Sailing Past Scylla

A History of the Seminar Program at Saint Mary's College of California
SAILING PAST SCYLLA

Saint Mary's and the Seminar

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FOREWORD

The major part of this story and the inspiration for the rest is the work of Professor Edward Porcella, who in 1992 spent some time thinking about, and reading about, the Collegiate Seminar. Any judicious remark results from his meditations. Any paragraph with a footnote is his. Any metaphor with some life in it is his. Brother Kenneth Cardwell selected paragraphs from three different versions of the original Porcella manuscript, added some opinions of his own, and stitched the patches together as best he could. Deanne Kruse, program manager of the Seminar during the tenures of five directors, contributed historical and practical observations made from her chair at the working heart of the program. Rosa Grundig edited the results and saw the booklet through the press.

This compilation is being issued as a tribute to Ed Porcella, the 2010 recipient of the DeSales Perez Award for his contributions to the Seminar Program.

Brother Kenneth Cardwell, FSC
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SAINT MARY’S AND THE SEMINAR

By Edward Porcella, Ph.D. ’64
Continuation by Brother Kenneth Cardwell, Ph.D. ’71
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I. The Movement for Educational Reform

The Seminar arrived at Saint Mary’s College during a time of national and institutional crisis. The run-up to the Second World War saw the College’s all-male student body dwindle, as the nation made ready for war. In Moraga, an internal revolution was under way. In the fall semester, which saw the attack on Pearl Harbor, Professor James L. Hagerty taught Philosophy 182a-182b. An upper division philosophy course, it was not, as first proposed, required of, or even open to, all students at the College. The catalogue describes it as follows:

Readings in the Great Books of the World:
Two-hour seminars once a week to study the masterpieces of thought in all ages of our Western civilization. Program for autumn semester 1941 includes the classics of the Greeks; for spring semester 1942 the Roman classics. Medievalists and moderns will be included in the 1942-43 program.

By means of such a simple construction, the Greeks and their associates gained entrance into what was called, affectionately or ambiguously and derisively, “our little white academic city.” After one year of trial, the course was made mandatory for all freshmen by President Brother Austin in the fall of 1942.

At Saint Mary’s, interest in liberal education through great authors had been sparked by a speech of Mortimer Adler to the American Catholic Philosophical Association.
in April 1941. President of the association’s western branch and personally acquainted with Adler, Hagerty had invited him to address the association in San Francisco. The meeting was well-covered by the press, including the Catholic San Francisco Monitor, and Adler’s talk, “The Order of Learning,” was printed in the fall issue of the Saint Mary’s Moraga Quarterly.

Adler drew a provocative contrast, declaring that progressive secular educators mistook the ends, but Catholic educators mistook the means, of education. True learning of a subject matter, he argued, is the aim of university study and possible only if one has first acquired the liberal arts in collegiate studies. A good scheme of collegiate education “spends all of the four years primarily on the liberal arts, and not on the mastery of subject-matters . . . A liberal education, crowned by the bachelor of arts degree, should consist in an ability to read and write, speak and listen, observe and think. A college graduate should be a liberal artist and nothing more—as if that were not enough to hope for . . . .”

As Robert Hutchins, then president of the University of Chicago, had argued in The Higher Learning (1936), education consists of three phases—elementary, collegiate and university—not four, and the collegiate phase ought to begin earlier than it does in America. Adler was calling for reform in education at all levels. No single institution could accomplish this, but a college acting on its own might attempt to do what remained undone with students as it found them. When Hutchins’s Committee on the Liberal Arts failed to reach agreement, either with the departments at Chicago or with itself, two of its members, Scott Buchanan and Stringfellow Barr, both of the University of Virginia, undertook in 1936 to revive the nation’s third oldest institute of higher learning, the nearly failed St. John’s College at Annapolis, by a plan of liberal education based on study and discussion of “great books.” Adler, who had studied, and later taught, in Columbia College’s Honors Program, had introduced Hutchins and Buchanan to the approach.1 Hutchins had been trying without success to establish such a program at Chicago. Only an institution in “critical condition,” it seemed, would consent to the measures Hutchins and his more radical committee members thought necessary.

In his San Francisco address Adler voiced agreement with St. John’s President Barr, that the aim of a college is not to teach subjects but to use them. A liberal arts student should not be set to master a subject but to grapple with it. And such a student will not acquire the liberal arts “unless great books are used as the representatives of subject-matter. Text-book representations simply will not work, for the simple reason that text-books are so written as not to require any liberal art on the part of the student. They try to make everything easy.”

The prestige of the San Francisco meeting and Adler’s address lent support to Hagerty’s proposal, but his Great Books of the World seminar was not a full implementation of Adler’s ideas,
even when it became a required course in the fall of 1942. Like most colleges and universities in the United States, Saint Mary's had in some measure participated in the move toward general education led by Columbia College in the years after World War I. Columbia had developed a liberal arts curriculum consisting of three two-year sequences in contemporary civilization, humanities and science required of all students. As introduced in 1941, Hagerty's upper division philosophy course resembled John Erskine's honors course in great books, introduced at Columbia in 1919 and known after 1929 as the "Colloquium on Important Books." 

Columbia University 1919 Erskine List

Homer, *The Iliad; The Odyssey*
Herodotus, *History*
Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*
Aeschylus, *Prometheus; The House of Atreus*
Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus; Oedipus Coloneus; Antigone; Electra*
Euripides, *Alcestis; Medea; Electra; Hippolytus*
Aristophanes, *The Frogs; The Clouds*
Greek Art: Percy Gardner, *Principles of Greek Art*
Plato, *The Symposium; The Republic; The Dialogues of Plato*
Aristotle, *The Ethics; The Poetics*
Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*
Virgil, *Eclogues and Georgics; Aeneid*
Horace, *Odes; Epodes; Satires; Epistles*
Plutarch, *Lives*
Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, *To Himself*
St. Augustine, *The Confessions; The City of God*
The *Song of Roland*
The *Nibelungenlied*
St. Thomas Aquinas, *Of God and His Creatures*
Dante, *La Vita Nuova; La Divina Commedia*
Galileo, *Nuncius Siderius; On the Authority of Scripture in Philosophical Controversies; Four Dialogues on the Two Great Systems of the World; Two New Sciences, Third Day*
J. J. Fahie, *Galileo, His Life and Work*
Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace*
Montaigne, *Essays*
Shakespeare, *Hamlet; Much Ado about Nothing*
Cervantes, *Don Quixote*
Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning; The New Atlantis*
Descartes, *Discourse on Method*
Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*
John Milton, *Paradise Lost*
Molière, *Les Précieuses Ridicules; Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme; Le Misanthrope; Tartuffe; L'Avar"e*
George Meredith, *On Comedy and the Comic Spirit*
John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*
Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*
Voltaire, *Candide; Toleration and Other Essays*
S. G. Tallentyre, *Voltaire in His Letters*
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality; Confessions*
Edward Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*
Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*
Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*
Goethe, *Faust*
American State Papers: The Declaration of Independence; The Constitution of the United States; *The Federalist*
Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*
Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*
Sir Charles Lyell, *The Principles of Geology*
Balzac, *Old Goriot*
Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*
John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography; On Liberty*
Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species; Autobiography*
René Vallery-Radot, *The Life of Pasteur,* or Emile Duciaux, *Pasteur, the History of a Mind*
Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto; Capital*
Lyof Tolstoy, *Anna Karénina*
Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*
Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra; Beyond Good and Evil; The Dawn of Day (Preface)*
William James, *Psychology*

In Humanities A, following a required version of the Erskine course introduced in 1937, Columbia freshmen read and discussed about 30 great authors (one each week) from Homer to Goethe, meeting for two semesters in groups of 20 to 25, with instructors drawn from the departments of English, philosophy, history, classics and the modern languages.

Columbia University 1937 *Erskine List*

**FIRST SEMESTER**

Homer, *Iliad*
Aeschylus, *Agamennnon; Choephoroi; Eumenides; Prometheus Bound*
Sophocles, *Oedipus the King; Antigone; Oedipus at Colonus; Electra*
Herodotus, Book I; Books VI, VII, VIII (in part)
Thucydides, Books I, II, V (in part); Books VI, VII
Aristotle, *Poetics*
Euripides, *Electra; Trojan Women; Hippolytus; Medea*
Aristophanes, *The Frogs; The Birds; The Clouds*
Plato, *Apology; Symposium; Republic,*
Bible, *The Book of Job*
Tacitus, *Annals* (in part); *Germany* (in part)
Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*
Virgil, *Aeneid*
SECOND SEMESTER

Dante, *Inferno*
Machiavelli, *The Prince*
Rabelais, *Gargantua* and *Pantagruel*
Montaigne, *Essays, Selections*
Shakespeare, *Macbeth; Hamlet; King Lear; Henry IV* (Parts I and II); *The Tempest*
Cervantes, *Don Quixote* (Part I)
Milton, *Paradise Lost*
Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I, IV, V
Molière, *School for Wives; Tartuffe; Misanthrope; Physician In Spite of Himself*
Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*
Fielding, *Tom Jones*
Rousseau, *Confessions*, Books 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 10
Voltaire, *Candide*
Goethe, *Faust*, Part I

Institutions across the country followed, in varying degrees, the Columbia scheme of a tripod of “orientation courses.” In addition to English composition, religion, philosophy, foreign language and public speaking, Saint Mary’s in 1941 was requiring of its students courses in Western civilization, mathematics and laboratory science. To introduce, then, in 1942 a “Seminar Studies” requirement for all freshmen, along the lines of Columbia’s humanities sequence, was not a radical step for the College to take. Viewed in Adler’s terms, Saint Mary’s was still a college/university mix, geared to the mastery of subjects as well as arts, professional as well as liberal. “The Art of Camouflage,” to take an extreme example, offered by the College art department in 1942-46, was probably little studied for its own sake; it was surely meant to be mastered by its students, not merely to be grappled with.

II. Early Liberal Education Reform at Saint Mary’s

The Catalog for 1942-46 shows 10 of the College’s 42 faculty members as teaching seminars, but all had department affiliation as well. “The tendency,” observes Brother Robert Smith, “to bring people from all departments while allowing them to remain in departments is inherited from the original Columbia Colloquium out of which everything started. Hagerty knew Hutchins personally . . . . So Hagerty proposed something in that line.” However, he
points out, "the Committee on the Liberal Arts at the University of Chicago was . . . made up of men who started as friends and who ended up largely separated by conviction and sympathy. Some—mainly Mortimer—remained true friends with both sides. The point of difference is of course the departmental one. Hutchins and Richard McKeon were staunch and (given the forces in control, not to speak of their own deep convictions) wise defenders of the departments. The redoubtable enemies were Scott Buchanan and Barr. Buchanan saw departments as entrenched bastions of unexamined opinion. No true education—free of indoctrination—could submit to departmental discipline."5

The division that developed at Chicago spread, as Brother Robert recalls, to Saint Mary's soon after the arrival of Professor Leo Camp in the fall of 1942. In November of that year, supported by a grant from Brother Austin Crowley, president of the College, Camp visited St. John's. An article in the Saint Mary's Collegian for February 12, 1943, announces, "Professor Camp returns from visit to St. John's College; makes report on famous institution." The excitement of the headline matches the tone and substance of the report. Camp proclaims St. John's "the most remarkable college in America," giving "the best education you can get in this country." Following the line of Adler's distinction between collegiate and university education, Camp praises St. John's for "teaching the students instead of teaching subjects" and extols the Great Books as "chiefly useful because a student needs to know, not the subject, but how to deal with it." "We have," he concedes, "a few seminars here at Saint Mary's. They are not so very bad, all things considered. But all too often they become a kind of disguised lecture. The teacher merely extracts information. If there is argument, it frequently turns on matters of fact which cannot be definitely settled by anyone." Camp also published a defense of St. John's in Commonweal.6 "After that," says Brother Robert, "the full sense of the conflict between education and the departments was known . . . Out of that awareness came the contest over what the Seminar was for the general College."

