincent's, the Booth's and the Chatfield's. And with us today are so many representatives of that tradition, our faculty who raise the standard every day, and especially our distinguished emeriti, from our newest, Dr. Sandra Parker, to the distinguished Professor Charles McKinley, who have carried on this tradition with distinction and care.

II. The Argument

So, let me begin with a statement of my argument: that liberal arts education is the ideal education for life and work in the global political, economic and social environment. And who better than a founding father to support my case. John Adams, the second president of the United States wrote as follows to his son, the young John Quincy Adams who would go on to serve as the 6th president of the United States:

*A taste for literature and a turn for business, united in the same person, never fails to make a great man.*²

In the world of John Adams, "literature" encompassed ancient and modern writing including fiction, poetry, political, moral and natural philosophy, and much more. In brief, he meant the kind of education you could get at his alma mater, Harvard College. Such quotes are music to the ears of the liberal arts educator! But they are anathema to the conventional wisdom.

The conventional wisdom holds that liberal arts education – especially in its residential form - lacks the "real world" applications and the vocational focus that students require to succeed in life. What is more, these anonymous sages tell us, technology is fast rendering obsolete most forms of residential education; so what is the point of the discussion today?

The point is that this assessment is wrong on every count. Ironically, those who sound the death knell of liberal arts education and the small residential college, do so most often in reference to globalization and its principal driver, technology. These are portrayed as overwhelming forces of modernism that will sweep away this venerable, nostalgia-ridden form of education. Having had the good fortune to enjoy careers in both higher education and global business, I would like to make the contrary argument, and more importantly, I would like to move beyond its narrow, shortsighted scope.

² Cited in David McCullough, John Adams (New York: 2001), p.170.

But let me be absolutely clear: it is liberal arts education at its cutting edge, in its most future-oriented forms, that finds its counterpart in globalization. John Kemeny, former president of Dartmouth College, put it best when he defined the mission and challenge of liberal arts education as follows: “[we are] preparing students to answer questions we don’t even know yet ...” Liberal arts education and globalization are both positioned at the horizon of our knowledge and capabilities, the one for educational purposes, the other for competitive purposes. Our institutions stand at the critical juncture where they meet meet.

III. The Challenge of Globalization

But what is globalization? Thomas Friedman’s book, The Lexus and the Olive Tree does an excellent job of capturing the scope of the phenomenon. Friedman opens his essay with a description of how the journalist’s “beat” or “market”, as he calls it, has evolved in recent years under the influence of globalization:

*In the old days a reporter, columnist or statesman could get away with thinking of his “market” as City Hall, or the Statehouse, or the White House, or the Pentagon, or the Treasury Department, or the State Department. But the relevant market today is the planet Earth and the global integration of technology, finance, trade and information in a way that is influencing wages, interest rates, living standards, culture, job opportunities, wars and weather patterns all over the world.*³

For Friedman, globalization is not a mere trend in international business activity, but a paradigm shift. Globalization replaces the Cold War as the defining international system. It is a pervasive, transforming, dynamic force, shaping not only business practices and strategies, but also the policies and conduct of governments, the evolution of cultures and human self-understanding.

The principal force underlying globalization is the movement toward liberalism and free market capitalism. To be sure, the movement is anything but complete as significant parts of the world remain under systems falling far short of the reigning American model (e.g., Russia and China). Moreover, it is a movement that will remain hotly contested in many regions for years to come; it remains in many important respects a “work in progress” with its ultimate ideological character as yet undetermined.

Technology is, of course, another driver of globalization. Information and communications technologies have made possible a breakdown of natural and political barriers. They have also enabled the economically efficient organization of industrial activity on a truly global scale. Today, headquarters in Europe might devise worldwide strategies to source materials in Latin America for manufacture in Asia while marketing and distributing in North America.

³ Thomas L. Friedman, The Lexus and the Olive Tree (New York: 1999,2000), p.27.

Take Siemens, the electronics company headquartered in Germany. It has 460,000 employees worldwide in 190 countries. Siemens has 80,000 employees in the U.S. and operates in all 50 states; Siemens does more business here than it does in Germany. So, what does it mean to be a German company? Or consider, for example, where your car was made and what company made it. You may get a much more complicated answer than you expect.

The globalization of business functions leads to a commensurate diversification of the workforce. As corporations globalize, they employ people from a wide variety of countries. As a result, the ethnocentric, nationalistic corporate headquarters of yesteryear is diversifying along with the basic workforce as the corporate community redefines itself across national boundaries.

It is no wonder, then, that diversity is a critical corporate success factor. “Think Global, Act Local” we are told. Companies require managers who can not only work effectively in multi-cultural environments, but also people who possess the ability to implement a global strategic concept in a manner suited to the particular locale in which they operate. In this profile of the global professional, we also hear an echo of the breadth and depth of the liberal arts curriculum that combines critical thinking with learning across time and cultures.

