



**Martin Trow delivering the keynote address  
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**INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES AS A  
COUNTERCULTURE:  
PROBLEMS OF BIRTH,  
GROWTH AND SURVIVAL\***

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Introduction

In this essay I want to raise at least these questions:

1. Why do some innovative interdisciplinary programs succeed, while others fail?
2. What are the effects of the legacy of the 60's, when so many innovative programs had their start? How much of a burden is that legacy in the 80's? Is it necessary "to change with the times" and can that be done while maintaining the integrity of interdisciplinary programs?
3. What are the special difficulties encountered during the start-up years of interdisciplinary programs?

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4. How can we reconcile the reformist commitments of innovative programs with the necessity for these programs to establish good and warm relations with other more traditional parts of their host institutions?

I take it as self-evident that interdisciplinary studies at their best are among the most powerful and effective perspectives for teaching undergraduate students. Note that I said "among," and that is indeed the heart of my message. Interdisciplinary studies "embody programs of teaching and research that transcend the methods and subject matter of single scholarly disciplines or academic departments," and "seek to use perspectives of seemingly disparate disciplines simultaneously and interactively to define common problems, issues and ideas, and to pose solutions based on genuine dialogue." When that is done, when interdisciplinary studies succeed, they are a joy to behold, and even more to take part in. I use the word "joy" because of the sheer pleasure in the intellectual play that they afford to students and teachers alike, the pleasures of roaming across disciplinary boundaries, and of finding connections and links, illuminations and insights in the ideas and discoveries of disparate disciplines.

Having said that, I must also say that I have seen powerful and effective teaching and learning in quite different forms and contexts. For example, the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program at MIT, and its counterparts elsewhere, give to undergraduate students an opportunity to join ongoing faculty research projects, and bring them very quickly to the frontiers of a discipline, though often on a very narrow front, I recognize that undergraduate research done within departmental structures may well push against the boundaries of those disciplines, and resemble closely the kinds of research that are done within interdisciplinary programs, such as those at Western College, Miami of Ohio, or Worcester Poly. (And the blurring of distinctions between what is done in interdisciplinary programs and in departments may be the kind of imitation that is the sheerest form of flattery.) More important than where it is done, the rewards of actually helping to create knowledge through specialized research can affect a student's motivation across the board, and give to him or her a totally different sense of the provisional, the unfinished nature of science, of academic work, and indeed of intellectual life. And even the more routine forms of disciplinary study, the ordinary departmental major, if it is well-organized, can give a student the beginnings of a real familiarity with a body of knowledge organized as a discipline or a sub-discipline. It is true that this can become more pedantry, or a premature introduction to specialized graduate study in an academic discipline. But the value for some undergraduates of studies in depth of a single discipline ought not to be dismissed too quickly, it may be that students, at least some students, need to gain familiarity with the methods and subject matter of a single scholarly discipline before they can transcend them.

I mention this not because traditional disciplinary studies need any further defense, and if they did this would hardly be the place for it. I mention it because I am interested in why some interdisciplinary programs and institutions succeed while others fail. And I have come to believe that the success or failure of these

programs is only in part related to their quality or to the demand for them locally. To a great extent, I think, the success and failure of interdisciplinary programs are a function of their relation to the rest of higher education, in their own institutions and elsewhere. My reading of the history of innovative programs in higher education over the past two decades—and interdisciplinary programs especially at the undergraduate level have appeared most of the time as innovative programs—is that the fate of any given program has depended heavily on whether its founders saw American higher education as a failure which they would try to repair or redeem, or as a system of great richness and diversity to which they would add additional richness and diversity, seeking for their own ecological niche in the jungle of American colleges and universities. If their founders were sure that the rest of higher education, and that includes the rest of their own university, was incompetent or venal, then their innovative programs were created to stand in witness to that failure, and to their own calling to provide alternative models. And if I speak here of sin and redemption, of bearing witness and having a calling, the religious overtones are not accidental.