Buchanan admired Camp and attempted to capture him for St. John's. Had Brother Austin not refused by telegram to release Camp from his contract, "the long love affair between the two colleges," as Brother Robert puts it, "might have died an early death." As it was, Camp, Brother Robert (who visited Annapolis in 1943), Brother Edmund Dolan, and others became great advocates for the St. John's approach at Saint Mary's. It distressed them that Catholic educators, despite their many advantages, could not do better with their students—that rightness as to ends, as Adler had said, should be so hampered by mistaken choice of means. Camp had come to the Catholic Church recently, through his doctoral studies, and his articles and addresses were fresh and forceful. The education offered at St.
John's, he increasingly came to believe, was flawed but sound in its method. Only by availing itself of what was fundamentally right in the St. John's approach could Catholic higher education "go on the offensive" and bear fruit as it ought to.

Though it can be said that seminars arrived in 1941, the Seminar, as a program, did not really arrive until 1942. Thus it arrived with the Navy, aptly, it would seem, since "classic" comes from *classis*, which is Latin for a fleet of ships. In February of 1942, the Secretary of the Navy accepted the College president's offer of the Saint Mary's campus for a preflight training facility. The reduction of the Saint Mary's student body to 250, occupying one corner of the campus, invited changes in curriculum and methods of teaching as well. The low enrollment and interruptions of the war years proved favorable to an experiment in liberal education more along the lines of that offered at St. John's. In the spring of 1943, a committee of 10 faculty members was formed to review the entire curriculum of the College; and in the fall of 1943, the year of the gray pennies, the schools of science, economics, and arts and letters were replaced by the School of Liberal Disciplines. In each of his four years, the Saint Mary's man would study science, mathematics, language, English composition, religion, public speaking, and Great Books. The approach was to be by seminar discussion and tutorial.7

Whatever it owed to circumstance, the new program was Saint Mary's response to a widely felt need for reform in American higher education. "It is well-nigh universally admitted," wrote Brother Austin, "that education . . . must aim at training the faculties of the mind . . . [that] the power to think intelligently and reason inductively, the facility to observe correctly and to communicate one's thoughts with clarity and precision are direct and immediate objectives worthy of receiving the careful attention of the educator." Thus, in the new School of Liberal Disciplines, the required mathematics and science courses are "taught with the mind of the student in view," and "precision and correctness in calculation and observation are a goal."8 Arthur S. Campbell, in the same issue of the *Education Bulletin*, writes that "the teacher has in mind something more than just teaching the science as such. Saint Mary's, in the new emphasis on the liberal arts . . . endeavors to develop an attitude of mind towards science that will place it in its proper perspective . . . . As other parts of the curriculum seek to educate by primary sources in certain books, the science course does so by laboratory experiences. Avoiding the superficiality of general science [courses], we expect the careful student to derive from a year of selected science some knowledge of the content of the particular science as well as the method."9

As for language, Brother U. Clement wrote, "In the liberal disciplines language has always been regarded as a staple; it and mathematics serve most suitably as exercises
calculated to liberate the human mind." From this point of view, "we do not intend our students to learn Latin or French or German, but English." Citing another educator, he says "your aim must be to understand the problems of all language: Latin and Greek merely pose these problems." But "reducing the study of language from the status of end to that of means involves for the teacher a position and attitude diametrically opposed to the one generally held in American education. The formation of a mind-skill has become our object as well as the criterion of teaching success." 10

In "The Liberal College and Religion," Brother Edmund proposed that "a college's main approach to the teaching of religion ought to be intellectual." In the discussion leading to the New Program it was agreed that "if students were to get a real—rather than a verbal—hold on religious concepts, we could do no better than introduce the students to books wherein those concepts were first developed and clarified. In so doing we were avoiding the trap of easy formulation so prevalent in modern text-books . . . Further, besides abandoning text-books in religion, the faculty decided to forego that necessary ally of the text-book, the lecture." 11

Appearing as a comet on an eccentric path, Hagerty's "Books of the World" seminar had become the sun in the system of studies at wartime Saint Mary's. Other studies ordered themselves around it and shone by its light. But that light was a mixture of colors. Hagerty seems to have prized the books as a thesaurus of wisdom, much needed correctives of modern thought and culture. His contributions to the Education Bulletin are praises for the wisdom of, and pleas for a return to, "the permanent philosophy" and the "treasury of scholastic truths:" to the Bible, Shakespeare, Donne, Dickens. Yet he was no advocate of Great Books as such. Regarding the choice of texts, Hagerty asks, "Why Aeschylus, Plato, Dante, Shakespeare Shelley, Wordsworth, Robert Bridges, rather than Villon, Marlowe, Congreve, Sterne, Byron, Heine, Stendahl, Housman?" The disjunction is apt to surprise; aren't all of these authors to be credited with having written "books of the world?" It is not, however, a question of greatness alone, according to Hagerty, "but of what is first rate in ideals and conduct." Hagerty seems to have earnestly desired to steep the students in thoughts and images more wholesome than modern ones; he deplored contemporary trends. He extols Saint Teresa of Avila, for example, to the discredit of Freud, Dewey and Proust, among whom, he says, "lost souls now search for the secret of life." 12

Hagerty wanted his students to be something more than passive recipients of ideas. But while Hagerty wished to use the seminar and its books to provide his students with better experiences, Brother Robert saw it more as a way of helping them begin to make sense of the experiences they had, and make fruitful their further experiences. The approaches,
though not opposed, and even overlapping, are yet distinct. Hagerty decries the modern world at every turn. Brother Robert, in his “Reading as a Preparation for Philosophy,” is not concerned with ancient versus modern in thought and culture. “Philosophy,” he suggests, “can be described as the continuing attempt to resolve the great problems that arise from human experience in and by self-evident propositions.” The customary introduction by means of a course in the history of philosophy “might be adequate if the aim of teaching philosophy were to make students acquainted with what has been thought by certain great men.” It is inadequate, however, if our aim is to philosophize ourselves. “To philosophize we must wrestle with questions that we see as significant . . . we have to work from our own experience toward an evaluation of it.” As for an alternative practice, prevalent in Catholic schools, of beginning with courses in the main branches of philosophy and ending with one in the history of philosophy, “this is not much worse,” says Brother Robert, “than doing the same thing in the opposite order.” For the only difference in these processes is that “one assumes that philosophy must begin with questions, albeit somebody else’s questions, while the other assumes that it is best to begin by studying the answers to questions we are not aware of.” Both approaches fail, however, because they treat philosophy as “something achieved, something finished before our time, instead of a task which everyone must apply himself to if he would discover the sense that there is in life.”

The means employed by the liberal arts, considered as ways into philosophy, are “primarily a consideration of the great human problems as they arise in the context of the great books. In these books we are confronted with men who were highly conscious of one or more great human problems and who have formulated more or less satisfactory answers.” The aim, then, is to initiate the student into an evaluation of the world as experienced by him, with its and his problems, by reflecting on the “more or less satisfactory” answers of the great books. For Brother Robert, presumably, Byron, Sterne and Stendahl, no less than Plato, Dante and Shakespeare, offer “more or less satisfactory” answers. The thing most needed is not that the student immerse himself in what is “first rate in ideals and conduct,” as Hagerty had said, but that he learn to recognize and examine his experience in his reading, and vice versa. Hence, “The young man who is reading Homer, and his teacher who is reading it with him, can say something valid about the love of Helen and Paris or of Hector and Andromache only if he considers carefully what Homer says about them. He can only judge this by reconsidering and evaluating his own experience. The judgment that he then makes will be challenged again when he reads Plato’s Symposium, or when he consults some further and more significant private experience.”
Hagerty, dissatisfied with current educational methods, which had “little or no constructive influence on the student,” and with “progressive educators,” who were “uncertain about the directives and purposes of education” or “conceive purposes that are contrary to the traditional religious, social or moral customs,” thought it “imperative, if Christian civilization and culture are to be remembered and perfected, to plant the ideas that have made the West supreme in the minds of our youth.”14 “Planting ideas” that have “made the West supreme” is somewhat different from reflecting on “more or less satisfactory” answers to “the great human problems.” Differences such as this, and perhaps greater than this, in conception of the seminar’s purposes and powers, are found among Saint Mary’s faculty to this day. Yet Hagerty, Brother Robert, Brother Edmund and other upholders of the new curriculum were agreed that Saint Mary’s must go further toward teaching the student rather than the subject, and that to do so required more enlistment of the student’s own activity and experience, and materials, therefore, which were rich enough to challenge and engage him more deeply.

III. Postwar Curriculum Revisions

When the war ended, the college did not follow through with the reforms it had initiated during the war. Back in February 1942, on the same day that the Navy accepted the offer of a large portion of the Saint Mary’s campus as the site for its preflight training program, then-President Brother Austin had announced, among other things, that “the college may put into operation a new teaching policy, allowing for a more extended use of the seminar and tutorial methods with a view to the complete adoption of such a policy on the return of normal conditions.” Hence it seems the positive merits of the policy were acknowledged by the president, quite apart from any temporary necessity due to low student enrollment. After the war, however, on April 29, 1946, Brother Austin declared in a note to faculty, that “with the possible influx of a large number of students next fall, the administration of the college thought it not only advisable but imperative to bring the curriculum to final form to meet the existing conditions. A committee was set up . . . Every phase of the present program was discussed, the reaction of the faculty was considered, in most cases views were expressed in writing, studied also were the difficulties met with in administering the program, the general reaction of the students, as well as the circumstances, which lay behind the adoption of certain phases of our present programs.”15 A list of thirteen modifications followed. Among them were: that the College would be divided, once again, into schools of liberal arts, economics and science; the four-hour-per-week, four-year seminar, thenceforth to be called “World Classics,” would meet two hours per week for four years in the
School of Liberal Arts; the mathematics requirement might have to be completed in the upper division, instead of in the sophomore year; science majors would take lower division World Classics only, and in the last two years of college; a major in business administration, as well as economics, would be offered. “With the return of peace,” writes Brother Matthew McDevitt, “the three schools were restored and ‘Liberal Disciplines’ became an ideal called ‘The Plan of Study Program.’ In the latter, the college claimed it could achieve the same ends with the lecture method as it had through the seminar.”

The thinking behind liberal disciplines had been that the seminar/tutorial method, applied to great books, was the door to progress in the liberal arts, through which alone a student could then go on to profit from lectures in a field of special study. “The lecture system,” as Brother Edmund had observed, “assumes that the students who submit to it are already liberal artists.” Yet, under the 1946 revisions, we see the mathematics requirements moved into the junior year, and by 1948 the World Classics requirement for science, economics and business administration majors, a mere fourth of what it had been, was placed in the last two years, when the lower division requirements for the major would already have been taken. The arrangement treats collegiate requirements as studies supplementary to specialization rather than as preparations for it. They balance out the major rather than underlie and provide for it.

