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## Community-Junior Colleges and General-Liberal Education

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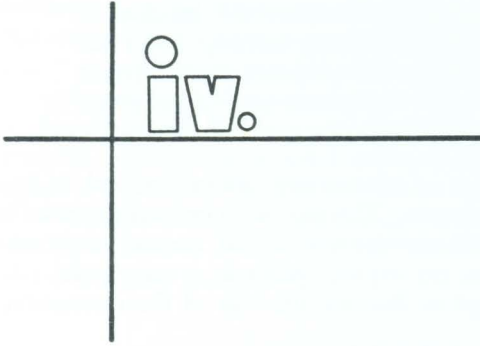
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# Community-Junior Colleges and General-Liberal Education

## Man and the Environment: A Course Designed for Lifelong Learning

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Alvin Toffler in his recent best seller, *Future Shock* draws an analogy between the vast resources employed in preparing spacecraft for a "soft landing" on the planets and the importance of equipping society for a "soft landing" as it impacts with the future. In this same vein, I suggest that jet-age knowledge and technology was necessary but not sufficient for outer-space travel. So too, our past educational experiences, no matter how comprehensive, can only serve as pre-requisites for continued and lifelong learning. The ultimate need for lifelong education should be apparent to anyone who has observed the social scene during the last decade. In that brief period we have all had to adjust to dramatic changes in life styles and job requirements, scientific discoveries, technological advances and an explosion of knowledge in virtually every field of endeavor.

If one accepts the desirability of lifelong education as a means of helping us to adapt to the future, the question must be raised, "What types of educational approaches will be most appropriate?" In responses to that question, Hesburgh, Miller and Wharton state the following:

The responsibilities among institutions for inculcating skills and attitudes favoring lifelong learning differ according to institutional type and purpose; these different responsibilities should be recognized and appropriate steps taken to meet them.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed the responsibilities of elementary, secondary and higher education are distinct and separate. The modes of instruction suitable for preparing students for lifelong education at the various levels may also be quite different. From my vantage point as a community college instructor I will attempt to describe the role of the community college in this regard.

Community college courses not designed for specific vocational training should be *interdisciplinary* and should allow for some degree of *independent or group study*. A major reason for providing an interdisciplinary approach is to combat what Daniel Bell refers to as "intellectual fragmentation."<sup>2</sup> A course which is interdisciplinary tends to encourage students to explore and gain insight to bodies of knowledge without being constrained by the artificial walls of specialized disciplines and academic departments. It is also essential that exploration in the form of independent and group investigation not be limited to the goals of the expertise of the instructor. The instructor's role in such a course should be primarily one of *facilitation*.

The principle implication of preparation for lifelong education is that students must acquire the skills and techniques to help them know how to go on learning as long as they live. A great deal of independence must be generated in the learning process. The faculty members should be used as resources just as the library, the laboratory, television tapes, programmed learning and other resources are used. Students need to be involved not only in self-learning but also in groups, which is the way much of the work in life is performed.<sup>3</sup>

I do not wish to imply that the instructor in the role of facilitator need merely to stand by passively and wait for students to approach him/her for advice and information. Undergraduates, whether they be recent high school graduates or mature adults will require, in varying degrees, the prerequisite knowledge and skills needed for inde-

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1. Theodore M. Hesburgh, Paul A. Miller, Clifton R. Wharton, Jr., *Patterns For Lifelong Learning*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, 1973, p. 12.

2. Daniel Bell, *The Reforming of General Education*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1966, p. 282.

3. Hesburgh, et al., op. cit., p. 11.

pendent study in a given area. Therefore steps must be taken to assure the acquisition of those prerequisites before the students are “turned loose” to investigate selected areas of interest. Initially, this requires an *active and directive approach* on the part of the instructor.

How is it possible to incorporate into a course of study both self-learning and teacher-centered instruction? As one example of how it can be accomplished I refer to a course in which I have been involved for the past two years. It is an introductory course entitled, *Man and the Environment*. The format for the course includes three separate learning phases shown below.

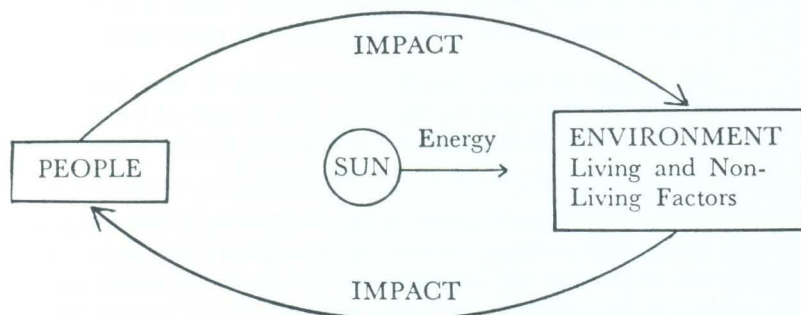
FIGURE 1



THE PHASES OF LEARNING

During *Orientation* the students are expected to become acquainted with each other, examine their values and master a considerable amount of subject matter. The subject matter deals with our impact on the environment as well as the impact of the environment on us. A model depicting this relationship is shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2

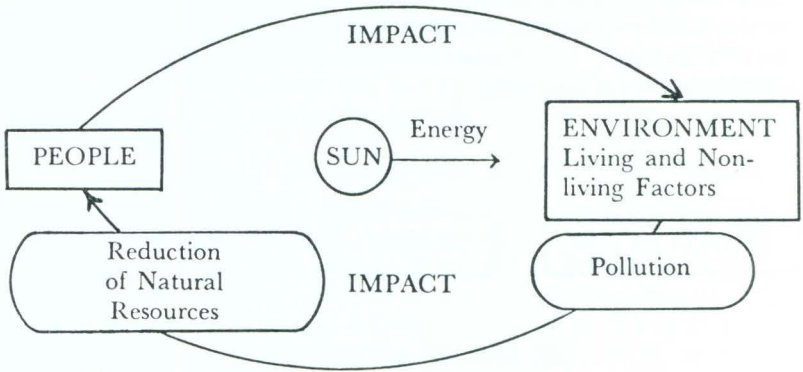


CONTENT MODEL A

There are really only two “environmental problems” considered.

