

JERRY BERBERET • FRANK F. WONG

# THE NEW AMERICAN COLLEGE

## A MODEL FOR LIBERAL LEARNING

ERNEST BOYER'S persistent calls (1987) for creation of "integrated" institutions and Alexander Astin's advocacy of "talent development" models of educational excellence

(1991) were warmly received at the recent

Wingspread Conference on the New American College, August 15-17, 1994. A study group—including Boyer and Astin—of presidents, senior academic administrators, and faculty from fifteen comprehensive liberal arts colleges and representatives of several professional associations assembled at Wingspread to consider what "New American Colleges," a name coined by Boyer, offer higher education at a time of public demands for increased educational quality, cost effectiveness, and accountability. Two conclusions: (1) the essence of the New American College model of liberal learning is a blending of knowledge and experience in ways particularly suited to society's needs in the 1990s; and (2) organizationally, these institutions are attuned to the restructuring movement currently affecting all sectors of society.

### **A developing model**

What is the New American College model? At one level it is an evolving paradigm that

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differs from the two dominant models long used to define status and quality in American higher education: the pure liberal arts college model and the research university model.

Unlike the pure liberal arts model, it affirms professional education such as business, computer science, and engineering and the applied learning that these disciplines represent. It takes as a priority the need to connect general education with specialized education, theoretical learning with practical learning, the development of intellectual skills with the need for vocational skills. It asserts the value of working at the intersection of liberal education and professional education, clarifying connections while recognizing legitimate differences between the two. A priority is the need to work at the intersections of the disciplines, to advance more connected learning and a contextual consciousness for specialized learning. It recognizes the need to work at the intersections of different organizational parts of the university so that bureaucratic divisions yield to a broader sense of community.

This model, in placing a higher priority on an integrated academic culture and connected learning on the one hand, and the value of applied learning and practical application on the other, draws strength from the unique history of American higher education. In the first instance it builds on the tradition of the colonial college with its concern for the education of the whole student within the context of a personalized academic community. In the second instance, it constructs on the

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tradition of the land-grant university with its orientation toward the usefulness of knowledge in addressing the issues and problems confronting the larger society. This prototypical American pragmatism is reaffirmed in the New American College model.

At the same time, historic roots are invoked to respond creatively to contemporary challenges. Boyer's work, which extends the meaning of scholarship beyond the scholarship of discovery to include the scholarship of integration, the scholarship of application, and the

competition. Applied learning and connecting with the wider community respond to the perception that higher education has become remote from the urgent issues of our society as well as from the practical outcomes of what we teach. Furthermore, as it becomes clear that the movement to restructure business also applies to higher education's structures, the model's adaptiveness to new, more efficient organizational mechanisms will help to reduce overhead costs and empower faculty and staff to become more productive. Respon-

siveness to the changing educational needs of dynamic local economies is at the center of an implied partnership between the New American College and its surrounding region.

#### **The Wingspread conference**

What is the New American College group that met at Wingspread? As a study group over the past two years we have analyzed the institutional implications of principles underlying the model. The New American

College model is neither exclusive to our group nor do we make some special claim to the model's concepts. Rather, we are eager to explore implications for all higher education that these ideas might have.

At the same time, we do not believe that our focus on these concerns is accidental. As predominantly small, private, "comprehensive" institutions (in the old Carnegie classification), we have not fit the liberal arts college or the research university models. The contrasts have made it possible for us to see that in addressing the education issues that face us, those models are deficient. Indeed, perhaps hundreds of colleges and universities could lay claim to the New American College designation. (*U.S. News and World Report* [26 Sept. 1994] rankings use "regional university" as a category for the five hundred Master's I and II institutions in the new Carnegie classification.) Wingspread institutions evolved from small and well-regarded liberal arts colleges (e.g., Hood, Quinnipiac, North Central, Rollins, Redlands, and Susquehanna). Often located in once rural and small town areas, they responded to marketplace opportunities that suburban economic and demographic

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continuing the central focus on the effective education of students.

In a similar way, this model is responsive to other widely held public concerns about the performance of higher education. Concentration on building and sustaining an academic community addresses the concern that education emphasize cooperation, democratic citizenship, and moral responsibility in addition to individual achievement and individual

scholarship of teaching, finds institutional expression in the New American College model. This paradigm extends the meaning of liberal education to include an emphasis on internal organizational integration and organizational connection with society through applied learning, while



Ernest Boyer addresses a Wingspread conference plenary session with Alexander Astin (left) and Harold R. Wilde (right)

growth spawned in the 1950s and 1960s. In cities that grew rapidly, some liberal arts institutions became New American Colleges as well (e.g., Richmond, Loyola of Baltimore, Hamline, and Trinity of San Antonio). Still others reflect a diversity of backgrounds, from conservatory (Ithaca) to institutions with strong professional school traditions (e.g., Pacific, Valparaiso, Santa Clara).