Like the Great Lakes of North America, the Great Books at Saint Mary’s after 1946, confined to the World Classics seminars, gave but a limited testimony to the larger movement that had introduced them. Land-locked amid a mixed range of majors in academic and professional subjects, the World Classics seminars must have appeared, at least to those who had hoped and believed in the liberal disciplines experiment, as a royal family subordinated to a great parliament and treated with respect and affection on just those terms.

Like the glacier that carved out the Great Lakes, however, the great books/seminar method, it was felt by some, bore down too heavily on teacher and student, and moved too slowly. Who had the time and endurance for a scouring so vast, even supposing it could carve Yosemite in the soul? Better to camp beside the rolling waters of a good lecture than venture upon—and perhaps be trapped beneath—the treacherous ice of dialectic. The liberal arts, some had openly urged, are necessary as a preparation for philosophy. But must everyone be initiated into philosophy? On the other hand, one who seeks higher education not hoping to grow in wisdom must believe he is wise enough already, or not yet wish to become wiser, or not think a college is the place to do it—all uncomfortable positions. In any case, with war in the recent past, and wisdom eternal anyway, it was jobs and GIs, apparently, that leaders at Saint Mary’s felt most called to reckon with in the spring of 1946.
A powerful objection to the great books/seminar method, not fully utilized by its opponents, was that it is too difficult. Brother Cornelius, a leader of opposition, had called it “delicate, difficult and dangerous”18 because it required the right relationship between teacher and student, difficult because the students must read the books and the instructor must see that they do so, and dangerous because it could make students argumentative and opinionated. A second shrewd objection of Brother Cornelius, though apt to be underrated, was that all Greek, Hebrew, Roman and medieval authors were read only in translation.19 Gertrude Stein had put the same objection to Hutchins and Adler in Chicago in 1931. Aside from such notable exceptions as Hobbes’s translation of Thucydides and Dryden’s of Plutarch, the student was being soaked for two years in samples of very un-classic English.

But the conventional course, Brother Robert had maintained, does not “force a student to articulate and judge his own experience. A student cannot be too active in presenting his necessarily limited views and forcing the discussion to work from them, or the ‘matter’ won’t get covered. Besides the course isn’t sufficient challenge to both pupil and teacher to initiate a vital dialectic; or, at least, it is only in the rare case when an inspired teacher decides to concern himself with his pupils and not his subject. Such a man would probably want to use the books anyway.”20

The evils risked in the practice of the seminar are perhaps more unpleasant than those that beset the lecture system—to the instructor at least, if not to the student. In a lecture course, a student may not learn, but at least the professor has his say, and the student lets him have it. But the seminar leader who cannot inspire the students to read the book and find questions that help them locate the author and themselves in the same world is painfully aware that he is not helping to educate them. A teacher who had no concern for any subject would of course be useless to students—a corruptor of the youth. But to seek the intellectual growth of the student primarily, taking up and pursuing a subject always with a view to that, is lofty and difficult for a scholar, who is zealous for the discipline, which abides, while students come and go, and difficult even for those like the Christian Brothers, who make a special commitment to students, as to a family.

Thirty years later, Brother Ronald Isetti conjectured that things might have gone more favorably for Hagerty and Liberal Disciplines in 1946 had he succeeded in eliminating intercollegiate football from Saint Mary’s, as Hutchins had done at Chicago in 1939.21 Still, unable as it was by itself to accomplish the liberal education of Saint Mary’s students, the reading of great books in the required World Classics seminars remained in the mid-1950s as a distinctive Saint Mary’s tradition, offsetting, if not overshadowing, the athletic tradition.
IV. Continued Experimentation and the Integrated Curriculum

"It would be false," wrote Brother Robert, "either to exaggerate the completeness of this change or to deny its importance. No one who has known the college during the past fifteen years or so will deny that much of what was said in intra-faculty and inter-student discussions related either to questions seen in the light of readings of the Great Books or to the general question of how well the new program accomplished the general purpose of giving an education."22

These lines appear in the 1957 report on a two-year study and experiment on the freshman curriculum at Saint Mary’s. Led by Hagerty in 1955-56, and by Brother Robert in 1956-57, under a grant from the Rosenberg Foundation of San Francisco, the study/experiment premised the inadequacy for liberal education of either a course-based or a Great Books curriculum. As an influential address had put it, "Most educators are . . . aware that the conventional curriculum of special courses . . . is not . . . a truly liberal education. It is likewise true that the Great Books curriculum has its critics who find that the mere chronological order for reading these books is not an adequate substitute for some more penetrating principle to unify the various Great Books . . . ."23 A solution was sought in a curriculum of Great Books organized under Great Ideas.

In the first year of the experiment, a volunteer group of freshmen fulfilled their World Classics and Philosophy requirements by reading and discussing, under Hagerty’s leadership, selected texts from Great Books organized under the ideas Man, Nature and God, giving about three months to each set of readings. "Clearly," said the report, "there were assumptions involved in the decision to treat these three ideas; yet it was reasonable to assume that, to follow one division of learning, man is important in the humanities, nature in the sciences, God in theology." Consensus after the first year, however, was that selections were too brief to convey the context and "idiom" of the several authors and their disciplines.

Under Brother Robert’s direction in the second year, therefore, the experiment sought to read entire works in chronological order in the seminar, thereby keeping to the World Classics tradition of the College. But it was agreed that, although seminar discussions make students "aware of many fundamental questions," force them to "judge their own experience in the light of opinions held by the best thinkers in the western tradition," and help them "to become articulate and to practice the art of oral discussion and joint inquiry," nevertheless, "the works studied are too long and too profound to yield in a single reading all that even beginning students are capable of getting from them, or to furnish all the exercise needed by students who are trying to develop their intellectual powers."24 The seminar was therefore
flanked with tutorials in philosophy, English composition, and, for the brave, ancient Greek. In tutorial, selections from the works read in seminar could be carefully reread and discussed from the special point of view of knowledge and its kinds, rather than under the three ideas of Man, Nature and God. The aim was thus to carry further what the World Classics seminar began.

The experiment in “integrating” the Great Books seminars with other freshman courses was subsequently expanded into a four-year curriculum called, appropriately enough, the Integrated Curriculum. Renamed in the 1970s the Integral Curriculum, it remains a voluntary venture (on the part of both faculty and students), with its own comprehensive requirements, virtually a “college within the College.”

Saint Mary’s did not cease to be troubled, however, by the problem which the New Venture had endeavored to solve. The Liberal Arts Committee, in a meeting on January 17, 1961, gives as its purpose, to “explore the problem of dealing with the liberal arts within the four-year college program.” The record of that committee meeting observes, by way of criticism and recommendation, “The Saint Mary’s College program is overcrowded and much too specialized. Students pack too many classes into their schedules. Seven courses a semester create an impossible and unrealistic burden. Such crowding makes for all kinds of superficiality. Students fail to concentrate as they should but are content merely to rush through their appointed tasks with the minimum of effort . . . . Ideally, the student should not engage in more than four courses each semester. A two-year program at the lower division level should allow all students to feel that they are learning together and that they are creating a genuine intellectual community.”25 The report goes on to call for more studies in common, more instructors’ attention and more time for discussion during the lower division years. The School of Liberal Disciplines in 1943 and the Revised Curriculum in Liberal Arts in 1955 had been attempts to secure these same things.

In the middle 1960s, the Saint Mary’s Integrated Curriculum was assisted in its efforts by the loan of instructors, called “tutors,” from St. John’s College, Annapolis, where a Great Books/seminar/tutorial approach had been followed college-wide since the 1930s. The educational philosophy of St. John’s continued in evidence in the Saint Mary’s World Classics program as well. A booklet issued in 1967 for teachers and students explains the nature and aims of the World Classics seminar by reprinting several paragraphs from the St. John’s College Bulletin.

Innovations appeared, however, in 1967-68. Freshman English and World Classics were combined in four one-hour meetings per week. Fewer books were read, and seven essays were assigned—one on each author—for the fall semester. Under the direction of Professor Norman
Springer, chronological order was relaxed somewhat in favor of a grouping by types of writing. For Springer, the World Classics seminar was as much an investigation into kinds of writing as kinds of thinking. The thinking mind of the author, dispersed in the details of the text, had to be collected from the text, line-by-line. As an experiment for 1967-68, the sophomore World Classics seminar was combined with the religion requirement. Works raising theological questions were studied. Junior and senior seminars met for two hours twice weekly, but for one semester only. World Classics was thus still a sixteen-unit requirement for liberal arts students, as it had been since 1946, but those hours were compressed into two semesters in the upper division and joined with English and theology requirements in the freshman and sophomore years.25

V. Structural Revision: SMC Calendar and Collegiate Seminar

In 1969, along with the adoption of the 4-1-4 calendar and the course rather than the hour as the unit of credit, came a thorough revision of the requirements at Saint Mary's. Combining several proposals of individuals and committees, each of which had faculty ballot approval, Academic Dean Rafael Alan Pollock wrote to President Brother Michael Quinn on May 28, 1969, requesting a “Reduction and Reform of Collegiate Requirements.”27 His proposal called for eight “collegiate seminars . . . one to be taken each fall and spring semester of attendance at the College.” One of the seminars, offered or approved by the Government Department, would be designed to satisfy the American Institutions requirement of California, and two others, administered by the Theology Department, would be devoted to theological works. With the exception of these three, the seminars would be controlled by a collegiate committee composed of faculty and students appointed by the dean of the College. The collegiate seminars were to be not an “amalgamation of offerings” under the “split authority” of several departments but a “distinct program of the College responsible to the collegiate governing committee.”

These eight seminars, out of 36 courses, would replace the 90 out of 136 units in theology, World Classics, English composition, philosophy, government, history, language, science and mathematics hitherto required for graduation from the School of Liberal Arts. Except for those in government and theology, the seminars would “differ from most current requirements in that they are not defined in terms of any particular subject matter to be covered . . . but take as their single aim the intellectual and imaginative development of students.”

The proposal decried the current structure of requirements as having “no demonstrable or easily arguable relationship to the ends of liberal education, consisting as it does almost entirely of units of subject matter in various fields.” Nevertheless, the
proposal gave as the first of three aims for the collegiate seminars, that they would “raise questions and propose critical experiences essential to liberal education: questions in such areas as theology, philosophy, scientific thought, government and historical method.” The criticism of existing required courses, then, seems to have been not that they lay in various fields—for so would the questions raised in the seminars—but that they were taught by departments. The proposal sought to promote liberal education by arresting, or reversing, the departmentalizing of the College and its faculty.

A second aim of the revised structure was to develop in students the capacity for independent study, on the assumption that “if a student does not acquire this ability, his liberal education has been largely a failure.” Thirdly, the seminars would serve as a focus of community within the College by offering some common intellectual experience to all students.” And by preserving “continuity with one of the most distinctive traditions of Saint Mary’s College [the World Classics program],” the collegiate seminars might “help foster the time-community of students and graduates which is so important to the continuing vitality of the College.”

Supporters of the proposal hoped to raise, like Atlantis, the lost continent of liberal studies, sunk under the weight of modern learning and concerns, its mountain peaks alone still visible as the scattered archipelago of departments, divergent in language and without shared horizons. On July 16, 1969, Dean Pollock announced that the Board of Trustees had approved the changes in collegiate requirements recently voted upon by the College faculty. The Collegiate Seminar was to begin in September.