However, globalization’s most significant characteristic is the institutionalization of accelerated innovation and change as business facts of life. On the one hand, change is the primary environmental characteristic of globalization. On the other, innovation is the indispensable condition for survival and success in this environment. Friedman does not hold back in describing their impact, using the Information Revolution as his example:

First [The Information Revolution] greatly lowered the barriers to entry into almost every business, by radically lowering the costs for new entrants. And, by doing so, it radically increased competition and the speed by which a product moved from being an innovation to being a commodity. Second, by lowering the barriers around companies, the Information Revolution also brought them closer to their customers, giving consumers much greater power...⁴

Most importantly, globalization has changed the relationships among people in the workplace. The global change phenomenon occurs on the front lines of competition where products are produced and marketed. It is a much more pervasive and democratic phenomenon than we have known. Change has made uncompetitive the old (and somewhat mythical) vertical corporate hierarchies that had omniscient leaders at the top giving direction to up-and-coming order-takers at the bottom. Instead, we see the flattening of organizational structures in order to distribute authority and accelerate decision-making, placing it closer to the operating line where change and new learning most frequently occur.

⁴ Op.cit. p.80.

We are seeing younger employees take on more responsibility sooner. Competitive companies (and competitive not-for-profit organizations, for that matter) must not only recruit good people; they must also organize themselves to cultivate in these people the intellectual acuity to see and grasp change as it occurs.

Change is, of course, a threat when it arises from the competitor. However, it is a strategic asset when it arises in one's own company. The most effective competitors have therefore reinvented themselves as learning organizations. They thrive on the work of intellectually active, critical thinkers, adaptable lifelong learners for whom innovation and change are sources of excitement and growth.

Having sketched this portrait of the global competitive environment let me now try to abstract from its conditions the educational requirements for its inhabitants. What education, then, do I recommend for the young man or woman setting forth to live and work in this global environment?

- To deal with change, I recommend a finely tuned historical sense, along with a strong aptitude and appetite for learning.
- To deal with the complexity of emerging issues and the demand for innovation and problem solving, I recommend a broad and integrated general education, critical thinking skills, and learning integrated with work experience.
- For success in multicultural environments, I prescribe foreign study and travel, strong communications skills and the study of other civilizations.
- For the young person taking on more responsibility sooner, I urge attention to the education of the whole person, to the marriage of critical thinking with ethics, and to deliberation on the role of the individual in the community. Most importantly, I recommend that the desire to lead be tempered with the spirit of service and duty.

I trust you can see where I am heading. But let us not relax in smug satisfaction that our traditional liberal arts dog is at last having its day. Do we dare think that we are immune from change?

IV. Liberal Arts Education in Our Time

Turning to the portrait of the liberal arts institution, I will touch on just a few fundamental characteristics of liberal arts education at its cutting edge that I believe demonstrate the fit with globalization. For it is only the liberal arts college at its most innovative and future-oriented that can lay claim to leadership in educating the global citizen.

To capture the dynamic of the modern liberal arts college, I will quote from A. Bartlett Giamatti's "Ruminations on University Presidency". I had the honor of studying with

him at Yale and following his exemplary career. President Giamatti first distinguished himself at Yale University as a leading scholar of Renaissance literature, rising subsequently to serve as president of Yale. Then, in fulfillment of a life-long dream, he went on to become the President of the American League then Commissioner of Baseball. Nowhere was Bart Giamatti more eloquent than when he spoke about the life of the university, which he called: “that serious and splendid conversation...” Relishing most of all its dynamism, he wrote:

*[The university] is still a constant conversation between young and old, between students, among faculty; between faculty and students; a conversation between past and present, a conversation the culture has with itself, on behalf of the country...Perhaps it is the sound of all those voices, over centuries overlapping, giving and taking, that is finally the music of civilization, the sound of human beings shaping and sharing, mooring ideals to reality, making the world, for all its pain, work*⁵

Giamatti’s language is poetic in the way it takes all the complexities of educational life and molds them into an optimistic vision. We see old and new, young and old, individual and community, soul and mind, ideals and reality, idea and work brought together in the great conversation that is liberal arts education. It embraces change as an invigorating force that stimulates a constant exchange between the life of the mind and the life of action. This is a vision of education equal to the scope and complexities of globalization.

Moving from the vision to the practice, liberal arts education works on parallel tracks that require the student to explore in depth a given field while ranging more broadly across the arts and sciences. On one track, there is the major that provides a substantive introduction to a field, its methods and analytical practices. Here the student’s analytical and critical thinking skills are honed in the context of a particular discipline. However, the student’s education will be incomplete if the course of study stops there.

