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This dissertation, SEVENTY YEARS OF CHANGING GREAT BOOKS AT ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, by WILLIAM SCOTT RULE, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education, Georgia State University.

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ABSTRACT

SEVENTY YEARS OF CHANGING GREAT BOOKS AT ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE
by
William Scott Rule

This dissertation examines a curricular approach at an institution that claims to maintain a liberal arts focus – that of the canon of Great Books as implemented as a formal curriculum at St. John's College. My research question is: what enabled the Great Books program at St. John's College to survive for over seventy years? The significance of this question can be seen by noticing that St. John's College is the only college in the United States to have exclusively adopted reading the Great Books as its four-year curriculum. Other institutions that have experimented with a Great Books program prior to and since its introduction at St. John's College have continued their existing programs as well, but many have limited their Great Books efforts to an honors course or general core requirement, if their Great Books effort survives at all. My dissertation is historical starting with the influencing factors leading to this curriculum's introduction at St. John's College in 1937. I then outline the implementation and document the changes to the list of Great Books comprising the program as it was updated over the subsequent seventy years as documented in St. John's College's academic catalogs from 1937 through 2008. I show that the list of Great Books required to be read by every student over the years has contained a consistent core while making slight adjustments.

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by

William Scott Rule

A Dissertation

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the twentieth century, education, especially higher education, has become more specialized. Veysey points out the professionalization of the professoriate and the corresponding departmentalization of knowledge beginning in the late 1800s.[1] While there is no definitive answer to why this move toward specialization has occurred, the advancement of science, the scientific method, and technology are commonly thought to be the motivating forces. Indeed, as the twentieth century has seen more rapid advances in technology, the specialization of higher education has tried to keep pace. There have been many educators who have mourned over the loss of the unity of knowledge, as expressed in the previous century by Cardinal John Henry Newman,[2] and they have pursued various strategies to return to a mythical golden age of liberal education. Alfred North Whitehead strongly states that "a man [sic] who only knows his own science, as a routine peculiar to that science, does not even know that. He has no fertility of thought, no power of quickly seizing the bearing of alien ideas. He will discover nothing, and be stupid in practical applications."[3]

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[1] Laurence Veysey, *The Emergence of the American University* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 142.

[2] Cardinal John Henry Newman, *The Idea of the University* (London: Longman, Green, 1899; reprint, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1996), 127.

[3] Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays* (New York: The Free Press, 1929), 52.

Yet, the idea of a liberal, non-specialized education persists. Indeed, there are numerous programs throughout the nation that attempt to provide just such an education. I do not wish to argue the strengths or weaknesses of these various programs nor even articulate them. I will, instead, focus on one such program – that of the canon of Great Books as implemented as a formal curriculum at St. John's College. My research question is: what enabled the Great Books program at St. John's College to survive for over seventy years? What is significant about this question can be seen in light of the fact that St. John's College is the only college in the United States to have adopted reading the Great Books as its four-year curriculum. Other institutions that have experimented with a Great Books program prior to and since its introduction at St. John's College have continued their existing programs as well. Many have limited their Great Books efforts to an honors course or general core requirement. My dissertation is historical starting with the influencing factors leading to this curriculum's introduction at St. John's College in 1937. I outline the implementation and document the changes to the list of Great Books comprising the program as it was updated over the subsequent seventy years. St. John's College, while not the first to attempt the adoption of a canon as its curriculum, is the longest-running and continues today. I found that the list of Great Books required to be read by every student contains a consistent core while making slight adjustments over the years to arguably prevent the list from stagnating or keeping works that no longer contribute to a liberal education.

As I will expound upon below, unlike the common belief that a Great Books canon is unchanging due to its claim to being a core of knowledge that everyone should know, the thinkers behind the St. John's College program have always advocated adding

and dropping works as they are found to be of value[4] or not to contemporary issues. The St. John's College canon has, indeed, changed. Yet, advances in science and technology were not the only instigators I found for change to the list of Great Books. Although science did contribute its share to change, such as the introduction of Einstein's work in 1957, I found just as many if not more changes due to social issues. Virginia Woolf became part of the curriculum in 1993 and W.E.B. Dubois and Booker T. Washington were added in 1998. To someone unfamiliar with the actual execution of the program at St. John's College, these late entries may indicate the college's delayed interest in race and gender issues. However, although it took some time to identify and adopt non-white, non-male authors, race, gender, and other issues as discussed by Eric Margolis as editor of *The Hidden Curriculum in Higher Education*,[5] were included in the seminars and discussions for years. Indeed, one could argue that one of the most provocative ways to discuss race and gender issues is to read works that ignored these issues in a diverse setting – for example, it would be difficult to read Rousseau without questioning his differing recommendations between educating boys versus girls.

Perhaps the least effort has been made to address the Eurocentric bias of the program. With the growing awareness of cultures outside of our limited Western views, it has become unacceptable to allow the statement put forth by Robert Maynard Hutchins in volume one of the Encyclopedia Britannica's *Great Books of the Western World* that "at the moment we have all we can do to understand ourselves in order to be prepared for

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[4] Value is difficult to define at this point, but should become apparent as the philosophy behind the Great Books program is discussed later in the dissertation.

[5] Eric Margolis. ed., *The Hidden Curriculum in Higher Education* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

the forthcoming meetings between East and West."[6] Although St. John's College has established an Eastern Classics Program in its Graduate Institute, I found no evidence of including non-Western authors in the undergraduate Great Books Program. However, like race and gender, topics were discussed as they apply to other works being read and their applicability to today's society in a wider world.

It would have been fascinating to read the records of any faculty debates on these topics as the required reading list was updated over the years. However, I was unable to find or gain access to records that may have shed light on the issues influencing the choice of works identified in the required Great Books reading list of the St. John's College curriculum. While records were reportedly kept of various committee and faculty meetings, they are not kept in the St. John's College library archive; they are kept in the office of the dean. Therefore, during my first week-long visit to the archives (which is when I found that the faculty meeting minutes were not there), I perused the records that were available in the archive along with a special collection in the library of the history of the college. While unable to access what I had originally hoped for, I found an extensive trail of evidence leading back to the turn of the twentieth century that showed the development of the program nearly three decades before it appeared in the catalog as the New Program at St. John's College in 1937.

Before making my second visit to the archives, I attempted to contact Dean Michael Dink but was unable to make arrangements to access the records kept by the Office of the Dean. While access to faculty meeting minutes would have provided an interesting path for my research, I found a wealth of information in the St. John's College

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[6] Robert Maynard Hutchins, ed., *Great Books of the Western World*. Vol. 1, *The Great Conversation: The Substance of a Liberal Education*, by Robert Maynard Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 73.

library and archive to address the research question I ultimately adopted. In addition to the special collection on the history of St. John's College, I found correspondence of the president and dean of the college in 1937 discussing the issues around the Great Books program. Furthermore, a review of the college catalogs from 1933-2008 provided enough details to analyze changes to the Great Books required reading lists over time. I was then able to focus my efforts upon changes to the curriculum based on this review. Thus, I decided to focus my research on the factors that enabled the program to exist and remain a strong curriculum for over seventy years.

Higher Education Curriculum in the United States

In order to appreciate the significance of the success of such a program at St. John's College and its surviving into the twenty-first century, a brief look at the history of the curriculum for higher education in the United States will be helpful. Laurence Veysey, in *The Emergence of the American University*, described four major conceptions of higher education from colonial times through the twentieth century. From the origins of the colonial colleges to the colleges and universities of the twentieth century, those four concepts shifted from discipline and piety to utility to research, and finally, to liberal culture. As an example of discipline and piety, Frederick Rudolph notes that at Harvard College in 1652, the curriculum consisted of a review of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew along with rhetoric, natural philosophy, and mathematics. A small amount of geography, history and botany were also covered along with four years of divinity.[7] At Harvard and most colonial colleges as they were established, the primary textbook was the Bible[8] but

[7] Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1977), 31.

