

AP550 - Discussion Paper
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What were the experimental colleges of the 20s and 50s?

The Experimental College Movement (also referred to as EXCO or EC) has taken several forms historically, but is generally a school within a school, based out of a college or university, that offers classes taught by not just traditional professors, but students and community members as well (often without grades and often free of charge or in some way associated with social or curricular change).

At Swarthmore in the early 20s under Frank Aydelotte, experiments were begun with special colloquia, honors instruction separate from the regular course of instruction, and general final examinations conducted entirely by external examiners (Lucas, 223).

In the 1960s the idea took the form of a movement, with Experimental Colleges arising at Tufts University and the University of California, Davis, in 1966 and the University of Washington and Oberlin College in 1968. In addition to these projects, which still exist today, some Experimental Colleges came in and out of existence, such as the Tussman Experimental College at University of California, Berkley, and at the University of Southern California. These projects reflect different approaches to the concept: some hold fast to the principle of cost-free courses, some offer courses for credit, some emphasize a community focus. More recently established Experimental Colleges exist at Haverford and in the Twin Cities.

And while EXCOs draw upon a long history of many radical community movements including Popular Education, Free Schools, Freedom Schools, Work Peoples' Colleges, etc., the original concept is often attributed to Alexander Meiklejohn, who spearheaded such a project at the University of Wisconsin, Madison and authored a book about the experience, *The Experimental College*, in 1932.

Experimental progressive colleges, such as Black Mountain in North Carolina and women's schools such as Sarah Lawrence and Bennington, mounted Deweyan programs emphasizing extramural work requirements, interdisciplinary courses, individualized studies aimed at addressing current social issues and problems, and independent study. (Lucas, 223)

Universities without walls

In many ways, certainly, the University Without Walls was not new, having sprung directly from the soil first tilled by the self-proclaimed "experimental colleges" of the 1920s and 1930s—colleges like Antioch, Bard, Bennington, Black Mountain, Goddard, and Sarah Lawrence. These colleges developed in conscious opposition to the growing hegemony of the comprehensive research university, in several cases (Antioch's most notably) as a last-ditch rethinking of their original missions in the face of insolvency. Others were newly founded and conceived as experimental, in some way, from the start. All were committed to putting the undergraduate student back into the center of the educational enterprise. None even made the leap until the sixties.

These new and renewed liberal arts colleges were invigorated by the ideas of John Dewey and actively nurtured by the progressive education movement. They emphasized individualized or interdisciplinary programs and the fine arts; independent study along with greater student responsibility for the educational process; the development of a

community of learners; experiential learning, whether work or service related; small, seminar style classes; and mentoring relationships with faculty.

They tended to de-emphasize "such traditional practices as grades, examinations, degree criteria and entrance requirements." Their commitment to a philosophy of educational experimentation and "learning how to learn" as a foundation for such non-traditional practices marked these colleges as a distinct new type on the higher educational scene.

Because of their ties to the progressive education movement and the shared concerns among their institutions, many of the faculty and administrators of the experimental colleges were well acquainted with one another. It was hardly remarkable then for the presidents of ten of these institutions to come together in 1964 to form a consortium known as the Union for Research and Experimentation in Higher Education (UREHE), later the Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities (UECU).

Royce ("Tim") Pitkin, founder and president of Goddard College until 1975, was the inspirational leader of this early consortium effort. Under his guidance, Goddard had remained exceptionally committed to the concept of institutional experimentation which had marked the beginning or transitional years (though not always the later histories*) of most of the member colleges. These initially numbered ten: **Antioch College, Bard College, the New College of Hofstra University, Monteith College of Wayne State University, Nasson College, Northeastern Illinois University, Sarah Lawrence College, Shimer College, Stephens College, and Goddard.** While Pitkin provided the inspiration, Antioch College provided more substantial support: President James Dixon contributed ideas and direction as well as offices for consortium activities on the Yellow Springs campus. Antioch also provided the consortium's first president and most energetic advocate, Sam Baskin.