On the whole, programs that have abused their hosts while claiming unique and almost ethereal virtues, have failed. Those that have claimed a place in the spectrum of higher education to serve that segment of the student population which wants and can profit from what interdisciplinary programs and colleges can offer, have on the whole survived and flourished.

But while most of the people in this field may be chiefly interested in this latter group (among which I number Miami's Western College), that is to say, interested in what successful programs look like and how they work, I hope I can interest you for a few minutes in a consideration of why so many innovative and interdisciplinary programs of the sixties and seventies failed. I think that if we look at them closely we will learn something about the nature of educational reform in this country, and perhaps about American higher education more broadly, and about the environment in which innovations in higher education seek for legitimacy and resources. In this effort I have to start by locating the innovations that I will be talking about in the broader spectrum of academic reform in the United States since World War II.

### Types of Academic Innovation

It may be useful to distinguish three different kinds of recent innovation or reform in American higher education. The first was the general loosening of the curriculum that took place in very many small colleges and universities during the decade 1965-1975, largely as a response or reaction to the heightened meritocratic pressures of the late 50's and 60's. The rapid growth of college and university enrollments in the 1960's--involving more than a doubling in the number of students--led to a very sharp competition for admissions to the elite colleges and greatly increased academic pressures on undergraduates who were competing for admission to graduate school. Students sought relief, and found a

sympathetic ear among many faculty members who resented the dominance of the graduate schools over the liberal arts colleges both within and outside universities. The "reforms" which were adopted very widely gave students more freedom of choice in the curriculum and more freedom in the sequencing of their courses. Three of the commonest reforms were: 1) a sharp reduction or the abolition of required courses; 2) a free choice of curriculum, that is to say, a reduction in the sequencing of courses; and 3) student-designed majors outside of departmental boundaries.<sup>2</sup> These "popular" reforms were very widespread although rarely advertised, but they modified the means of education within the bounds of the existing goals of a research oriented university, and of the colleges that fed them.

Another type of academic innovation took the form of educational inventions designed to achieve learning in ways other than through traditional lectures and seminars. These reforms were less focused on the curriculum than on the modes of instruction, affecting the relationship of teacher and student and a body of knowledge or skills. The Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program at MIT is an example here, as are self-paced courses, the use of videotapes, and the significant reforms of engineering education pioneered in the Worcester Polytechnic Institute Plan. These are indeed academic innovations, but still lying within the assumptions of discipline-oriented colleges and universities.

A third type of academic innovations comprise what David Riesman and Gerald Grant call "telic" or purposive reforms.<sup>3</sup> These center on a significantly different conception of the goals of undergraduate education. Such ambitious aims require not just the reform of a curriculum or the invention of an instructional technology, but the creation of new educational institutions which embody these new goals, in a sense these institutions can be seen as a criticism of the central values of the research oriented multiversity, of the pre-eminence of the academic discipline and the academic career. These values—of "competitive excellence" in the service of specialized research and scholarship, based on individual achievement, and a cognitive style that subordinates "feeling" to "knowing," "being" to "becoming"—had in the decade of growth after World War II come also to dominate a wider circle of satellite four-year colleges, and through their power as models, a much larger number of more modest colleges and universities.

While the enormous expansion of higher education (and of federally supported research) after World War II greatly strengthened the disciplines as well as the reaction against them, it is important to emphasize that colleges designed in opposition to the dominant models began to emerge as long ago as the thirties. Among the older "telic" institutions were St. John's, Antioch, Bennington, Black Mountain, Goddard and Sarah Lawrence. But much larger numbers of such institutions emerged after World War II; among these were Old Westbury (both I and II), Franconia, Hampshire, Evergreen, Green Bay, the College of Human Services in New York, New College in Sarasota, and Stockton State and Ramapo Colleges in the New Jersey state system. They also included

institutions embedded within larger and more conventional universities: examples here were Bensalem in Fordham, both Tussman College and Strawberry Creek College in Berkeley, Kresge College in Santa Cruz, Western College in Miami of Ohio, and Livingston College in Rutgers.