Fall 1969 began a year of vitality but also considerable challenge for the Seminar at Saint Mary’s. Its instructors, under the guidance of the Seminar Council, were responsible now for all core education of Saint Mary’s students in the liberal arts. Working out a coherent yet flexible structure for the new seminars proved difficult. The World Classics format of acknowledged “great books,” already considerably altered in 1967, was now altogether abandoned. The readings were feared unsuitable, in such quantity and in their bare chronological order, to the work of liberal education for Saint Mary’s students of the late 1960s.

The expedient first formulated in the summer of 1969 resembles the compromise of 1955-56, which had organized Great Books around Great Ideas, except that where the new venture of the mid-50s had sought to nourish and fortify the Seminar by integrating at least some of the other required courses around it, the new Collegiate Seminar had subsumed under itself the whole task of launching, if not completing, the liberal education of Saint Mary’s students. In its summer discussions, the Governing Committee of the Collegiate Seminar
determined that a given semester of the Seminar would read a core of three texts, with supplementary texts to be chosen by the instructor from a variety of disciplines. Readings over the four years were to be organized under four themes: the nature of Self, Mind, Nature, and Man & Government. For example, freshmen taking the Nature of the Self read Camus' *Stranger*, Plato's *Gorgias*, Dante's *Inferno* and Descartes' *Discourse on Method*.

It was intended by this arrangement, wrote Professor Owen Carroll for the committee, to “insure a wider introduction to the perennial yet contemporary questions and avoid any reductionism to a particular discipline or thought style.” Disciplines to be represented by supplementary texts were: psychology, economics, geography, philosophy, education, physics, literature, theology, law and sociology. Each instructor was required to submit with his or her list of supplementary texts a statement explaining the selection and its accord with the aims of the Collegiate Seminar.28

Following its mandate, the Governing Committee of the Seminar program submitted a Progress Report to the Academic Council and the faculty of the College in January 1970 and another report at the end of the spring term. The eight-page Progress Report, submitted by Professor James Townsend Jr., Seminar Council chairman, was compiled from reports of individual instructors on their readings, written assignments, estimated success or failure, and plans for the spring term. On the principle which should govern the choice of readings, Townsend observed: “The aim is rather radically different from the one implicit in the World Classics program. There the student was asked to immerse himself in the text—an act of meaningful immolation, if possible; he could develop skills through the immersion, profitably if he escaped drowning and clung to a pattern meaningful on its own terms; he failed or drowned if the act of immersion ritualized itself and him into formula. The fundamental attempt now of instructors in the Collegiate Seminar is to catch students at the point where they are putting the world together, and to get them to continue to put it together with aid of a variety of materials close at hand and within reach. Eyes direct themselves not so much at the subtlety and perfection of the materials themselves, as the work under construction—the students themselves, their world.”29 The fire and flood of Professor Townsend's metaphor may have been the effect, for many, of the World Classics system, but not by design. “Teach the student, not the subject” had been widely proclaimed and thoroughly expounded by the seminar inaugurators of the 1940s.

Again, Townsend's Progress Report observed that “most instructors in seminar conceive of discussion as a unifying process, an occasion for the student to perceive and elaborate continuities which thread through most or all of the texts they work with. Texts
remain subsidiary to discussion inasmuch as they afford the materials for articulating thematic patterns in discussion. Discussion becomes the transcending element which in turn gives life back to the readings and puts them in living context with each other. Emphasis to this degree on the discussion itself was perhaps something new. Brother Robert had seen the need to fructify, or cross-fertilize, the student’s reading with his experience, but it had still appeared as something transpiring within each student through discussion of the books under the inspired teacher who decided to concern himself with his students instead of his subject. The discussion was where it happened, but not so much what was happening. Perhaps, however, this is too fine a distinction to draw. In any case, the Seminar Council reported after one year a substantial agreement among instructors and students that the distinguishing mark, and primary goal, of the seminar was the conversation itself, the serious discussion between students and instructors of texts (or other media) and their implications as they yielded themselves to the students.

The experience of the fall semester, however, had revealed much uncertainty on how to achieve the goal. The themes or verbal tags for the four years were felt to constrain, without guiding individual seminar leaders in the choice of texts and conduct of their discussions. Without the uniform scheme of the World Classics, some instructors felt forced to formulate individual rationales for their respective formats. Seeking a principle of text selection and organization which would be independent of chronology and less explicit than a question such as “What is a self?”, the committee arranged the 1970 curriculum around areas of experience. It identified them as: existential (freshman year), epistemological (sophomore year), scientific (junior year) and political (senior year). Such a principle, it was hoped, would lead to organization but not rigidity. It would lend each seminar an internal rationale which obviates the necessity for imposition of a rhetorical structure from without. A second criterion of text selection was intrinsic value: core reading lists including only texts that raise important and provocative questions, present coherent models of experience of broad application, and are accessible to students without previous specialized or technical training. Seeing its mandate as calling for an approach that was essentially inductive, the committee characterized the fall semester as a search for profitable variations in approach to seminar management, resulting in the institution of a variety of methods of review, assessment and supervision, the increased emphasis on the need for communication within the seminar staff and an increase in precision and number of the demands made upon individual seminar sections.

The five-member Seminar Council met twice weekly with instructors during the spring 1970 semester, at least once weekly in closed session, and in brief or special meetings as occasion demanded. It met with the dean to discuss staffing and conducted class
visitations of about two-thirds of the instructors, most of them more than once. Instructors had been encouraged to submit proposals for program reorganization, and those submitted had immediate pragmatic value in stimulating the members of the committee to assess the program critically from new and imaginatively helpful viewpoints, particularly those which addressed the longstanding question of written composition and its role in the seminar. In addition to considering written proposals, the committee met with staff in a series of 17 noon sessions, each led by an instructor or committee member, to discuss some aspect or reading of the Collegiate Seminar.

The Seminar’s high energy during this period is evident from the frequency, intensity and close articulation of its committee/staff discussions, over the course of which, says the report, it became clear “that instructors were locating themselves at four points within the perimeter of the program . . . [1] those instructors who regard the text as ultimate authority, with the instructor himself as the expert guide into the content of the text . . . [2] those instructors who concentrate on the text for discovery and elucidation of rhetorical structures and technique . . . [3] those instructors who, while not ignoring the text, move away from it at some point or use it as a point of departure for speculation or analysis to connect individual experience with the world of ideas . . . [and 4] those instructors who subordinate the text to immediate experience, creating through the interchange of discussion an imaginative and intellectual structure within the seminar.” Instructors were divided about equally, five or six to each of those four groups. A fifth group of at least three “[did] not demand any strongly held theoretical or abstract structure or mode of procedure.”

VI. Reorganization and Return to World Classics Structure

The committee characterized the Collegiate Seminar in its first year as a pluralistic structure in the process of defining itself. Yet not all members of the College, or even of the Seminar staff, believed that the lengthy and sometimes precarious exchange of the first year was a good thing. Some diagnosed the discomforts as symptoms of disease rather than pains of growth. In the fall of 1971, Dr. Thomas J. Slakey of St. John’s College, Santa Fe, assumed the post of academic vice president at Saint Mary’s, and by December of that year—the third of the Collegiate Seminar—had written to the Seminar Governing Board proposing a major review of the program. He noted as grounds for review the withdrawal of the Religious Studies Department, the continuing concern about writing within the program, widespread dissatisfaction among the faculty, and the constant discussion among staff about purpose and methods. He criticized, moreover, the use of topics to organize the seminar, maintaining that
the topical arrangement of Seminar readings meant that students did not simply confront authors and begin the difficult task of finding out what they had to say. When students approach an author with a topic, or even a question in mind, the most valuable thing to be learned from books, especially books from other times and places, was obscured, Slakey felt, and that it was the whole context and manner of posing the question which must be recast before any worthwhile comments could be made or answers attempted. He noted also as a weakness of the Collegiate Seminar, as compared with World Classics, that the greater use of contemporary texts made it less likely that students would break out of the tangle of slogans, jargon and half-conscious assumptions in which we all find ourselves enmeshed. 32

Slakey proposed a seven-course College requirement: two courses in religious studies and one in government, chosen by the student from a range of courses offered by the respective departments, and a series of four World Classics-style seminars, to be taken in the freshman and sophomore years, covering works from ancient times up through the Renaissance. World Classics seminars on books from the modern period, as well as “problem” seminars, would be available to upper division students as electives. Slakey assured members of the Governing Board that he would not discuss the matter in Academic Council before hearing from them.

The Governing Board welcomed his proposal only in part. They approved the reduction of requirements but objected to the isolation of the religion and American Government courses, proposing instead that appropriate religious and political texts be included within the four seminar requirement. Thus they were favoring a reduction of collegiate requirements from eight to four, instead of Slakey’s eight to seven. But members of the Governing Board were strongly opposed to any return to the World Classics format for the four required seminars. They recalled the faculty vote of 1969, with its rationale, which had led to the Collegiate Seminar program, and pointed out besides that faculty and student response to the program had been favorable, or at least not so adverse as to warrant a major review. Revision of the World Classics program by professors Merrill Rodin and Norman Springer in the mid-1960s and the adoption of the Collegiate Seminar system in 1969 were part of an “inductive process,” which attempted to respond to “the real situation of the student, rather than to some view of what his situation ought to be.” World Classics, though ideal for a few, had encouraged “widespread and regular use of ponies which engendered insincere discussions if not straight lectures on the part of despairing instructors.” The inadequacy of the system was evident from the “shockingly disappointing results of the senior World Classics 199 examinations given for many years as some measure of the success of the four years work.” Faced with a student body “less docile, more openly skeptical about
the nature of education and authority,” composed mainly of “exceedingly poor readers... only a fraction... at ease in dealing with books,” the Governing Board reaffirmed the need to address “without blinking” the question “how best to enhance and increase the appetite to learn; how best to open the way to the thought and work of remarkable men and women past and present.” In keeping with this view of its task, the Governing Board repeated its denial—the subject of an earlier memo to department chairs—that the teaching of writing was in any special way the task of the freshman seminar. As Springer, speaking for the Governing Board, had said, “Our underlying assumption about writing in college is that it has very much to do with understanding and intellectual growth—that it is not, in the first place, a matter of technique.” The argument was that writing cannot be separated from the matter under consideration and that, therefore, faculty in all seminars and all departments of the College share the task of promoting it.

The Governing Board agreed with Slakey’s proposal that World Classics, as well as problem seminars, be offered as upper division electives. But while they echoed his concern about topical organization of the four required seminars, their proposal to remedy this by making the titles “less restrictive” failed to cope with the dean’s objection to the topic over the author approach to books. And their proposal that students move, over four semesters, from shorter to longer, and less to more difficult, works, “which would certainly include some of the classics,” revealed a basic division over the nature of the problem posed at the start by the student’s relation to learning. The board was aiming at “that reinforcing experience of success [which] will come from the excitement of reading something difficult and actually coming to understand it.” The student, unsure of his or her abilities, and long intimidated by books, must be launched on a life of learning by a first taste of success—even if that taste must be provided by a less-than-classic author. Slakey was assuming a more Socratic situation: The student, long accustomed to understand—or think he understands—what he reads and hears, will not begin a more reflective life until he is first perplexed and brought to a halt. The easy and familiar must be replaced, for quite some time at least, by the difficult and strange.

Meetings of the Academic Council in February and March of 1972 reached a compromise, in which the religious studies requirement became once again separate from Collegiate Seminar—as it has remained to this day—and the Seminar requirement was
reduced to six semesters, with additional ones available as electives. But the College offered once again a chronological series of World Classics seminars, along with the Problems in Perspective series—works bearing on a set topic or issue—which had been in place since 1969. Which series to follow was up to the student, and movement from one series to the other was allowable under certain conditions.