The Union's mission was innovative in its emphasis on research and development projects that would effect changes on the members' own campuses. The Consortium had three functions:

- to conduct experiments and research projects involving two or more member colleges;
- to foster research in education by individuals within member colleges; and
- to give visibility to results achieved both by its coordinated research projects and by the projects of individual faculty members of the member colleges

The emphasis on research and development implied an orientation towards grantsmanship, especially in the free-spending sixties, and the Union proved adept at the game. The emphasis on grants, in turn, assured that the consortium would develop beyond just a club for college presidents into an organization with paid staff. It was this staff that Sam Baskin directed from the Antioch campus in Yellow Springs. An early indication of the impact this organization would have was its work on the concept and initial funding for Change magazine, which it later spun off as an independent publication with George Bonham as editor. (Harris and Hendra, <http://www-unix.oit.umass.edu/~hendra/Unpublished%20Results.html>)

What did Antioch, Bennington, and Goddard contribute in the way of higher education formats?

Antioch

Arthur E. Morgan at Antioch College in 1921 inspired a revival of the work-study idea. As a five-year program, it offered a combination of liberal studies, social training, and real-life work aimed at bringing students face to face with “practical realities in all their stubborn complexity.” (Lucas, 223)

Beginning in the 1940s, Antioch was considered an early bastion of student activism, anti-racism, and progressive thought. During World War II, Antioch, among other eastern colleges, with the help of Victor Goertzel, participated in a program which arranged for students of Japanese origin interned in Relocation camps to enroll in college. In 1943 the college Race Relations Committee began offering scholarships to non-white students to help diversify the campus, which had been mostly white since its founding. Antioch was one of the first historically white colleges to actively recruit black students. Antioch was also the first historically white college to appoint a black person to be chair of an academic department, when Walter Anderson was appointed chair of the music department.

In the 1950s Antioch faced pressure from the powerful House Un-American Activities Committee and faced criticism from many area newspapers, because it did not expel students and faculty accused of having Communist leanings. College officials stood firm, insisting that freedom begins not in suppressing unpopular ideas but in holding all ideas up to the light. The school, including professors and administration, was also involved in the early stages of the American Civil Rights Movement. In 1965, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave the commencement speech.

Antioch became increasingly progressive and financially healthy during the 1960s and early 1970s under the Presidency of Dr. James P. Dixon. The student body topped out around 2,400 students, the college owned property all over Yellow Springs and beyond, and the college grew throughout the decade. It began to appear in literary works and other media as an icon of youth culture, serving, for example, as the setting for a portion of Philip Roth's most popular novel, "Portnoy's Complaint". At this time, Antioch became one of the primary sources of student radicalism, the New Left, the anti-Vietnam War movement, and the Black Power movement in the region. The town of Yellow Springs became an island of liberal and progressive activism in southern Ohio, an otherwise very politically conservative region.

The 1970s saw the college continue to develop its reputation as a source of activism and progressive political thought. Several graduate satellite schools around the country, under the Antioch University name (with the college as a base), were established as well, including the McGregor School (now known as Antioch University McGregor located on a new campus in Yellow Springs that opened September 2007). Antioch University New England was the first graduate school offshoot in 1964. The university campuses are located in Keene, New Hampshire; Seattle, Washington; Los Angeles, California; and Santa Barbara, California. The corporation of Antioch College legally changed its name to Antioch University in 1978. The name Antioch College continued to be used for the residential undergraduate program in Yellow Springs, OH.

Funding and enrollment at the college began to decline as the University system was created. In the late 1970s, the new Antioch University system partially collapsed, leaving Antioch College in dire financial straits by the beginning of the 1980s. Beginning

in the mid 1980s and continuing through the 1990s, under the leadership of Antioch Presidents Alan Guskin and Bob Devine, Antioch's enrollment figures and financial health improved, though college enrollment never surpassed 1,000 students. The campus underwent renovations and many buildings that had been boarded up were repaired and reopened, including South Hall, one of the college's three original buildings.