David Riesman and Gerald Grant in their book *The Perpetual Dream*, develop an interesting typology of these institutions they call "telic," or purposeful. They distinguish four types of such colleges by reference to their basic conceptions of education, their students' motivations for choosing the college, the institution's own valued ends, their social models, core values, educational styles, historical roots, and the nature of the authority that each invokes and accepts. The types they identify are the "neo-classicals," among them St. John's and the Tussman College at Berkeley; the "aesthetic-expressives," for example, Bennington and Sarah Lawrence as well as Black Mountain; the "communal-expressives," including both Kresge and Bensalem; and the "activist radicals," including Antioch College, Old Westbury in its first phase, and the College for Human Services in New York.

But while there is much to be said about these different types of "telic" institutions and the differences among them, they all shared certain characteristics in common. First, each had a sense of mission. They aspired above all to be distinctive, and the distinctiveness lay both in the set of positive characteristics which they embodied and also in their assertion that they were not like the "ordinary" college or university. The claim to "distinctiveness" is made by faculty and students in these institutions who are on the whole dissatisfied with the competitive life of the university, and yearn for a sense of identity; they want to be part of an institution that can evoke from them deep loyalties, and in which their own sense of themselves as persons is ratified and justified. For both teachers and students, to join such a place is not just to get a job, or to go to college: it is to make a commitment, a commitment that for the faculty may involve sacrifices in their academic career. For faculty especially, but for students also, joining such an institution may mean that bridges have been burned and that costly career choices have been made that reflect their deep personal and social ideals.

There is in all of these purposive institutions also an intensity in the student-teacher relationship that is rare in "ordinary" colleges and universities, an intensity partly reflecting their common recoil against research and publication norms. It also reflects the value held in all of these experimental forms of innovation that teachers and students are to be seen as "co-learners." They are not necessarily egalitarian—for example, they surely are not at St. John's—nor does it necessarily require the dominance of charismatic leaders. What they do share is the commitment to a community and the ceremonies of a community. In such institutions, as Riesman and Grant observed, "the important judgements are common judgements about whether students measure up to the ideals of the college, not whether they are excellent students in the traditional sense, as in the judgements of a departmentally organized faculty." <sup>4</sup>

The historian, Lawrence Veysey, captures the spirit of these telic institutions in a review of Martin Duberman's *Black Mountain*:

Many of us yearn in some part of our minds for a college setting utterly free from bureaucratic harassment, a place where nothing distracts from mutual learning and creation. The dream merges with that of community—an educational environment to be sure but one where life and classroom merge into each other, and where status dissolves in genuine human relationships.<sup>5</sup>

The primary values of these institutions are anti-institutional. What is valued is the enduring personal relationship, rather than the tangential and fleeting encounters of persons and roles that are so common in large traditional institutions. They are hostile therefore to the university model, the large, formal organizations of specialized roles and statuses, and are committed to small size, informal structures, and less specialized academic roles which blur the distinction between disciplines, between academic ranks, and between teacher and student. The curriculum places great value on interdisciplinary studies which drastically subordinate the disciplines (and their administrative arms, the departments) to the "natural articulations of knowledge" as in the neoclassical institutions, or to "creativity," as in the aesthetic-expressive institutions, or to the "human community" as in the communal-expressive institutions, or to "social change and the activist professional" in the activist radical institutions.

### Institution-Building

I have been describing a broad movement in American higher education that includes programs and institutions that have succeeded and survived as well as others that failed and disappeared. I want now to look even more closely at some of the characteristics of those innovative institutions which put them at risk, and have led some to fail. I want to do that by looking at the early years of newly-created, purposefully innovative, "telic" institutions, to consider the peculiar problems and tensions that arose, and perhaps still arise, as they move from birth, through infancy, toward adult status and full maturity, it is the perspective of the institutional life-cycle.

Let me start by considering what are, or more accurately what were, some of the peculiar characteristics and advantages of the start-up years--the years of "institution building"--in these innovative programs and colleges.

