



The Decline and Revival of Liberal Learning at Duke: The Focus and Gerst Programs



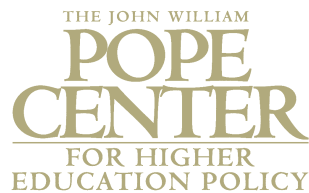
POPE CENTER SERIES ON HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

March 2007

Russell K. Nieli

The Decline and Revival of Liberal Learning at Duke: The Focus and Gerst Programs

Russell K. Nieli



200 W. Morgan Street, Suite 110
Raleigh, NC 27601
Tel: 919-532-3600 | Fax: 919-532-0679
www.popecenter.org

ISSN 1935-3510

CONTENTS

To the Reader	i
Executive Summary	i
From Christian Liberal Arts College to Modern Research University	1
Chaos: The Late 1960s, the Fish Era, and the Post-Fish Thermidor	3
A Real Interdisciplinary Experience: The Focus Program	7
The Gerst Program: Viewpoint Diversity and Freedom	10
Duke's Political Science Department and the Gerst Program	11
Students, Faculty, and Administrators Speak Out.....	14
Some Final Thoughts	18

TO THE READER

This paper discusses two academic programs at Duke University. Together, they are helping to restore the tradition of liberal learning that diminished dramatically in recent decades at Duke, as at many other universities.

The first program is Focus, which took shape in the early 1990s as a way of restoring coherence to undergraduate education. The second, named for its chief alumnus sponsor, Gary Gerst, is designed to further students' appreciation for the role of freedom in the development of America's economy and culture.

Russell K. Nieli attended Duke University in the tumultuous years of the late 1960s. Graduating in 1970 (summa cum laude) with a B.A. degree in political science, he moved the following year to Princeton University, where he did graduate work in political philosophy. Nieli received his Ph.D. from Princeton in 1979 and taught at several colleges before returning to Princeton in the late 1980s to take on a variety of teaching and advising tasks.

Nieli is currently a lecturer in Princeton University's politics department and a freshman advisor at Mathey College, one of Princeton's five residential colleges. He has published an important study of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, numerous articles on current public policy issues, and an anthology of writings on the affirmative action controversy. He is currently working on a book related to issues of race in America.

This essay is part of the Pope Center Series on Higher Education Policy published by the John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy. Our research, directed by George C. Leef, identifies problems in today's colleges and universities, especially North Carolina, and proposes ways to correct them. The center addresses issues that include curriculum, governance, finance, accountability, and faculty research, as well as broader educational topics. This and other essays are available from the Pope Center and on our Web site, www.popecenter.org.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Duke University grew from a small liberal arts college founded before the Civil War into a major national university by the 1960s. Throughout those years, the school (named Trinity College until 1924) was known for its solid, traditional curriculum and its opposition to the racism that was prevalent across most of the South. Unfortunately, Duke was badly affected by the student upheavals of the 1960s and '70s. Catering to students' demands for greater control over their education, the university abandoned its old core curriculum in favor of a loose "distribution requirements" system, thereby discarding the idea that certain subjects are vital to a well-rounded education.

Even more important, university administrators decided that they wanted to boost Duke's humanities departments to national prominence. To do so, they hired a number of avant-garde literary theorists who were expected to generate "academic excitement" with their "cutting edge" research. Although applications to graduate programs did increase, the result was

an infusion of "postmodern" professors, especially in the English department, and a radicalization of some key components of the undergraduate curriculum. Western literature and culture were no longer the pillars of a Duke education; in fact, hostility to Western literature and culture became a hallmark of the school. Students interested in a traditional, non-political, and un-avant-garde education went elsewhere.

In the early 1990s, several discerning faculty members and administrators realized that the university had gone badly astray and sought to reinvigorate the university's undergraduate curriculum. The result was the Focus program. This program brings together veteran faculty members who desire to teach undergraduates with incoming students for a rigorous and interdisciplinary semester of study centering on a single subject or cluster of related subjects. The Focus program further intensifies the students' educational experience by grouping participants in a single dorm and having a weekly dinner discussion with faculty members. Almost a third of all

Duke undergraduates now participate in the Focus program and many regard it as a high point in their education.

Duke's curriculum has also benefited from the generosity of one of its alumni. Gary Gerst, a 1961 engineering graduate, wanted to establish a program that would combat the near absence at Duke (as at most other universities) of viewpoints other than those of the political and cultural left. What emerged in the late 1990s was the Gerst Program in Political, Economic, and Humanistic Studies. The overarching objective of the program is to further the student's appreciation for the role of freedom in the development of America's economy and culture. Under the leadership of Professor Michael Gillespie, the Gerst program has become known for its intellectual challenges and academic rigor.

The Focus and Gerst programs illustrate how universities can raise the level of undergraduate education by adding well-conceived offerings that give dedicated students new options.

THE DECLINE AND REVIVAL OF LIBERAL LEARNING AT DUKE: THE FOCUS AND GERST PROGRAMS

By Russell K. Nieli

During the late 1960s and early 1970s Duke University, like many other universities, changed the way that undergraduates selected their courses. It moved from a system with a modest core curriculum requirement that also allowed generous elective choices to a system that had no specific required courses of any kind. Students were only expected to meet the requirements of their major discipline and to scatter their remaining selections among different departments. That system largely continues today.

This shift away from a coherent liberal arts education was the first step in the demise of traditional education at Duke. It was not until recently, with the formation of the Focus and Gerst programs, that the university began to offer its students an undergraduate education that integrates a variety of disciplines into a meaningful whole. This essay will describe those two programs. To see their importance, however, it will be helpful to know something of the history of undergraduate education at Duke.

From Christian Liberal Arts College to Modern Research University

Duke is the youngest of the elite national universities, having been established in 1924 through a huge endowment from the family of Washington Duke and his two sons, James and Benjamin. The Duke family acquired its wealth in the tobacco business after the Civil War and in later years through the manufacture and sale of electric power. Duke's origins are thus similar to other newer national universities such as Stanford, Cornell, and the University of Chicago, also established by wealthy benefactors. In one important respect, however, Duke differs from those universities. It was built around an existing institution, Trinity College, which already had its own beautiful campus in Durham, North Carolina, and a well-established regional reputation as a serious Christian liberal arts college. The Duke family, in fact, was an important financial supporter of Trinity College for many decades before there was any intention to transform the college into a national university.

Trinity College itself grew out of a smaller institution—the Union Institute Academy—which was established in 1838 under the leadership of Brantley York, a largely self-taught Methodist minister who had been asked by local Methodist and Quaker farmers in rural Randolph County, North Carolina, to establish a local

school of higher learning for their children. York's school was chartered twice by the state of North Carolina, first as the Union Institute Academy (1841) and later as Normal College (1851). In 1859 Normal College began its long financial and trusteeship relationship with the United Methodist Church, changing its name to Trinity College to reflect its new religious affiliation. Free tuition was also granted at this time to all students studying for the Methodist ministry.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s Duke University changed the way that undergraduates selected their courses. It moved to a system that had no specific required courses of any kind.

From its official founding in 1859 to its transformation into Duke University in 1924, Trinity College reflected the vision of liberal Protestant educators who combined a serious Christian religious commitment with a strong desire to create an educational environment that was open to the best in both ancient and modern learning. The pattern can be seen even in Trinity's first president, Braxton Craven, an ordained Methodist minister, who held teaching professorships in the college in a host of areas both traditional and modern. Craven was professor of American constitutional law, Biblical literature, mental and moral science, rhetoric and logic, ancient languages, and metaphysics. No narrowly conceived denominational college, Trinity sought to establish itself as a Christian progressive institution that would encourage Christians of various denominations to teach, study, and worship together and to combine the best of both "education and religion." This latter phrase, in its Latin form, *Eruditio et Religio*, became Trinity's official motto—the words having been lifted from a hymn by Methodist evangelist Charles Wesley.

Under the leadership of John Kilgo, president between 1894 and 1910, Trinity established itself as one of the South's most distinguished liberal arts colleges, and one of the few small colleges in the South to become known outside the region. Kilgo was a preacher of great power, and during his tenure one can see the faint stirrings of the progressive Christianity that would become such an important force in the South during the civil rights

Trinity established itself as one of the South's most distinguished liberal arts colleges, and one of the few small colleges in the South to become known outside the region.

struggles of the 1950s. Although Kilgo was Trinity's leader at the very time that the Jim Crow philosophy of segregation and white supremacy was reaching the peak of its cultural dominance in the South, under his guidance Trinity College established itself as a distinctly moderate voice on the racial issues of the day. A pivotal event was the visit of Booker T. Washington to the Durham County Colored Fair in October 1896. While Washington was in Durham, Kilgo invited the famous black leader to speak in Trinity's chapel, a gesture unprecedented in the South in the Jim Crow era. Trinity was the first white Southern college to extend such an invitation to Washington, who was grateful enough to remember the event in his autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, where Trinity College found itself mentioned among the nation's top colleges and universities: "It has been my privilege," Washington wrote, "to deliver addresses at many of our leading colleges including Harvard, Yale, Williams, Amherst, Fisk, the University of Pennsylvania, Wellesley, the University of Michigan, Trinity College in North Carolina, and many more."¹

Washington would also be prominent in another development that occurred during Kilgo's presidency—the so-called Bassett Affair involving the Trinity history professor John Spencer Bassett. In a 1903 article published in the *South Atlantic Quarterly* Bassett praised Booker T. Washington as a man second in stature only to Robert E. Lee among the great Americans of the past hundred years—an assertion many whites at the time found outrageous, amounting in the minds of some white supremacists to a kind of racial treason. Powerful voices outside Trinity, including influential Democratic politicians, called for Bassett's dismissal, and not wanting to cause trouble, Bassett offered to resign. With Kilgo's support, however, Trinity's Board of Trustees voted 18-7 not to accept Bassett's resignation—a vote that would later be heralded as a victory for both academic freedom and racial tolerance. Two years after the Bassett incident President Theodore Roosevelt, during a visit to the Trinity campus, praised the college for the courageous stance it had taken in the Bassett affair in defense of free inquiry and free speech.²

Kilgo was succeeded as president in 1920 by William Preston Few, who was the driving force behind the transformation of Trinity College into a major national university. Few was a man of extraordinary talent and vision,

who believed that it was possible to combine the best of a Christian liberal arts college with the diverse educational opportunities offered by a modern research university. Southern reared and Harvard educated, Few was a champion of the ideal of the New South that would bring higher education in the South into line with the advanced learning obtainable elsewhere. A pious Methodist layman, Few believed that Trinity College's long-time motto, *Eruditio et Religio*, could serve as the guiding principle for the new university he envisioned. The Latin phrase would be adopted as Duke's official motto, and *Eruditio et Religio* remains Duke's motto to this day, prominently displayed at the base of the university's official seal.