[8] Veysey, 31.

also included readings of Roman and Greek classical works. This curriculum advocated discipline of the mind by students' grappling with the various texts in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. Indeed, many required exercises were simply to translate a work from Greek to Latin or from Hebrew to Greek.

While the colonial college included additional subjects such as botany and geography, it substantially followed in the footsteps of the medieval university with its classical curriculum, including its favored method of measuring students' progress through recitation. But the classical medieval curriculum did not last. "By 1776, six of the eight colonial colleges had professorships of mathematics and natural philosophy; by 1788, the remaining two had found the funds necessary to establish similar chairs."[9] Also around the end of the eighteenth century, the course on divinity, viewed as too narrowly applicable to the dwindling number of students actually seeking entry into the ministry, was being replaced by a course on moral philosophy.

> As taught, usually by the president to seniors, the course moved easily into a consideration of current events and questions of pressing practical concern to young men; it brought a mix – but a systematic mix – of ethics, science, and religion to bear on a very large question: How should man behave?[10]

Thus, the shift from discipline and piety to utility had begun.

"There was a certain clarity of purpose in the eighteenth century – the training of a governing class – that could not so easily be adhered to in the nineteenth century."[11] A growing number of self-made millionaires made a college education seem unnecessary.

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[9] Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 35-36.

[10] Ibid., 40.

[11] Ibid., 58.

Yet, as the nation grew, the tools that were developed and used relied on advances in science and technology. By the mid 1800s, a number of those self-made millionaires were

> creating centers and monuments of applied science, temples of materialism and utilitarianism, schools that rested on the assumption that they were training young men in the tools that would make them rich – and, also, too often, disdainful of the humanizing, liberal, intellectual purposes that were associated with the old colleges and the old learning.[12]

Indeed, even the federal government, with the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862, contributed to the shift to utility with its requirement of establishing programs in agriculture and mechanic arts if colleges were to be beneficiaries of the seventeen million acres of federal land.

Yet, perhaps the shift to utility was not surprising. Veysey pointed out that the colonial colleges, in the era of discipline and piety, were also utilitarian – or in Veysey's term, careerist,[13] as they were providing preparation for the ministry. Yet, the new emphasis on science and technology, agriculture and mechanics broadened the field of career preparation available in the colleges. Indeed, colleges experienced a rapid growth in the number of different subjects introduced and taught which led to other significant changes.

One of these was the method of instruction; the lecture followed by a final examination took the place of recitation. With so many courses and an increasing number of students (toward the late 1800s), the recitation was no longer tenable. While there was little controversy about this change, another change brought about by the

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[12] Ibid., 106.

[13] Veysey, 39.

increased number of courses was widely debated – the requirement of Greek and Latin for entry into and as required coursework in the college. The materialistic and utility-focused argued that a farmer cannot milk a cow with Greek and Latin.[14] However, advocates of retaining study in the dead languages did not argue whether a farmer may benefit directly in his trade, but "whether modern man could know himself without knowing the languages in which the history of his own culture was imbedded."[15] Ultimately, the number of courses vying for position in the college, the pressure of legislatures to find measurable value in public institutions, and the growing student population of a more egalitarian nature all worked against the continuation of the ancient languages except in some smaller liberal arts colleges.[16]

Perhaps the most significant change triggered by the increasing number of subjects available in the colleges was the creation of departments. The introduction of departments marked the transformation of the college into the university. No longer was there a prescribed sequence of courses for every student. A university offered a selection of specializations amongst which students could choose an area of study. Indeed, when Cornell University opened in 1868, its namesake, Ezra Cornell, had claimed that he wanted the university to provide instruction in any subject to any student.[17] But, even after selecting an area of study (to be called majors in the twentieth century), there was still a challenge of identifying what combination of courses should result in the awarding of a degree. This was such a difficult task that one way to deal with the problem was to

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[14] Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 183.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., 187.

[17] Veysey, 82.

ignore it, make no decision, which provided the concept of electives entry to higher education.[18]

Not only did some colleges allow electives to fill in hours to complete four years of study around a number of related courses in a given major, the elective system was also implemented as a replacement for having any prescribed sequence of courses at all. At Harvard University from 1869 to 1909, President Charles W. Eliot implemented just such a system where he felt students should be treated as free individuals who could choose the courses for which he was best suited.[19] Critics pointed out that students tended to select easy courses and graduate without having learned anything to any advantage.[20] Although this extreme version of the elective system had its faults, "electives were unavoidable except in colleges with suicidal tendencies"[21] due to the demand by students to have more than a limited number of choices. More and more departments were created, each with a growing number of courses in more specialized areas.

This departmentalization and specialization led to advanced studies, including graduate level work. In 1876, the first institution dedicated to advanced study and research, The Johns Hopkins University, opened its doors; the concept of research as a function of higher education had taken form. While research led to many discoveries in various areas, with its focus on minute details of an issue, process, or experiment, research restricted social interaction. Communication among professors became so

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[18] Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 194.

[19] Veysey, 93.

[20] Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 227.

[21] Ibid., 195.

particular and esoteric that even colleagues in the same department were less likely to fully understand the finer nuances of what was being said.[22] Consequently, if the professors were no longer communicating with each other, it is not surprising that a common, unified, coherent program of study became less likely. And this was not limited to a research-only institution; indeed, The Johns Hopkins University was unusual and even struggled with its dedication to research only. Research became a function of more and more universities and was most successful when the undergraduate programs, with their large, efficient, lecture-based instruction, could financially support it.[23]

All of these developments up to the turn of the twentieth century – specialization, departmentalization, electives, and research, led some educators to lament the loss of the unity of knowledge. Higher education had become too utilitarian; the curriculum had become inhumane.[24] Thus,

> remedies for curricular disorders defined the career of the course of study in the twentieth century. Dismay, nostalgia, even success – a whole bundle of sensations and experiences – led deeply concerned people to begin once more to see if any order, any coherence, any integrity could again be associated with the undergraduate curriculum.[25]

Veysey classified this effort as the fourth concept of higher education – liberal culture. He explained that advocates for liberal culture may also "speak of 'culture' without an adjective, or of 'general culture,' or of 'liberal education.'"[26] While liberal education has

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[22] Veysey, 152.

[23] Ibid., 171.

[24] By inhumane, I do not refer to cruelty, but to the lack of study and investigation into the human experience and the individual's role in society as my discussion on liberal education, below, will clarify.

[25] Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 220.

[26] Veysey, 180, footnote 1.

been defined inadequately and in multiple, sometimes contradictory, ways throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, I feel obligated to provide at least a working definition as St. John's College followed the path of liberal education in reaction to the elective system and specialization.

Liberal Education

According to the Yale Report of 1828,

> a liberal education, it is believed, has been generally understood, as such a course of discipline in the arts and sciences, as is best calculated, at the same time, both to strengthen and enlarge the faculties of the mind, and to familiarize it with the leading principles of the great objects of human investigation and knowledge.[27]

The foundation of such a liberal education is frequently based on the seven liberal arts of the *trivium* and the *quadrivium* that have been around since the Middle Ages. The *trivium* consists of study in grammar, rhetoric, and logic while the *quadrivium* includes arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. Ancient works in Greek and Latin have been defended by educators such as the faculty at Yale College in 1828 as the basis of a wide-ranging curriculum revolving around these seven liberal arts.[28] Indeed, according to the report,

> the range of classical study extends from the elements of language, to the most difficult questions arising from literary research and criticism. Every faculty of the mind is employed, not only the

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[27] *Report on the Course of Instruction in Yale College by a Committee of the Corporation, and the Academic Faculty* (New Haven, Connecticut: Hezekiah Rowe, 1828), 30. Facsimile of the original downloaded from http://www.higher-ed.org/resources/Yale/1828_curriculum.pdf on 29 April 2008).