1. The earliest years of a new and innovative program are marked by a highly selective recruitment of staff and students. Typically, the new institution attracted faculty for whom the college offered not a job but a calling, no 9-5 day but an opportunity and challenge. Founding faculty were quite often enthusiasts, true believers, for whom the institution and its philosophy was not just another educational option but a kind of secular religion.

Similarly, the students of this first generation were often brought there by advance publicity about the institution or program, in some cases by energetic efforts to bring to the institution the kind of student whom the founders believed would help give it its unique character. They were, on the whole, enthusiastic and dedicated to the ideals of the college. Moreover, many saw themselves as pioneers solving problems, and quickly gained the high sense of efficacy associated with the experience of a pioneer generation faced with a great variety of problems for which there are no institutional answers or precedents, or specialized problem-solvers already in place. The first few classes in such institutions were also often (but not always) better students: more imaginative, independent, and self-directed, more adventurous and more highly motivated. They often were a very hard class to follow.

2. The resources available to the institution in the first few years were often unusually abundant. There were commonly special start-up resources, one-time subventions from "special" funds for just such innovative ventures. In addition, the newly recruited staff was often given a planning year, or were recruited faster than the students so that there was an early favorable staff-student ratio. Very often, the first year or two in the institutions saw a staff-student ratio of about one to five or six. Three or four years later, it was one to twenty or twenty-five. The experience of that change alone was a shock that the young program had difficulty surviving.

3. The new college was, for obvious reasons, almost always very small. Small size allows the emergence of a "handicraft culture" and obscures the implications of the absence of procedures. Small size allows communal and often consensual decision-making. This may also be ideologically required, and in the beginning it was just barely possible, given the small size and the recruitment of staff and students around common values. Small size allowed each problem that arose to be defined as unique, to be solved in a communal atmosphere of sentiment, feeling, and comradeship, working together as substitutes for precedents and procedure.

4. Both the ideology of many telic institutions and the lack of precedent in all very new ones made for a readiness to treat each student, each problem, as if it were the first and wholly unique. "Every student is a unique exception,"--with respect to grades, to course requirements, and to everything else. (This principle, incidentally, exposed the teacher in these colleges to enormous pressures from solipsistic and exploitative operators among the students.) The lack of precedent and institutional procedures, the weakness of boundaries and routines also required that each case be the object of willful decision, one that squared with principle and ideal. Moreover, each such decision had to be made with great care and deliberation, both for its own sake and also because it would become a precedent. The experience of making a world and not merely serving it was for many of the participants both exhilarating and exhausting.

Characteristically, over time, it became increasingly exhausting and decreasingly exhilarating.

5. The new college, if it was embedded in a larger, more conventional institution, was at this very early stage not yet seen as a threat to other parts of the larger institution. Its demand on resources was not yet large, and even its opponents felt the necessity to "give it a chance" after the decision had been made to set it up. This was an important if temporary advantage of the new institution.

Partly as a result of all these special (if temporary) advantages, the first few years of life of a new telic institution were often marked by the euphoria of creation, and of high morale arising out of a steady flow of problems and the pleasures and rewards of "solving them" and building an institution.

### Problems Arising From the Transition to Steady State

But for every Eden there is a world, and for young innovative institutions the agents of the world come not in the form of a serpent and an apple, but of growth. And with growth came the inevitable emergence of secondary relationships among people, in place of the primary relationships of whole persons that characterized the early years. This development was especially hard on the "communal-expressive" type of telic institution. (We see the consequence of growth in such institutions in the evocative picture that Riesman and Grant sketch of Kresge College at Santa Cruz, and the split that occurred within that college after its first few years.)

Students after the initial years start coming to an established institution. They are expecting to find a program in place, rather than to be helping to create one. This reflected and accelerated changes in the character of student recruitment; a different kind of student comes to an established program than to a brand new one in the making.

Moreover, there was a measure of faculty turnover during the first few years as some of the early founders left, disaffected by their experience in an institution which did not, and could not, remain permanently malleable and uninstitutionalized.

