

Rethinking Undergraduate Business Education

**LIBERAL LEARNING
FOR THE PROFESSION**

Anne **Colby** • Thomas **Ehrlich**
William M. **Sullivan** • Jonathan R. **Dolle**
FOREWORD BY **LEE S. SHULMAN**



THE CARNEGIE FOUNDATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF TEACHING

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The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

Founded by Andrew Carnegie in 1905 and chartered in 1906 by an Act of Congress, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is an independent policy and research center whose charge is “to do and perform all things necessary to encourage, uphold, and dignify the profession of the teacher and the cause of higher education.”

The Foundation is a major national and international center for research and policy studies about teaching. Its mission is to address the hardest problems faced in teaching in public schools, colleges, and universities—that is, how to succeed in the classroom, how best to achieve lasting student learning, and how to assess the impact of teaching on students.

FOREWORD

IN HIS BOOK *A Modern College and a Modern School*, Abraham Flexner—famous for his pioneering Carnegie Foundation study of medical education—articulated his vision for the modern undergraduate institution. Published in 1923, Flexner argued that there were three kinds of students served by a modern college—future scholars, future professionals, and future businessmen and businesswomen. The first group comprised those few who intended to pursue graduate work as scholars, professors, or teachers in the fields that constituted the college curriculum. Professionals were those who were headed toward one of the learned professions such as medicine, law, engineering, and the like. Finally, those who were preparing for careers in business or commerce, the future merchants of our society, were in the third category. Thus preparation for business careers was identified nearly a century ago as one of the important missions of higher education.

Flexner was confident that education in the liberal arts and sciences was a necessity for a student in any one of those paths. He had, after all, been liberally educated at the Johns Hopkins University and then had returned to his hometown of Louisville, Kentucky, to found and lead a very successful college preparatory school. For the future scholar, the importance of a broad background in the liberal arts was unquestioned in spite of the fact that he or she would ultimately specialize in a particular field from among those arts and sciences. For the future professional, the argument was somewhat more challenging, but one Flexner put forward with clarity and confidence for medicine and the other “learned professions.” But what of that third category, the substantial number of college graduates who intend to

become members of the business community? Flexner made that argument for liberal learning with equal enthusiasm. He rested much of his case not merely on the general value of the skills, understandings, and values of the liberal arts for the decisions that characterize the world of business. He also asserted that, like all other educated men and women, future members of the business community also shared the responsibility of active citizenship in a democratic society, and preparation for that role was the most important function of liberal education.

At the Carnegie Foundation, we have not previously chosen to study education for business. Instead, we had examined those fields for which formal professional preparation in universities is a requirement for practice. This meant, however, that we had excluded from our work several forms of professional education that large numbers of students elect to study. Indeed, in recent years business has been the single most popular undergraduate major in the country. Moreover, the ordinary citizen interacts with businesswomen and businessmen far more frequently than with members of other professions.

We may seek medical care rarely, engage a lawyer even less often, and interact with a priest, minister, or rabbi on a weekly basis or not at all. But the world of commerce, of buying and selling, of banks and boutiques, of monthly salaries or foreclosed properties, is the sea in which we take our daily swim. And although one can engage in business without formal academic preparation (just as one can bandage a cut without nursing school and read a novel without becoming an English major), universities and colleges take very seriously their claim that they have the competence and responsibility to educate business practitioners. This book explores the grounds for that claim by seeking examples of the special contribution of higher

education to the general intellectual and ethical preparation of business majors.

This book represents, in several ways, a convergence and culmination of more than a decade's work at the Carnegie Foundation from the late 1990s to 2010. Several parallel programs of research were conducted during those years, independent from one another in one sense yet closely tied in another. One line was our work on education in the professions for which formal academic preparation is required. The professions that we studied are law, engineering, the clergy, nursing, and medicine. We also conducted parallel studies of teacher education, but not as part of the general and comparative Preparation for the Professions Program. This work was under the general coordination of William Sullivan and Anne Colby.

The second line of work was our studies of how colleges and universities prepare students for lives of civic engagement and political participation in a democratic society. This work was under the general direction of Anne Colby and Tom Ehrlich.