Few was college president for a very long time—he became Trinity's president in 1910 and served as president of the new university until his death in 1940—and his vision and character left an immeasurable stamp. Few knew exactly what kind of university he wanted Duke to become, and his vision seems to have been shared by the Duke family and most of the members of the board of trustees. That vision was succinctly summarized in a mission statement contained in the bylaws of the act of endowment for the new university, which Few had inscribed on a permanent metal plaque and placed at the center of the main campus in front of the university chapel. The plaque still stands today and reads:

The aims of Duke University are to assert a faith in the eternal union of knowledge and religion set forth in the teaching and character of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; to advance learning in all things of truth; to defend scholarship against all false notions and ideals; to develop a Christian love of freedom and truth; to promote a sincere spirit of tolerance; to discourage all partisan and sectarian strife, and to render the largest permanent service to the state, the nation, and the church. Unto these ends shall the efforts of this university always be administered.³

The statement is striking for its combination of devout Christian piety, love of learning, defense of scholarly inquiry, political and religious tolerance, and the ennobling ideal of action directed in the service of the common good. It was a reflection of the highest ideals of late nineteenth and early twentieth century liberal Protestantism. The educational ideal enshrined in the mission statement would stamp the character of Duke University for at least a generation after its founding, and as late as the mid-1960s (when the present writer first entered Duke as a freshman), a faint echo of it could still be discerned. It could be seen, for instance, in the large religion department and divinity school prominently placed near the center of the campus; in the religiously based interest in the civil rights movement of the era;⁴ in the respect for higher Biblical criticism and

the requirement that all arts and science majors (the vast majority of the undergraduate body) take a scholarly two-semester religion course focused on the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament; in the requirement that all students take an introductory course in a modern natural science; and in the requirement of a four-semester Great Books-type English literature sequence focusing on the greatest of English and American writers from Chaucer to Eliot. The ideals of a Christian liberal arts college and a modern research university may ultimately be at odds, but Duke in its early days probably did as good a job as possible in uniting those goals and in instilling a respect for Christian religious values, traditional Western high culture, and the best in modern learning.

Students completing a Duke undergraduate degree before the mid-1960s were likely to know not only that the book of Job is part of the Old Testament, but were likely to have read the book and reflected upon its contents as part of their freshman religion course. They would most likely have been exposed to some of the better known works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Donne, Wordsworth, Yeats, Shaw, O'Neill, Faulkner, Joyce, and Eliot – and their teachers would with equal likelihood have been men and women who both knew and deeply appreciated the greatness of the works they read. They would have known the meaning of words and phrases like iambic pentameter, eschatology, romantic poet, Magna Charta, Synoptic Gospel, Elizabethan drama, Renaissance man, baroque art, Aeschylean tragedy, Platonism, the Reformation—and most of the hundreds of other terms E.D. Hirsch says all literate Americans should know.⁵ They would, in short, be in possession of a core knowledge of Western history, religion, literature, and ideas, in addition to whatever specialized body of knowledge they had acquired in their major field of concentration. In a word, they were educated Americans, and if their religious formation fell short of what might be found in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century denominational liberal arts colleges, where daily chapel service and periodic examination of conscience were the order of the day, at least they would have known something about the major religious, literary, and philosophic developments that had formed the heart of Western culture. And they would have one huge advantage over their eighteenth and early nineteenth century counterparts: Many would have acquired knowledge in a useful technical field like economics or chemistry that would enable them to pursue a constructive occupation in a world of ever more advancing technology.

Chaos: The Late 1960s, the Fish Era, and the Post-Fish Thermidor

For anyone entering Duke as an undergraduate in the 1970s or later, the vision of William Preston Few was

history. The ideal of combining the best of a Christian liberal arts college with that of a large modern university was no longer a living reality on the Duke campus. The ideal had begun to fade even before the sixties, but during the tumultuous era of the late 1960s and early 1970s the university Few and the Duke family had created was transformed into something very different.

A major impetus to change was, of course, the student uprisings of the period and the demand for more individual freedom in the choice of elective subjects. In short order Duke, like many other universities at the time, switched to a system of distribution-only electives which had no core curriculum and virtually no limits on student choices except for the requirements of the student's major. Gone were the days when almost all Duke students would have read the *Canterbury Tales*, *Paradise Lost*, and *King Lear*; when one could strike up a conversation with even a Duke chemistry or biology major on the differences between St. John's Gospel and the Synoptics; when students eagerly debated in their dorm lounges whether Yeats, Eliot, and Pound were fascists or high-minded traditionalists; and when Southern students and faculty took special pride in the outstanding literary achievements of the great Southern writers. The ideal of a liberally educated citizen gave way to student demands for greater individual choice and an *à la carte* curriculum.

Gone were the days when almost all Duke students would have read the *Canterbury Tales* and could discuss the differences between St. John's Gospel and the Synoptics.

The 1980s at many colleges and universities brought serious soul-searching over what had transpired over the previous period, and there was a modest return to the idea of a minimal core curriculum. Prominent conservative voices including those of Education Secretary William Bennett, National Endowment for the Humanities head Lynne Cheney, and scholar Allan Bloom all counseled a return to more traditional notions of a liberal arts education.

Duke, however, took a very different turn, particularly in its English and comparative literature departments, which sought to assemble the most influential group of anti-traditionalists—deconstructionists, postmodernists, Marxists, feminists, “queer theorists”—of any university in the nation. And in this endeavor it clearly succeeded, in large measure due to the support of the

Duke administration, especially dean of arts and sciences Richard A. White and the new president of Duke, Keith Brodie, who took office in 1985.

Brodie and White wanted to raise Duke's humanities departments to national prominence, and they were persuaded that the best way to do this was by hiring a stellar cast of radical avant-garde literary theorists, who, if nothing else, would generate publicity and excitement about modern literary criticism and put Duke's literature departments on the map. Concern for the quality or value of what would be taught appeared to be secondary, if it mattered at all. Duke's vice-provost Malcolm Gillis explained the thinking to Dinesh D'Souza in a 1990 interview. Defending the hiring of Duke's controversial literary theorists, Gillis said to D'Souza, "What I do know is that these fellows generate a lot of sparks....Look, what we wanted was academic excitement, and these fellows sure knew how to generate that. They are cutting edge. Whatever they're doing, they get attention. That's our objective....Do you know that applications for our graduate program are up 340 percent in the last five years?"⁶

The point man in this ambitious project to make Duke humanities "cutting edge" was Stanley Fish, a leading postmodernist literary theorist, who was hired away from Johns Hopkins in 1985 to become the chairman of Duke's English department. Fish was instrumental in bringing to Duke many other scholars who shared his doubts about the value of traditional approaches to literary criticism and the evaluation of classic texts.⁷

Postmodernist Stanley Fish carried the implication of his analysis to its logical limit: "No reading [of a text], however outlandish it might appear, is inherently an impossible one."

He had done early and generally respected scholarly work on John Milton, but what established Fish's reputation among the avant-garde was his 1980 book, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*,⁸ in which he attacked the idea that in interpreting literature there are such things as objective interpretations, objective texts, or objective truth. The idea that has generally prevailed in literary theory, Fish explained, is that there is a real, true, or objective meaning of an author's writing, one usually identified with the author's intention, and that the job of the critic or interpreter of literature is to discover that meaning. Such

a view, Fish argued, is naive because it fails to appreciate the constitutive nature of the reader's input into the interpretative process and of the community of interpreters for whom a literary critic writes.

Even what constitutes a "text," said Fish, is a product of the interaction of a reader-interpreter upon words and sentences that have no independent or objective meaning outside the mind of those doing the reading and interpreting. "The text is always a function of interpretation," he wrote; it is "produced" by interpreters and, contrary to the conventional wisdom, has no interpretation-independent life by means of which multiple or conflicting interpretations could be judged as true or false, adequate or inadequate.⁹ Since the text has no independent life of its own, according to this view, it cannot, Fish argued, "be the location of the core of agreement by means of which we reject interpretations."¹⁰ According to the conventional, objectivist model of literary criticism, Fish explained, "critical activity is controlled by free standing objects in relation to which its accounts are either adequate or inadequate. But according to Fish's model "critical activity is constitutive of its object." He writes, "In one model the self must be purged of its prejudices and presuppositions so as to see clearly a text that is independent of them; in the other, prejudicial or perspectival perception is all there is, and the question is from which of a number of equally interested perspectives will the text be constituted."¹¹

Interpretation and literary criticism on Fish's view would seem to involve a highly subjective process that accords a ridiculously expansive role to the reader-interpreter in determining the meaning of what is being read. And this is indeed the case, though Fish stressed that the reader-interpreter is always constrained by what he calls the "boundaries of the acceptable," which are determined by the interpretive community in which the literary critic lives and breathes and has his cultural being. Examples of such "interpretive communities" might include academic English or comparative literature departments, various scholarly journals and their editorial boards, popular newspapers and magazines, sectarian religious publications, etc. These institutions, says Fish, determine the "canons of acceptability" at any given time, though Fish is quick to point out that these canons can change without notice and are never eternally fixed. Fish carried the implication of his analysis to its logical limit: "No reading [of a text], however outlandish it might appear," he wrote, "is inherently an impossible one."¹²

Many dismiss Fish's ideas as the silly musings of a wacky professor. But his ideas, and ideas like them, have been enormously influential in certain academic circles and for anyone knowledgeable of the political demographics of the post-1960s professoriate in America it is easy to see why. For in stressing the central and irreducible

element of subjectivity in all interpretive judgments, the Fishian variety of postmodernism not only accorded an elevated position to the role of text interpreter in determining what a text means, but simultaneously provided the interpreter with the absolute freedom to determine what constitutes literary, aesthetic, or moral merit in literature and art. All those individuals and groups who were hostile to the traditions of Western high culture—and in the post-1960s academy their numbers were legion—could find in this analytic framework a basis for dismissing and dethroning the great classic works of Western culture that past interpreters, within their own interpretive communities, had previously heralded as great and worthy of passing on to posterity.