One result of a high level of faculty turnover (and the academic market was much stronger before 1975) was to weaken further the new program's already weak capacity to develop formal procedures and organizational routines, it increased the instability of the students' experience, and it also changed in the aggregate the character and values of the staff. With faculty as with students, the second generation of recruits is never like the first and founding generation. The difference between them was that in the faculty, the first, second and third

generations of recruits were intermingled; and differences among them in the passion and purity of their commitment made for dissension and conflict.

After a year or two, typically the faculty and staff began to search for ways of managing overload. The overload arose essentially out of the fact that increasing numbers of students began to come to an institution whose ways of working and teaching were highly personalistic, and ill adapted to the conditions of mass education for which many of these telic institutions were destined. The initial response of such institutions was always to try to expand the personalistic response developed in the first year or two to the larger numbers coming in the third and fourth years. When this was experienced as impossible overload, there was a search for procedures to manage the relationship between faculty and these larger numbers of students. And ironically, another source of overload was the growth of demands on the faculty arising from the necessity of their developing the very procedures needed for managing large numbers. The third and fourth year of such institutions was often experienced as the worst of both worlds: a large number of students without the routines and impersonal procedures which allow large numbers to be taught and managed in more traditional programs and institutions.

On top of all this, there was characteristically the loss of the early extra resources. Governing agencies started to require the new entity to function at cost levels of comparable traditional programs or institutions, or of traditional units in the host institution. This was partly due to pressures from older units. There are enormous leveling pressures in multi-unit institutions: legitimacy requires equity, and in many such institutions marked differences in per capita support among departments are defined as inequalities, and inequalities as inequities. These norms did not usually operate during the very first start-up years, and that is in part why the Golden Age of such telic institutions usually lies in the institution-building years. (That, of course, was not the only reason.) But when these norms were applied, they had drastic effects on the budgets of these innovative programs, and on the sometimes costly practices that they had developed.

Sooner or later during the innovative institution's transitional years it experienced the emergence of conflict, latent but obscured during the early communal phase by the consensus of a small, relatively self-recruited faculty and student body around a common ideology. (In some institutions—e.g. Old Westbury I—fierce conflict was present from the very beginning, as if by design.) Conflict always emerges around conflicting interests, as for example, between the tenured and the non-tenured faculty, the publishers and non-publishers, the faculty and the administration. It arises also around ideology, as between people on the "left" and those on the "right." It also arises from differences between those who prefer spontaneity and those who prefer predictability and order, between those who place greater value on personal qualities and those who would reward achievement. These differences come to be more or less organized, structured and contained within most colleges and universities—where

they don't, the department or institution suffers. But telic institutions usually have few procedures for adjudicating conflict—conflict tends to be seen not as part of the ordinary life of the institution, but as evidence of the loss of Eden, as a failure of the communal ideal. The emergence of conflict is especially painful in a communal setting where people interact as persons rather than in roles; in such circumstances, conflict tends to be personalized. Moreover, where decisions are meant to emerge from consensus, conflict often results in decision paralysis: the "Polish parliament" phenomenon.

Another aspect of the transition to a steady state after the first few years in the life of these innovative programs was the growing evidence of faculty fatigue arising out of a continuing overload. This overload was due in part to the highly individualized modes of instruction, associated both with educational ideology and the favorable staff-student ratios of the first few years, and in part the constant meetings associated with participatory decision-making without procedures or precedent.

This overload and fatigue in turn led to a pattern of withdrawal and privatization on the part of at least some of the faculty members. As they stopped going to meetings, that in turn delegitimized the decisions made at those meetings. (Non-participation delegitimizes decisions more quickly where there is a reliance on participatory democracy and the politics of consensus.) Also, it further overburdened the continuing participants, and drove more of them to reduce some of their exhausting involvement in the never ending process of making decisions about every event as if it were absolutely new and unique.