In the 1973 College Bulletin announcement for Collegiate Seminar, Professor James Collins, chairman of the Governing Board, explained that, though they differ in organization of reading materials, “both programs confront the student with a learning situation peculiar to the seminar.” Besides acquainting the student with the books themselves, the Collegiate Seminar attempts “to provide a context in which the students can learn the process of intelligent discourse by engaging in it directly and actively” he said, adding that “reading accurately, speaking clearly, listening objectively, and reflecting are the elements of this discourse, and can best be learned by their exercise.”

VII. Reduction of Seminar Requirements

By 1976, however, one of the worst years of the drought in California, the seminar requirement at Saint Mary’s had dropped to just two semesters—lower than ever before or since. The mid-70s were times of financial difficulty for the College, and the discussions of college requirements which greatly occupied the Academic Council from 1974 to ’76 were occasioned and influenced, if not quite ruled, by those difficulties. In the spring of 1974, the College Requirements Review Committee, formed under Slakey, had proposed required courses in English composition, religion, language, science and mathematics, social science and World Classics—a total of 12 to 16 semesters, depending on the student’s previous study in a foreign language. In the spring of 1975, however, the proposal was still in limbo in the Academic Council.

In the summer of 1975, therefore, the Board of Trustees, under a motion from Academic Vice President Brother S. Dominic Ruegg, called for a faculty/student committee, to be appointed through the Academic Council, to consider the issue of general collegiate requirements “in view of quality liberal education, student needs, faculty availability and cost effectiveness.” It called for a second committee to scrutinize the 4-1-4 calendar, noting that “a return to the semester system would seem to be educationally advantageous and financially effective,” and for a third committee “to consider the impact of tenure at a small liberal arts Catholic College and its future implications.”35 Brother Dominic had based his motion on the premise that “the elimination of breadth requirements has significantly

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mitigated the ideal of a broad liberal arts education, as well as failed to respond to the basic needs of students in critical areas of reading, oral and written composition and calculating, and has caused some faculty to be virtually unemployed.”

In its majority report, however, the Committee on Collegiate Requirements, chaired by Professor Robert Hass, concluded that “a new set of requirements seems pointless.” Public discussions by faculty and students of six different proposals for collegiate requirements had revealed “no substantial dissatisfaction with the present system.” Students “seemed decidedly in favor of the seminar and felt that ‘breadth’ requirements would dilute or completely dissolve the special character of the College.” The committee advised, nevertheless, a more thorough evaluation of the Seminar program through student, faculty and alumni questionnaires and called in addition for seminars on scientific and mathematical thought, and for Better Writing courses small and numerous enough to meet student needs. Conceding some inadequacies of the Seminar in practice, the committee concluded by enunciating the principle that “required courses ought to be the College’s best and most characteristic courses,” and warned that “the last place the College should look for cost cuts through packed lecture halls is in those courses which will define the Saint Mary’s experience to students.”

A new majority report proposed reducing the seminar component of the eight-course requirement to two semesters, with additional semesters optional. Minutes of the Academic Council meeting, however, at which both reports were presented, record that the academic vice president “was of the opinion that the recommendations were unrelated to the grave situation of the College, and the reports were tabled without motion or vote.”

Brother Dominic favored returning to a system of reckoning credit by units, 128 to be required for graduation, with a greater portion—40 of them—in required courses. He and President Brother Mel Anderson submitted revised proposals to the faculty for discussion at a special meeting, explaining reservations about certain committee recommendations.

On December 3, 1975, the faculty voted in special assembly to accept the new majority proposal, amended to require two freshman seminars, two religious studies and six additional courses. Brother Dominic urged increasing the requirement to 12 courses, four of them seminars. At its December meeting, however, the Board of Trustees proposed a collegiate requirement of 10 courses and requested further study before any reduction of the Seminar requirement below four semesters, “in view of its long-standing tradition at the College and its general appreciation among alumni.” The board’s resolution thus gave the academic vice president the four seminars he had requested but not the 12 courses he had...
mainly desired, while it gave the faculty the 10 courses requested, including two of the four seminars it had been willing to relinquish. The 1976-77 Bulletin, however, announced a collegiate requirement of 10 courses, only two of which had to be seminars.

Like 1946, the year 1976 was thus a recession year for the Seminar at Saint Mary’s. But whereas the changes of 1946 had been prompted by the prospect of a rise in enrollment, those of 1976 were tied to a decline. Under such conditions, a system that allowed students more options doubtless seemed more attractive than one that allowed them fewer. And for those who had to administer the College, it was easier to send students into existing department courses than to send existing department professors into seminars. But the changes are not explained by such causes alone. One among several difficulties before the Academic Council from 1974-76, and addressed by the Committee on Requirements, was that of effectively introducing students to methods and questions in mathematics and natural science in the Seminar. Liberal Disciplines in 1943 and the Integrated experiment in 1956 had buttressed the Seminar with tutorials to meet this need, among others. In voting for the Collegiate Seminar system in 1969, the faculty was betting it could find texts and instructors able to effect that introduction in a seminar setting. But backing the bet proved difficult. Abolishing the loose array of general requirements taught by faculty not closely in touch with one another or with the Seminar program did not overcome the insufficiency of these requirements for liberal education. Hence the introduction of area requirements in 1976.

To introduce greater coherence into the curriculum, with the Seminar at its core, the Curriculum Committee, formed in 1977 under Academic Vice President Brother William Beatie, recommended in the spring of 1979 a four-seminar requirement. The Seminar could not be truly central to the Saint Mary’s curriculum if it lacked centripetal force. Around the center, then, were required two courses in religious studies and two each in areas other than that of the student’s major. Ensuing discussion of the proposal in Academic Council and Faculty Assembly, and with the staff and Governing Board of the Collegiate Seminar, chaired by Professor Chester Aaron, determined that two of the seminars would be taken in the freshman year and would be devoted to Greek authors. The 10-course requirement thus included more seminars than the system preceding it, and a uniform plan for freshmen, while retaining the option, available since 1969, of fulfilling all general requirements except religious studies through collegiate seminars. The College continued to offer a sequence of eight seminars in Greek to 20th century authors, as well as a number of topic seminars, from which the student could select the two required upper division seminars.
VIII. The 1983 Revisions

In a 1982 address to faculty, Brother William maintained that the Saint Mary’s Seminar, over the course of its history, had drifted from its original purpose. Its aim, he argued, had been to develop the habit of reading with understanding through the use of specific texts and “to form a central educational experience for all the students within the context of a required diversity of academic experience for all students.” By the 1960s, specific texts had yielded to specific types of texts, the English composition requirement had been combined with the Seminar, and writing and discussion were supplanting reading as the defining activity of the Seminar. Disorientation was greatest, according to Brother William, in 1969, when earlier course requirements were dropped and a Collegiate Seminar was instituted in which themes or problems replaced classic texts as the “central educational experience for all students,” and in which “the development of habits of reading with understanding . . . gave way to emphasis upon class discussion and the ability of students and instructors to interrelate.”

Defenders of Collegiate Seminar pointed out that reading with understanding does not stand apart from—much less compete with—either discussion or written composition and that reading and the writing and discussion which focus and sustain it together comprise that preparation for philosophy which is the essence of a liberal arts curriculum and of each course that has a place in it. As for a commonly shared experience, whose provision, according to Brother William, is the Seminar’s second aim, the advocates of Collegiate Seminar in 1969 argued that this would be better fostered through meaningful themes and problems and their discussion than through a collection of Great Books largely alien or inaccessible to students. Nevertheless, Brother William’s analysis made plain that Collegiate Seminar was failing to provide exposure to diversity of reading in its restriction to a few, mostly contemporary, texts. Slakey’s re-introduction in 1972 of an optional series of World Classics seminars grew, he said, out of a concern over the proliferation of themes and aimed at challenging students with other times, places and ways of thinking. In the absence of required courses outside the Seminar—philosophy in particular—Professor Frank Ellis, as Seminar director from 1974 to 1978, sought to maintain diversity of subject matter by urging Seminar leaders to use classic texts in the various theme seminars still being offered.

A final move toward a simpler, if not otherwise superior, plan came in 1983, when meeting times for the four required seminars were reduced from four to three hours per week (the duration of most of the College’s other courses), topic seminars were discontinued, and a single series of four chronological seminars, covering Greek to 20th century authors, became required of all students. The academic vice president and Curriculum Committee favored
the added symmetry of one seminar for each of the student’s four years, while the faculty in assembly recommended that freshmen continue to have a full year of seminar, reading only Greek works, and that they continue with one seminar each year thereafter. The academic vice president adopted the first part of the recommendation but not the second. Beginning the fall semester with Homer, freshmen since 1983 have ended the spring not with Aristotle but with Thomas Aquinas, Dante and Chaucer.

The 1983 revisions eliminated, even as an option, “liberal education through seminars alone,” which had been the soul of the innovations of 1969. Diminished in volume since 1983, regulated in flow and banked in its course, the ancient river of authors appears less apt to rise and invade the fields among which it runs. And yet this may partly account for the wider participation in Collegiate Seminar of the College’s schools and departments during these years—a welcome development, since the Collegiate Seminar program, claiming at once all subjects and no subject for its province, might seem inevitably bound to conflict with the departmental arrangement of the College faculty.

IX. Continuity: The Brother DeSales Perez Years

From 1983 to 2003, the Collegiate Seminar Program suffered no structural reorganization. The College grew, leaping and bounding, but the undergraduate degree requirements changed very little. The increasing prosperity of the College accounted for much of this stability. Brother Mel Anderson, who had become president in 1970, continued as president into the mid-90s. He supported the Seminar throughout his tenure and taught in it as his commitments allowed. Enrollments grew and continued strong; College finances improved. Full-time faculty concerned themselves with governance matters; faculty welfare issues dominated lunchtime conversations, and the 4-1-4 calendar became disputed territory in a struggle between faculty and administration over the proper course load for tenured faculty. Part-time faculty teaching one seminar per semester came to constitute the stable core of the Seminar program.

The stability of the program resulted in—as it also resulted from—the long tenure of Brother O. DeSales Perez as chair of the Governing Board and director of the Collegiate Seminar. In the wake of the changes of 1983, this politically cunning and personally charming Modern Language professor took over the helm and held it for 14 years. Tacking this way and that, he maneuvered the Seminar into the front of the College’s fleet of programs, aided by presidential, favoring winds. The College’s advertising touted the Seminar; visiting students sat in on seminars; recruiters bragged about the Seminar’s virtues. During his tenure, too,
the Seminar created for itself a culture which reflected the personality of the director. Every faculty seminar, every Governing Board meeting, every faculty workshop would include wine and food, often a pasta cooked by the director himself.

A creative man and gregarious, DeSales (as he was universally known) initiated relationships with other creative and inspired faculty. He envisioned the Governing Board as a truly managerial body and sought its members from all schools of the College. He nurtured this group in the same way that he nurtured the Seminar program, guiding them to practices and policy changes that would enhance and centralize the Collegiate Seminar Program in the life of the College. He began each board meeting with a series of questions and then let a discussion develop. He could then vanish into a nearby kitchen to return with an innovative salad and piping hot pasta.