In addition, there were inquiries into challenges of integrated liberal learning for undergraduates. Mary Huber and Pat Hutchings led some of this work in collaboration with the Association of American Colleges and Universities. That line of inquiry was enriched by studies of "shaping the life of the mind for practice" in which William Sullivan and Matthew Rosin led a team exploring the integration of liberal and professional learning for undergraduates (Sullivan & Rosin, 2008).

These several lines of inquiry were elements of a larger examination (which included studies of the PhD across the disciplines) of how the educational process can prepare students "to profess," to lead lives that require the exercise of intellect, skill, and moral intention for the sake of the greater society. Our method in each of these inquiries was

to seek “visions of the possible” rather than primarily to offer criticisms of the offerings that were typical for a given field. Doing so involved identifying the consensus among leaders of the field regarding the most significant challenges that the profession was facing and those places where the most ambitious and creative attempts to deal with those challenges were in place or in development. Extended site visits to those institutions were typically complemented by survey research to tap a broader set of programs and perspectives, and small conferences to review and critique emerging work.

Thus, when our scholars ultimately proposed particular strategies of curriculum, teaching methods, field work, or program rearrangements, the teams could point to places that were already engaged with that kind of work rather than speculate about what that sort of innovation might look like, were someone to undertake it. Visions of the possible serve as existence proofs. They demonstrate that certain pedagogical initiatives can, in principle, be undertaken. Whether educators or policy makers are prepared to deploy the resources, the talent, and the will needed to move from examples to a broad shift in practice is another question.

A starting point for this book was asking the question, “What does it mean to think and live like an educated person?” The answer that is communicated early in this book and reappears regularly is that an educated person is capable of three interacting and complementary modes of thought: analytic reasoning, the ability and disposition to take multiple perspectives when confronting a complex decision or judgment, and finding and making connections of personal meaning between what one does and who one intends to become. Thus a good education prepares a student to dig deeply, critically, and analytically when confronted by a problem; to be able to see that same problem analytically from different points of view; and

perhaps most important, to develop a sense of self and of personal identity in which these capacities and dispositions are well integrated. Relating the analytic and the multiple perspectives to the search for personal meaning, the elaboration of a sense of self, and the formation of identity appears to be the key. Ultimately, these liberal and professional capacities are not integrated in the way someone puts the pieces of a complex jigsaw puzzle together; they are integrated via the formation of a sense of identity and personal meaning so that these understandings and dispositions cohere.

As I have looked back on the many studies that my colleagues and I pursued during our work at the Carnegie Foundation, there is a consistent theme at that point in each inquiry when we move from description, diagnosis, and analysis to proposals for change and improvement. Again and again, I find that we recommend greater *integration*. It appears that the most common underlying malady besetting undergraduate education and doctoral education, the education of lawyers or of nurses, the preparation of teachers or of business leaders, is the *disintegrated* character of their learning experiences.

It should probably be no surprise that higher education breeds specialization, distinctiveness, and separation. The dominant social forces in universities are centrifugal, spinning the world apart into more discrete parts whose elucidation is the work of separate disciplines, fields, and professions. We recruit faculty members as experts in these areas, promote them because of their contributions to them, and organize both our catalogues and our libraries to correspond to their topography. The dilemma of universities in great measure is that when the educational goal is to teach students to become adept at practical reasoning in the presence of problems of the real world, the very separations that make the growth of knowledge possible

make its educational use problematic. Disciplinary specialization is a powerful way to expand knowledge; it is a terrible way to apply it.

The core problem is not specialization and disciplinary investment per se. The problem is that the parts remain separate and distinct with no complementary strategy or incentive to put Humpty Dumpty back together again. I'm reminded of a conversation I had in the Moscow Academy of Pedagogical Sciences in 1980 with a Professor Posner. He observed, "You Americans fail to understand the important distinction between *individualism* and *individuality* as educational values. When a society values individualism, it rewards the development of personal expertise and talent so it can be used for the benefit and competitive advantage of the individual who possesses those attributes. By contrast, when a society values individuality, it too nurtures the development of individual talent and expertise, but rewards and recognition come when those accomplishments are then directed to the benefit of the larger community and not solely for the sake of the individual." In universities, we readily reward the accomplishments of the individual academic entrepreneur but afford much less support to meeting the challenges of bringing those distinctive talents back together collaboratively for the sake of the institution's educational and service efforts.