Privatization--the reduction or withdrawal of their involvement in the political life of the Institution--by at least some of the faculty does not have necessarily destructive consequences in traditional institutions, nor is it severely condemned there by the other participants. In the early days of a telic institution, by contrast, it is seen as a "betrayal" and evidence of the failure of the communal ideals. The expectation in such institutions was that each faculty member had to continue to give evidence of a deep and abiding commitment to the college's ideals, and that participation was in response to an inner calling. Such institutions demanded not just a fair day's work but "a full measure of devotion." Any qualification of that devotion, as, for example, a genuine but limited commitment to innovative forms of undergraduate teaching, is quite unacceptable in the telic institutions.

As time went on, routinization, conflict, privatization all in one way or another were growing evidence to the participants that the institution was not able to maintain the requisite levels of spontaneity, creativity, community, commitment and involvement of all of its participants. This growing recognition, feeding back on the institution, was reflected in declining morale, animosities among colleagues and growing evidence that ad hoc procedures do not work very well. All of these developments, the institutional as well as the psychological, contributed to a widespread sense of failure among faculty

members. In these institutions, the judgement of failure was made by not any reasonable comparison with other institutions of higher education, but rather against the Utopian criteria that the founders had in mind when they created the institution. But against Utopian criteria, only failure is possible.

There are other reasons for the difficulties that some of these innovative colleges and programs experienced, difficulties that were more a consequence of the nature of their host institutions than of the innovations themselves. For one thing, the very fact that innovative colleges were so passionately devoted to teaching made them suspect to a large part of the faculty of the research-oriented university. And in the big research universities, where the academic career is so closely linked to research motivations and achievements, it was difficult for these innovative "teaching" colleges to attract and retain many regular faculty.<sup>6</sup> They too often lived on the energies of their senior founders and a small band of temporary non-tenured and non-tenurable assistants, and died when those energies were exhausted.

Moreover, these programs often were funded as "experimental" units, without a permanent "line" in the operating budget of the university. The resources they drew on were designed for academic innovations, and were easily withdrawn when university budgets were cut, or were shifted to other newer claimants for experimental funds. After all, when a college program had been in existence for five years or more, it could hardly be considered "experimental" any longer. It was then often told that it had to find a place on the ordinary operating budget of the university, but could not. So a major difficulty for some of these programs was that they were never fully institutionalized, either with respect to staff recruitment or budget.

To sum up, the difficulties faced by innovative programs during their early start-up years are broadly of two kinds: those inherent in the transition from an experimental or pilot program to the status of a regular and institutionalized school or program, and those that result from the romantic, evangelical and Utopian ideologies of some of the founders of innovative programs.

The two kinds of difficulties, when found together, are nearly always fatal--they tend to enhance or exacerbate each other. The former set of problems are still with us, or rather with new programs. The latter, I suspect, are less so--but they are not wholly absent, nor are they likely to be wherever passions and commitments to innovations in undergraduate teaching are strong.

### Successful Transition to the Steady State

The successful transition of an innovative program from its initial phase to a stable steady state is highly dependent on its success in developing academic and administrative routines. "Routines" and "routinization" have a bad name in academic life. They are thought to be the enemies of creativity, spontaneity, and

of the lively interaction of people and ideas that makes for the best learning and teaching. A great deal of academic innovation is designed precisely to break routines, and enable institutions to find new ways of pursuing familiar ends.

Routines are viewed with special hostility in innovative institutions during their formative years. But the evidence suggests that for such institutions there are two possible paths. One involves a search for stability; the other is marked by a steady slide toward collapse. Bensalem at Fordham, and Old Westbury I were illustrations of what failed telic institutions looked like before they were mercifully terminated. By contrast, those institutions that survived were marked by a search for academic routines and institutional procedures that would be compatible with their basic purposes. And those routines that were not at odds with an institution's goals were likely to be routines that an institution chose to create rather than those it fell into.

What are some of the functions of routine? Some routines can be seen as "solved problems" thereby conserving the time and energy of participants. Another name for routines is regular procedures. Until it develops procedures, a new academic unit is likely to spend a very considerable amount of time and energy in discussion and debate about each case or problem, as well as about all the principles associated with it.