In June 2007, the Antioch's Board of Trustees announced that the college would be suspending operations as of July 2008, and would try to reopen in 2012. Antioch closed in June 2008. However, the Trustees passed a resolution on June 7, 2008 stating "that the Trustees request the [Alumni] Association create the necessary process, plans, and resources for the development of an independent four-year, residential, liberal arts college in Yellow Springs, Ohio, and a business plan for the transfer of assets from the University, and to present those plans to the Trustees for their consideration and approval and that the Association present its timetable for implementing this request to the Trustees." On June 30, 2009, it was announced that Antioch had agreed to transfer the campus, endowment, and adjoining Glen Helen Nature Preserve to the Antioch College Continuation Corporation, an alumni-led group seeking a reopening of the college. The transfer of assets was completed on September 4, 2009.

(Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antioch_College)

Bennington

Bennington College was founded in 1932 as a women's college and became co-educational in 1969. The idea for Bennington College was conceived in the midst of the Roaring Twenties. The process began in 1923 and lasted nine years. The movement aimed at creating a new model for education that would usher in a new direction for higher learning. The most pivotal figures in the College's earliest history are Vincent Ravi Booth, Mr. and Mrs. Hall Park McCullough, and William Heard Kilpatrick, an educational philosopher who worked with John Dewey. In 1924 a charter was secured for the College and a Board of Trustees was set up, setting the stage for a new liberal arts college for women.

In August 16, 1931, the groundbreaking for the college took place. The college was founded on a farmland donated by Mrs. Frederick B. Jennings. The project employed many local craftsmen, many of whom had been out of work since the stock market crash of 1929. The main educational building was a renovated barn, and despite an early attempt to give it a more official name, The Barn has persisted.

The first class of eighty-seven women arrived on campus in 1932. Since its inception the College has placed the student in charge of her education. Bennington College was the first to include visual and performing arts as important curricular elements of a liberal arts education. One of the defining aspects of a Bennington education has been in place since the beginning, the Winter Field and Reading Period (the name was changed to Non-Resident Term and later to the current name, Field Work Term). During this winter recess, all students seek internships around the world, gaining meaningful real-world experience in their field(s) of study, and in life. Many alumni established connections during this recess that were pivotal in their careers.

From the Bennington website ([www. http://www.bennington.edu/go/academics/the-academic-structure](http://www.bennington.edu/go/academics/the-academic-structure))

Bennington Curriculum:

Bennington's academic structure requires that students take increasing responsibility for their own education, their own work, and their own lives. The self-direction of the planning process, the connection to the world through the winter internship term, and the ongoing attention of faculty advisors combine to provide students with internal sources of order that shape a Bennington education. Your imagination, your intellect, your discoveries are cultivated and increasingly govern your educational life at Bennington in place of the imposition of external templates designed by others.

The Plan Process is the structure Bennington students use to design and evaluate their education. In a series of essays and meetings with the faculty throughout their years at Bennington, students learn to articulate what they want to study and how they intend to study it. They identify not only the classes they wish to take, but how those classes relate to each other and the rest of their Bennington experience: Field Work Term, tutorials, projects beyond the classroom, and anything else they undertake.

Basic Principles of the Plan

- The Plan Process is the framework of a Bennington education. Through the Plan Process, you investigate and discover what is of consuming interest to you and what is not. Throughout you are continuously reflecting on this process, often in writing, to deepen your understanding of what is happening, and to steer it in the most compelling directions.
- Support and guidance are built into the Plan Process. You are not on your own: you will meet regularly with your academic advisor and have ongoing meetings with your Plan committee. The faculty will challenge and support you. You will find that conversations with other students also spark ideas for taking your Plan in new directions.
- A successful Plan invariably changes over the course of time. Learning is a moving, living process. If you don't know what you want to study, all the better: the Plan Process is a particularly powerful way to discover it. If you know exactly what you plan to study, the process will allow you to maximize your immersion and encourage you to make room for surprise and new discoveries. Either way, the Plan Process enables you to relish and contend with the implications of your choices.

Goddard

Goddard College is a private college located in Plainfield, Vermont and was founded by Royce Stanley Pitkin, a progressive educator and follower of John Dewey and other, similar proponents of *educational democracy*. Pitkin conceived of the college as a place for "plain living and hard thinking."