[28] The Yale faculty, Hutchins, Whitehead, and others, admit that "no course of study can claim any position of ideal completeness" (Whitehead, 46). However, great works, due to the fluid nature of establishing a list of such works, may provide an avenue for study in practically any field. Indeed, due to the quantity of works that may be considered for inclusion on a Great Books list, it has been impractical to include all of them – especially for inclusion in such a short timeframe as a four-year college curriculum. Therefore, some works come and go as the relative importance of their inclusion varies over time.

> memory, judgment, and reasoning powers, but the taste and fancy are occupied and improved.[29]

Furthermore, the Yale Report argued for the continued study of Latin and Greek in order to exercise the mind. Along these same lines, Whitehead claimed, "in classics we endeavour by a thorough study of language to develop the mind in the regions of logic, philosophy, history and of aesthetic apprehension of literary beauty."[30] Thus, the Yale Report, Newman, Whitehead, and others argued that a study of Latin and Greek works will include not only the subject matter necessary for a person's education, but the discipline of the mind along with the appreciation for the aesthetics of the language.

Alexander Meiklejohn, in his inaugural address as president of Amherst College in 1912, pointed out that

> the old classical curriculum was founded by men who had a theory of the world and of human life. They had taken all the available content of human knowledge and had wrought it together into a coherent whole. What they knew was, as judged by our standards, very little in amount. But upon that little content they had expended all the infinite pains of understanding and interpretation.[31]

Meiklejohn went on to expose the difficulties that scientific investigation and discovery presented to this unity of knowledge. Even crediting the likes of Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibnitz, Benedict de Spinoza, Immanuel Kant, and Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel with reunifying knowledge during their era, Meiklejohn gave his address in a time of further scientific investigation and discovery and separation of knowledge. Indeed, during the

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[29] Yale Report, 36.

[30] Whitehead, 63.

[31] Alexander Meiklejohn, "Inaugural Address" in *Essays for College Men*, eds. Norman Forester, Frederick A. Manchester, and Karl Young (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1913), 49.

century since his inaugural address and the century before that, the seven liberal arts, based on ancient texts in Greek and Latin and now referred to as the classical curriculum, have been extended, due to our increasing knowledge base, to include more and more material deemed essential. Furthermore, as already stated, disciplining the mind, via requiring reading and translating Greek and Latin, lost favor by the late nineteenth century. As a result, the fully prescribed curriculum, appropriate for everyone, has practically disappeared, and attempting to identify a common set of courses appropriate for everyone to study has become difficult. Indeed, Whitehead argued that "it is hopeless to approach the problem by the way of the enumeration of subjects which every one ought to have mastered. There are too many of them, all with excellent title-deeds."[32]

Nevertheless, the twentieth century witnessed numerous attempts to counter the specialization of higher education – especially reacting to the overuse of the elective system. The goal was to ensure that students were not too narrowly focused on a single or limited number of subjects nor too broadly exposed to an array of electives with no depth of study in any area and no understanding of the interrelatedness of the various subjects. Higher education had shifted away from liberal education which, some would argue, is necessary for citizens "for self-governance in a free democratic society."[33] Instead of in-depth study in one area, a liberal education consists of

> (1) broad study in the arts and sciences, (2) strong intellectual skills, (3) keen attention to major questions in science and society, and (4) a constant emphasis on personal and transformational possibilities.[34]

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[32] Whitehead, 30.

[33] Carol Geary Schneider, "Liberal Education Takes a New Turn," in *The NEA 2008 Almanac of Higher Education* (Washington, DC, 2008), 30.

[34] Ibid.

Of course, each college or university reacted to the criticism of overspecialization in its own way. One reaction, typically found at smaller colleges, was to embrace a curriculum of liberal culture which was "to protect such values as leisure, contemplation, self-discipline, wisdom, and character from the overwhelming materialism of the age."[35] Indeed, St. John's College made perhaps the most successful reversion back to a curriculum reminiscent of an early American or classical curriculum as I will discuss below. Of course, the institution made significant changes in how it was implemented, but more on that later.

A more widespread approach was to implement a requirement for all students to take a broader set of courses as a general education component of their program of study while maintaining specialization. Some colleges specifically identified the exact courses required; others adopted a method referred to as concentration and distribution. Concentration and distribution required "a student to select one major, perhaps a minor, and to distribute some of his courses among… prescribed groups of courses."[36] Yet,

> even distribution through groups presented curriculum planners with formidable problems. No consensus existed on how to divide subjects among groups or how to define groups. Some faculties regarded history and philosophy as social sciences; others grouped them with humanistic studies.[37]

Some colleges loosely accepted any combination of courses outside a student's concentration while others established limited choices within specified groups.

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[35] Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 239.

[36] Ibid., 229.

[37] Ibid., 254.

As liberal education's "curricular offspring,"[38] general education is now more often just a component of the curriculum. It

> is the breadth component of the undergraduate curriculum and is usually defined on an institutionwide or collegewide basis. It generally involves study in several subject areas and frequently aims to provide a common undergraduate experience for all students at a particular institution.[39]

Neither liberal education nor general education advances a notion that graduates will have any immediately marketable skills; rather, the focus is on "a philosophy of education that empowers individuals, liberates the mind, cultivates intellectual judgment, and fosters ethical and social responsibility."[40] For the purposes of this paper, I have identified that the greatest distinction between the two is how each is usually executed within higher education. While general education now most frequently refers to the common component within a larger curriculum, liberal education usually refers to an entire program of study with no major or concentration.

Attempts at Liberal Education in the Twentieth Century

In *The Battleground of the Curriculum*, W. B. Carnochan pointed out that higher education in the United States has gone in many different directions. He reviewed Harvard University's once free elective system, the development of Cornell as an institution where any study may be pursued, and the struggle of Stanford University to establish a core curriculum with ever-changing goals. As the Harvard University, Cornell University, and Stanford University plans proceeded, specialization grew and a common

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[38] Schneider, 31.

[39] Arthur Levine, *Handbook On Undergraduate Curriculum* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1978), 3.

[40] Schneider, 30.

base of knowledge became less common. Soon, this effect was noticed and there arose an outcry for returning to a general education.

One argument was that scholars were no longer able to communicate with each other. Indeed, the increase in specialization resulted in difficult communication even within a single department; areas of study were becoming sub-specialized and more esoteric.[41] Thus, students in higher education were being inducted into those specialized fields and no longer able to converse with others outside their department – the department became an end in itself.[42]

The reaction was occasionally abrupt, such as the succession of Eliot at Harvard University by Abbott Lawrence Lowell. "The movement which placed Lowell in power represented an effort to capture the institution for the cause of liberal education… and away from the dubious utilitarian orbit."[43] Together with "dean and professor of English, LeBaron R. Briggs,"[44] Lowell, previously a professor of political science at Harvard during Eliot's presidency, "dominated a distinguished committee which investigated academic standards at Harvard and found them sorely wanting."[45] And this was not the first time Lowell had spoken out against Eliot's elective system; that would have been as early as 1887 as a Harvard alumnus.[46] "The election of Abbott Lawrence Lowell as

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[41] Veysey, 320.

[42] Ibid. The expression "the department became an end in itself" indicates that specialized study moved into the realm of not trying to relate to any other field. Some departments became an island unto themselves and, ironically, pursued knowledge for its own sake as John Henry Newman desired as the ultimate aim of education.

[43] Veysey, 248.

[44] Ibid., 249.

[45] Ibid., 251.

[46] Ibid.

Eliot's successor in 1909 signified that, after forty years, a basic change in Harvard's educational allegiances had occurred."[47] Immediately upon taking office, Lowell introduced "a system of concentration or majors and general education distribution requirements."[48] Electives were still offered in numerous studies, but no longer could students graduate with any combination of courses they chose.

Shortly after, in 1920, Alexander Meiklejohn published his argument in *The Liberal College* against the elective system and attempted to point out its weaknesses. One of his claims was that electives placed courses of varying degrees and kinds on par with one another.[49] While Eliot's ideal at Harvard was to enable students to decide, for themselves, on the correct combination of courses that would prepare them in fields they were naturally inclined toward,[50] Meiklejohn and others claimed that, in reality, students were more apt to choose a series of easy courses simply to graduate and thus not attain a well-rounded education. Additionally, this free selection also made it possible for students not to focus on any given area of study thereby not even gaining a specialized education (which was not as desirable as a liberal education, but better than none at all).[51]

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[47] Ibid., 248.