When to the Fishian type of analysis was added Marxian and Foucaultian claims that literature always reflects the economic and power interests of its author and intended audience, a powerful framework was created for undermining the authority and appeal of the traditional canon of Western philosophy and literature. The supposedly Great Books of the Western tradition could then be dismissed as the partisan propaganda of dead, white, heterosexual, property-owning, European males, and be replaced by a reading list more congenial to the sensibilities of academic feminists, Marxists, deconstructionists, “queer theorists,” and Third-Worldists.

For those holding more conventional classic or Christian beliefs about the content of a well-structured liberal arts education, the effect of these developments on the curriculum of the Duke English department was a disaster. By the late 1980s it was possible to graduate as an English major at Duke without having read a single word of Shakespeare or of any of the other great English or American authors from Chaucer to the present. While other universities in the 1980s were slowly bringing back some of their older course requirements—rashly jettisoned, they came to believe, in the frenetic years of the late sixties—Duke’s English department decided to abandon even its minimal historical distribution requirement for departmental majors. In the Fish years Duke English majors could spend almost all their reading and class time studying American westerns, twentieth century feminist literature, Marxist literature, science fiction novels, contemporary popular novels, and the works of African American and Third World writers. And they would have a rich opportunity to explore these works with flamboyant professors who approached the material from a variety of popular left-of-center viewpoints. Since merit, according to Fish, always reflects a political perspective that wrongly claims for itself “the mantle of objectivity,” and since “all educational decisions are political by their very nature,”¹³ it didn’t seem much of a problem for a department dominated by thinkers like Fish to replace the traditional canon of English and American literature with one dearer to the hearts of the literary avant-garde.

Opposition to some of the ideas and changes that were introduced during the Fish years came from two of the English department’s professors, Kenny Williams and Henry Louis Gates, both of them African-American. Williams, whose position on the Duke English faculty predated the Fish era, was a traditionalist in her literary tastes and was appalled by the takeover of the English department by postmodernist radicals who had little respect for the literary culture of the Christian West. From her perspective, the English department had succumbed to the onslaught of Young Turks whose orchestrated assault against an older and more genteel academic establishment was largely successful because of the latter’s inability to fight vigorously enough for the older ideals. Williams would later join the National Association of Scholars, an advocacy group dedicated to combating left-wing political correctness and threats to academic freedom and free speech on college campuses.

Unlike the upheavals of the late 1960s, literary postmodernism was a movement led largely by a small coterie of quirky professors who enjoyed only limited support from college students.

Henry Louis Gates was hired away from Cornell to join the Duke faculty in 1989, and although moderately left-of-center in his political and cultural leanings, he was not an enthusiast for much of what was going on in the late 1980s in literary theory. Unlike many of his colleagues in Duke’s English and African-American studies departments, Gates believed that there really are objective standards of merit in literature and that what is best should be singled out for special attention and study. He was particularly concerned to identify the best in underappreciated African-American writers and have it read by students alongside the best writing produced by white Europeans and Americans. Although somewhat disinclined to admit it, Gates, like Kenny Williams, was in many ways a literary traditionalist.

The Duke postmodernists of the 1980s and 1990s led a movement that certainly had an impact on the Duke curriculum and the tenor of intellectual life on the Duke campus. The movement they led, however, lacked staying power. In part this was due to the fact that unlike the upheavals of the late 1960s, which involved large numbers of radicalized students and successfully intimidated administrators and faculties, literary postmodernism was a movement led largely by a small coterie of quirky

professors, many of them “tenured radicals” from the sixties, who enjoyed only limited support from the generation of college students coming of age during this period. Whereas the radical leftist professors of the 1960s, such as Herbert Marcuse and C. Wright Mills, enjoyed enormous popularity among substantial segments of the Baby Boom generation of college students, the leading postmodernist literary theorists of the 1980s and 1990s enjoyed no comparable popularity with Generation Xers, whose enthusiasm for radical politics and radical philosophical theories was much more subdued than their parents’.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the general discrediting of Marxist and Marxist-influenced ideas had much to do with this development. An equally important effect was produced by the revelation that Yale literature professor Paul de Man, a leading light in postmodernist and deconstructionist literary theory, had as a young man in occupied Belgium written articles for a collaborationist newspaper in which he parroted the Nazi line about the Jews. Even for postmodernists, collaborating with Nazis was beyond the pale.

In a way, postmodernists like Fish had blown a great opportunity to enhance our understanding of the relationship between truth and the existence of multiple interpretive traditions.

An additional factor in the postmodernist decline was the enormous publicity generated by Alan Sokal’s parody of postmodernist theoretical writing. Sokal, a mathematical physicist at New York University, wrote a tongue-in-cheek article parodying the style and thought of literary postmodernists which made absurd claims about the allegedly subjective nature of the physics discipline and about a supposed convergence between modern physics and postmodern hermeneutical theory. Its concluding paragraph was so over-the-top that it is worth quoting at length:

Finally, the content of any science is profoundly constrained by the language within which its discourses are formulated; and mainstream Western physical science has, since Galileo, been formulated in the language of mathematics. But whose mathematics? The question is a fundamental one, for, as [the Marxist theoretician] Aronowitz has observed, “neither logic nor mathematics escapes the ‘contamination’ of the social.” And as feminist thinkers have repeatedly pointed out, in the present culture this contamination is overwhelmingly capitalist, patriarchal and militaristic: “mathematics is portrayed as a woman whose

nature desires to be the conquered Other.” Thus, a liberatory science cannot be complete without a profound revision of the canon of mathematics. As yet no such emancipatory mathematics exists, and we can only speculate upon its eventual content...¹⁴

Sokal’s article was taken seriously when submitted to the editors of the leading postmodernist literary journal, *Social Text*, who, failing to realize the absurdity of its claims and its mocking parody of postmodernist jargon, published the article in their Spring/Summer 1996 issue.

Sokal’s hoax received widespread media coverage with extensive accounts in leading national newspapers and magazines in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. From the *New Republic* magazine to the *Dartmouth Review*, from the *New York Times* to the *Wall Street Journal*, many had a good chuckle at the expense of the editors of *Social Text*. The stars of literary postmodernism had already been in eclipse by the middle of the 1990s, but the ridicule unleashed by the Sokal parody helped to deprive the movement of whatever vigor it still had outside the narrow confines of a few eccentric academic English and comparative literature departments. The Sokal hoax was particularly painful for Stanley Fish, who had been instrumental in founding *Social Text* and gaining sponsorship for the journal from Duke University Press, of which he was a director. Fish would subsequently write a long and somber op-ed piece for the *New York Times* in which he accused Sokal of dishonesty and breach of trust in the hoaxing of the *Social Text* editors.¹⁵ Unlike almost everyone else, Fish failed to see the humor in it all.

In the late 1990s, the Duke English department essentially imploded, with many of its leading postmodernist stars squabbling among themselves and unable to agree on what they or their department should stand for. Stanley Fish left Duke in 1999 to take up an administrative position at the Chicago campus of the University of Illinois, where he became the dean of arts and sciences. A number of the other postmodernist stars of the 1980s also left Duke around this time. The Duke English department experienced its own post-postmodernist Thermidor.

In a way, postmodernists like Fish had blown a great opportunity to enhance our understanding of the relationship between truth and the existence of multiple interpretive traditions. The epistemological and hermeneutical issues with which they dealt had been explored to great benefit long before by thinkers like John Stuart Mill, Karl Mannheim, and Hans Georg Gadamer. Mill’s comment about popular political opinions is equally true of opinions about the interpretation of literature, philosophy, and social theory. “Popular opinions,” said Mill, “are often true but seldom or never the whole truth. They are a part

of the truth, sometimes a greater, sometimes a smaller part, but exaggerated, distorted, and disjointed from the truth by which they ought to be accompanied and limited." "In the human mind," he further explained, "one-sidedness has always been the rule, and many-sidedness the exception."¹⁶

The great potential of a university—one that post-modernists completely missed—is that under favorable circumstances the university community can become a great forum in which competing viewpoints confront each other in a mutually enriching exchange in which participants learn to expand their knowledge, qualify their claims, transcend their parochialism, and overcome the single vision that Mill correctly saw as endemic to the human mind. The experience of the English department exemplified Duke's failure to create and sustain that mutually enriching exchange.

Duke's flirtation with avant-garde trendiness in the late 1980s did nothing to enhance its reputation among serious-minded people. In other ways, too, Duke seemed to be succumbing to the worst national trends towards left-wing political correctness and "tenured radicalism." Its decision in 1988, for example, to require every academic department to hire at least one additional black professor regardless of the availability of black Ph.D.s also did little to raise its academic standing.

For Duke supporters who could remember when Duke was still concerned with uniting the best of an older Christian liberal arts tradition with the best of modern university learning—*Eruditio et Religio*—the 1980s and 1990s were a time of great sadness. While growing in size and in national prestige due to its professional schools and research departments, Duke seemed to be losing whatever remained of its claim to be a place where students could receive a valued liberal arts education. The absence of a core curriculum, the bewildering proliferation of ever more narrowly specialized academic courses and subdivisions, the faculty focus on research, the nationwide attack in the name of multiculturalism on the once ennobling ideal of a Western canon of Great Books, the capitulation of the Duke administration in acceding to the demands of militant students for the racially conscious hiring of educators and departmental personnel, and the university's intoxicating embrace of postmodernist literary theory all contributed to the feeling among many of its long-time supporters that Duke had lost its way.