Among these schools, some responded out of necessity to their circumstances—a declining traditional-age student base and small endowments—and to increase their enrollments significantly. Most achieved this with part-time adult students, often enrolled in non-traditional program formats (evening, weekend, off-campus sites) and by newly created or expanded professional and graduate programs. In many cases, the influx of adult students increased the number of majors in the liberal arts as well as in professional fields, with the added benefit of making possible increased numbers of liberal arts faculty.

#### **An educational laboratory**

We are interested in becoming an educational laboratory to evaluate the effectiveness of the ideas we are exploring.

A number of exemplary programs embody the model's principles:

1. To leverage its potential to establish a national reputation in media communications, Ithaca College consolidated separate programs in radio, television, print journalism, media, and corporate communications into a single media studies program emphasizing a learning triad of theory, practice, and performance in the Park School of Communications.
2. To focus on the natural sciences while building bridges to the social sciences and the local region, the University of Redlands developed an interdisciplinary environmental studies program in association with ESRI, a firm specializing in geographical information systems.
3. To assist in improving K-12 education in San Antonio, Trinity has for several years convened a roundtable involving superintendents, business leaders, and politicians; a graduate program in education is associated with the roundtable. Quinnipiac responded to a Connecticut mandate that all teachers possess an undergraduate major

by developing a master of arts in teaching program combining disciplinary and pedagogical studies with a K-12 residency.

4. To improve retention, North Central faculty, academic and student affairs administrators, and student leaders joined together to establish fall-term freshman seminar teams for orientation, advising, small group learning, and co-curricular activities, integrating expectations gained in the admission process with actual experience.
5. To implement Boyer's redefinition of faculty scholarship in the curriculum, Hamline inaugurated a program of student-faculty collaborative research across all undergraduate disciplines.
6. To assure curricular and faculty structural integration, Hood and North Central, although offering undergraduate and graduate programs in a variety of day, evening, and weekend formats, have deliberately maintained one faculty and one set of undergraduate curricular requirements. Pacific, Valparaiso, and Ithaca have developed ways for graduate and professional school faculty to teach in the undergraduate general education program.

#### **Planning the next steps**

At the Wingspread Conference a number of potential projects were identified for the study group to pursue as an educational laboratory in the future:

- inter-institutional data exchange to refine identification of common characteristics and to quantify some indicators of excellence;
- campus mini-conferences to focus on exemplary curricula and programs demonstrating the possibilities of the model;
- study project on the implications of New American College concepts for faculty hiring, development, roles and rewards, and graduate school preparation;
- newsletter and other means of communicating with an expanded network of colleges and universities;
- study project on standards and procedures for resource analysis, planning, management, and development.

The Wingspread Conference synthesized our thinking in powerful ways. Boyer's view of the multiple roles of faculty scholarship and Donald Schön's call to educate "reflective practitioners" in reforming professional edu-

cation became metaphors for liberal learning in a new context. Drawing an analogy with another sector of society under pressure to contain costs and become more accountable, Frank Wong identified "disconnected specialization"—the antithesis of integration—as a core problem in health care as in higher education. He called for a "primary care professor"—a faculty member able to contribute in multiple ways to the education of students as whole persons. Establishing the connections—

and empowerment. As Peter Senge notes in *The Fifth Discipline*, successful institutions in the 1990s will become "learning organizations" that seek to harness the creative and analytical capacities of all participants by involving all organizational members in the learning curve. This seems consistent with Astin's emphasis on talent development outcomes to gauge a college's excellence, in contrast to input measures alone, such as faculty salaries and student selectivity. Assessing what

New American College graduates know, value, and can do appears to be a logical next step in weighing the significance of the impacts these institutions are having on students.

Typically products themselves of elite liberal arts colleges and distinguished research universities, the school leaders who met at Wingspread perceive their current institutions as different, rather than better models of higher education. North Central President Harold R. Wilde noted, "There is no Amherst or Harvard that others can use as

the epitome of excellence, the model against which to be measured.... The model—the standard—is still being formed. Perhaps it was this fact, more than anything else, that explains the excitement which marked all of the conversations at the conference."

The Wingspread participants are eager now to continue this exciting conversation with others, mindful that the rethinking of liberal learning in the context of higher education's response to a new era has broad implications for the future.

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Frank Wong (center), Tamar March (left), and Jerry Berberet (right) at Wingspread

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knowledge and applications, general education and discipline specialization, curriculum and co-curriculum, faculty and student-life staff, campus and community—which enable a college or university to become an integrated institution makes possible multiple benefits

from a single activity. An applied research project in the off-campus community, for example, may powerfully educate students, integrate faculty teaching and scholarship, utilize community resources in ways that augment college resources, and advance community education and good will—a substantial multiplier or value-added effect.

What seems to be emerging in New American Colleges is a mirroring of student, faculty, and administrative roles around learning