[48] Arthur Levine and Jana Nidiffer, "Key Turning Points in the Evolving Curriculum" in *Handbook of the Undergraduate Curriculum: A Comprehensive Guide to Purposes, Structures, Practices, and Change*. ed. Jerry G. Gaff and James L. Ratcliff (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997), 74.

[49] Alexander Meiklejohn, *The Liberal College* (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1920. Reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1969), 41.

[50] Charles William Eliot, *University Administration* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1908), 134.

[51] Yale Report, 18. The Report acknowledges that those without "time and pecuniary resources, must be content with a partial course." This "partial course," in addition to being an aborted program of study in the liberal arts, also included the study of specific material with views of application instead of contemplation.

An alternative at the time, which has become a common strategy today, was to allow students to choose from among a limited group of courses within a specialization. Regardless of which implementation was chosen, specialized departments had largely removed study of society or of how various arts and sciences interacted with one another. Furthermore, and this was Meiklejohn's greatest fear – students were no longer being taught how to become citizens in the United States. While not being able to do much about that at Amherst, Meiklejohn would get another chance to attempt to rectify this situation.

From the presidency at Amherst College, Meiklejohn moved to the University of Wisconsin where he was allowed to create a liberal arts college to his specifications. It was called "The Experimental College" and was an attempt to provide a liberal education as he saw it. And what it ended up doing was just what Meiklejohn had defined a liberal college to do – prepare students to become citizens. While Meiklejohn advocated reading broadly, his program focused on a limited analysis of civilization. The Experimental College consisted of the first two years of higher education; the first of these focused on Western culture as it existed in the Athens of Pericles. The second year focused on Western culture as it developed in the United States. The idea was to stimulate the students' minds to think about eternal questions.[52] However, as Meiklejohn's candid report shares, the students were not quite able to grasp the concept and the job was made

[52] Alexander Meiklejohn, *The Experimental College* (New York: Harper, 1932; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1971) (page citations are to the reprint edition). Like all Great Books efforts described in this dissertation, the focus on Western culture was even more limited in being white, male Western culture.

even more difficult because the advisors[53] were struggling with the idea themselves.[54] Furthermore, the two years, although including numerous readings of various topics, tended to concentrate on Plato's *Republic* during the freshman year and the sophomore year focused on *The Education of Henry Adams*. This was a far cry from a liberal education that is supposed to increase breadth of knowledge – a limited canon of Great Books, indeed.

Contemporary with Meiklejohn, John Erskine at Columbia University was implementing a General Honors course. This course was a two-year program limited to advanced students who would read a list of approximately fifty Great Books. As a literature and poetry professor, Erskine's primary interest was to teach students how to read for enjoyment and understanding. As I will detail below, the General Honors course led to Columbia University's general core requirement. It was also the origins for the St. John's College Great Books program.

Also following the influence of the General Honors course at Columbia University, there was activity at the University of Chicago under the direction of Mortimer J. Adler and with the voice and leadership of Robert Maynard Hutchins. Adler had convinced Hutchins about the need to focus on liberal education and proposed a curriculum consisting of "Great Books of the Western World." Hutchins attempted to institute this idea at the University of Chicago but met with resistance from the faculty.[55]

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[53] The term advisor here represents the faculty members of the program in the Experimental College. The concept was that the faculty members would not "teach" the material but help the student come to an understanding through independent inquiry with the assistance of helping to formulate questions, not answers – advising.

[54] Meiklejohn, *The Experimental College*.

[55] Mary Ann Dzuback, *Robert M. Hutchins: Portrait of an Educator* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991).

In *The Higher Learning in America*, Hutchins outlined the problems with higher education which included the difficulty of mass education, specialization due to advances in technology and career requirements, and the general commercialization of higher education – Hutchins attributed these changes to "the love of money," what Veysey terms utility.[56]

However, although Adler's idea failed under Hutchins at the University of Chicago, at least two other faculty members were influenced by Adler and were able to pursue the idea of a liberal education based on the Great Books elsewhere. Stringfellow Barr and Scott Buchanan were invited to the University of Chicago in 1936 specifically to participate on the Committee of the Liberal Arts which was recently formed to discuss general education and its role to replace electives and specialization in the first two years of college. I will discuss the progression of Barr and Buchanan later in this dissertation, but their involvement with the Committee on the Liberal Arts at Chicago positioned them to be able to join forces at St. John's College in 1937 – Barr as president and Buchanan as dean of instruction.[57] At St. John's, Barr and Buchanan attempted to provide a liberal education consisting exclusively of reading and discussing the Great Books at what was a struggling liberal arts college in Maryland. There were two initial factors which made that effort more successful than any prior: the college had been struggling financially ever since its initial charter of 1789 and, many times through its life when a new

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[56] Robert Maynard Hutchins, *The Higher Learning in America* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1936; reprint, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 1995), 10.

[57] J. Winfree Smith, *A Search for the Liberal College: The Beginning of the St. John's Program* (Annapolis, Maryland: St. John's College Press, 1983), 9.

president was chosen, the St. John's curriculum became a creation of the new president.[58] Thus, the trustees were willing to try anything to gain students, and thereby, additional funds, and the existing faculty members were not overly committed to their existing programs of study. I will elaborate on the St. John's College program below.

Adler, decades after influencing the start of the St. John's College Great Books program, claimed in *The Paidea Proposal*[59] that it is impossible to attain a complete education in youth. He stated that education continues throughout life.[60] One attempt at a solution to this dilemma was the Paidea group's targeting youths of pre-college age. In 1984, Adler insisted that it is of utmost importance to start youth along the path of critical thinking to gain "understanding and insight" about society by pursuing the Paidea group's three-component curriculum.[61] The first of these components begins with "Acquisition of Organized Knowledge" where elementary facts are transferred to the student via lecture and didactic instruction. The second component is that of "Development of Intellectual Skills" where the students are able to practice some of the concepts which were related to them and work on experiments to see for themselves. The instructors would simply act as coaches – similar to the advisor role at Meiklejohn's Experimental College. Finally, the third component consists of reading Great Books to have the student inquire into the relationship among all the arts and sciences and to

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[58] Tench Francis Tilghman, *The Early History of St. John's College in Annapolis* (Annapolis, Maryland: St. John's College Press, 1984), 32-68.

[59] The paidea program is a proposal for elementary and secondary schools, not for higher education, but this fact stresses my upcoming point.

[60] Mortimuer Adler, *The Paidea Proposal: An Educational Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1982), 9.

[61] Mortimer Adler, *The Paidea Program, An Educational Syllabus: Essays by the Paidea Group* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. 1984), 8.

identify and ponder the eternal questions of civilization. Yet, Adler admited that while it would be of tremendous benefit, it is difficult to interest students in such a general education instead of pursuing a curriculum that would result in knowledge and skills perceived to lead to a career, increased status, and material success. This is a similar view as expressed by Hutchins in *The Higher Learning in America* regarding the focus on making money.[62] So, student interest is a problem.

Compiling the Canon

Due to the nature of expanding knowledge in a world of science and advancing technology, any proposal for a common education for all based on a core curriculum will be difficult, a compromise based on agreeing to specialize in a subset of what may be identified as core knowledge.[63] The Paidea group, just as the Experimental College sixty years earlier in an higher education environment, had to settle for just such a compromise with its focus during the compulsory school years on citizenship in the United States. While this focus can arguably be presented as core knowledge necessary for individuals to understand and execute their role in society, it is in no way the only information that would be essential to succeed in this democratic and capitalistic system. It is even more unreasonable to expect this focus to be appropriate globally.