The original antecedent of the college was founded as Green Mountain Central Institute in 1863. The college currently uses a self-directed, mentored system of intensive residencies in Plainfield or Port Townsend, Washington.

Residencies require the student's attendance every six months for approximately nine days, during which time the student engages in a variety of activities and lectures from the early morning until quite late in the evening. After the residency, students return home and study independently, sending in "packets" to their faculty mentor every three weeks. The content of the "packets" varies with each individual.

Having narrative transcripts instead of traditional letter grades, as well as learner-designed curricula, Goddard was one of the Union for Experimenting Colleges and Universities, which also included Franconia, Nasson, Antioch, and several other educational institutions.

Advocating innovation in higher education is its expressed objective and, in 1963, Goddard introduced the first Adult Degree Program for working adults. This program has been copied around the world and since that date, over twenty million adults have been educated using this innovative, intensive, student-centered model.

In 2002, after fifty-four years, the college terminated its traditional age on-site experimental bachelor degree program. Today its more than six hundred adult students attend residencies in either Plainfield or Port Townsend. Only two programs are available at the Port Townsend site: the MFA in Creative Writing and the MFA in Interdisciplinary Arts, which was new to Port Townsend in the fall of 2007. Also new for the fall of 2007 was the first low-residency Bachelor of Fine Arts program in creative writing. Students must transfer to Goddard with a minimum of sixty undergraduate credits to be eligible for the program.

(Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goddard_College)

Where are the “Great Books” colleges?

The “Great Books” curriculum, as proposed by Robert Maynard Hutchins at the University of Chicago, was a revival of the ‘classical’ liberal arts tradition, built around the reading and discussion of original sources of Western Civilization. The course of study prescribed was both “uniform and demanding,” assuming the form of a series of one-year tightly packed, interdisciplinary survey courses taught through lectures and supplemented by frequent small group discussions. (Lucas, 224)

At least some parts of the Chicago Plan, as it was called, were replicated in experimental colleges and honors programs of other institutions throughout the country in the late 1930s: Monteil College at Wayne State University; St. John’s College in Annapolis, MD and Sante Fe, NM. At Boston University, the College of General Studies offers students a “college within a college” experience, with a two-year interdisciplinary curriculum, and is a relatively unique offering.

Black Mountain College was founded in 1933 by John Andrew Rice, Theodore Dreier and other former faculty of Rollins College, and was experimental by nature and committed to an interdisciplinary approach, attracting a faculty which included many of America's leading visual artists, poets, and designers,

Operating in a relatively isolated rural location with little budget, Black Mountain College provided an informal and collaborative spirit, and over its lifetime attracted a venerable roster of instructors. Some of the innovations, relationships and unexpected connections formed at Black Mountain would prove to have a lasting influence on the postwar American art scene, high culture, and eventually pop culture.

Not a haphazardly conceived venture, Black Mountain College was a consciously directed liberal arts school that grew out of the progressive education movement. In its day it was a unique educational experiment for the artists and writers who conducted it, and as such an important incubator for the American avant garde. Black Mountain proved

to be an important precursor to and prototype for many of the alternative colleges of today ranging from the University of California, Santa Cruz and Marlboro College to Evergreen State College, Shimer College, Goddard College, and New College of Florida among others.

Berea College is a liberal arts work college in Berea, Kentucky (south of Lexington), founded in 1855, and is distinctive among post-secondary institutions for providing low-cost education to students from low-income families and for having been the first college in the Southern United States to be coeducational and racially integrated. Berea College charges no tuition; every admitted student is provided the equivalent of a four-year, full-tuition scholarship (currently worth \$102,000; \$25,500 per year).

Berea offers undergraduate academic programs in 28 different fields and has a full-participation work-study program where students are required to work at least 10 hours per week in campus and service jobs in over 130 departments. Berea's primary service region is Southern Appalachia, but students come from all states in the United States and more than 60 other countries. Approximately one in three students represents an ethnic minority.

(Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berea_College)

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