The DeSales tenure saw the establishment of programs designed to buttress or embellish the central edifice of the Seminar. Professor Barry Horwitz was persuaded to organize a series of model seminar discussions in which students would gather in concentric circles, led by a faculty member, to discuss one of the texts they were reading in class. These continued with various degrees of success and evolved into a combination of discussion and
dramatic performances in the evenings. Horwitz began to bring in outside groups to perform some of the Greek plays students read and discussed in class. This endeavor became popular with both students and faculty and gradually replaced the model seminars. At around the same time, DeSales acquired a copy of a publication from John Henry Newman’s undergraduate days at Oxford in 1819. The first edition of Collegiate Seminar program’s *Undergraduate* was born, reproducing Newman’s “celebration of the essay.”

Student essays were collected by faculty in the Greek Thought and 19th/20th Century Thought classes and judged by a panel of faculty. Every spring, faculty, staff and student essayists gathered for a lunchtime celebration of student writing. DeSales continually looked for ways to involve the faculty in outreach, sending willing volunteers to local high schools to promote seminars by leading model seminars in English and humanities advanced placement courses at Skyline High School in the Oakland hills just west of the College and at Saint Mary’s College High School in Berkeley.

DeSales constantly worried over writing instruction in the Seminar Program. Many of the veteran seminar leaders saw attention to writing as an interruption of the discussion. Others treated seminar as a writing workshop. Chaos of expectations was the order of the day. In response, the Governing Board adopted a standard requiring 12 to 15 pages of formal, expository writing for each semester course. DeSales also worked with the English Department to coordinate “federated” sections of Seminar and Better Writing, where one faculty member met with the same group of students for both classes. This proved too logistically difficult, and the “federated” sections died a natural death after a few years’ fighting for life. However, DeSales continued to stew about the state of students’ writing and proposed a Seminar writing consultant who would coordinate with the Seminar faculty and the English faculty and publish a guide to writing in the Seminar. At twice-a-year workshops, faculty read and graded essays in common. Discussions gradually led to a fragile consensus on the purpose of writing in the program. The faculty developed criteria not only for grading writing but also for judging an effective seminar leader and for evaluating good discussion habits in students. The list of ten criteria for effective seminar leading, developed at the Russian River workshop in 1982, has survived for over a quarter century with only a minor revision.
No opportunity to talk to alumni and donors about the Seminar program was missed by its director. In the early 1990s, he met Neville and Juanita Massa, who expressed an interest in a bequest to Saint Mary’s, and DeSales recruited Professor Marsha Newman to help him persuade the Massa family to support the Seminar program. He designed an Institute which would meet every summer in a peaceful, beautiful location where faculty could gather to immerse themselves in discussions. Each year the Governing Board would decide on a text or series of selections around a theme, and Perez would delight in collecting the materials and putting them together in an imaginative way to present to participating faculty. This event was named after the Massa family even before the bequest became a reality.

Faculty and students continued to struggle with the reading selections for the four seminars. The director and the Governing Board worked to develop a process for reviewing the reading lists. Eventually it became evident that the process needed to become more public and involve more of the College community. The board developed a two-year review of the reading lists, appointing one of its members to host meetings where interested faculty could propose modifications to the reading lists. Disgruntlement was rising on all sides. Race entered the discussion, and some faculty deplored the exclusion of all but “dead white men” from the list of approved authors. Not only was the lack of women writers noted, but
the canon's Eurocentricity came in for scathing criticism. Cropping up over lunch or in the midst of tedious meetings devoted to routine business, these conversations were occasionally rancorous. To civilize the disagreement, DeSales formed a special committee to look into the canon question and make recommendations. Young Turks confronted Defenders of the Realm for a long year and produced much heat but little light. More practically minded members of the faculty carefully and quietly introduced readings from women authors, black writers and anyone other than the canonical dead white males into faculty retreats. The strategy eventually led to Sappho, Hildegard of Bingen, Christine de Pizan, Mary Wollstonecraft and Virginia Woolf, with Gabriel García Márquez, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X and Toni Morrison joining the list of the elect.

As a further response to the pressure to look at what “other” people write, read or recite, the board proposed two additional seminars to add to the traditional four: the Multicultural Seminar and World Traditions Seminar. They were designed and offered as experimental courses. Sentiment on campus varied from thinking this was an appropriate solution to calling the effort “tokenism.” Endeavors made to add a fifth Seminar requirement in order to legitimize the two “diverse” seminars were opposed by departments where the “general education” requirements already crowded the number of courses required by the major.

A 1997 Governing Board decision to eliminate García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* from the 19th/20th Century Thought list prompted an e-mail campaign by concerned faculty. The board recanted and restored Márquez. Five years later, a new board dumped the *Hundred Years* and replaced it with a novelette, *Love and Other Demons*, also by Márquez. In this case and in others like it, high-minded, principled persons are pursuing different goods. While one group is looking for a text that will “work,” challenge students, actually be read and lead to serious, text-based discussions, another's goal is finding a text that will acknowledge a marginalized race, gender or nation and bring to the Seminar table voices not before heard. Ideally, a single text will satisfy both parties. Practically, the board will always have to make difficult choices.

Not only *what* but also *how much* to read was a chronic issue. Springer, most notably, could always be counted on in any relevant faculty gathering to point out the folly of expecting students to read a great (long) work, such as the *Odyssey*, in a few (short) weeks. The board’s decisions, he argued, favored reading widely over reading well. Others—and they have so far prevailed—argued in favor of assigned readings both long and short. A reading list from 2009-10 gives a snapshot of the results from these ongoing conversations.
Saint Mary's College Collegiate Seminar Reading List 2009-2010

Seminar 020, Greek Thought:
- Homer, *The Odyssey*
- Sappho, *Sappho: A New Translation*
- Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*
- Euripides, *Bacchae*
- Sophocles, *Oedipus the King, Antigone*
- Thucydides, selections from *History of the Peloponnesian War*
- Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*
- Plato, *Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo, Symposium*
- Euclid, selections from *The Elements*
- Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*

Seminar 021, Roman, Early Christian and Medieval Thought:
- Genesis 1-3
- Virgil, *The Aeneid of Virgil*
- Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*
- Epictetus, *The Handbook (The Encheiridion)*
- Plutarch, “Life of Coriolanus”
- Gospel of Mark
- Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, selections
- St. Augustine, *Confessions*
- Marie de France, *The Lais*, selections
- Rumi, *Say I Am You*
- St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, selections
- Dante, *Inferno*
- Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*
- Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, selected tales

Seminar 122, Renaissance, 17th and 18th Century Thought:
- Machiavelli, *The Prince*
- Luther, *On Christian Liberty*
- Cervantes, *Don Quixote*
Shakespeare, *The Tempest*
Galileo, *The Starry Messenger*
Descartes, *Discourse on Method* and the *Meditations*
Hobbes, selections from *Leviathan*
John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*
Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, *The Answer/La Respuesta*
Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*
Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*
Voltaire, *Candide*
Wollstonecraft, selection from *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*
Jane Austen, *Emma*

**Seminar 123, 19th and 20th Century Thought:**
- Whitman, selection from *Leaves of Grass*
- Marx, *Wage-Labour and Capital*
- Newman, “The Uses of Knowledge” from *The Idea of a University*
- Darwin, *The Origin of Species*
- Thoreau, *Walking*
- Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*
- Shaw, *Pygmalion*
- Kafka, *Metamorphosis*
- Freud, “Dissection of the Psychical Personality”
- Unamuno, *Saint Emmanuel the Good, Martyr*
- Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*
- Picasso, *Guernica*
- Flannery O’Connor, *A Good Man is Hard to Find*
- Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail”
- Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet”
- García Márquez, *Of Love and Other Demons*
- Morrison, *Bluest Eye*
- Pablo Neruda, selected poems
X. Tentative Advances, Real Gains: 1996–2005

In 1995, Theodora Carlile, a professor in the Integral Program, a “Johnnie” (from St. John's College, Annapolis) who had begun teaching at Saint Mary's in 1970, accepted the reins of the Collegiate Seminar Program from Brother DeSales. After administrative training on many College committees, as well as a turn as Integral Program director and director of the new Women's Studies Program, Professor Carlile stepped up into the Seminar saddle with her spurs on. Confined to a closet-sized, shared office in Dante Hall, with her staff support at the opposite end of the long hallway, she felt what in the Information Age is called a “disconnect” between the College's claims about the centrality of the Seminar Program and its grudging allocation of resources. As the undergraduate college grew and tried to distinguish itself from similar institutions, Saint Mary's highlighted the program at every opportunity. Recruiting brochures featured happy Seminar students; the program occupied a prominent spot on the College's website; recruiters talked it up on their visits to high schools. Students visiting Saint Mary's were slotted into the day's Seminar classes.

Theodora Carlile with Brother Kenneth Cardwell and Charles Hamaker (right), recipient of the 2006 O. DeSales Perez Award for Excellence in Collegiate Seminar
or corralled into Seminar classes set up for them alone. The few hours of new-student orientation activities not given over to welcome addresses and ice-breakers were devoted to an orientation seminar in which students began by asking themselves whether they had just entered or just exited Plato's Cave. Still, Carlile and Program Manager Deanne Kruse lacked a room of their own.

When the College added the Filippi Hall and Brother Jerome West buildings to house administrative functions, the abandoned arcade wings on either side of the chapel were renovated. Carlile entered negotiations with the architects and fought a low-intensity turf war with other claimants to the space. As the paint was still drying, just days before the first classes in fall 1997, Carlile and Kruse changed the locks and moved into the new, capacious Seminar office. Seminar now had quarters adequate to its operations and a central place on campus under the new bell tower, opposite Campus Ministry, as it was then called.

Along the arcade, a large classroom with a well-equipped kitchen in back and a one-wall library was named for Brother Gary York, an English Department faculty member, assistant to the president and longtime teacher and supporter of Seminar, who had died the previous summer. His family bequeathed his library to the Seminar program; the W. M. Keck Foundation gave a large gift for the renovation; and the Warta family, friends of his from Portland, where he had taught, funded the new classroom as a centerpiece for Seminar instruction on campus. Intent that the room be truly dedicated to Seminar, Carlile designed a grand table for the room. Like Penelope and Odysseus's bed, it was built in place and is virtually immovable, an unambiguous pledge of the College's commitment to seminar conversation.

Shortly after the program's move to the new offices, the Massa estate was settled and the bequest to the Seminar Program became a reality. Despite pressure to put the money into an endowed chair position, Carlile insisted that the money go into program enhancement in accord with the covenant of gift. She negotiated with the College development officers to use only a portion of the money for salaries, including extra team-teaching positions, with the remainder to be divided among several budget categories directly related to enrichment and improvement of the program. The program (and with it the College) had become rich enough to support the costly pairing of experienced seminar instructors with novices for their introductory semester—a practice now seen as essential to the program's unity and continuity. In addition, the Massa Institute retreat continued to be held every summer, usually at Huntington Lake in the High Sierra, at the Christian Brothers' Camp La Salle, now with full support for participating faculty.
When Brother Craig Franz was installed as the new president of the College in 1997, his interests and background lay in the sciences, and he began to focus on those programs. He turned a skeptical eye toward the Collegiate Seminar and, at a Governing Board meeting, asked unsettling questions of a kind not usually confronted by Seminar faculty. In order to explain the program’s virtues and justify its continuation, the director thought nothing would succeed so well as getting Brother Craig involved in it himself. In the fall of 1998, Brother Craig and Professor Lisa Mauzer co-taught a seminar for freshman students. After this experience, Brother Craig became a loyal and strong advocate for the program.