Yet, in order to survive, a liberal education must take some form, even if imperfect. As reviewed above and discussed in greater detail below, attempts by Meiklejohn, Erskine, Hutchins, and Adler have met with various levels of success. The Great Books program at St. John's College, however, was implemented in 1937 and

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[62] Hutchins, *Higher Learning*, 31.

[63] Thomas F. Green, "Liberalism and Liberal Learning – Within Limits," in *Philosophy for Education*, ed. Seymour Fox (Jeruselem: The Van Leer Jerusalem Foundation, 1983), 44.

remains largely unchanged today. The focal point of St. John's curriculum, of course, is its list of Great Books. And, as one would expect, identifying which books are considered great is quite a challenge. Who is to define great? Who would have read all books ever written to be able to compare them and eliminate those which are sub-standard? And even if such a list were deemed valid, it may be impossible to read even the resultant abbreviated list of works. Furthermore, it would be quite a challenge to create a list of approximately one hundred books and claim that everything one needs to know is included within those pages. Indeed, the list as implemented at St. John's College in 1937 was distinctly male, protestant, Western European and remains so today.

I cannot claim familiarity with many texts and I definitely do not feel as though I have read many Great Books. However, there are ancient texts that were written by creative and philosophical thinkers such as Homer, Aeschylus, Plato, Aristotle, and Euclid which, although difficult to explain why they have been categorized as great, can possibly be identified as the oldest surviving written record of their respective topics.[64] This position of seniority, while not definitive, plays a significant role in the justification to elevate these works to that of great.[65] Many books that have been identified as great discuss concepts such as government, love, justice, and values. Additional works

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[64] Upon closer evaluation regarding the chronological seniority of works, some commonly accepted great works are pre-dated by others that have not been accepted as great. This simply compounds the problem of identifying works as great for one possible defining element in a work that makes it great is what can be called the original thought. Older works may not have been uncovered when works were being evaluated; furthermore, as I state in the body of this dissertation above, it is impossible for a person or even a group to have read all texts ever written. Additionally, older works of non-western origin have been ignored in Great Books lists, once again pointing out the focus on Western culture.

[65] The age of a work is obviously not the best metric to use to judge its quality. However, two of Adler's criteria for a Great Book have a correlation with longevity: the first is that Great Books must continue to have contemporary significance and the second is that Great Books must be re-readable where the reader finds something new with each reading. (*The Great Conversation: A Reader's Guide to Great Books of the Western World*. Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1993, 25-26.)

document mathematical theories and scientific discoveries such as those presented by Euclid, Newton, and Galileo. This wealth of recorded knowledge is overwhelming and appears to be unapproachable as an entire body of knowledge. As a first attempt at tackling this issue, I have, in table 1, compiled a list of sixty-nine works that appear in common on three different lists of Great Books. The three lists are: Encyclopedia Britannica's *The Great Books of the Western World*[66] of 1952, a list compiled by Mortimer Adler in his work *How to Read a Book*[67] published in 1940, and the list of books to be read during the four-year Great Books program at St. John's College that started in 1937.

Table 1. Common Great Books from Three Lists

Aeschylus	Complete Works
Alighieri, Dante	The Divine Comedy
Aquinas, Thomas	Summa Theologica
Aristophanes	Complete Works
Aristotle	The Complete Works of Aristotle
Augustine, St.	City of God
Augustine, St.	Confessions
Bacon, Francis	Advancement of Learning
Bacon, Francis	Novum Organum
Bacon, Francis	The New Atlantis
Cervantes, Miguel de	Don Quixote
Chaucer, Geoffrey	The Canterbury Tales
Darwin, Charles	Origin of Species
Descartes, Rene	A Discourse on Method

[66] Hutchins, *Great Conversation*, 93-109.

[67] Mortimer Adler, *How to Read a Book: The Art of Getting a Liberal Education* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940), 377-387.

Table 1–*Continued*.

Descartes, Rene	The Geometry
Dostoevsky, Fyodor	The Brothers Karamazov
Euclid	The Elements
Euripedes	Complete Works
Faraday, Michael	Experimental Researches in Electricity
Fielding, Henry	Tom Jones
Galen	On the Natural Faculties
Galilei, Galileo	Dialogues Concerning Two Chief World Systems
Gibbon, Edward	The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von	Faust
Hamilton, Jay, Madison	The Federalist
Harvey, William	On the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals
Hegel, Georg Friedrich Wilhelm	Lectures on the Philosophy of History
Hegel, Georg Friedrich Wilhelm	Philosophy of Right
Herodotus	The History of Herodotus
Hippocrates	Complete Works
Hobbes, Thomas	Leviathan
Homer	The Illiad
Homer	The Odyssey
Hume, David	An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding
James, William	The Principles of Psychology
Kant, Immanuel	The Critique of Judgment
Kant, Immanuel	The Critique of Practical Reason
Kant, Immanuel	The Critique of Pure Reason
Locke, John	A Letter Concerning Toleration
Locke, John	An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
Locke, John	Concerning Civil Government, Second Essay
Lucretius	On the Nature of Things
Machiavelli, Niccolo	The Prince
Marx, Karl	Capital
Marx, Karl	The Communist Menifesto
Mill, John S.	On Liberty
Mill, John S.	Representative Government

Table 1–*Continued*.

Mill, John S.	Utilitarianism
Milton, John	Areopagitica
Milton, John	Paradise Lost
Milton, John	Samson Agonistes
Montaigne, Michel	Essays
Montesquieu, Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de	The Spirit of Laws
Newton, Isaac	Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy
Newton, Isaac	Opticks
Nicomachus	Introduction to Arithmetic
Plato	Collected Dialogs
Plato	The Seventh Letter
Plutarch	Lives
Rabelais, Francis	Gargantua and Pantagruel
Rousseau, Jean Jacques	The Social Contract
Shakespeare, William	Complete Plays and Sonnets
Smith, Adam	Wealth of Nations
Sophocles	Complete Works
Spinoza, Benedict de	Ethics
Swift, Jonathan	Gullivers Travels
Thucydides	History of The Peloponessian War
Tolstoy, Leo	War and Peace
Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro)	Aeneid

Of course, this list necessarily is a least-common denominator derivation of all works and is therefore flawed as a comprehensive list but is a beginning toward identifying those works that have been identified as Great Books by numerous people and institutions. I am acutely aware that the Great Books list presented in table 1 is limited to Western culture to the exclusion of any other. There are obviously Great Books from other cultures and parts of the world and those works are making inroads to the canon. But, the

combined list here is of importance due to Britannica and Adler being intertwined with the St. John's College curriculum.

As I have shown, there have been numerous attempts at providing a liberal education through Great Books and they have been variously called a classical education, General Honors, the Experimental College, a Great Books program, and the Paidea Proposal. As the list of works in table 1 illustrates, there are few works in common from the early Great Books lists that I found. Ironically, the three original lists had a common thread of thought based on Mortimer Adler's influence and yet, even these three lists were not consistent.

Historical Method

I had, from the start, expected my dissertation to be historical in nature with an investigation involving archival research to explore my original question of "what changes have been made to the required reading list of Great Books at St. John's College and why were they implemented?" Attempting to document the changes to the required reading list at St. John's College would require first, an investigation into the formation of the first list of Great Books established for the college in 1937. Next, I expected to visit the archives at St. John's College and review faculty meeting minutes and supplement those with any correspondence I might find related to discussion and decisions on the changes to the reading list in subsequent years. Unfortunately, I was disappointed and more than a little discouraged when I found that faculty meeting minutes were not accessible via the St. John's College library and archives.

I scheduled a week-long visit to the St. John's College archives in Annapolis, Maryland, in hopes of finding enough documentation from other sources to help answer

my question. I spent the entire week reviewing what I could of the archives. While not assisting much with my original question, I was fascinated by what I found. As expected, there were memoranda, reports, and news clippings revolving around the New Program. What was unexpected was the appearance of a name I had only identified as a minor contributor to the Great Books discussion in relation to St. John's College: John Erskine. Yet, memoranda and letters were addressed to and from Erskine in correspondence with the other influential individuals in the initial establishment of the New Program: Buchanan, Adler, and Hutchins. I did not know it at the time, but this single finding would change the focus of my research and prompt a slightly different question.