A Real Interdisciplinary Experience: The Focus Program

Gradually, however, things began to change in the early and mid-1990s as postmodernism and its close ally, Marxism, were discredited, and it became clear to many members of the Duke faculty and administration that

entering undergraduates deserve more from their educational experience than a supersized menu of courses from which to hack out a zig-zagged program of study. Here is where the Focus program, begun earlier but expanded greatly in the 90s, began to have an effect. As its name suggests, the Focus program was aimed at overcoming the unfocused, smorgasbord style of student course selection that had come to dominate large, research-oriented universities like Duke. Focus is sometimes said to stand for "First-year Opportunity for Comprehensive Unified Study," although the name was not chosen as an acronym. Its main goal is to counter the fragmentation of the undergraduate curriculum and the splintering of academic inquiry into ever narrower and more insular specializations where experts in each discipline talk only among themselves while contributing nothing to a wider conversation.

As its name suggests, Focus was aimed at overcoming the unfocused, smorgasbord style of student course selection that had come to dominate large, research-oriented universities like Duke.

The basic idea behind Focus was to bring together experienced faculty and entering undergraduates in an intense interdisciplinary exchange that centered on a single subject or thematic cluster of subjects that could fruitfully be approached from a variety of academic disciplines. The specific subject or thematic cluster provides the "focus" of study, with the faculty gearing all courses within the program both to the topic and to the needs and level of understanding of the freshmen participants. For each general topic or thematic cluster, Focus offers four semester-long seminar courses, each taught by a different professor, usually from different academic disciplines, each coming from a different background. Thirty freshmen students are admitted to each of the various Focus clusters. From the four seminar offerings, they must choose two in which to enroll for credit. Each of the four seminars typically enrolls about 15 students—the result of thirty students each choosing two courses among four alternatives.

To encourage student discussion outside the classroom, all of the thirty students participating in each Focus cluster are housed together in a common student dormitory on Duke's East Campus. In addition, members of each cluster meet once each week for a dinner discussion with faculty members that will often feature a guest speaker or video presentation. Students in each Focus cluster must also take a special writing seminar that is

similar to freshman writing seminars at other universities except for the fact that it is centered on topics directly related to their specific Focus theme. Focus students thus get a multilayered immersion in their theme cluster that includes a) two seminar courses directly related to their chosen topic; b) a weekly dinner discussion with faculty; c) a semester-long writing course on their cluster theme; and d) the daily (and often nightly) interchange with other freshman students sharing similar interests and taking the same courses who are housed in the same freshman dormitory.

Although the Focus program was originally restricted to the first semester of the freshman year, its popularity with students and faculty eventually led to its expansion to include both first-year semesters, so that first-year students could join the program in their second semester. In recent years plans have been made to offer the Focus program to second-year students as well.

A few illustrations from recent Focus offerings will help illustrate how the program works. A popular recent topic dealt with "Global Islam." The catalogue description reads as follows:

This [Focus] cluster will offer a broad introduction to the peoples and institutions, beliefs and practices that characterize the Muslim world. A cultural and religious element in major societies throughout Africa and Asia, Islam has also become important in Northern Europe and the Americas during the modern period. Crucial to the study of Islam and the Muslim world is the comparative dimension. To grapple with the complexity of Islam requires an approach that is at once culturally embedded and multiregional in scope.

Focus is an intellectually intense and challenging program, which, like the typical engineering and pre-med programs at most colleges, has acquired the reputation of being among the most demanding of Duke's offerings.

Listings of four seminar offerings then follow this description. One deals with "Women and Islam" and is taught by a professor of Arabic literature; a second, taught by a professor in Duke's religion department, focuses on the Koran and its various interpretations over time; a third is titled "Islam and Comparative World Cinemas," and takes up the topic of how Islam is portrayed in world literature and film—it is taught by a professor in the comparative literature department; and the fourth, taught by a

specialist in Turkish studies, looks at the development of Muslim identities outside the Arab Mideast in the countries of Europe and Asia.

Another recent Focus cluster looks at the "Medieval and Renaissance Worlds" and is described in the official catalogue offering as follows:

All facets of our modern world have parallels in Medieval and Renaissance cultures. This cluster will explore the negotiations and clashes that took place between the Arab and Christian worlds, and the worlds of Church and State. Ranging across the formative periods of Western culture from late ancient to early modern eras, and examining historical, religious, literary, and art historical materials, [students] will examine women's and men's lived experience, focusing on beliefs about how people should live and behave. This cluster will explore two concepts vital for the understanding of Medieval and Renaissance cultures: memory and invention. The men and women of the Middle Ages and Renaissance shaped their present—whether real or ideal—by endlessly reinterpreting, revising, recombining, and innovating upon the traditions, ideologies, values, and social structures that they had inherited from their forebears, or that they acquired through contact with other cultures.

Of the four listed seminars following this description, one is taught by a professor of Romance languages and deals with the history and culture of the city of Venice; another, conducted by a professor of art history, deals with the "Architecture of Monasteries, Cathedrals, and Friaries" in medieval Europe; a third, given by a historian, deals with "Work and Worship" from early medieval times to the dawn of the modern era; while a fourth deals with the positive and negative role models represented by medieval saints and sinners and is taught by a professor in the classics department.

Students enrolling in Focus clusters such as these attend two of the four seminar courses offered, in addition to attending the weekly faculty-student dinner discussions, and they must also write regular papers for the cluster-specific freshman writing course in which they must enroll. In addition to these Focus requirements, all students must enroll in one additional Duke University course of their choosing outside the Focus program.

All in all, Focus is an intellectually intense and challenging program, which, like the typical engineering and pre-med programs at most colleges, has acquired the reputation on the Duke campus of being among the most demanding of Duke's offerings. Despite its challenges, however, students find their Focus participation enormously rewarding, and like Marines who have finished

their basic training on Parris Island, after completing the program many feel that they have gone through a rigorous and transformative experience that a less intense program could never have provided. It is for this reason that the program has been so popular among Duke undergraduates despite the fact that there are much easier courses and programs available to meet the university's requirements for promotion and graduation. If nothing else, Focus shows that, when challenged, at least some students will rise to the occasion. Students who have completed the Focus program usually feel that they have really learned something important, that they have had an incomparable interchange with knowledgeable faculty and engaged students, and that they have stretched their minds and their imagination in ways they had never done previously—and perhaps never thought possible. For many students the experience is the high point of their intellectual career at Duke.

Ironically perhaps, the Focus program was at least in part a product of the initiative and ongoing support of Duke's dean of arts and sciences, Richard White, the same dean who had been instrumental in overseeing the transformation of Duke's English department to postmodernism. White in the late 1980s was disturbed by the fact that many of the more intellectually focused of the high school students who were admitted to Duke were choosing to pass Duke up for places like Williams, Swarthmore, Oberlin, and the University of Chicago—institutions with long traditions of dedication to undergraduate instruction and liberal learning.¹⁷ To deal with this issue, White appointed a Committee on the Freshman Year to look into the possibility of making the first year of study at Duke particularly attractive to the more academically serious of the admitted students as a way of convincing these students to enroll at Duke. The committee, headed by the sociologist Angela O'Rand, eventually recommended that Duke expand its small living-learning program—known as the Twentieth Century America program—which had existed since the early 1970s, into a much more ambitious project that would offer a variety of integrated cluster themes to incoming students to be taught by professors from a variety of academic backgrounds. The current Focus program grew out of the recommendations of this committee.

At the inception of the Focus program in the early 1990s the cluster offerings were modest in number, but they expanded greatly in the latter years of the decade due to widespread student and faculty support, as well as to the aggressive nurturing by history professor Sy Mauskopf, the Focus director from 1995–2003. Angela O'Rand, who is the current Focus director, says that at the outset there was considerable resistance to starting the Focus program on the part of some of Duke's faculty and administrators, who believed that it would be very difficult to get faculty

from widely varying disciplines at a research university like Duke to come together and cooperate in a program aimed at instructing freshmen. "When we first proposed this program," O'Rand writes, "the primary resistance from faculty was that it would probably be impossible to get faculty from across the major divisions to teach together—particularly to get science and math faculty to work with social science and humanities for very long, if at all." But Richard White, whose academic background was in biology, ignored these misgivings, she says, and moved forward with a strong commitment to the program. "We now have fully one-third of our clusters," she says, "that include biologists, computer scientists, chemists, historians, political scientists, psychologists, philosophers, linguists, literary scholars, etc. etc. who teach together in these programs."¹⁸

Contrary to the predictions of skeptics, the Focus program soon proved a hit with both students and faculty and has undergone considerable expansion, which continues to the present. Many of the faculty who teach in Focus, O'Rand says, "return year after year because they enjoy the experience so much . . . and new faculty approach us annually either to participate in an existing cluster or to start a new one." Since Focus courses are part of the university's distribution requirements for students and count as part of the regular teaching load of participating faculty, the Focus program has been fully integrated into Duke University's official curriculum.

Ironically perhaps, the Focus program was partly a product of the initiative and support of Richard White, the dean who had overseen the transformation of Duke's English department to postmodernism.

A second misgiving that some had at the inception of the Focus program concerned funding. It was not clear where the money for the program would come from, but with the vigorous support of both Richard White and Dean Lee Willard, outside funding sources were obtained, and Focus today even has its own supplementary endowment, with some of the money coming from former Focus students, who are now loyal Duke alumni. All in all, Focus has been a model of a successful living-learning academic program, at once rigorous, challenging, and rewarding, one that is probably responsible for attracting a number of very eager and capable undergraduates to Duke.