In the fall of 1997, a faculty committee studying student retention had asked the Seminar Program to pilot a cohort program for incoming freshmen. Carlile recruited eight faculty members to serve as freshman advisors and seminar leaders for their Greek Thought class. Funds were committed, and when the pilot program was subsequently studied by tracking the students who had been in the selected sections, their retention rate proved to be substantially higher than the rate for students without the experience. After a year to meditate on the results, the College decided to go ahead with a cohort program. Appealing to fairness as a good rule of thumb for allocating resources, Carlile insisted that all freshmen be included. With the approval of Academic Vice President Sally Stampp and the president, Carlile opened 30 cohort sections of freshman Greek Thought in fall of 1999. The seminar leaders were trained to be their students’ freshman advisors, as well as social directors for class activities cultural, culinary or both. Full-time faculty were heavily recruited for this project, the rationale being that they would not only be more familiar with the resources at the College but would also give students a more permanent and solid connection to the life of the community. The expanded program proved to be successful and was continued until a precipitous drop in the retention rate, a flurry of changes in the advising staff, and a shift in the Zeitgeist on campus made it appear to be time to try something new. The First-Year Experience program was born.
The Saint Mary’s Program and Its Administrators

1941 – 42  Phil 182a—182b, Readings in Great Books of the World, James L. Hagerty, professor of philosophy


1946 – 56  World Classics, James L. Hagerty, professor of philosophy and World Classics

1956 – 62  Brother S. Edmund FSC, Ph.D., professor of philosophy and World Classics

1962 – 66  Department of World Classics, John F. Logan, M.A., chair

1966 – 68  Merrill Rodin, M.A., chair

1968 – 69  Norman Springer, Ph.D., chair

1969 – 70  Collegiate Seminar, Norman Springer, Ph.D., chair of the Governing Board

1970 – 71  Interregnum

1971 – 73  Norman Springer, Ph.D., chair

1973 – 75  James Collins, M.A., chair

1975 – 79  Frank Ellis, Ph.D., chair

1979 – 81  Brother Oscar DeSales Perez, FSC, Ph.D., chair

1981 – 83  Chester Aaron, M.A., acting chair

1983 – 89  Brother Oscar DeSales Perez, Ph.D., chair

1989 – 95  Collegiate Seminar Program, Brother Oscar DeSales Perez, Ph.D., chair of the Governing Board and director of the program

1995 – 2001  Theodora Carlile, Ph.D., chair and director

2001 – 02  Charles Hamaker, Ph.D., interim chair and director

2002 – 07  Brother Kenneth Cardwell, FSC, Ph.D., chair and director

2007 – 10  Charles Hamaker, Ph.D., chair and director

Professor Carlile came to the end of her five-year commitment as director of the Program in 2000. The search for a new director was complicated by a shuffling of College administrators, some of whom would have been the board’s top candidates for the position. Carlile agreed to stay on a sixth year until other areas of the administration became more stable. At the end of her sixth year, the Governing Board nominated Brother Kenneth Cardwell for the position, with Professor Charles Hamaker to be interim director until Brother Kenneth could escape the beleaguered city of Bethlehem, where he was teaching at Bethlehem University.
Brother Kenneth received a program in good shape. Then, an unexpected misfortune: In October 2003, former Director Brother DeSales Perez underwent heart surgery and died on the operating table. The loss to the College community and the Seminar Program was monumental. Close friend and colleague Bob Gardner was appointed executor of the estate and took on the task of organizing and distributing the huge collections of books, art, crafts and mementos.

In addition, it turned out that Brother DeSales had bequeathed a substantial amount of money to the Seminar Program and had earmarked it for program enhancement, specifically in the areas of faculty development and student support. The Governing Board and Brother Kenneth worked to embody DeSales’s generosity in the Seminar’s ongoing life. For example, starting in fall 2003, instead of a one-day meeting on campus, the faculty gathered for a weekend retreat at Saint Joseph’s Camp at the Russian River. The first such retreat brought two dozen faculty and staff together for two days of memorable food, great wine and fine conversation on the theme of wine and food—all in remembrance of Brother DeSales and the many plates of salmon and pasta he served at faculty seminars. Also, the DeSales Perez award to an outstanding member of the Seminar faculty now brought with it a considerable cash award. And for students? Writers of the best essays submitted to the Undergraduate were now to receive cash prizes at a gala free lunch in honor of all the essayists.

Another fruit of the bequest was that the Association for Core Texts and Courses (ACTC), under its director J. Scott Lee, established its national office on the college campus in the fall of 2004. Fulfilling DeSales’s desire that the Seminar Program receive wider recognition and that Seminar faculty find a professional home suited to their Seminar lives, the Saint Mary’s program became a major supporter of the fledgling national organization, primarily known as sponsor of the one yearly academic conference specifically designed for faculty teaching “core texts,” either in their disciplines or in general education courses. Saint Mary’s earned a seat on ACTC’s governing board and gained increased visibility in the community of those dedicated to having undergraduates read great works (broadly defined), whatever the genre, whatever the discipline. (Today, a total of 10 institutions are supporting members of the ACTC Liberal Arts Institute at Saint Mary’s College of California: Assumption College, Benedictine University, Columbia University/Columbia College, Pepperdine University, Rhodes College, Saint Mary’s
College of California, St. Bonaventure University, St. John’s College - Annapolis and Santa Fe, Shimer College and the University of Dallas. Having grown nationwide and taken tentative steps overseas, ACTC listed 68 colleges and universities, from Aquinas and Baylor to Whitman and Yale, as contributing members in the academic year 2009-10.

With good times came good moves. In 2003, Provost Sally Stampp suggested reducing the class size for freshman seminars. After many years of class limits creeping up to 20, 21 or sometimes 22 students, freshman sections were limited to 18 participants. This caused the number of sections to increase. Fall 2004 saw freshmen in 33 sections wondering whether Telemachus was simply a pawn in a game played by gods. Brother Kenneth wondered whether the numerous adjunct faculty teaching a single section semester after semester had, in fact, become the stable core of a program in which tenure-track faculty taught periodically, sporadically or not at all. He began to look for ways to increase the level of participation from the full-time faculty, especially in the freshman cohort sections. He invited the department chairs to a Governing Board meeting to discuss ways to attract faculty, especially from the schools of science and business. The report from the chairs was not particularly encouraging, as they cited restrictions in their own departments’ hiring for tenure-track positions, leaving them to fill their departmental courses with part-time faculty and therefore limiting the number of full-time faculty who could be “released” to teach Seminar. When harder times came, requiring cutbacks in the departmental offerings, adjunct and part-time faculty members found themselves looking for work elsewhere, and Seminar found lines of full-time faculty knocking at the door. The program had become a buffer in the jostling crowd of departments.

Before the hard times, though, came the hard-nosed times. Increasingly across the United States, academia was being asked to justify its high cost and faculty their lavish incomes by demonstrating student learning outcomes. No hand-waving or anecdotal evidence would do. Pedagogical theoreticians demanded strictly-defined competencies and well-crafted instruments with which to measure students’ progress in achieving them. Accrediting agencies spoke of “a culture of evidence.” How could Seminar identify, let alone measure, the educational effects it achieved, if indeed there were any? An Assessment Committee was established. It created and supervised surveys of alumni in five-year tranches. The results showed a something of a halo effect. The further the alumni were from the actual experience, the more likely the former Seminar students were to rate the Seminar as very important to their intellectual and, indeed, professional life. But that kind of self-reported response gauged affection, perhaps accurately; it did not measure learning. A new tool was needed.
First the Governing Board had to say as clearly as possible just exactly what it was that Seminar students were supposed to be learning. Under Professor Jerry Brunetti of the School of Education, the Assessment Committee crafted and brought forward “language” for the board’s consideration. Not content with half measures, the board wrote, rewrote and finally endorsed a vision statement, a statement of overarching goals, and then a list of more than a dozen learning outcomes.

**Collegiate Seminar Vision Statement**

The Collegiate Seminar Program seeks to provide its students with a solid grounding in the world of ideas as expressed in great texts of the Western world and exposure to its encounter with other traditions. The Program seeks to help them develop as curious, thoughtful members of an intellectual community. Designed to serve Saint Mary’s goals of a liberal education, the Program strives to put students in possession of their powers to think clearly and articulate their ideas effectively—powers that will serve them for the rest of their lives.

**OVERARCHING GOALS OF THE COLLEGIATE SEMINAR PROGRAM**

The Collegiate Seminar Program fosters a genuine sense of collegiality and intellectual community by providing an authentic forum for students to meet and partake of a common experience—the reading and discussion of shared texts under the guidance of faculty from all disciplines. Its participants engage in collaborative dialogue with texts whose ideas shape our world. In doing so they develop:

- the skills of close reading, informed and probing discussion, and sustained, organized argument in writing;
- the habits of intellectual curiosity, healthy skepticism, and open-mindedness;
- an awareness of diverse kinds of human knowledge, their uses, and their fundamental unity;
- an appreciation for the process of discovery and the search for meaning;
- and a sensitivity to their own humanity and to the diversity and unity of the human condition.
LEARNING OUTCOMES OF THE COLLEGIATE SEMINAR PROGRAM

Learning Outcomes: Reading
As a result of their participation in the Collegiate Seminar Program, students will grow in their ability to:
1. Read and understand complex ideas in challenging texts that represent different genres and different periods.
2. Analyze texts by drawing inferences, making connections across sections, and discovering underlying principles.
3. Critique and question texts and explore their implications.

Learning Outcomes: Discussion
As a result of their participation in the Collegiate Seminar Program, students will grow in their ability to:
1. Raise pertinent questions presented by the text.
2. Formulate and express their points of view confidently and clearly in discussion.
3. Defend their interpretation of important ideas with logical reasoning based on textual evidence.
4. Listen to and respect the points of view of other discussants.
5. Arrive at new and/or enriched understanding of the texts through collaborative inquiry.
6. Engage in a sustained and coherent intellectual discussion.
7. Relate ideas across seminar texts and tie them to their human experience.
Learning Outcomes: Writing
As a result of their participation in the Collegiate Seminar Program, students will grow in their ability to:
1. Use writing effectively as an exploratory tool.
2. Express their ideas effectively in writing that is clear, coherent, intellectually engaging, well developed, and correct.
3. Explicate their own interpretations of the readings with sustained, organized arguments and proper reference to the text.
4. Relate ideas across seminar texts and tie them to their human experience.

General Learning Outcomes
As a result of their participation in the Collegiate Seminar Program, students will:
1. Develop increased appreciation for great books as demonstrated by their habit of seeking out good reading.
2. Grow in their understanding of some great ideas of humankind and of the problems and dilemmas that people have struggled with over the millennia.
3. Grow in their intellectual curiosity.
4. Grow in their appreciation and understanding of different ways of knowing (e.g., philosophical, literary, historical, scientific, artistic, etc.)
5. Simultaneously develop a tolerance for ambiguity and a desire for clarity, recognizing that ideas and human life are complex and not easily explainable.
But the point was not simply to set a target. Somehow the program had to see whether students and instructors in the classroom were actually aiming at the goals and then measure, if possible, any improvement in their ability to hit the bull's eye. The long-suffering sub-committee, now three years into its assignment, decided to begin small and picked Discussion Learning Outcome # 3 for a test run.