After also reading through the special collection of St. John's College history section of the library along with extensive review of the St. John's College catalogs, I concluded my stay in Annapolis with much information, but little in the way of answering my research question. However, I started investigating the key names I ran across in the archives in greater depth than I had before. These included John Erskine, Mortimer Adler, Robert Maynard Hutchins, Scott Buchanan, and Stringfellow Barr.[68]

While I already had a general knowledge of each of these individuals, I was to find that John Erskine, professor of Literature and Poetry at Columbia University in the early 1900s, was responsible for the initial list of Great Books eventually implemented at St. John's College. He was also responsible for the method of instruction that was adopted at St. John's College. Yet, Erskine did not agree with converting his General Honors program into a formal curriculum.

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[68] Interestingly, Alexander Meiklejohn was one individual whom I had investigated in relation to Great Books programs, but his name was not directly mentioned with the St. John's College program throughout the documentation that I found.

> This course of mine in reading Great Books has been adopted in many colleges, but not always as I intended it. Many teachers have turned it into a course on philosophy, on some specific philosophy, and others have tried to expand it into an educational method for teaching all subjects. With these aberrations I have no sympathy whatever. Science, I think, should be studied in the laboratory, not in the literary gropings toward science before laboratories existed; and to confound all the racial and personal variations of history in one philosophy is, I think, to abandon that training of the mind which enables us to observe accurately and make distinctions. I was concerned with no philosophy and no method for a total education; I hoped merely to teach how to read.[69]

Nevertheless, even with these discouraging words that would imply that he would not want to be involved with the St. John's College program, the same autobiography that included the above paragraph acknowledged that the additions and modifications made to the required reading list while implementing the St. John's College program were well done.

Noticing the significance of Erskine's contribution to the New Program is what prompted me to shift my research question to "what enabled the Great Books program at St. John's College to survive for seventy years?" Answering that question would begin with Erskine's work and continue with the trials and tribulations of his program along with others that attempted some form of Great Books curriculum in the early twentieth century prior to St. John's College implementing one in 1937. To identify most, if not all, the factors that influenced the New Program, I will start with Erskine's experience at Columbia University. I will then share the story of Moritmer Adler, who was Erskine's student and mentee and would then be responsible for sharing the idea of the Great Books with Robert Hutchins at the University of Chicago. I would be remiss if I did not also

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[69] John Erskine, *The Memory of Certain Persons* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1947), 343.

include a review of Alexander Meiklejohn's Experimental College since it is commonly mentioned in Great Books discussions. But, I do not include it for only that reason; another reason is that Scott Buchanan was a student at Amherst College under Meiklejohn's presidency and was to follow Meiklejohn's work at the University of Wisconsin.

Thus, the story and experience of these attempts were not just coincidental; Scott Buchanan and Stringfellow Barr, to become dean and president, respectively, at St. John's College in 1937, were present, watching, and working with Adler, Meiklejohn, and Hutchins prior to moving on to St. John's College. Indeed, these experiences make up the bulk of my dissertation as I found that they contributed greatly to the success of the Great Books program at St. John's College. While there were other factors, not the least of which was the financial jeopardy St. John's College was facing when Buchanan and Barr came on the scene, the knowledge of what worked, what did not, and the difficulties in execution of a Great Books program helped the new administration at St. John's College avoid or prepare for those difficulties.

Another enabling factor that I found was the growing availability of Great Books. Instead of being restricted to scholarly texts and rare editions, ventures such as *Everyman's Library*, the *Harvard Classics*, and the *Loeb Classical Library* were making works available – and not only available, but affordable. The publishing efforts also focused on English translations when the work was formerly only available, if at all, in another language. Indeed, the *Loeb Classical Library* was exclusively dedicated to printing Greek and Latin works in the original with their translation into English on facing pages. Each of these three efforts was begun for different reasons, but ultimately

made a Great Books program viable and not restricted to scholars who would dedicate themselves to grueling study of foreign languages to grasp a general comprehension of any given work. I have included a review of these three ventures to describe each of their strengths toward enabling a Great Books program.

I think that the firm foundation provided by these preliminary experiences and various Great Books lists and publications could answer the question on how the New Program has survived for seventy years. However, it would be an incomplete answer. In addition to the foundation, there is a significant amount of maintenance that must occur with any endeavor for its continuing welfare. That is why I also provide analysis of the changes to the St. John's College required reading list from 1937 through 2008. While I could not access material that could explain the reason for any changes, I was able to find what those changes were. Nine months after my first visit, I spent another week in Annapolis to more fully analyze the college catalogs from 1937 through 2008. The catalogs proved invaluable as they clearly listed required reading lists and even categorized each work as to general subject such as literature, philosophy and theology, history and social science, and mathematics and natural science. This final portion of my research, following my tracing the influencing factors resulting in the St. John's College program initially, revolves around the changes to the list as it was reflected in the seventy-two years of catalogs.

CHAPTER 2

TWO EDUCATORS LEADING TO THE NEW PROGRAM

Mortimer Adler was a constant entity for the larger part of the twentieth century[70] regarding the development of a Great Books canon and was instrumental in its implementation as a formal curriculum in higher education. In the 1980s, Adler also attempted to extend the idea of the Great Books as a direct instructional tool to the pre-collegiate years as outlined in the Paidea Proposal. While I will articulate below how Adler played a significant role at the University of Chicago, the Encyclopedia Britannica, and at St. John's College, the germ of his efforts with Great Books as a formal curriculum could arguably be attributed to John Erskine as Erskine had developed a General Honors program at Columbia University where Adler was a student. Indeed, Erskine was professor and mentor to not only Adler, but also Scott Buchanan and Stringfellow Barr among others. Each of these individuals ultimately played significant roles in the St. John's College Great Books program.

Perhaps the words of Mark Van Doren, another of Erskine's students, will demonstrate the strength of the belief in Great Books that Erskine nurtured in each of these individuals:

> The classics of our world, the Great Books, ancient and recent, in which the Western mind has worked and played, are more essential

[70] While I will elaborate on Adler's life as it led to the development of the Great Books program at St. John's College, it is interesting to note that Adler was born in 1902, started along the Great Books path in the 1920s and continued working on projects and writing books about the Great Books until his final publication of *How to Think About The Great Ideas* in 2000 prior to his death on June 28, 2001.

> to a college than its buildings and its bells, or even perhaps its teachers; for these books are teachers from which every wise and witty man has learned what he knows. They are the one accessible source of whatever ideas have existed and survived their times. To know them in their relations with one another, for they have a strong family resemblance even when they argue like contrary winds, is to re-enact the drama of human thought and feeling, and to be capable of assisting in new scenes. The common possession of the experience they offer would civilize any society that had it, not by stopping controversy but by giving it the new lease of a start which all could understand.[71]

So, who was this person who had such a profound effect on Van Doren, Adler, Barr and Buchanan? While the study of the classics and even Great Books lists had been around prior to Erskine, he appears to have been the single common entity to introduce the concept to those who would ultimately form the St. John's College program.

John Erskine

When Robert M. Hutchins invited Erskine in the early 1940s to participate in the *Great Books of the Western World* project for the Encyclopedia Britannica, his letter of invitation identified Erskine as "the father of this kind of study in the United States."[72] Coming from the president of a major university, this was quite a compliment. Yet, the compliment was not unfounded. Naturally, Erskine had his own mentor, by the name of George E. Woodberry, but Erskine's fortune to have students who would later grow the idea of a Great Books program into an entire undergraduate program granted him the title. Of course, it didn't hurt that Erskine had an opportunity to test the concept when he established an Honors Course that required the reading of Great Books, but more on that momentarily.

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[71] Mark Van Doren, *Liberal Education* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1943; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 148 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

[72] John Erskine, *My Life as a Teacher* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1948), 173-174.