But academic routines are not necessarily the enemy of creativity and spontaneity; on the contrary, they make it possible to respond to some occasions, persons and issues in wholly unroutine ways. Institutions which resist developing any routines demonstrate how oppressive (and uncreative) an educational environment can be in which all people and problems are defined as absolutely unique and as having an equally urgent claim on the faculty's time and energy.

Routines are also the basis of institutional predictability. They allow people to act with some idea of how others are going to act and react in specific circumstances. An example here is the establishment of faculty office hours. Office hours are especially interesting precisely because many innovative programs and institutions resisted just such "routinization" of the student-teacher relationship. They argued that teachers should be available for spontaneous interactions, and that the very idea of office hours is at odds with the kind of close personal relationship between student and teacher that the institution is designed to foster. But being always potentially available was one of the sources of strain and overload on teachers in these institutions, which in turn led them to find other ways of rationing access to them by the growing numbers of students. And those other ways—especially privatization and "hiding"—have other consequences for the life of the institution which are more deleterious than is the "routinization" associated with establishing office hours.

We can look at the functions of routines in yet another way--by considering the outcomes of their performing these several functions. Routines

are "solved problems" and introduce a certain economy, both of energy and money, into the institution. The problems that are dealt with by routines and procedures do not have constantly to be solved. The routine as a basis for predictability means that the institution is able to plan and coordinate action without constant consultation among its members. The main business of the institution can then be teaching and learning, and not meeting and decision-making. Predictability also provides a measure of psychological security to its members.

The provision of legitimacy by routines is illustrated by those routines which become procedures—accepted ways of doing things. Procedures, equitable and predictable ways of reaching decisions and adjudicating disputes, are the very opposite of arbitrary rulings and ad hoc decisions in problem situations. The hostility in the early years of many innovative institutions to all procedures had as an unintended consequence the denial to the institution of one of the most powerful forces for gaining and holding the willing participation of its members, that is, the shared sense that the institution is operating in fair and equitable ways, ways that are embodied in its broadly accepted procedures.

One crucial question in relation to routines for any institution, and not least for those in transition from institution building to steady state, is: what aspects of the life of the institution should be subject to routine and "administration," what left to spontaneous response, and what left to group decision-making, i.e. the political process? Institutions have only this limited number of ways of reaching decisions on academic issues and the determination of what kinds of decisions are or should be made by which of these different processes tells a lot about the dominant character and values of the institution.

The tension between spontaneity and routines is inherent in education. It is a question of what is given and what is problematic. If everything is problematic, then the world is as William James saw it to be for the newborn infant, "a bloomin', buzzing confusion." On the other hand, if nothing is problematic, then the institution has in fact ritualized its operation, that is to say, transformed its means into ends; it is wholly in the service of its own continued operation. A danger for every institution, and perhaps most sharply for colleges and universities, is the tendency to resolve the tension between spontaneity and routine either by resisting the emergence of any routines, as in the failed programs of the 60's, or by routinizing everything possible, as in the dreariest departments we know.

### Lessons for Interdisciplinary Studies

Why raise these questions now, when most of these innovative institutions are either dead or safely institutionalized? My motive, I hope, is not to give support to the principle which, it is alleged, governed the University of Oxford for so many years--i.e. that "nothing should ever be done for the first

time." I think there are other and better reasons for looking at innovative institutions, and at their difficulties during their early years. One of these is to learn about the relations of individuals and institutions under the conditions of high stress, in which institutional mechanisms for adaptation to stress and the resolution of conflict—that is to say, the mechanisms which permit institutional survival and the achievement, or at least the pursuit, of intellectual goals—are highly visible by virtue of their very weakness or absence. The extreme case is a useful comparative case, throwing into bold relief what otherwise one takes for granted in ordinarily successful functioning institutions where the observer is lulled by familiarity and routine, and where the mechanisms for survival are obscured by their interpenetration with each other in a web of patterns and activities which we cannot easily disentangle.