This book is filled with vivid accounts of teachers, courses, curricula, and student performances that transcend the centrifugal academic inertia in which curricular motion persists in spinning disciplinary concepts and their meanings further apart over time. These examples demonstrate that the problems can be addressed and we can cite powerful instances in all types of institutions. So why don't these kinds of initiatives occur with regularity?

Such integrations require institutional intentionality, not parallel play. The integrations that are advocated can be

achieved only when one or more faculty members are prepared to leave the comfort zones of their personal expertise and embark with their students into the messy domains of practice and practical reason. Moreover, they must be actively mixed together, squeezed and kneaded, shaken not stirred. This kind of integration does not occur by merely adding the humanities to a business curriculum as either prerequisite courses or distribution requirements. The reciprocal infusion of liberal learning and professional development is not like fluoridating the water to prevent cavities; liberal learning and business education do not affect one another by proximity. These educational ends will not be achieved by having business majors inhale the secondhand smoke of Plato and Emerson.

The strategic idea at the heart of the proposals for change is what I would describe as *reciprocal integration*. The authors are not just prescribing the value of the liberal arts to ameliorate the ills of business education in particular or professional and civic education more generally. This is a far more radical proposal. They assert that liberal education itself is also in distress, too often taught in isolation and antiseptically removed from the humans and their problems from which it purports to derive and to which it claims relevance. The concept of reciprocal integration argues strongly that the liberal arts must be professionalized, must be framed and taught in the context of practical problems, at least as much as practical learning needs to be enriched, nuanced, and critiqued through the lenses of the ideas and perspectives of the liberal arts. Each of these domains must serve as both crucible and catalyst to animate the educational potential of the other. Therein lies the most important challenge this book confronts in both of the academic domains that it studies. The concept of reciprocal integration demands intentionality and effort from all those who engage in undergraduate education.

This work was conducted by a “dream team” of Carnegie colleagues who joined together in this program of research. The team comprised Anne Colby, a developmental psychologist who has made singular contributions to our understanding of moral development across the life span; Tom Ehrlich, a lawyer who has served as professor, dean, provost, and president in private and public universities, and as a public servant at the national level, and whose liberal education probably owes at least as much to discussions at the Harkness tables of Exeter as to the lecture halls of Harvard; Bill Sullivan, a classically trained philosopher who has been doing as much social science as philosophy for the past twenty-five years; and Jon Dolle, an engineer turned educational philosopher and policy scholar, who joined the project as a graduate student and soon became a full partner (while earning a Stanford PhD). I tend to believe that this kind of interdisciplinary team could be formed “only at Carnegie” but that would be an exaggeration. It certainly was much easier to accomplish in a community of scholarship and policy that did not have to bear the burden of formal departments, academic disciplines, or an accounting of credit hours or even “Carnegie units.”

Would that our team could have come up with a simpler resolution than a call for the very sort of reciprocal integration of curriculum, of teaching and learning, and of institutional culture that our universities and colleges seem designed to resist. Alas, no quick fix presented itself. Teaching and learning are not activities for the faint of heart. Radical transformation of teaching and learning requires intelligence, tenacity, and courage. In that sense, the proposals that emerge from this work indeed echo the century of Carnegie work that began with Flexner’s studies of medical education. Acting on Mr. Flexner’s proposals produced a painful period of institutional dislocation and

creative curricular destruction. And those changes eventually needed repair and renovation as well.

Our proposals to “fix” business education are also proposals to repair the deficiencies of general and liberal education even as the importance of such work becomes more apparent to our society and its leaders. Our proposals to repair the education of PhDs, reported in other books, are also critical here because we cannot ignore that doctoral education serves as the “normal school” for training future university and college faculty members, shaping their identities as it molds their habits of mind and their scholarly and teaching skills.