On the second track, there is the student’s general education. This is the least glamorous aspect of liberal arts education, but it is perhaps its most important dimension. At a minimum, it exposes the student to the various fields of human knowledge; at a maximum, it endows the student with a conceptual framework for understanding humankind and the world. The conventional wisdom tends to focus on the major as the cornerstone of undergraduate education and the basis on which a career is built. However, as our glance at globalization has demonstrated, it is the aptitude for continuous learning that defines success. General education - encompassing a variety of disciplines including the major - constitutes the foundation on which all future learning is built.

⁵ A. Bartlett Giamatti. A Free and Ordered Space: The Real World of the University. (New York: 1990) Norton, p.24-25.

I was surprised to find support for this view recently in a seminal work on the history of science, Thomas Kuhn's book, The Copernican Revolution. I learned that this book - describing the revolutionary transition from the Ptolemaic view of the universe to the Copernican view with all its consequences for science, philosophy, religion and the arts in the Renaissance and beyond - this book arose out of a series of lectures that Kuhn delivered in the science General Education courses of Harvard College.

This is significant because Kuhn's work gave rise to the notion of the paradigm shift and stands as one of the most cogent analyses of the scientific, philosophical and cultural roots of change. He saw the purpose of his general education lectures as communicating to the students not technical scientific tools, but paradigms constructed from the integration of scientific, historical and cultural insights. These paradigms would "illuminate the way in which science develops, the nature of science's authority, and the manner in which science affects human life."⁶

Such paradigms are the conceptual schemes that constitute our world view. They are the frameworks upon which creativity, innovation, and the advancement of knowledge exert their powers to produce changes in our understanding of the world or, as we have come to say, paradigm shifts. And as Thomas Friedman reminds us, globalization represents a paradigm shift from the Cold War structure of political and economic relations, and has built into itself a vast propensity for on-going change. General education, the field without a home in too many institutions, proves to be the area of study that reaches most deeply into the heart of globalization.

Not every new idea produces a paradigm shift, but many ideas entail a complexity that challenges our ability to deal adequately with them. In close kinship with general education, interdisciplinary studies confront the student with intellectual problems in all their complexity. Gender studies, comparative literature, multicultural studies, the history of science, biomedical humanities (a Hiram creation), these are areas of study that challenge the student to integrate the diversity of learning, to address problems that are not yet – or cannot be - fully codified in terms of single disciplines.

Interdisciplinary studies may be the individual's first experience of the intellectual challenge that confronts all economic and political leaders: that is, to read the pattern in the flux of the present, to see the first lines of the future image of the world. Two weeks ago, we inaugurated the Andrews Professorship in Biomedical Humanities. On that occasion, the Andrews Professor, Carol Donley, mapped for us the complex of ethical, scientific and policy questions that arise in the debate over stem cell research. Her tour de force exposition not only illuminated this difficult subject, but also demonstrated the power of integrated learning to help us chart a difficult course.

Liberal arts education speaks most naturally to the cross-cultural aspects of globalization. At Hiram, we consider it a great accomplishment that approximately 50% of our students study abroad at some point in their careers at the College. To my mind, it is an even

⁶ Thomas S. Kuhn, The Copernican Revolution: Planetary Astronomy in the Development of Western Thought (New York: 1957, 1985), p. ix.

greater accomplishment that they gain this experience of other cultures in an interdisciplinary setting. For example, last year, a group of students traveled to Japan to study in a program designed by two faculty members from the management and fine arts departments, respectively. They learned much about the Japanese culture, economy and management practices, and even more about how those dimensions of Japanese life interact.

Because globalization is multi-cultural and change-driven, it is also ineluctably communications intensive. The ability to communicate effectively is crucial to the success of the fluid, adaptive and innovative modern organization.

At Hiram, today and many of our sister institutions, the diversity of our studies, as well as the emphasis on analysis and argument, as well as the complexity of today's issues make the art of communication a pervasive challenge for the student in all our programs across the curriculum.

In addition, I would argue that the most effective communication is closely allied with the quality of the educational community as a community. At our best, we combine substantive deliberation on ideas and issues with a close, diverse, interactive community. Students dialogue freely among themselves and they have ready access to faculty mentors who challenge and guide them.

To go a step further, it is a virtue to be small when one considers the educational value of intense intellectual exchange. I am reminded here of the words of the great 19th century orator and senator, Daniel Webster, as he successfully defended the autonomy of Dartmouth College before the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court in a landmark case. With classic understatement, the legendary Webster declaimed: "It is, sir, as I have said, a small college, and yet there are those who love it ..." ⁷

Perhaps the least appreciated among the benefits of liberal arts education, is experience in the advancement of knowledge: that is, exposure to the methods and standards of research, of knowledge production. At Hiram we take great pride in the involvement of students in collaborative research with our faculty. In research – even research that would not qualify as groundbreaking – the student participates in the advancement of knowledge. The student learns the rigor, discipline and insight required to expand the horizon of human knowledge, to perfect our methods for dealing with nature for scientific, political or industrial purposes.