The Gerst Program: Viewpoint Diversity and Freedom

“Comprehensive unified study” (the term is part of the Focus acronym) is the great strength of the Focus program, which has done about as much as can be expected from a single program to overcome the intellectual fragmentation endemic to modern university education. In recent years almost a third of all Duke students have participated in Focus, and while complaints are sometimes made of the great demands the program makes in terms of the effort and energy participants are expected to invest, student and faculty feedback is almost uniformly supportive. During three days of interviewing faculty, students, and administrators on the Duke campus in March 2006, I was unable to find a single person who judged the program negatively. Such response explains why the program has been expanded and may include sophomores in the future.

If the Focus program can be seen as a successful response to the fragmentation and *à la carte* incoherence of contemporary undergraduate instruction, a second innovative program at Duke sets its sights on another cardinal failing of contemporary elite universities, namely, the stifling effect of political correctness and the near absence on university campuses of viewpoints other than those of the political and cultural left. This second innovation is the Gerst Program in Political, Economic and Humanistic Studies. Named after the Duke engineering alumnus Gary Gerst (class of 1961), who provided the initial idea and most of the funding for the program, the Gerst program was largely scripted by Duke political science professor Michael Gillespie, who developed the program into a prominent intellectual and educational force on the Duke campus. Other contributors include the John Templeton Foundation, another alumnus, and some internal Duke programs.

Duke alumnus Gary Gerst was deeply disturbed by the general ideological intolerance on college campuses and the virtual exclusion in many places of conservative and free-market voices.

The Gerst program grew out of the perceived need to counteract the pop-trendiness and political correctness that was so pervasive on many university campuses in the 1980s and 1990s—trends that found such resonance at Duke in the heyday of the Fish era. In an interview,¹⁹ Gerst told me that like many concerned alumni of Duke and other elite universities he was deeply disturbed by the general ideological intolerance on college campuses and

the virtual exclusion in many places of conservative and free-market voices. He mentioned in this context the troubling development of politically-driven campus speech codes, the several instances of leftist students destroying campus conservative publications without rebuke or reprimand from college administrators, and the ideological exclusion that refused to consider any idea challenging the hegemony of the political left (he mentioned in this context Lawrence Summers’ troubles at Harvard over remarks that offended Harvard’s feminists).

“I was unhappy with the extreme left attitude reigning at almost every academic institution of any quality in America,” he told me. “There is little political diversity [at such quality institutions],” he complained, and he cited in this context a poll by a campus conservative group at Duke indicating that well over 90% of Duke’s liberal arts professors are registered Democrats compared to a national average among American voters of only about 40%. Diversity is something the elite institutions pay a great deal of homage to, but when it comes to political and ideological diversity they seem to care little. “I don’t think Duke is any worse in this regard than any of the other better colleges,” he said, “but I see no reason why people who don’t agree with what is going on continue to shell out money to their universities.” In giving generously to Duke, Gerst was determined not to let his own money further developments of which he strongly disapproved.

Gerst was also concerned with what he saw as the watering down of academic standards through such developments as grade inflation—as a past engineering student at Duke he knew what rigorous standards were all about. And while he was not tied to the idea of a Great Books approach to liberal learning, he nevertheless believed strongly that many traditionally acclaimed works, both fiction and non-fiction, were superior to the trendy writing that had become popular on many college campuses. “There was a period at Duke when Fish was head of the English department,” he told me, “where there was this attitude that ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’ and that there was no such thing as good writing or bad writing. Students in English departments were beginning to read some pretty trashy stuff as opposed to what people for a very long time considered good writing.” Gerst was determined that any program he would fund would be marked by rigorous academic standards and reading material that was selected on the basis of weight and substance rather than popular fashion.

The Gerst program was set up with one overarching theme: to further an appreciation for the role that freedom and ordered liberty have played in the political, economic, and cultural development of America and the West and in the lives of morally responsible individuals. To this end, the program seeks to further discussion of differing

meanings of freedom and liberty and the role that those differing ideals have played in the abolition of slavery, the overthrow of monarchies and other forms of dictatorial rule, the growth of democracy and national self-determination, the success of movements to guarantee political and economic rights to women and ethnic minorities, the expansion of free enterprise and free markets around the world, and the rise and later collapse of communism and its claim to represent a truer form of freedom and liberty. In terms of concrete activities, Gerst is a multi-layered program intended to spur appreciation for the ideals of liberty, democratic governance, and morally responsible personal action.

Where the Gerst overlaps the Focus program is in the popular Focus cluster that it sponsors, Visions of Freedom. This theme cluster brings together professors from the political science, public policy, history, English, and economics departments to explore with thirty freshmen each year “the various competing conceptions of freedom and their historical origin.” The cluster description asks, “Do we know what it means to speak of a free people, a free government, a free economy, or of personal or moral freedom?” Four seminars are offered that address various aspects of those questions. Recent Visions of Freedom offerings have included a seminar on the classical defenders of liberty in English and American writing (e.g., Milton, Locke, Mill, Jefferson, etc.); on the contrasting views of order provided by a hierarchic model of governance versus the spontaneous order expressed through competitive markets and a freely floating price system; on the criticism of classical conceptions of liberty offered by Marxist-Leninists, fascists, poststructuralists, and certain varieties of feminism; and on the conflicting visions of the relation between public freedom and social responsibility in the works of major Western political philosophers from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries.

Besides its Focus component, the Gerst program supports several other initiatives at Duke, all of which are supervised by the Gerst director, Michael Gillespie, a member of Duke’s political science department. Gillespie’s scholarly background is in political theory and nineteenth-century German philosophy. In the tradition of the great past thinkers he has studied, he has tried to keep the Gerst program focused on the Big Questions that emerge from the Western philosophical tradition—especially those related to freedom and moral responsibility. For those familiar with the extreme narrowness of scope and arcane writing that often appear in academic philosophical circles, the approach Gillespie has taken in his management of the Gerst program provides a refreshing contrast.

The Gerst program sponsors an ongoing colloquium and speaker series that meets on a regular basis in which

students, faculty, and other interested parties within the university community can hear knowledgeable academics and eminent public figures discuss topics related to program themes. The Gerst program also sponsors an annual spring conference that brings together nationally known scholars and others with relevant knowledge and experience to discuss a pre-selected Gerst theme.

Gary Gerst was insistent from the start that any courses his program would sponsor would be intellectually challenging and weighty in their course matter, not hip, cool, or “gut.”

In addition to those activities, the Gerst program funds a postdoctoral fellowship that permits a recently minted Ph.D. to teach two courses per year at Duke to upper-level undergraduates on subjects related to the major themes of the program. Money is also provided for teaching fellowships to graduate students who are in the final stages of their doctoral dissertations so that they can develop and teach courses to undergraduates on a variety of selected topics. Rounding out its teaching component, the Gerst program also provides money to experienced university professors to develop one interdisciplinary team-taught course per year intended for graduate students and advanced undergraduates. Although the content of all the Gerst-sponsored courses is left up to the individual academics who develop them, it is an expectation—if not a formal requirement—that all courses must embody the highest standards of scholarship and make considerable demands upon student participants in terms of reading and writing requirements. Gary Gerst was insistent from the start that any courses his program would sponsor would be intellectually challenging and weighty in their course matter, not hip, cool, or “gut.” All indications are that these expectations have been met.

Duke’s Political Science Department and the Gerst Program

The Gerst program was quite consciously set up with the understanding that the various courses, seminars, and colloquia that it sponsored would not only deal with big issues—especially those related to freedom and personal responsibility—but also that it would be open to a variety of methodologies, disciplines, and ideological perspectives. Among the latter, there was from the beginning a special concern that free-market, conservative, and classical liberal viewpoints be among those brought to the table.

It is difficult for those who have not spent much time on elite university campuses to imagine just how one-sided and conformist much of contemporary academia tends to be in its political and cultural leanings. In most social science and humanities departments at the better colleges and universities, something like a ten-to-one rule reigns in regard to the number of professors who consider their political and cultural views liberal or left-of-center—and who mainly vote for Democratic political candidates—compared to those who consider their views conservative or right-of-center and vote mainly for Republicans.²⁰ Duke is no exception. A 2004 survey by the Duke Conservative Union, a student group on campus, looked into the party registrations of Duke professors in eight liberal arts-oriented departments as well as those of Duke's top academic deans. Most of those surveyed were registered as members of one of the two major political parties, with the overall count being 142 registered Democrats and eight registered Republicans. The history department took the prize for the most politically one-sided department of those surveyed, with 32 professors listing their party affiliation as Democrat and none as Republican.

Michael Gillespie, director of the Gerst program, had considerable praise for the many Duke administrators who have supported him and the Gerst program despite their own left-of-center orientations.

The one surprise in the student survey was Duke's political science department. Six of the eight registered Republicans whom the students were able to locate were from this one department, which also contained 26 registered Democrats. This may not seem like much improvement in terms of ideological pluralism and balance, but such a view would be misleading for two reasons. First of all, a number of the more conservative or free-market oriented professors in Duke's political science department, including its current chairman, Michael Munger, are outspoken in their right-of-center viewpoints and make no attempt to hide their criticisms of reigning leftist beliefs. This adds immeasurably to the vibrancy and genuine intellectual interchange that takes place among department members and between department members and the larger Duke community. A second factor, which may be equally important, is that a number of those in the Democratic camp, as Michael Gillespie explained to me in an interview,²¹ are centrist or "Scoop" Jackson Democrats rather than leftists. Leftists are certainly represented in the department, Gillespie told me—there is even

a deconstructionist or two—but the department as a whole displays a genuine plurality of viewpoints unlike most other departments at Duke or at other elite universities.

I asked Gillespie why so many humanities and social science departments at places like Duke are monochromatically left-of-center in their political orientation. He told me that the ideological polarization of the academy must be viewed within the context of a more general polarization taking place within American society. The military and evangelical churches are becoming just as one-sidedly conservative and Republican as colleges and universities are liberal and Democratic. Self-selection, he believes, has much to do with these trends. Academic professions, he explained, tend to attract those more interested in social causes who are less financially ambitious and less focused on upward economic mobility. "People are not attracted to the academy because they want to get wealthy, and Americans for the most part are attracted to becoming wealthy." While more conservatively oriented people might be drawn to medicine, business, engineering, or other high-paying professions, academics tends to attract more humanistically oriented people who harbor grand ideas for social change and often spurn the business world. The net result of this self-selection process, Gillespie says, is the extreme political one-sidedness we often see at many universities like Duke.