At the end of a dozen years of work, therefore, we present our colleagues in higher education with a daunting challenge. If you wish to make significant changes for the better in any particular domain of instruction—such as education for business—recognize that you must begin to mess with the entire interconnected and marbled enterprise. If nothing begins to unravel as you begin your work, it’s likely you have missed the point.

I know I join all who will read this book and ponder its implications for themselves and their institutions in thanking the authors for the rigor of their scholarship, the engaging clarity and stimulation of their accounts, and the inspiring character of their challenges. To read this book seriously does not engender a sense of comfort and satisfaction with the way things are; yet it does provide a thrilling vision of how they might be. And that has been the role of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching since that day in 1907 when the Foundation’s first president, Henry Pritchett, invited a schoolmaster named Abraham Flexner into his office and invited him to conduct a study of medical education.

Lee S. Shulman

Stanford, California

*For the many Carnegie Foundation colleagues with whom
we have worked and from whom we have learned—in
incomparable intellectual community, with abundant hilarity
and joy—from 1997 to 2010*

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IN RECOGNITION OF the collaborative nature of the research for and writing of this book, the three senior authors are listed alphabetically. Our coauthor, Jon Dolle, who was a doctoral student at Stanford during the research and writing, was also our full collaborator. The scheme for describing liberal learning in terms of Analytical Thinking, Multiple Framing, the Reflective Exploration of Meaning, and Practical Reasoning, which is introduced in Chapter Four, was developed by William Sullivan in the context of this project, drawing on his earlier work on Practical Reasoning (Sullivan & Rosin, 2008).

The team was assisted by many others, and we gratefully acknowledge the many people who have contributed to the project and the book. We especially want to acknowledge the help and hospitality extended by the administrative leadership, faculty, and students of the colleges and universities that participated in our study.

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preparation of the book. Her contributions made a huge difference in the cogency and readability of the manuscript.

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LIBERAL LEARNING FOR BUSINESS EDUCATION

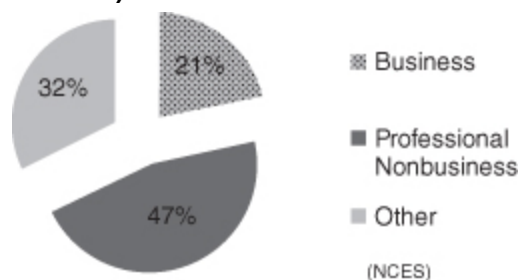
AN INTEGRATIVE VISION

BUSINESS HAS NEVER MATTERED MORE. Most people now realize that the livelihood of citizens of Minneapolis is related in complicated ways to the skills and aspirations of the citizens of Guangzhou, Sao Paulo, and Mumbai as well as those of Mobile. The enormous economic expansion within some of the most populous nations of the world, especially China, Brazil, and India, has put competitive pressure on growing numbers of U.S. workers and firms, who compete with others in distant places, even as they also sometimes cooperate through complex networks of trade and investment.

Increasingly, this fragile interdependence is being managed by international business and, over the past several decades especially, by banking and financial sectors that have become tightly linked on a global scale. The “commanding heights” of the economic welfare of nations are no longer occupied by governments alone (Yergin & Stanislaw, 1998). Business in its multiple manifestations has become a prodigious governing force, shaping the destiny of people everywhere.

Business is also more important than ever in American higher education. In 2006-07, the most recent academic year for which national data were available, 21 percent of all undergraduates were business majors. This makes business

the most popular field of undergraduate study. When business is combined with other vocational majors such as engineering, nursing, education, agriculture, security studies, and others, the total rises to 68 percent of all undergraduates (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009).



At the same time, the prominence of business institutions in contemporary U.S. society has enhanced the prestige and authority of successful leaders in business, and business ways of thinking have now taken hold in wider sectors, including not only government but also the organization and leadership of the academy.

