

MC 2.1 and Radicalism
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Hampshire proudly lays claim to the title “experimenting college,” and as such is in some sense always reinventing itself. Presidents Patterson and Longworth anticipated for our college then coming into being “successive approximations”: Hampshire College, they wrote in *The Making of a College*, “will embody, as well as speak for, change.”

Hampshire College was radical in so many ways when it took shape and opened: interdisciplinary schools in place of departments, individualized concentrations instead of set majors, evaluations in place of grades, a sequence of divisions with a variety of markers of completion rather than an accumulation of courses and credits. This was “radical” in multiple senses: taken together, these departures from the norms of mid-twentieth-century higher education were bold and significant, and the framers of Hampshire College intended them in turn to bring about further fundamental change, in students, in faculty, in higher education.

Even over our relatively young life — fifty years, if one counts all the way back to the fall of 1957, when faculty members from Amherst, Mount Holyoke, and Smith Colleges and the University sat down to devise “The New College Plan” — we have undergone many changes. There are multiple layers even to our founding, a story more fascinating the more one explores its details and seeks to comprehend them in their historical context. Not all that was planned came into being; some plans were revised in light of better second thoughts, others were modified or abandoned in the face of necessity. Necessity is the mother of invention, runs the proverb, and many improvisations were genial. Other solutions to this contingency or that proved, or may yet prove, less long lasting.

I applaud all those who, over the past few years, have participated in Re-Rad, be it a group or, as some prefer, a “movement,” for they are the latest in a long line of visionaries and experimenters. I have been variously energized, challenged, and enlightened by the discussions I’ve had with many who have been involved with Re-Rad, in a variety of contexts. As anyone who has read MC 2.1 can readily imagine, we share many goals in common. I, too, want to ensure that students succeed at independent work and continue to be the driving force in the Div IIs and Div IIIs they negotiate with faculty advisors. And though that document did not focus on the “how,” I did raise some questions about the efficacy of our current program. “Does each of the first two divisions,” I asked, “really prepare the student for the next?”

In conversation I’ve more than once shared my surprise on arrival that Hampshire had become so much more course-based than I had expected on the basis of its educational philosophy. Indeed, since then I have even ventured the opinion that it has become too course-based. Of all colleges, it seems to me, Hampshire ought to embrace the full range

of learning activities that could — advisors willing — be part of a student's portfolio. These still must be assessed and approved, and "interdisciplinary" should not be understood as a synonym for "no discipline" much less "undisciplined," but let us make sure we do not needlessly erect arbitrary organizational barriers to students' creativity, fertile imaginations, and energy.

In my most recent discussions with concerned students, faculty, and alumni I've come to appreciate why Re-Rad's focus on Division I is so intense, and no doubt comparable concerns have motivated the faculty to task EPC to revisit Div I. Div I not only helps students lay the foundation for their subsequent career at Hampshire in the obvious preparatory ways. More than a "stage" in a process, it fundamentally affects students' expectations both of faculty and of themselves. It may profoundly set the motivational metabolism, if you will, of many students. Seen in this light, it could hardly be more important, and it is certainly my hope that the faculty, who are entrusted with the responsibility of proposing to the Board any changes to the course of study, will bring all their experience, creativity, and dedication to the question.

It is not an easy one, and would not be even if resources were unlimited. Re-Rad's own proposal contains many interesting ideas, and in discussion I have found that many of its proponents readily acknowledge that one program will not fit all, indeed, that differentiation of approach and flexibility of options are called for given variation among our students, for whom we all wish success. I know that infinite flexibility becomes unmanageable, but I hope that there are ways we can work together to reduce the pressure of unrelated externalities on curricular decisions.

Even as we think carefully and deeply about students' first year at Hampshire — and we must, for it is formative — we need to think yet more broadly, as I emphasized in both MC 2.0 and MC 2.1, at once farther into the future and more deeply into our own roots. We need to think about both teaching and learning. A careful reading shows that both terms are woven deep into the fabric of Hampshire's history. *The Making of a College* speaks at length about "The Idea of The Teacher as Teacher," and all of us who fret endlessly about structure should remind ourselves of the wisdom of Patterson and Longworth, who write, "[t]he faculty at Hampshire...will be infinitely more important than the organized curriculum. In Hampshire's program," they continue,

with its emphasis on enabling the student to teach himself, a strong faculty role will be indispensable. If students are in effect to become scholars, in the sense of having the will and ability to pursue learning on their own, they cannot do so in an atmosphere where the adult models available to them are neuter. (70)

As Re-Rad's original manifesto notes, "radical" derives ultimately from *radix*, the Latin for "root." In MC 2.1, I maintain that we can most fully embody the "roots" of Hampshire not by looking back and revisiting any particular prior state but by analyzing those roots and then bringing that understanding to bear, in the context of our own times, on the future. Hampshire should again model new pedagogies, and the real challenge, for us all — and here I want to call on students as much as faculty — will be to think what those might be in 2007 and beyond, given all the learning resources we have today.

The abundance, even hypertrophy of information ready-to-hand — of varying quality, to be sure — provides students new opportunities "to teach themselves." It also provides opportunities for professors to do some rethinking about new forms teaching might take and their roles as teachers and advisors.

But even in this new and radically evolved world, there are fundamentals from the roots of Hampshire that seem worth recalling. President Longworth, in his report for 1971-1974, wrote, "Independence is learned and must be carefully nourished. The student simply cannot be assumed to have the capacity to become independent by virtue of his or her presence at Hampshire College." This insight at once speaks to the crucial value of Div I (and the role of the academic advisor, about which Longworth is speaking in particular) even as it (among myriad other citations) belies the myth that students are expected to arrive and simply proceed on their own. As I wrote in MC 2.0, "The discussions now ongoing about Division I address a number of issues of what one might call 'balance' between a firm commitment to student-centered pedagogy and a realization that its *reductio ad absurdum* would be a universe of independent self-learners."

Balance requires constant adjusting. I am confident that together and by means of ongoing dialogue we can make adjustments that will make it possible for Hampshire College to fulfill its promise for more of our students in more ways, but at the same time we should understand that, as Patterson and Longworth saw, there is no ultimate form to be attained, after which change would stop. Hampshire is an ongoing project, not a utopia. By design it reinvents itself on an ongoing basis. It is without end in the best sense of the term. I believe that its most radical forms lie in its future and that we cannot yet fully discern its lineaments. To "embody change," we must proceed by "successive approximations."

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