But the situation has improved at Duke, Gillespie believes. "There's been a moderation in a number of departments," he told me, offering Duke's English department as a concrete example. In recent years, he says, the English department has attracted a number of serious practicing Christians, something that would have been unlikely in an earlier period when the department was dominated by radical postmodernists. Even the Marxists have changed, he says. The Marx that gets taught at Duke in various departments, he explained, "is not the Marx that you and I knew as undergraduates"—it is a less dogmatic, less deterministic, more cultural-aesthetic brand of Marxism that looks at hip-hop movies and their meaning rather than predicting the imminent collapse of capitalism.

Gillespie had considerable praise for the many Duke administrators who have supported him and the Gerst program despite their own left-of-center orientations. Many people, he told me, "are bigger than their political ideology," and one of the great things about Duke, he said, is that there are administrators, who, whatever their political or ideological leanings, are genuinely dedicated to open inquiry and expanded debate. Many also want to see Duke become a place where students can pursue a genuine liberal arts education.

Gillespie's comments about Duke and Duke's political science department were generally seconded by

Michael Munger, the department chair. An economist by training, Munger is an unabashed, unapologetic classical liberal in the tradition of Adam Smith, James Madison, and Friedrich Hayek. He is a great believer in free markets, competition, and the basic Madisonian principle of checks and balances and separation of powers in politics. The basic economic and political problem, he told me,²² echoing an address he had given as president of the Public Choice Society, “is the design or maintenance of institutions that make self-interested individual actions not inconsistent with the welfare of the community.” In so far as the left has failed to grasp the pervasiveness of self-interest in human affairs, he believes, it has lost contact with reality—and done so in a dangerous manner that leads to both poverty and enslavement. He is particularly dismissive of those who believe that innovation, increased productivity, focused persistence, and hard work can be brought about through an economic system that does not seek to reward these activities through material incentives. “People can imagine economic systems where everyone works well together [without material incentives], where everyone just naturally produces—as Marx said—all that we can. But this imagined economic world has no more empirical content than unicorns.”

Munger harbors no illusions about how far free-market ideas are from mainstream academia including Duke. “My libertarian-conservative views are as strange to most academics,” he wrote in a campus student publication, “as if I were a cannibal or a Zoroastrian dastur. Worse, actually, since those guys would at least be considered multicultural and romantically primitive.”²³ Even so, Munger insists that in the political science department at least, his views gain a respectful hearing, and he has high praise for Duke as a place “where a free-market Republican like me” can become chairman of an academic department. He was not hired for his political views, he says, but they did not count against him either. Echoing Gillespie, he told me that politically “our department is all over the map. Almost everyone in our department believes in the transcendent virtue of intellectual tolerance and they are respectful of other faculty opinions.” The same is true, he believes, for at least some of Duke’s administrators, though he acknowledged that there are some departments—he specifically mentioned cultural anthropology—where scholarship is highly politicized and intolerant of views like his own. Many at Duke on both the left and right, he told me, are genuinely committed to “the transcendent virtue of tolerance and civility,” and for this reason Duke stands on a higher plane than many other universities which are hostile to viewpoints like his own.

“I’ve watched the American academy transformed,” he wrote in the student publication. “Where the left was once *outré*, it is now tiredly and firmly entrenched inside.

Because of this hegemony, many faculty on the left have softened into baccate self-caricatures, unable to tolerate dissent, and unwilling to think hard enough to justify their own positions... Still, Duke is the least ‘politically correct’ place I’ve ever been. Regardless of the private political views of administrators, the main thing they want is to improve the intellectual and academic atmosphere at Duke. Those of you who have been nowhere else have no idea how precious, and how rare, the intellectual freedom of Duke is.”

“Those of you who have been nowhere else have no idea how precious, and how rare, the intellectual freedom of Duke is,” said Michael Munger, chairman of the political science department.

Before coming to Duke, Munger taught at a number of prominent universities, including Dartmouth, the University of Texas at Austin, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He found the intellectual atmosphere at each of these stifling and oppressive.

The praise that Gillespie and Munger have for the intellectual diversity in Duke’s political science department resonates with comments made to me in an interview with Duke’s former president Nannerl Keohane, who during her years as Duke’s president (1993–2004) was also a political science department member. When I asked her about the Duke Conservative Union survey that documented the extreme political one-sidedness of Duke professors, she responded, like Munger, with a comparison to other universities with which she was familiar: “From my own experience at Duke I would argue that Duke is one of the most ideologically balanced institutions that I know. I know for a fact that the political science department, which was my department, has a number of Republicans and libertarians—who agree and disagree about everything—in addition to Democrats and independents. And I don’t know much about other departments but I know that among major universities Duke seems to me to have more balance and range of opinions than most and certainly part of our purpose was to encourage that.”²⁴

In a sense one can see the Gerst program as an extension of the ethos of Duke’s political science department. It addresses serious issues in political philosophy and public policy and does so from a variety of viewpoints and perspectives. At the same time, the Gerst program, by multiplying the number of courses at Duke that reflect this ethos, not only increases the salience on campus of the political science department—Gerst’s institutional home—

but helps to further an atmosphere on campus that provides a powerful counterweight to more highly politicized departments where open-minded discussion and a genuine exchange of ideas are not practiced. The Gerst program and Duke's political science department go a long way to furthering genuine liberal education at Duke.

Students, Faculty, and Administrators Speak Out

In the three days I spent interviewing people on the Duke campus, I was able to get a fairly good idea of the state of liberal arts education at Duke and of both the strengths and limitations of programs like Focus and Gerst in fostering such learning. One of the most knowledgeable and perceptive of the many people I interviewed was Bill English, now a graduate student, who was a Duke undergraduate between 1999 and 2003 and one of the better known personalities on campus as a regular columnist for the *Duke Chronicle*, Duke's widely read student newspaper.

English has thought long and hard about the problems confronting those seeking a broadly-based liberal arts education at universities like Duke and has written extensively about the problem in his *Chronicle* columns. In one column, titled "What Is a University?" he juxtaposed the original mission statement of Duke University ("The aims of Duke University are to assert a faith in the eternal union of knowledge and religion ..."), with the current state of liberal education at Duke.²⁵ The comparison was not favorable.

With the collapse of Marxism and the degeneration of literary postmodernism, the radical left on campus has been in retreat and has very little resonance with mainstream Duke students.

Most programs of study currently taken by undergraduates at Duke, English complained, suffer from a "fractured incoherence" born of an undergraduate curriculum and advising system that leaves most students with an education "that appears to be assembled by a random number generator."²⁶ In another column, taking up the same theme, he said that Duke undergraduates are divided between (a) the "pre-professionals," such as pre-med students, who take a narrowly focused but at least thematically coherent course of studies; the (b) more fun-loving and freer "student consumers," who choose classes

"so as to satisfy minimum distribution requirements and maximize amusement and free time"; and (c) the much smaller group of "scholarly students," who really seek a liberal arts education at Duke, one that may not lead to "immediate benefits or job offers," but could "broaden one's understanding of the world," and even possibly "free the individual from the ignorance of youth and tyranny of popular thought."²⁷

The students in this last category, English told me, are often most disappointed by their education at Duke.²⁸ The pre-professionals, he said, have the easiest time getting what they want. They don't expect great intellectual challenges or a general education that will confront them with great ideas or personally transformative visions—and as a result they are not disappointed when they don't get any of these. Those seeking a real liberal arts education—one that will confront students with "the best that has been thought and said"—are most likely to be disappointed, since few students have the foresight or the guidance to put together a proper program from the enormous number of courses at their disposal that will satisfy their needs. Duke students, he wrote in one of his *Chronicle* columns, are subject to "a constant flux...of values, priorities, reasoning and aspirations...in which [they] continually adopt and divorce rival versions of student life and are formed, over time, into individuals incapable of viewing their lives as a unified whole."²⁹ Many students at Duke, he told me, wake up after their junior year with a sense that they have missed something fundamental in their university education and ask themselves, What have I learned? "It's hard for undergraduates who are not pre-professional to understand what their undergraduate education is for," he said. English expressed particular scorn for the system of student advising whose inadequacy, he believes, has a particularly harmful effect upon those who are not part of a well-structured pre-professional curriculum. Such students are set adrift into a bewildering universe of course offerings without proper mentoring or guidance.

English was also critical of the general intellectual climate on campus. Aside from a few programs like Gerst and Focus, the general intellectual atmosphere on the Duke campus, he told me, is "insipid and vacuous." He attributed this to subtle pressures of conformity and a general fear of raising eyebrows that inhibit students from speaking their minds on controversial topics. Even students on the left, he said, sometimes complain about this state of affairs despite the fact that the overwhelming bias among Duke administrators and professors is clearly left of center.

The situation, however, has probably improved, he says, from the way it was during the height of the Fish era in the 1990s. With the collapse of Marxism as a viable economic system and the degeneration of literary

postmodernism into what he calls “a parody of itself,” the radical left on campus has been in retreat and has very little resonance with mainstream Duke students. At a meeting of recent Duke alumni who had worked for one of the conservative publications on campus he got a chance to compare notes and discover how deradicalized the Duke campus had become compared to earlier times. “Duke has improved from the time I first came here [in the late 1990s],” he says; “the far left radicals have less and less of a foothold.” While there are still some departments in which there is “a heavy ideological slant” expressing far-left or far-out views of one kind or another—he mentioned specifically in this context Duke’s women’s studies department, comparative literature department, African American studies department, and English department—student interest in these perspectives has waned and faculty who represent them are much less influential than they once were. The problem today, he says, is “less of a case of the university pushing an ideological agenda than simply failing on a very basic level of being a place of genuine intellectual inquiry. Duke University has not learned to sustain a real intellectual community on campus.”