Seminar recruited and trained student observers and sent them into active Seminar discussions to see whether the participants in fact constructed arguments based on evidence found in the text they were currently assigned and, more important, whether their skill at doing so improved with experience. Results were illuminating, if disappointing. Good Seminar classes, whatever the level of the students, did keep their discussions text-based or text-framed (i.e., discussing a matter of current importance in the light of the text just read). In other classes, students—juniors and seniors as much as the freshmen—ignored the poor, silent author or ignorantly attacked the tentative opinions of their better-prepared classmates (those who had actually read the assigned reading). The data were collected; means and chi-squares were calculated; conclusions were drawn; and the committee then struggled to "close the loop," in other words, to bring the results of its study to bear on improving classroom practice of both students and instructors.

Next, to test a range of outcomes at once, the Seminar Assessment Committee, now led by José Feito of the Psychology Department, decided on an indirect strategy. It would ask the students to be tested to watch a video of a real Seminar conversation and score its participants on whether they helped or hindered the discussion. The committee would then compare their answers with the considered judgments of the experienced Seminar instructors who had, after weeks of viewing the videos, come to their "expert" conclusions. The hypothesis: As students grew experienced in Seminar, their judgments would approach those of the experts. Seminar hired Scott Gibbs, a videographer who had produced inspirational videos for the Christian Brothers, to film five classes of students, from freshmen to upper division students. A team of faculty examined the films with a hand lens, picked one, and, after intense discussion, drew up a set of Twenty Questions (with answers). The trial of this "beta" version revealed two or three things. Faculty had widely divergent views about what they were seeing; students were just slightly less able than their instructors to guess what the "correct" answers were; and almost everyone, but especially faculty, thought taking the test was fun and a great way to generate grounded reflection on good and bad Seminar practice. Finally, sizable numbers of students were lured into the Garaventa Hall computer classrooms to take the test for real. Data were produced. Feito and a computer program
managed to quantify the results and measure their significance. What they discovered was that the Seminar Effect was quite small. Still, in its collateral benefits, the project proved a fruitful attempt at squaring the Seminar circle.

Writing continued to occupy a disputed territory within the Seminar Program. Some instructors, on various grounds, excused themselves from assigning or reading any student writing. Some claimed and promised to demonstrate their incompetence as writing instructors. Others objected to writing as premature—students needed first to spend several semesters engaged in dialectic before committing their insights to paper. Others worried that writing assignments allowed the shy or timid student to avoid actually getting vocally engaged in the conversation.

The Governing Board, doing its best on this contentious issue, issued a ukase that writing could (some instructors read “should”) constitute up to half of the course-related activity that instructors would evaluate. (In studentspeak, writing might “count” for half the grade.) The board borrowed the English Department’s grading rubric and modified it for Seminar use. It continued to insist that each faculty retreat include a writing practicum. For its part, the school continued to support a part-time-position writing facilitator, writing coordinator or Seminar writing advisor to assist faculty in their work with students’ writing—and students writing—in workshops and group-grading sessions.

A flood of interest in establishing an honor code on campus spilled into the Seminar Program with the proposal to subscribe to a web-based program to detect and deter student plagiarism. Even in the Golden Years, some students had had others write papers for them. Faculty had always, and rightly, felt that the plagiarist struck at the heart of the academic community; and the Faculty Assembly had adopted formal procedures for dealing with student violations. With the advent of computers, typical Seminar essays and, indeed, archives of such essays, could easily circulate among the student body and be quickly modified with that “personal touch.” Once the Internet had arrived, getting a ready-made essay on the timeless and sleep-inducing question “Was Odysseus Really a Hero?” required only a credit card and a quick download. In 2003, Turnitin.com remodeled its program of electronic scrutiny to evade charges that it was violating student privacy and illicitly appropriating the products of student labor, two objections that had scuttled use of the service after a previous trial. It was proposed to give the company a second chance, with faculty immediately dividing into camps. Some instructors thought that the employment of an anonymous source-checking electronic brain destroyed the bond of trust which must join teacher and student. Others argued that failure to check student writing for originality was
to betray professional responsibility. Finally, an uneasy compromise allowed faculty (but not students) to opt out of the surveillance program. And now, a half decade of evidence shows that either plagiarism has declined or that students have become better at evading the traps set to catch them.

The “culture of evidence,” in addition to encouraging the program to clearly state learning outcomes and test student achievement, asked collegiate departments and programs to engage in regular rounds of curricular review and to include in their evaluations reflections on the assessments of colleagues from outside the College. Collegiate Seminar was among the first college units to take “peer review” seriously. Ratchet the departmental and program review process up one notch, and the entire core of the undergraduate curriculum could be seen to need and profit from a comprehensive review. Paraphrasing Socrates, some administrators and faculty held that “the unexamined curriculum is not worth following.” A Core Curriculum committee and the Faculty Senate accepted the challenge. Seminar has been granted power to choose its own fate. And (as of academic year 2010-11), that fate is soon to be seen. In the beginning, educational reform midwifed the birth of the Seminar Program at Saint Mary’s. Now the program must deliver itself.

Epilogue: The Role of the Collegiate Seminar

Writing in 1992, Edward Porcella drew some conclusions from his knowledge of the Seminar and its history. They remain relevant in 2010, as enduring as the program.

From the beginning the Seminar has been bifocal in its vision of both the prime benefit to be imparted to students and the teaching methods and institutional organization most apt to effect it. Over the years, as a result, its promoters and practitioners at Saint Mary’s have found it necessary to engage in the same sort of sustained and reasoned dialogue that the Seminar seeks to engender in its students. Seen against the larger movement and conflict of ideas that are its matrix and background, the history of Seminar presents a condensed and remarkably controlled instance of the interplay among educational ideas and aims which few institutions have pursued or embraced so fully.

A salient feature of the Saint Mary’s curriculum for nearly 70 years, the Seminar continues to draw the notice of other institutions, increasingly aware of the value of such a program and the difficulty of introducing and sustaining one in a contemporary college or university. Recently the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Association for the Advancement of Core Curricula have recognized the Saint Mary’s Great Books Seminar for promoting a unity and coherence sorely missed in the curricula of many
institutions. They have cited as the success of this core program the open canon, which implies continuity in present and past ways of thinking, as well as community among diverse disciplines; and the Seminar methodology, which mitigates that primacy of the professor and passivity of the student so out of keeping with liberal education.41

The Seminar has from the first been a source of ferment and debate, and the renewed attempt, in recent years, to draw Seminar leaders from all departments, programs and schools of the College has perpetuated, if not increased, a diversity of opinion among Saint Mary’s faculty on the program’s proper aims and methods. Lively dialogue continues over the books that are to form the “canon”—in particular, whether more contemporary, women, minority and non-Western authors ought to be studied, and how they support the search for truth and the achievement of serious and lively discussion.

Granted the good of a diverse canon, moreover, it may be asked whether different kinds of thinking, or methods of inquiry, or fields of study, or types of writing are being sought: all have received emphasis over the Seminar’s history. The phrase “ways of knowing,” favored by many as a summary of what the Seminar seeks to teach the student, itself conceals enough diversity of meaning to sustain a long discussion. For those engaged in Seminar at Saint Mary’s, such discussion has been beneficial and is doubtless inevitable in an institution which, notwithstanding its diversity of aims and disciplines, aspires to academic community and liberal education through the study and discussion of a single set of distinguished readings.

Opinions continue to differ not only on the books to be read and the principles of their selection but on the kind and degree of leadership appropriate in Seminar discussions. It is generally agreed that the Seminar leader must refrain from lecturing or from pursuing a line of questioning that leads relentlessly to a favored point of view. The Seminar exists, as a recent formulation has it, to encourage students in the making of judgments. It fails if the judgments arrived at, however correct, do not spring from the student’s utmost effort and attention to the book, the discussion and his or her own experience. Impatience is the greatest temptation of the Seminar leader, particularly of one who happens to be learned in the book or subject under discussion. For example, it may be felt that the student lacks awareness of the historical context of the reading. But how is that to be provided? Indeed, “historical context” may itself be a notion in need of seminar examination, given the appropriate reading. Should the student set out in search of historical context before making the genuine discovery or reaching the judgment that there is such a thing? Critical reflection and attention to assumption pose a continuing challenge to the Seminar leader, as well as to the student.
Nothing taxes or develops the power of forming judgments more severely or effectively than the attempt to write the judgments down and make them stand firm. The practice of writing is, accordingly, an important component in the activity of Collegiate Seminar, albeit primarily as an instrument in the development of clear and critical thinking, rather than as an activity engaged in for its own sake.

Through its policy and practice in regard to Collegiate Seminar, the College reminds its faculty that their continued growth as teachers and scholars requires ongoing intellectual engagement with one another on common ground, as well as the private pursuit of specialized knowledge. Moreover, the College signifies to students that effective concentration in a particular discipline cannot be had without a basis and balance in liberal studies, nor enlightened and informed professionalism without philosophic reflection.
Endnotes


4 Carman, op. cit., 107-108.


15 Austin Crowley, FSC, memorandum to faculty, Saint Mary’s College, April 29, 1946, College Archive.
16 McDevitt, op. cit., 233ff.
18 McDevitt, op. cit., 233ff.
19 Adler, op. cit., 139.
20 Robert Smith, FSC, op. cit., 3.
21 Isetti, op. cit., 392ff.
24 Smith, “The Revised Freshman Courses and Their Integration,” 17.
26 The World Classics Program: Saint Mary’s College, California—a description for students of the methods and course of study” (Sept. 1967): 2-3, College Archive.
27 Rafael Alan Pollock, dean, memorandum to Michael Quinn, FSC, president, May 28, 1969, College Archive.
28 Owen Carroll and George Hersch, for the Governing Committee of the Collegiate Seminar, July 16, 1969, College Archive.
30 Townsend, op. cit.
32 Thomas J. Slakey, academic vice president, memorandum to Collegiate Seminar Governing Board, Dec. 8, 1971, College Archive.
33 Governing Board, Collegiate Seminar, memorandum to Dean Slakey, January 31, 1972, College Archive.
34 Governing Board, op. cit.
35 Resolution, Board of Trustees, June 12, 1975, College Archive.
36 Robert Hass, majority report, Committee on Collegiate Requirements, Nov. 19, 1975, College Archive.

37 O. DeSales Perez, new majority report, Committee on Collegiate Requirements, Nov. 20, 1975, College Archive.

38 Andrew L. DeGall, acting secretary, Academic Council, Nov. 24, 1975.

39 Resolution, Board of Trustees, Dec. 10, 1975, College Archive.


The Authors

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Ed Porcella first led a Saint Mary’s seminar in 1967 during a break from graduate study in philosophy. He returned to Saint Mary’s in 1978 and continues to teach in the Integral Program and Collegiate Seminar. In the early 1990s, at the request of Dean Paul Zingg and President Brother Mel Anderson, he composed a history of the Seminar at Saint Mary’s. Brother Mel recently expressed a wish to see it revived, and Brother Kenneth Cardwell undertook to revise and bring it up to date.

Kenneth Cardwell, Ph.D., FSC
From 1977 to 2010, Brother Kenneth taught in the Seminar Program between studying at various graduate schools (the University of Washington, Oxford University, UC Berkeley) and teaching at Bethlehem University. For a half dozen years, he shared an office with Ed Porcella, and he was director of the Seminar Program for five years. He now teaches at Deep Springs College, in Big Pine, California.

Deanne Kruse, M.A.
Deanne Kruse came to Saint Mary’s College in 1986, entering credential and degree programs in the School of Education. Instead of leaving to teach children, she became manager of the Seminar Program under Director O. DeSales Perez, and in 1994 she taught her first Seminar class with mentor Brother Charles Hilken. She continues to manage and to teach in the Seminar Program.