Perhaps a review of Erskine's words will assist in understanding his belief in reading and discussing Great Books as a method of education. In 1918, at Bedford College, University of London, Erskine delivered an address that was later published as the essay "American Character." In this address, Erskine attempted to explain the then common perception that Americans were primarily materialistic and anti-tradition. He acknowledged that Americans tended to be future-oriented as opposed to focused on the past, but he pointed out that this was one of America's strengths. As a fairly young nation, comprised of immigrants from various countries, there was no common set of traditions to anchor the nation as a whole. Indeed, while those entering the United States may have arrived with a strong set of traditions, they were frequently minimized or even discarded altogether. Erskine believed that this was a great opportunity whereby the best thought of various origins could be combined to the benefit of all. Though still limited to Western thought, Erskine wished to identify Great Books from this broader pool[73] to ensure American citizens could continue to look toward the future because they would then have a better understanding of the past.

Of course, Erskine's initial Honors course, like the Great Books program at St. Johns College nearly twenty years later, was not simply a series of courses requiring independent reading followed by examinations with rote answers. The program relied heavily on a seminar format where students and tutors discussed a given work and allowed that discussion to be driven by questions and interpretations by the students. Erskine was influential in establishing this format that would be adopted by St. John's College. In his essay entitled *The Kinds of Poetry*, Erskine shared that he gained

[73] Specifically, Erskine embraced not only the commonly recognized classical works in Greek and Latin, but included works in other languages such as Italian, French, German, Russian, and English.

affection for poetry after having read certain passages of a few poets. However, those specific passages, he went on to say, may have had nothing in them for his fellow students. Thus, in order to benefit from the written word, each student must find his or her own way to connect with the work. Expressing his dissatisfaction with standard teaching methods of the time, Erskine lamented that a teacher

> may lecture on the contributing circumstances of literary production, on the language, on the lives of the authors; but for poetry, we fear, for the spark from heaven, the student like the scholar gypsy must wait, and we half believe with the scholar gypsy that he had better wait outside our class.[74]

It is obvious that Erskine did not believe individuals can possibly learn the same things in the same ways. Yet, he did not simply give up on being able to reach every student; he proposed the solution that "the office of the teacher of poetry is easily defined; it is to afford a mediation between great poets and their audience."[75] While I do not claim that Erskine originated this idea that ultimately became the foundation of the definition of the St. John's College tutors, he certainly supported and reinforced the idea which ultimately had a significant influence on Adler, Buchanan, and others who were more directly responsible for the establishment of the Great Books program.

Yet another factor of the Great Books program can be seen in Erskine's philosophy of teaching; a teacher should not attempt to limit his or her instruction to a single topic or area of concentration. Even pertaining to his own field, Erskine argued for this wider perspective on study when he stated that the

> definition of literature [must be broadened] until it includes not only poetry and the novel, essays and drama, but also the

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[74] John Erskine, "The Kinds of Poetry," in *American Character and Other Essays* (Chautauqua, New York: The Chautauqua Press, 1927), 49.

[75] Ibid., 51.

> masterpieces of biography and other forms of history, of philosophy, and of science…. The advice is… to consider all masterpieces of expression as literature.[76]

By embracing a wider range of topics, Erskine pointed out their interconnectedness and cautioned teachers to avoid specialization. Furthermore, Erskine sought to balance intellectual material with emotional so as to improve one's ability to benefit from these written works. For example, with too great a focus on the emotional aspects of poetry, an individual would fall in the realm of the romantic, whereas those who focus exclusively on intellectual works would not be able to relate fully to life.[77]

But, to back up a moment to get a more fundamental perspective of Erskine's views, I should share a little of his earlier life. He was an avid reader in a prosperous family with his own library of books. His mother, Eliza Jane Hollingsworth Erskine, stayed at home and his father, James Morrison Erskine, was a successful textile merchant, being able to build two factories as his business grew.[78] His parents believed in including their children at or close to the dinner table when guests were over in order for them to be introduced to polite society and listen in on conversations. Guests frequently included professors and ministers.[79] Erskine's dominant interests as indicated by his written works revolved around literature – focusing on poetry – and music. Erskine claimed that it was his growth in music that strengthened his ability to appreciate literature and he credits at least one teacher – Edward MacDowell.

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[76] Ibid., 53.

[77] Ibid., 63-64.

[78] Erskine, *Memory*, 47.

[79] Ibid., 44-46.

> Not only my early months at Columbia College, but all my years, were colored by knowing [Edward Alexander] MacDowell. Had I begun to study English literature in the usual approach, I should have tried to admire, simply because my teachers and even more famous critics told me to do so, a number of authors who were not really first rate. But after a few hours in MacDowell's classroom I saw that literature is an art, like music, and every art should be studies in its masterpieces, from the standpoint of an apprentice who hopes some day to practice what he has learned, not simply to collect opinions about it.[80]

Thus, Erskine, early on, formed his belief in learning from personal interest and interpretation by the student and not based on the knowledge, style, or even charisma of the teacher.

Erskine graduated from Columbia University in 1900 with a Bachelor's Degree in English, followed by his Master's degree a year later and his Ph. D. in 1903. Accepting a job as a teacher of English at Amherst College immediately upon graduating in 1903, Erskine returned to Columbia University in 1909 as professor of English. Upon his return to Columbia, Erskine reestablished his involvement in a discussion group of students on informal topics to cater to his belief in learning through personal interest. This discussion group, which was originally formed during Erskine's junior year as an undergraduate at Columbia,[81] came to be known as the King's Crown Literary Circle and, as its name implies, had an underpinning of written works.[82] Two other professors at the time, George Edward Woodberry and Professor Jackson, "kept the talk on worth-while

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[80] Ibid., 73-74.

[81] Ibid., 96.

[82] The Anglophilic name has additional implications as the group focused on English and Western European thought and literature which are the foundation of liberal culture. As the reader will see, this carries through from Erskine through to St. John's College's curriculum.

topics, and drew [the other participants] into it."[83] As mentioned above, Woodberry was somewhat of a mentor to Erskine and the team approach to the literary circle promoted the idea of not having a single instructor who would, in all likelihood, come to dominate conversations. By having more than one professor, students were able to witness differences of opinions which highlighted the fact that they can question what someone says – even if he or she is usually the authority figure. The idea was not to come to a conclusion or gather knowledge, but to continue to ask questions of interest and investigate the validity of responses.

This experience even emboldened Erskine to critique Alexander Meiklejohn's efforts as president at Amherst around the year 1913, when Erskine claimed that "though the Amherst boys were acquiring a technique of discussion, I was not sure that they cared deeply for any of the issues which they discussed."[84] He commented further on this topic in his later work, *My Life as a Teacher*, by sharing that he and a colleague of his

> agreed that during the Meiklejohn regime the students had been trained to unusual skill in debate. Some of them were masters of dialectic. They could and did argue on the basis of little information, or none at all, and their keenness of mind, strange to say, had nothing to do with intellectual curiosity.[85]

Of course, this was easy to say when looking back more than thirty years later and after Meiklejohn's resignation from Amherst followed by his failed attempt with his Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin.

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[83] Ibid., 96.

[84] Ibid., 232.

[85] Erskine, *My Life*, 71. Erskine's evaluation came from his experience when he returned to Amherst briefly during the 1923-1924 academic year after the resignation of Meiklejohn. He taught two courses, one on Fridays and one on Saturdays – a seminar and a lecture respectively – where he had the opportunity to interact with the Amherst students.