For higher education, these developments pose an important question. The American academy has been chartered for important public purposes, chiefly to educate citizens for democracy. The centrality of business in society, the great number of undergraduates who choose business as their field of study, and the even greater numbers who will be employed in business for their working lives demand that higher education do more than just help students acquire tools for advancing their personal careers in business, although that is an important goal. In order to ensure that its graduates develop the breadth of outlook and conceptual agility for living in a global century, higher education also needs to ensure that students understand the relation of business to the larger world and can act on that understanding as business professionals and as citizens. The question, then, is how best to do this? What

should undergraduate business education provide for students?

The Bell Project

The answers proposed in this book reflect our work in the Business, Entrepreneurship, and Liberal Learning (BELL) project, an initiative of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. Simply put, we believe that undergraduate students who major in business should have the benefits of a strong liberal education. Business and liberal learning must be woven together to prepare students for their professional roles and work and also to prepare them for lives of social contribution and personal fulfillment. In this sense, we propose an integrative vision.

Accordingly, our research has focused on how liberal education interacts with business preparation in undergraduate programs, asking how well undergraduate business education has been able to take advantage of the contributions of liberal learning. We began our research with an understanding, which was subsequently reinforced by our observations, that business majors typically experience the liberal arts and sciences in ways that are weak or episodic. Many business students see liberal arts courses as largely irrelevant to their education. For all the reasons discussed previously—and elaborated in the pages that follow—we believe this is unsatisfactory. Therefore, we set out to examine programs that explicitly announced the intent to provide their undergraduate business majors with the benefits of liberal learning, looking both at common principles and concepts shaping their efforts and at the diverse strategies they have employed. These institutions' efforts hold lessons for one another and for the larger field of business education, and we believe they also provide an opportunity for liberal arts disciplines to learn from business

education, especially about strategies that help students practice and refine their knowledge in real-world circumstances (see, for instance, Shulman, 1997). Additionally, successful efforts at integration within business programs may be instructive for other professional and vocational programs that wish to do the same.

In this sense, we view business education as an instance of the larger phenomenon of vocational majors, fields of study that aim to prepare students directly for entry into the workforce. Due to the rising costs of higher education and the challenges of the employment market, students and their parents today consider preparation for work a top priority among the goals of higher education, and this preference is reflected in the large percentage of students choosing to major in professional or vocational fields. Because more undergraduate students major in business than in any other single field, it would seem there might be a distinctive character or identity to studying business at the college level. But we did not find this to be the case. Undergraduate business seems to be widely understood as a kind of simplified MBA program. In institutions that offer both MBA and undergraduate business degrees, the undergraduate program rarely has its own faculty or dean and its curriculum resembles that of the graduate program. A more distinctive identity for undergraduate business programs would acknowledge that this is their students' college education as well as professional preparation. This means, in the American tradition of liberal education, that students need to be prepared for their futures as citizens and persons as well as entrants into the workforce.

Rethinking Undergraduate Business Education

To meet the needs of today's increasingly complex context, undergraduate business programs should help their students develop intellectual perspectives that enable them to understand the role of the field within the larger social world. In keeping with this aim, business programs should uphold and cultivate among students a sense of professionalism grounded in loyalty to the mission of business to enhance public prosperity and well-being. To accomplish this, business education must be integrated with liberal learning.

We believe that undergraduate education of every kind should enable students to make sense of the world and their place in it, preparing them to use knowledge and skills as means toward responsible engagement with the world. In order to contribute to the larger life of society, students must be able to draw on varied bodies of knowledge. They need to gain fluency in looking at issues from multiple points of view, which requires the opportunity to explore with others different ways of posing problems and defining purposes. These are the traits that have historically defined a liberal education. In this sense, the question of what business education should provide for students is part of the more fundamental question of what a *college* education should provide.

Research on educational attainment provides abundant evidence that a college education produces significant lifelong effects. College is a prime moment for students, including many older students, to question and redefine their core sense of who they are. It offers the opportunity to expand their understanding of the world and to develop skills they will need to make their way in it. College education enables students to grow as whole persons as well as develop their minds and strengthen their working skills. It helps awaken their intellectual curiosity and self-