

## Back-to-the-basics goes to college

By Carole Stone

IN 1977 the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education reported that "higher education in America is a disaster." Part of the problem, according to *The Mission of the College Curriculum* from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, is college programs with little more than a smattering of courses were being palmed off as "general education."

Interest in the humanities, literature and the arts dropped in the last decade. At the same time, pre-professional programs seemed to offer better job prospects.

Between 1971 and 1976, the number of undergraduate degrees granted in English and literature fell by 38 per cent. Overall, the number of students in the traditional humanities fell from 9 to 5 per cent and in the social sciences from 18 to 8 per cent of all undergraduates.

Roughly 60 per cent of all college-age Americans go to college, and the degree serves as the passport to the job market. Yet employers are finding many graduates deficient in basic skills of reading, writing and math.

The result is a new trend back to an old idea in education — away from a watered down "general" courses to what is being called the "core curriculum."

## Return of the core curriculum

In a pure core curriculum, all students take the same courses. This was first established in 1937 at St. John's College in Annapolis, Md., where students study the 120 "classics of Western civilization," and only this, for four years. Rare is the school with such a strict program in 1980, due to the notion of a pluralistic education.

But at Columbia University, and at Reed College, courses in Western civilization — Plato, Aristotle, Shakespeare, Joyce — are required of all students.

Stanford University in California has returned to a similar "core curriculum": all entering students must study Western culture, plus one course each in literature and fine arts; philosophical, social and religious thought; human development, behavior and language; social study, mathematics, natural sciences, technology and applied sciences.

Experts in education cannot agree on what subjects ought to be included in a "core curriculum." There is a raging debate between the two Ivy "core curricu-

lum" models — the Columbia University "Great Books" or Harvard's "distributional requirement." The first is supposed to offer a specific body of knowledge, the second intellectual skills.

Ron Edmunds, of the New York City Board of Education, a supporter of the Great Books approach, says, "If a distributional requirement allows you to take history without American history, then it's not successful."

Dr. Reynolds, at the vice chancellor's office, SUNY, feels that "any curriculum without computer literacy, the ability to manipulate data, is too limited." In our technological society, studying "the classics" may not be progressive enough, he adds.

### Have you read any of these lately?

**THERE** are some old fogies who remember when a college education meant struggling with the great thoughts of mankind. Here is a list of some books which should keep a freshman chewing. How many have you met?

Even so, each school in the country sets up its variation of the leading plans.

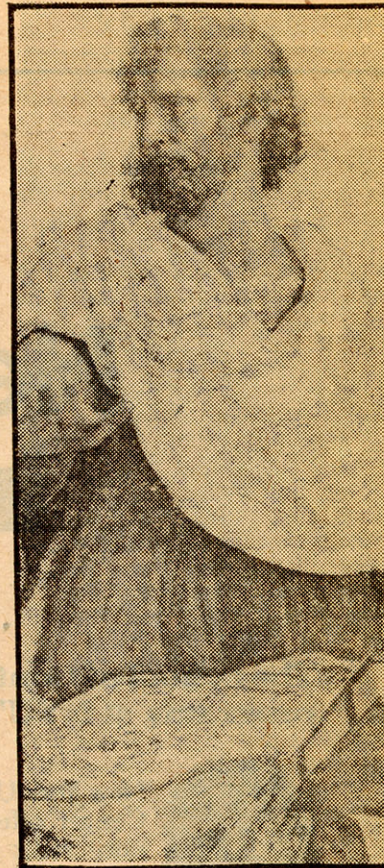
Adelphi College, for example, making a major change this year by specifying requirements of 12 hours of humanities, 8-10 of math and natural science, and 9 hours of social science. Still the curriculum is somewhat loosely defined. From 1969 to 1980 the college had no requirements other than the courses in a student's major.

Fordham, also making changes this year, has a "core" requirement built on clusters of courses, in all four years, in English, history, philosophy, and theology.

Queens College now requires students to take 3 semesters of foreign language, scientific methodology and quantitative analysis, including one lab course, 3 courses in literature and criticism, 1 in art, music or theater, 1 in aesthetics, and 2 courses in different departments in the social sciences. Also required are composition, writing, and math.

Brooklyn College is in the process of devising a core program.

And a new model at New York University requires natural science, social science, and a course in: ethical concerns; music and visual arts; Western civilization; non-Western civilization, foreign language, and expository writing and mathematics competencies.



J. S. Mill: *On Liberty*  
Utilitarianism  
Marx: *Capital*  
Nietzsche: *On The Genealogy of Morals*  
Freud: *Introductory Lectures*  
*Outline of Psychoanalysis*  
*Civilization and its Discontents*  
Homer: *The Illiad*

Rousseau: *The Social Contract*  
Kant: *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*  
*Moral and Political Philosophy*  
*Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*  
Adam Smith: *The Wealth of Nations*



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