So one motive for studying innovative institutions is the identification of institutional mechanisms for coping with stress and change, and a clarification of their functions in higher education.

Another motive for our interest in "telic" institutions lies in the light they can shed on the potentialities for purposeful social action in higher education, and a better awareness of its limitations. It is one thing to create institutions with broad and largely traditional social functions—for example, a college—and then allow it to find its functions through its institutional forms and processes. It is rather different to create a program or institution that means to achieve new ends through specific intended means—where what is being specified in and by the institution has a close link between means and end. Anyone interested in educational policy may find in telic institutions some of the possibilities, problems and limitations of purposeful innovation in higher education, as contrasted to the responsive adaptations that are our more common springs of action.

Finally, it may appear that I have been talking more of the past than of the future. But as we have been warned, if we forget or ignore the lessons of the past, we are condemned to repeat them.

What are those lessons? As I read our recent history, here are some lessons for interdisciplinary studies.

1. First, programs of interdisciplinary studies can be critics of other more conventional discipline-centered studies; but they ought not to be their enemy. For one thing, the disciplines are simply too strong, too institutionalized in the academic departments. Departments are the forms that the disciplines take in our colleges and universities; they link the organized bodies of knowledge, and their research and scholarly activities, to the administrative units of universities—the units that appoint and promote faculty and manage the academic career, organize most of the undergraduate curriculum, and all of graduate studies. We cannot fight the disciplines; they manage the creation and extension of knowledge across national boundaries, and almost everywhere control the reward structures of both teachers and students. We can point out and demonstrate that discipline-

based departments are not always the best units in which to organize instruction; and that there is a difference between the creation and transmission of knowledge, and the deepening of understanding, and that the latter is uniquely served by interdisciplinary studies.

I think there is a broad sympathy for and acceptance of that perspective even among specialized and self-limiting disciplinarians. But that sympathy is likely to disappear if the interdisciplinary studies movement claims not only that it adds something important and unique to the diversity of forms of higher education, but that it is the only way or the best way to organize higher education.

2. Second, I have said that many interdisciplinary studies programs have a certain evangelical element to them, and that is only a short step from fanaticism. Almost a century ago, Peter Finley Dunn, the wry commentator on American life and customs, observed that "A fanatic is a person who is sure that God would be on his side if He only knew the facts of the case." There is something of that spirit among partisans of any movement; the trick is to find a way to reconcile partisanship and commitment with tolerance and civility. Can we be passionate partisans without abusing our neighbors, especially when resources are at issue?

3. And finally, and here I would anticipate spirited disagreement within the community, it may be that interdisciplinary studies are not for everybody; that they are, so to speak, a curriculum for students (and teachers) who have an usual love of learning, who are self-motivated, and who are curious beyond the average about the world they live in, and who welcome chances to see that world, its history, social structure, politics, economy, art, literature, and its social and environmental problems, in a perspective that transcends the disciplines. We can, of course, try to engender and encourage that curiosity and motivation, but when those qualities are absent, and stubbornly absent, interdisciplinary studies may not be the best way to reach students who fear and resist the play of mind, the unfamiliar connection, the disturbing insight. And it may be that interdisciplinary studies, having made peace with its institutional environments, needs to find and acknowledge the limits of its relevance to American higher education, at the same time as it extends and fulfills its own intellectual potential as a unique way of learning and teaching.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>*Newsletter*, Association for integrative Studies, #13, 1983.

<sup>2</sup>On the sources of these pressures on students and some of their reactions see Christopher Jencks and David Riesman, *The Academic Revolution*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday) 1968, see Chapter 1. See also Martin Trow, "Bell, Book, and Berkeley," *American Behavioral Scientist* (May-June 1968).

<sup>3</sup>Gerald Grant and David Riesman, *The Perpetual Dream*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press) 1978.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup>Quoted by Grant and Riesman, *Ibid.*, p. 33

<sup>6</sup>See Grant and Riesman, *op. cit.*, pp. 370-373.