The great exception to this general failing, he believes, is the Gerst and Focus programs on campus. In these programs, he says, there is “real learning going on”—one that all participants recognize as such and usually deeply cherish. He participated in a Gerst-sponsored freshman Focus program and praised such programs for “building off natural freshman curiosity.” Programs like these “are taking some of the more motivated students and matching them up with professors and other students sharing their intellectual goals.” There is an emphasis in these programs, he explains, on classic texts and on trying to capture the “Big Picture,” and most of the students who have been through such programs, he says, look back as they approach graduation with the feeling that their freshman-year program was the most intellectually intense and rewarding of all the experiences they had at Duke. The Focus and Gerst programs, he says, were intellectually vibrant and alive, in a way that many social science courses are not (the majority of Duke social science and humanities professors, he says, “are not being biased [when they teach], they are just being boring”). For many Duke students, he explains, Gerst and Focus opened up an intellectual space “much broader than that in the typical classroom. It was a shock for a lot of us who came out of the first semester Focus program as soon as we moved beyond that environment to the larger university.”

There really are resources at Duke where a student who is so inclined can get a good liberal arts or general education, English told me, but much of the success of such an endeavor, he says, is contingent upon finding the right sorts of courses, faculty, and students with which to connect. “Undergraduate advising at Duke is terrible,”

he says, and one of the great advantages of programs like Gerst and Focus, he believes, is that they enable undergraduate students to get to know intimately faculty and other students who, in the absence of good formal advisers, can help in the selection of a course of study tailored to their individual needs. “The real value of the Gerst and Focus programs for me was in initiating this kind of serious academic engagement. We were introduced to a body of texts, a body of ideas, and a body of students that enabled us to take advantage of these resources that are at Duke but not so easy to access.”

“We were introduced to a body of texts, a body of ideas, and a body of students that enabled us to take advantage of these resources that are at Duke but not so easy to access.”

Of the faculty members whom I interviewed one of the most informative was the English professor Michael Moses.³⁰ Moses teaches a course within the Gerst-sponsored Visions of Freedom Focus cluster that explores the classical idea of freedom in British and American writers from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries. He has also been active in other Gerst-sponsored activities including its conferences and colloquia. Echoing a theme taken up by many others, he said that it is increasingly difficult at most modern research universities to get a truly integrated liberal arts education. Some of the smaller liberal arts colleges might be better places to go, he says, if one is seeking the traditional kind of grounding in Great Books or English literary classics “from Beowulf to Virginia Woolf.” In his view, “the research goals of the faculty have tended to erode the notion of a common curriculum. Departments don’t like to be told by administrators to teach things that fit into an overall plan outside departmental interests or imperatives.” Students seeking a good liberal arts education at places like Duke, he says, need to connect very early on with faculty members or other knowledgeable people whom they trust and who can provide them with good advice.

Since Moses is clearly in sympathy with much of the classical ideas on freedom held by eighteenth and nineteenth century British writers, I asked him why various kinds of leftist and socialist thinking are so dominant on university campuses like Duke. He acknowledged that “there is a pretty hard-core left that remains active at Duke,” particularly in the literature department (Duke’s designation for what at other universities is called comparative literature) and that the Duke faculty is overwhelmingly left-of-center in its political leanings (he cited the recent

student poll noted above showing only eight registered Republicans among Duke's higher level administrators and the faculty of several liberal arts departments). But he said that the extreme ideological skewing of the faculty and administration is due less to discrimination against people with classical liberal or conservative views than it is to subtle conformist pressures that may not even be fully conscious. The kind of extreme ideological one-sidedness that one sees at places like Duke, he told me, "doesn't require any kind of deliberate planning on the part of the faculty." Most faculty members, he says, "are already in agreement with each other so they don't have to say 'we want to exclude such and such people because they have the wrong political views'. Faculties tend to replicate themselves over time and an inertial process develops that reinforces political conformity."

One of the great benefits to Duke of the Gerst program, Moses believes, is that it has opened a wider intellectual space on campus where non-leftist views can receive a fair hearing. The Gerst program, he says, was from the start "very consciously tolerant of a wide spectrum of political opinion. It quite consciously did not seek to exclude conservative, or libertarian, or liberal-democratic viewpoints—which has not always been the case with other programs." Both the Visions of Freedom Focus cluster and the Power of Ideas cluster, he explains, have attempted to put classical liberal thinking on the map and expose students to an ideal of freedom that leftist professors often ignore or disparage. The Gerst program, he says, has also encouraged interdisciplinary thinking and the cooperation of faculty from different departments. Largely as a result of the Gerst and Focus programs he finds himself interacting more with faculty in other departments than those in his own department.

Focus "allows students to start off their careers very early with a well-grounded interdisciplinary focus on a topic that really interests them," said Peter Lange, Duke provost.

For students, Moses says, the great benefit of programs like Visions of Freedom and the Power of Ideas is the high level of course integration and the exciting intellectual atmosphere provided by a program that looks at a key set of issues so intensely. Many Duke students, he says, are extremely bright, highly motivated, and intellectually curious and benefit greatly from the intellectual challenge provided by Focus-type programs. Programs like the Visions of Freedom and the Power of Ideas, he

says, offer students a common set of texts and a much more highly integrated set of courses than they are likely to choose on their own from the smorgasbord of courses available to them in the course catalogue; they have more contact with faculty members than in standard university courses; and they are in continual conversation both in the classroom and in their residential dorms with fellow students who share common intellectual interests. "Students will say 'I never had an intellectual experience as intense or as satisfying as the first semester of my freshman year'."

Similar praise for the Focus program was offered by Duke's former president Nannerl Keohane and its present provost, Peter Lange.³¹ "The Focus program is one of our jewels," Lange told me, "and it is one of the places where we've been a leader. It allows students to start off their careers very early with a well-grounded interdisciplinary focus on a topic that really interests them." Keohane had similar words of praise. The intellectual experience provided by the Focus program is one "few people on any college campus have at any time," she told me. "Students often tell us that it doesn't really matter if you get your first choice of Focus programs. [Students value] the intellectual experience of having the close relationship with about six faculty members and a limited number of students who all live in the same dormitory and eat meals together, and once a week at least eat meals with the faculty members and take half their course load in this cluster and find therefore that the rest of their time at Duke they are more likely to feel that they can reach out to faculty members." Students who have gone through the Focus program, Keohane explained, have the great advantage of knowing "more about the kinds of things they want to pursue because five or six different ways of looking at the problem on an interesting issue have been suggested to them in class."

Both Keohane and Lange acknowledged, however, that despite the advantages of programs like Focus and Gerst, many had trouble getting a good liberal arts education at a large research university like Duke. Students, Keohane says, are often fascinated by the huge range of courses available to them and the wonderful opportunities offered by a large university like Duke. She sees the great range of courses offered to students at places like Duke "as an asset not a disadvantage." But it is a common complaint of students at all institutions that do not have a well-structured curriculum such as a Great Books program, she told me, that the curriculum offered to them lacks coherence. This complaint, she says, is not unique to Duke or to the present time—she heard similar complaints, she explains, when she was on the faculty of Stanford University in the 1970s. The problem can be avoided at

small liberal arts colleges where faculty and deans can get to know every student very well, but such places suffer, she says, from a lack of the great range of intellectual opportunities offered by larger institutions. “You have to be more of a self-starter on a large university campus,” she explains. “The key is good advising, but good advising is difficult to do well.” And she admits: “I don’t think any of us do it particularly well.”

Peter Lange had similar comments. “We have at Duke,” he told me, “a very vibrant intellectual atmosphere. We’re pushing the undergraduate experience hard, and we pride ourselves in having sustained a commitment to undergraduates and to undergraduate education even as we’ve become much better as a research institution.” Nevertheless, he admits, Duke isn’t for everyone. When I asked him whether he would recommend Duke to someone seeking a good liberal arts or general undergraduate education, he said that it all depended on the student involved. For some a small, more traditional liberal arts college, he said, would be more suited to their needs and learning style than a large university—he himself is a graduate of Oberlin and recognizes the advantages of an education at a smaller institution. “If a kid is interested in attending a research university then I would definitely recommend Duke,” he says. “But that doesn’t apply to all kids because it’s not the right setting for all kinds of students, all kinds of learners, and the kinds of experience they want.” Although he didn’t speak in the same language of “self-starters” as Nannerl Keohane, he too seems to believe that undergraduate students entering a large research university would do well to have a good idea of what they want out of their undergraduate experience or at least the ability to seek out and find knowledgeable faculty and administrators who can provide them with good advice. In the absence of these prerequisites, he believes, students might do better attending a small liberal arts college.

One of the most vibrant – and unusual – persons I interviewed about the Focus and Gerst programs was Elizabeth Kiss, the director of an ethics-related public policy institute on Duke’s East Campus known as the Kiernan Institute.³² Kiss (pronounced keese), whom I had known years earlier when she was an assistant professor in Princeton’s politics department, has been an active faculty participant in Duke’s Focus program for a number of years. She is unusual in that she has strong left-liberal political leanings, but has been highly critical of universities like Duke for their failure to embrace a wider range of perspectives than those on the political left. In an article appearing in a local campus publication shortly before our interview, she said that universities like Duke need to “confront our liberal bias” and recognize that there are alternative viewpoints out there that need to be discussed and taken seriously.

In our interview, Kiss explained that there is often an unconscious liberal bias at places like Duke where professors and others routinely make assumptions of the kind that “any intelligent person would think ‘x’ when the fact is that there are a lot of intelligent people who would think ‘not-x’ and we are not doing a good job if we are just letting that go.” There is, she said, a kind of “intellectual sloppiness” involved here that is not healthy for a university. It is important, she is quick to add, that people have moral, philosophical, and political convictions, even controversial ones. A university composed mainly of apolitical or non-committal people who have no convictions or who keep their convictions to themselves would not be an intellectually stimulating place to be. But it is important, she says, to have a variety of people with a variety of views who are outspoken in their convictions yet open and fair to alternative viewpoints. In this context she praised Michael Gillespie’s Gerst-sponsored Visions of Freedom program, which she said tended to attract many classical liberal thinkers, and Michael Munger’s Power of Ideas program, which attract free-market libertarians. Such programs, she told me, provide a much needed counterweight to all the “lefties” at Duke (she includes herself in this designation). Other Focus programs, such as Humanitarian Challenges at Home and Abroad, attract people from the left, she explained.