They are *pollution* (land, air and water) and *reduction of natural resources* (both living and *non-living*).

FIGURE 3



#### CONTENT MODEL B

One of the dangers in teaching this particular course is to view every human condition as an “environmental problem.” Such matters as war, racism and emotional stability when discussed are more usefully considered as being *caused by* or *causes* of the environmental problems.

I agree with Thomas Tanner that in a course such as this (and it may be true of any general education course) there is a tendency to be *pseudo* holistic. Tanner makes the following observation:

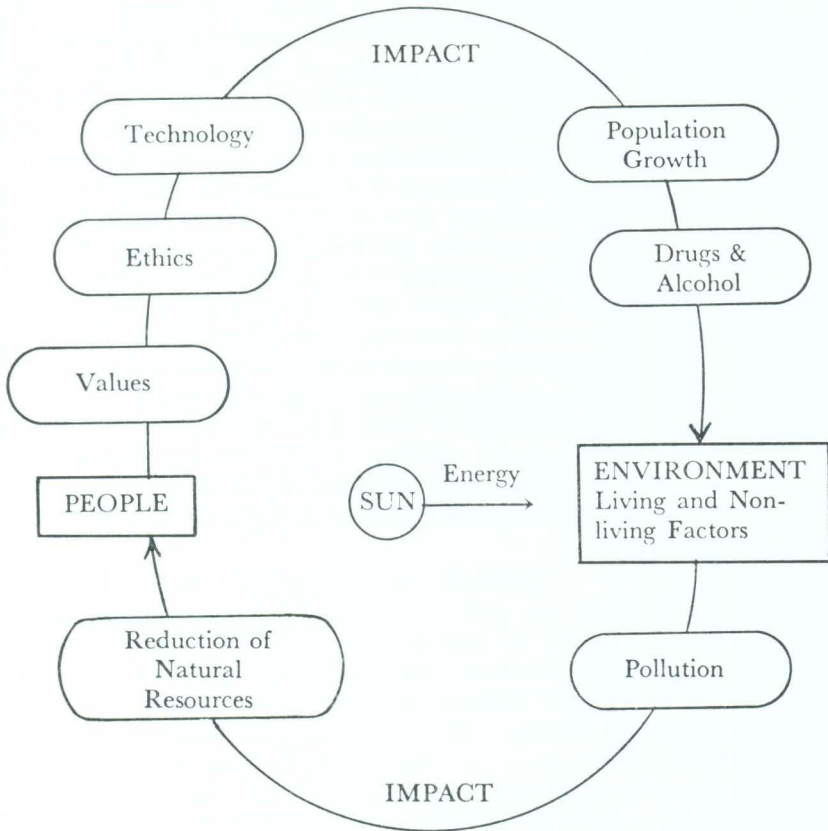
The danger of being insufficiently holistic is that one may not see the forest for the trees. The danger of being pseudo holistic is that one also will fail to see the forest if he insists upon calling everything a tree.<sup>4</sup>

To avoid being “insufficiently holistic” there is a consideration; by way of selected readings, lecture and discussion; of factors which *amplify* our impact on the environment. A completed model for the *Orientation* phase of the course (it is constantly being revised, largely on the basis of student input) is shown below.

4. R. Thomas Tanner, “Environmental Pseudo-Holism,” an article in the *American Institute of Biological Sciences, Education Division News*, Vol. 1, Number 4, August 1972.



FIGURE 4



CONCEPT MODEL C

As a part of *Orientation* the laboratory hours are devoted to learning water and air analysis techniques and to visiting natural communities, as well as industrial sites, waste treatment facilities and power plants. *Orientation* continues throughout the course but there is less emphasis on directed learning and an increasing concern with what the students plan to do with the information acquired. By the mid-point in the semester the students are encouraged to begin to design a plan of action based on what they have learned thus far.

The *Design Phase* requires that the students write down what they plan to do individually, in small groups or as a class. The activities

usually include *personal conservation commitments* (e.g., turning down thermostats, riding in car pools, recycling paper, using returnable bottles when possible, *research efforts* (e.g., studies of biological oxygen demand of a stream or lake, effects of local sewage treatment plant on a stream, diversity of plant life in a forest community) and *public awareness* (e.g., writing articles in the school paper, participating in local environmental organization activities, writing congressmen, promoting environmental education in elementary and secondary schools).

The *Actualization Phase* requires that the students demonstrate to themselves, their classmates and their instructor the extent to which they are engaged in the activities specified during the *Design Phase*. This is not always possible, especially in the area of personal conservation commitments. It is understood that grades are not a function of their ability to show to others what they have accomplished. This last point is made in an effort to minimize extrinsic rewards and to maximize the intrinsic value of what they are doing.

Theoretically the *Actualization Phase* does not end when the course is completed. In fact, many students return after completing the course to share new insights, seek information and discuss their continued efforts to learn about and improve the quality of their environment.

