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General Education: Let’s Be Specific!

By C. Edwin Howard

To many of those who have been vitally interested in the advancement of General Education over a period of years, it seems that much has been written, and more said, of the philosophy of General Education but considerably less about the specifics of its implementation. It is without question that the philosophy of general studies is essential to the planning of an educational program. Also, few would deny the necessity for the continuous promulgation of that philosophy. But for those who have accepted the general philosophy of General Education, whether long ago or recently, there is the continuing and often pressing need to transform philosophy into action. Philosophy must finally come alive in specifics. The process usually involves seeking answers to specific questions: What exactly should a General Education program contain? How should General Education courses be taught? Who should teach General Education courses? How should a General Education program be organized? How should a General Education program be administered? Of course, these are questions for which answers are never final; for though the substance of General Education is the universal and timeless, the nature of learning is change, and each age, perhaps each generation, will reassess its essential knowledge as well as its ways of imparting this. The translation of philosophy into specific programs is, therefore, a continuing activity.

It is to the questions of specifics which this activity initiates that this year’s conference of the Association of General and Liberal Studies, October 16-18 at Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, will address itself. In planning the program the attempt has been to avoid the overly general, theoretical and evangelical and seek in-
stead to concentrate on alternate methods of organizing General Education programs, techniques of teaching General Education courses, and the content of specific courses in the humanities, fine arts, social sciences, and natural sciences.

Dr. Harold Taylor, the keynote speaker of the conference, is a man usually well prepared to initiate the translation of philosophy into action. Having begun his career as a teacher of philosophy, Dr. Taylor has been for over thirty years, as college president and teacher, an educational innovator: in curriculum, in teaching, and in administration. Perhaps no book of the 1970's has been so bold in its assertion of the changes necessary in the contemporary institution of higher learning or so specific in the ways of achieving change as Dr. Taylor's *How to Change Colleges: Notes on Radical Reform*. Dr. Taylor's address to the conference on Thursday, October 16, at six P.M., will present the specific objectives of General Education.

Two concurrent sessions will begin the conference activity on Friday morning. One—"Contrasting Structures for Presenting General Education"—will examine alternate methods for organizing General Education in the four-year institution. The objective will be to identify specific strengths and weaknesses, advantages and disadvantages of differing program structures at four four-year colleges. Presenting the structures of their institutions will be the following: S. D. Lovell, Dean of the General Studies Division of Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville; Candadai Seshachari, Director of General Education at Weber State (Utah) College; John Nichols, Core Curriculum Coordinator at Saint Joseph's College of Indiana; and Douglas Dunham, Professor of Social Science at Michigan State University.

Concurrently, "General Education and the two-year College" will be led by Otto Kolar, Assistant Dean of the School of University Transfer Studies of Triton College, Illinois; Richard Bedics, Instructional Development Services, Pensacola Junior College, Pensacola, Florida; and Lloyd Monnin, Chairman of General Education, Clark Technical College, Springfield, Ohio. Dean Kolar's recently completed *Survey on General Education Curriculum* compiles the opinions of administrators of two-year colleges relative to General Education requirements for the associate degree. Dr. Bedics will discuss the new program of General Education proposed at Pensacola. Dr. Monnin's contribution to the panel discussion will deal specifically with a General Education program for two-year career-oriented students.

Friday afternoon's sessions will focus on the specific content of general education courses in three areas generally found in all programs: the humanities and fine arts, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. Sessions on each area will meet concurrently. Panelists for the session on fine arts and humanities will be Henry-York Steiner of Eastern Washington State College; Bernard F. Engel, Michigan State University; Phylis Colyer, Oklahoma City University; and Leonard Heldreth, Northern Michigan
University (alternate). The panel on content of general education courses in the social sciences will be Nita H. Hardie of Western Michigan University; Paul F. Haas of Bowling Green State University; Midori Y. Banks, Frostburg State College; and Everett Van Devoort, Joliet Junior College (alternate). Panelists speaking of content in the natural sciences will be Donald E. Crawford, College of St. Teresa; Gerald Parchment, Middle Tennessee State University; and Paul H. Barrett, Michigan State University. In each session audience participation will be encouraged.

Friday afternoon's sessions will offer conference participants a choice of symposiums: "What Are Some Specific Characteristics and Approaches of Teachers Who Excel in General Education Instruction?" and "Learning Resources, Innovation and General Education." Those who choose the symposium on specific characteristics of teachers who excel in teaching General Education courses will benefit from a delineation of such teachers—"The Ideal Generalist"—by Theodore E. Kiffer, Director of General Education in Humanities and Social Studies at Pennsylvania State University. No less interesting and instructive will be Boston University's College of Basic Studies' "Team Structure for Presenting General Education." Peyton E. Richter and a team of colleagues representing psychology and guidance, science, rhetoric, social sciences, and the humanities—"a kind of college within a college"—will present a panel discussion on their interdisciplinary approach to General Education content and teaching.

Concurrently, the symposium "Learning Resources, Innovation, and General Education" will take place in the Multimedia Presentation Room of the newly completed Learning Resources Center on the campus of Middle Tennessee State University. Dr. Howard Clayton, Editor of Learning Today and Professor of Library Science at Oklahoma University, will present the Library-College Concept. This educational concept emphasizes learner-directed activities through use of self-selected study tools within the typical classroom setting. Dr. Jane Featherstone, Director of Comprehensive English, American Thought and Language at Michigan State, will speak directly to means of developing study and learning skills through cooperative effort of subject matter and learning resource center instructors. Dr. William Jackson, Director of Instructional Development at Middle Tennessee State University, will be concerned with the specifics of planning the instructional design for General Education: What, why, when and where in the use of instructional resources. Following Friday afternoon's concurrent sessions, a tour of the new Learning Resources Center will be conducted by the director, Dr. Marshall Gunselman. Featured will be the personalized learning laboratory, interaction rooms and isolettes, and the environmental simulation laboratory.

The planning committee for this year's conference, recognizing the great value deriving from informal discussions among participants, has sought to provide time for these between and after scheduled sessions.

1975 will be the Year of General Education at Middle Tennessee State
University; for not entirely coincidental with the annual meeting of the A.G.L.S. on its campus, Middle Tennessee will, after twenty-two years, inaugurate a new General Education program. Recent experience, sometimes painful, in hammering out the specifics of a viable General Education structure and program content has motivated the planning committee to seek in the conference program specific answers to specific questions likely to confront all who are revising old programs or developing new ones.

For those who are unfamiliar with Tennessee, Murfreesboro, the home of Middle Tennessee State University, is located in the exact geographical center of the state thirty miles southeast of Nashville. Nashville's Metropolitan Airport is a terminal for all major national airlines. Transportation to and from the Nashville Airport and the Ramada Inn conference headquarters in Murfreesboro will be provided at no cost.

As usual, the registration fee of $25 will include the social hour Thursday afternoon, dinner Thursday, lunch and dinner Friday, and business-meeting breakfast Saturday. For those who can arrange only one day, a special one-day registration will be available for Friday, October 17. The fee of $9.00 will include lunch.

Plan now to attend an interesting and stimulating meeting of the A.G.L.S. in the glow of a Middle Tennessee fall.