According to the director of Duke’s Kiernan Institute, a university composed mainly of apolitical or non-committal people who have no convictions would not be intellectually stimulating.

One of the great advantages of the Focus program, Kiss says, is that it provides entering freshmen with the opportunity to get to know professors better than they would from mere classroom exposure because of the weekly dinners and the field trips that are often included as part of the Focus seminars. Students develop a more trusting attitude toward the faculty and are less inclined, she told me, to see professors as “the other.” This provides them with a wonderful introduction to intellectual life at Duke and can have a positive effect on their future academic development. “Students in the Focus program are incredibly engaged,” she told me, and despite Focus’s reputation for being intellectually very demanding, student interest in the program has continued to grow to the point where there is serious talk of extending the program to sophomores who missed out by not taking the program during their first year at Duke.

Some Final Thoughts

Duke University has certainly not lived up to its founder's dream of combining the noblest features of a Christian liberal arts college with the scope and breadth of a large national university. In its ascent up the academic rankings to become one of the half-dozen most prestigious research universities in America—one with not only a national, but a world-wide, reputation—Duke has certainly accomplished much. But it has done so while succumbing to all the infirmities that seem inextricably bound up with the modern American “multi-versity,” which tries to be all things to all people. Loss of institutional cohesiveness, curriculum fragmentation, the proliferation of ever more narrowly focused disciplines and sub-disciplines, left-wing political correctness, undergraduate confusion and anomie—these and all the other problems found at our nation's large research universities are all to be found at Duke and they are not likely to disappear soon.

Such programs do not spring up spontaneously out of the ground like mushrooms, but require a sustained vision and the persistence and fortitude of educational entrepreneurs who can make the vision a reality.

Nevertheless, the combined effect of the Focus program, the Gerst program, the university's generally open-minded administrators, and Duke's ideologically diverse and intellectually vibrant political science department have really made a difference on the Duke campus. This is evident to anyone who has had a wide sampling of the campus scene at other large research universities. Many on the Duke campus would echo Michael Munger's statement that those “who have been nowhere else have no idea how precious, and how rare, the intellectual freedom of Duke is.” There are pockets of real learning going on at Duke, and while they are not pervasive enough to stamp the character of the entire university, they are real “jewels” (provost Lange's description of Focus) that provide immeasurable opportunities to the students who avail themselves of their benefits.

Many will want to know whether it is possible to duplicate the effects of programs like Focus and Gerst at other university campuses. The answer is a qualified “yes” with at least three conditions being necessary as a prerequisite.

First, there must be prominent faculty members like Michael Gillespie and Michael Munger who are willing to sponsor such programs and take the initiative in starting them. Such programs do not spring up spontaneously out of the ground like mushrooms, but require a sustained vision and the persistence and fortitude of educational entrepreneurs who can make the vision become a reality. The second requirement is for one or more high-level, strategically placed administrators who are congenial to the idea of such programs. These will be people who are willing to acknowledge that the fragmentation of the undergraduate curriculum and the extreme ideological one-sidedness that characterize so many of our larger research universities do not add up to a healthy situation and need to be corrected. Many political conservatives assume that finding such people is a near insurmountable hurdle, given the fact that college administrators usually share the same left-of-center views as college faculty. But conservatives often underestimate the capacity of administrators whose own political views may be left-of-center to acknowledge that intellectual fragmentation and political correctness are real problems and need to be addressed. As Michael Gillespie says, people are often bigger than their political ideologies, and this has certainly proven true on the Duke campus. It could no doubt be proven true on many other college campuses as well.

The final requirement is funding. Whether the money comes from concerned alumni and generous outside donors like Gary Gerst, or some in-house institutional source of funding, programs like Focus and Gerst require a good deal of money both to get started and to be sustained. If the money comes from an outside donor, it is probably a good idea for the donor to speak first with those who have had experience in these matters, as donor money has a tendency to be shifted around by university bureaucrats if it is not made clear from the outset exactly how and where it is to be spent. Gary Gerst was savvy enough from the beginning to recognize the potential perils of donor money and obtained guarantees from the start that his money would go to exactly the purposes for which he intended it.

What the Gerst and Focus programs show is that small programs can make a big difference on college campuses and that a few dedicated people, with the support of college administrators, can get such programs up and running. So long as curriculum fragmentation, left-wing political correctness, and the sense among many undergraduates that they are adrift and not being intellectually challenged remain central features of so many university campuses, there will be an urgent need for programs such as these.

ENDNOTES

¹ Quoted in William E. King, "Booker T. Washington's Visit to Trinity College." Duke University Archives. Online: http://www.lib.duke.edu/archives/history/washington_bt.htm. The material on Washington is taken from this article.

² See Wikipedia, "History of Duke University." Online: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Duke_University.

³ George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 322; Bill English, "What Is a University? Duke Has Failed to Achieve the Mission Laid Out by Its Founders," *Duke Chronicle*, August 26, 2002.

⁴ As early as the late 1940s, members of Duke's divinity school addressed Duke's whites-only admission policy using appeals to Christian values that would prefigure the later protests of the black-church-led civil rights movement. Long before other white universities in the South were willing to take the integrationist plunge, Duke's University Council in January 1956 called for the admission of blacks, although its recommendation didn't become a reality until 1961.

⁵ E.D. Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987).

⁶ Dinesh D'Souza, *Illiberal Education* (New York: Free Press, 1991), 161, 167.

⁷ Besides the chapter in D'Souza's book, see Scott Heller's article on Duke's English department in the Fish era. Scott Heller, "A Constellation of Recently Hired Professors Illuminates the English Department at Duke," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, May 27, 1987, 12-15.

⁸ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 342.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 365-6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 347.

¹³ D'Souza, 176.

¹⁴ Alan Sokal, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," *Social Text*, Spring/Summer 1996. The article is reprinted in full on Sokal's Web site, www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal. The final quotation is found on page 11 of the Web site version of the article.

¹⁵ Stanley Fish, "Professor Sokal's Bad Joke," *New York Times*, May 21, 1996, A23.

¹⁶ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Chapter II.

¹⁷ Most of the information in this paragraph and the three paragraphs that follow is taken from material supplied to me by the current director of Focus, Angela O'Rand, email communication November 30, 2006.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ All quotations from Gary Gerst are from a telephone interview with the author June 13, 2006.

²⁰ On the near monopoly of left-of-center viewpoints on contemporary university campuses see Daniel B. Klein and Andrew Western, "Voter Registration of Berkeley and Stanford Faculty,"

Academic Questions 18 no 1 (2004-5), and David Horowitz and Eli Leher, "Political Bias in the Administration and Faculties of 32 Elite Colleges and Universities," a report of the Center for the Study of Popular Culture, Los Angeles, August 28, 2003. Executive summary online: www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org/reports/lackdiversity.html.

²¹ Michael Gillespie, interview with the author, Duke University campus, March 22, 2006.

²² Michael Munger, interview with the author, Duke University campus, March 21, 2006.

²³ Michael Munger, "Pilgrim's Egress," *New Sense*, July 3, 2004. Online: http://mungowitzend.blogspot.com/2004_06_27_archive.html.

²⁴ Nannerl Keohane, interview with the author, Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University, April 14, 2006.

²⁵ Bill English, "What Is a University?" *Duke Chronicle*, August 26, 2002. Online: <http://www.dukechronicle.com/media/storage/paper884/news/2002/08/26/Editorial/What-Is.A.University-1435140.shtml>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Bill English, "Rival Versions of Student Life," *Duke Chronicle*, November 4, 2002. Online: <http://www.dukechronicle.com/media/storage/paper884/news/2002/11/04/Editorial/Column.Rival.Versions.Of.Student.Life-1460997.shtml?noreferrer=0612171554&sourcedomain=www.dukechronicle.com>.

²⁸ Quotations from Bill English are taken from an interview with the author on the Duke campus March 23, 2006.

²⁹ English, "Rival Versions of Student Life," *ibid.*

³⁰ Interview with Michael Moses, Duke University campus, March 22, 2006.

³¹ Interview with Peter Lange, Duke University campus, March 23, 2006.

³² Interview with Elizabeth Kiss, Duke University East Campus, March 21, 2006.

ABOUT THE POPE CENTER

The John William Pope Center for Higher Education Policy is a nonprofit institute dedicated to improving higher education in North Carolina and the nation. Located in Raleigh, North Carolina, it is named for the late John William Pope, who served on the Board of Trustees of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The center aims to increase the diversity of ideas taught, debated, and discussed on campus, and especially to include respect for the institutions that underlie economic prosperity and freedom of action and conscience. A key goal is increasing the quality of teaching, so that students will graduate with strong literacy, good knowledge of the nation's history and institutions, and the fundamentals of mathematics and science. We also want to increase students' commitment to learning and to encourage cost-effective administration and governance of higher education institutions.

To accomplish these goals, we inform parents, students, trustees, alumni, and administrators about actual learning on campus and how it can be improved. We inform taxpayers about the use and impact of their funds, and we seek ways to help students become acquainted with ideas that are dismissed or marginalized on campuses today.

More information about the Pope Center, as well as most of our studies and articles, can be found on our Web site at www.popecenter.org. Donations to the center are tax-deductible.

THE JOHN WILLIAM
POPE
CENTER
FOR HIGHER
EDUCATION POLICY

200 W. Morgan Street, Suite 110
Raleigh, NC 27601
Tel: 919-532-3600 | Fax: 919-532-0679
www.popecenter.org



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Russell K. Nieli is currently a lecturer in Princeton University's politics department. Author of an important study of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, he has written numerous articles on public policy topics and edited an anthology of writings on affirmative action. Nieli graduated summa cum laude from Duke, received his Ph.D. from Princeton in 1979, and taught at several colleges before returning to Princeton.