To experience research is to experience change in its most basic and forceful form: it develops the ability to identify the patterns and relationships emerging from the flux of data, to capture the paradigm shift that redefines our self-understanding or the basis of competitive advantage.

⁷ Cited in Frederick Rudolph, The American College and University: A History (Athens, Georgia: 1962, 1990), pp.209-210.

As a final brush stroke in this dual portrait, I must not fail to speak about experiential learning. Experiential learning - and its analog, service learning - integrate work and field experience with academic experience. On the one hand, it leverages the learning of the seminar with the process of the workplace; on the other, it subjects the methods of the workplace to the analytical scrutiny of the classroom.

Experiential learning is not without its critics. Many liberal arts purists see it as thinly disguised job training, or the elevation of experience over concept. The importance of experiential learning has deeper roots than mere vocationalism. It reflects a philosophical evolution in liberal arts education that owes more to the pragmatic educational philosophy of John Dewey than to the idealism of Henry Cardinal Newman's university. Both remain important influences in our idea of education and both placed great importance on the community as a key factor in education.

But where Newman cherished the discrete community of scholars, Dewey relished the interaction of the idea with experience in the world. Dewey emphasized the engagement of thought with the world because his ultimate goal was to educate the citizen for the practice of democracy. And today, as always in the history of our country, the need for an informed and active citizenry is of crucial importance.

The spread of experiential learning among the liberal arts institutions also corresponds to an evolution in the idea of the residential institution. From the sheltered sanctuary with monastic overtones, the modern college has evolved to become a center of exchange with the world at large. At Hiram today, we talk about Intimate Learning and Global Reach, a tradition of close, personal mentoring with global scope. I spoke a moment ago of the virtues of being small. Our challenge is to exploit technology, foreign study and institutional alliances in order to take the learning experience from our academic village to the farthest reaches of the world, and back.

You may have noticed that I have not spoken a great deal about technology. I am a big fan of technology: I want as much of it as I can get at the right price. The problem is that technology does not define the liberal arts institution and, we the liberal arts educators, have not yet come up with a sufficiently strong and independent vision of how technology may serve our purposes. However, technology is one of the great opportunities presented to us. If we educators can learn how to make it serve our goals, as we did centuries ago, for example, with printing and the proliferation of books, then we stand to be wonderfully enriched.

V. Conclusion: Undergraduate Education and Beyond

As I see it, there is a rather impressive congruence between the demands of the global economic environment and the qualities of liberal arts education today. The liberal arts experience responds point by point and with great effectiveness to the educational requirements of life and work in the global environment. It is our challenge now to make this good news known and to generate in our communities the support necessary to perpetuate our institutions.

In my remarks today, I have focused on the residential liberal arts college. As Voltaire admonished us to do in Candide, I have ‘tended my own garden.’ But I would like to close with a quote and a message that will ring true to any and all educators. The quote is another from Bart Giamatti’s “Ruminations on University Presidency”. He begins the essay with this statement:

*Being president of a university is no way for an adult to make a living. Which is why so few adults actually attempt to do it.*⁸

At first glance, that is a surprisingly disobliging statement from someone whose devotion to the academy is so strong. For a long time I wondered what he could have meant by it. Bart Giamatti’s wit was legendary but never superficial. He had to have a point.

And then, last year, as I watched the students arrive on campus, it came to me. I saw the campus come alive with the enthusiasm of our wonderful young people, starting new courses, renewing friendships, making new ones; I saw the rejuvenation and excitement of our Weekend College students; I saw the faculty return to campus with thinly veiled alacrity and anticipation; I saw the staff smile as their “old” kids returned (students: no matter what anybody tells you, we all think of you as our kids; we just try not to act that way) and the “new kids” struggled to find their balance.

A college presidency is no way for an adult to make a living because academic leadership is for the young, at least the young in spirit. Intellectual curiosity, daring, the revolutionary turn of mind, the taste for adventure and discovery, the urgency of idea and feeling, growth in mind and spirit: these are marks of youth and marks of the strong student and scholar. If colleges are about the future, if their role is to position themselves at the horizon of what we know, then, like the young men and women we take into our communities, the best must always be ahead of us. And the role of the president is to see the institution with the eyes of youth, with the vision of promise, and to move across frontiers with a lively step.

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September 14, 2001

⁸ Giamatti, p. 17.