Yet, Erskine felt he was qualified to submit such a negative evaluation of Meiklejohn due to his experience putting together a program that was supposed to provide the level of student inquiry, discussion, and investigative criticism he desired. He had his first chance "between the outbreak of the war in 1914 and the American entry into it in 1917, [as he] managed to do considerable writing, and … launched an educational experiment at Columbia which bore fruit when the war was over."[86] His initial attempt at what would be called his honors course and, ultimately, the general core program at Columbia, revolved almost exclusively around works of literature and poetry. This was not surprising due to Erskine's early professional focus in these areas. But, what is of importance with his first attempt at a Great Books method of education is that he desired that students enjoy Great Books because they are great – not because of the author's biography or historical reasons or political, but as art.[87]

Before being interrupted by the First World War, Erskine had compiled a list of specific works that he identified as Great Books. Again, the qualifying factor was Erskine's subjective evaluation that each could be understood by the reader and appreciated simply for its beauty, however that would be defined. Additionally, Erskine believed that a Great Book was great due to its ability to be interpreted in a contemporary light to stimulate thought and debate about current issues. Erskine stressed this latter value of Great Books while he simultaneously identified why it was not a widely adopted practice:

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[86] Erskine, *Memory*, 244.

[87] John Erskine, *The Delight of Great Books* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1928), 12-15.

> The fact that a book is famous is enough to scare off some people who, if they had the courage to open the pages, would find there delight and profit. We make the mistake of fearing that the immortal things of art must be approached through special studies and disciplines, and we comfort ourselves on the principle of sour grapes, by deciding that even if we were prepared to read the classics, we should find them dull. But one explanation of any long fame is that it was deserved, and the men who wrote these books would have been horrified if they had known that you and I might think of them only as matter for school and college courses. They wrote to be read by the general public, and they assumed in their readers an experience of life and an interest in human nature, nothing more.[88]

After the war, his initial list became the basis of the honors course at Columbia College.

Actually, there was not much of a lull in the development of the honors course between the beginning and end of the war. "Late in the autumn of 1917 an earnest-looking young gentleman knocked at [Erskine's] office."[89] While Erskine did not remember the gentleman's name, he was a representative from the Y.M.C.A. and, with the army's approval, was recruiting a group of educators, as part of the American Expeditionary Forces, to travel to France to establish an educational program for the enlisted men. The goal was to avoid the expected situation that

> whenever the war ended, a million or so idle boys in France would be getting into mischief unless their minds were occupied…. [Thus,] a plan sketched out by Dr. Anson Phelps Stokes, Secretary of Yale University, perhaps after consultation with John H. Finley, Chancellor of New York University, had been proposed to the War Department through the Y.M.C.A., and approved by Mr. Newton Baker and his Assistant Secretary, [Erskine's] old friend Fred Keppel.[90]

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[88] Ibid., 11.

[89] Erskine, *Memory*, 258.

[90] Ibid.

With little time to decide and prepare, Erskine sailed for France on January 10, 1918 and coordinated Stokes's plan which called for placing students in French and British universities as soon as the war ended. Of course, as the end of the war extended past the summer months and the armistice was not signed until November 11, 1918, the beginning of the fall term was already begun by the time students could start. "Even before our Army students were safely in the French and British universities, we were planning a large American school… to take care of those for whom the crowded foreign institutions had no room."[91] The American Expeditionary Forces decided to establish their "American school," a university of sorts, in Beaune, France. Erskine, among others, was charged with establishing this university which had the nearly impossible goal of providing the beginnings of a university education while simultaneously ensuring skills training in any area of a soldier's interest to tens of thousands of soldiers to ensure they would be prepared for employment upon their return and discharge.

Erskine strongly believed that preparing these soldiers should also include preparation to enter society and what better way than by reading and discussing Great Books. This opportunity served to crystallize Erskine's opinion on the value of all to have a common core of knowledge, to come to have a shared understanding of society, its development and progress, and recognize that there are issues and problems that are unsolvable yet important to continue to evaluate. Thus, the concept of a core using a Great Books approach was tested rapidly with thousands of individuals. Erskine's list of just over fifty Great Books "became a part of the May 1919 catalogue issue of the

[91] Ibid., 311.

University of Beaune and the publication itself is said to be the only college catalogue ever prepared for and adopted by an army in the field."[92]

This experience only contributed to cementing the idea into Erskine's thinking; but it was not explicitly used as a test case for a Great Books program nor did it convince many, if any, others of the value of such a program. With Beaune University's brief life,[93] a track record, positive or negative, could not be established. Indeed, while I focus on this aspect of Erskine's work, his efforts with the American Expeditionary Forces were divided among many other concerns such as physical facilities needing to be built practically over night, finding knowledgeable instructors for the vast number of specialized courses required, and even obtaining supplies.

Thus, when Erskine returned to Columbia College in 1919, he basically had to pick up where he left off, although with a greater understanding of how such a Great Books program would work. Erskine relates,

> In the College I took up again the plan for reading Great Books which I had been advocating when the war broke. Most of my colleagues were still hostile to the idea, and they tried to protect the students – and themselves – from it by decreeing that my course should be open only to the specially qualified, who would take it as an extra, or as they liked to say, as "honors." The registration the first year was not large. [94]

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[92] Warren C. Bomhardt, *The St. John's College Program* (Annapolis: St. John's College Library, 1968), 8. Sadly, I was unable to acquire a copy of the catalog referred to by Bomhardt although the National Archives, which I was unable to visit, may prove fruitful as the Guide to Federal Records indicates that textual materials are available regarding the Beaune University in Record Group 120 – specifically 120.3.5.

[93] Beaune, France was selected as the sight of the American Expeditionary Forces' university in February of 1919 and its first students appeared on March 15 that same year. With the assistance of a new concept of open enrollment, more than 8,000 enlisted men gained college credit for various courses offered for the remainder of that year as they awaited their orders to return home. The university was in operation for less than one year. (Erskine, *Memory*, 315.)

[94] Erskine, *Memory*, 342-343.

So, while Erskine was not able to reach all students, he began refining the method of teaching using Great Books. His methods, also, would ultimately be adopted by St. John's College.

Yet, even with resistance from other faculty members, Erskine was able to officially offer the General Honors course for the first time in the fall of 1921. As I will cover below, Mortimer Adler was enrolled in that first session. According to Adler, Erskine's first list of Great Books included only fifty-two authors and a review of Greek art.[95] This agrees with the published General Honors list of required readings in 1924 which I have listed in table 2.[96] Considering this list would become the basis of the Great Books program at St. John's College, how did Erskine identify these works as being great?

Table 2. Columbia University's General Honors Reading Lists

Outline of Readings in Important Books **1924**	***Classics of the Western World*** **1927**
Homer	Homer
	Bible – Old Testament
Herodotus	Herodotus
Thucydides	Thucydides
Aeschylus	Aeschylus
Sophocles	Sophocles
Euripides	Euripides
Aristophanes	Aristophanes
Plato	Plato
Aristotle	Aristotle
	Cicero
Lucretius	Lucretius

[95] Adler, *Philosopher at Large: An Intellectual Autobiography* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1977), 60.

[96] Table 2 also includes the list as it was modified and published in 1927.

Table 2–*Continued*.

Vergil	Vergil
Horace	Horace
	Ovid
Plutarch	Plutarch
	Lucian
Marcus Aurelius	M. Aurelius Antoninus
	Plotinus
	Bible – New Testament
St. Augustine	St. Augustine
	The Volsunga Saga
The Song of Roland	The Song of Roland
The Nibelungenlied	
St. Thomas Aquinas	St. Thomas Aquinas
Dante	Dante Alighieri
	Francesco Petrarca
	Geoffrey Chaucer
	Leonardo da Vinci
	Niccolo Machiavelli
	Desiderius Erasmus
	Thomas Moore
	Francois Rabelais
Galileo	Galileo Galilei
Grotius	Hugo Grotius (Huig van Groot)
Montaigne	Michel Eyquem de Montaigne
Shakespeare	William Shakespeare
Cervantes	Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra
Francis Bacon	Francis Bacon
Descartes	René Descartes
Thomas Hobbes	Thomas Hobbes
	Pierre Corneille
John Milton	John Milton
Molière	Molière (Jean-Baptiste Poquelin)
	Benedict Spinoza
John Locke	John Locke
	Jean Racine
	Isaac Newton
	Jonathan Swift
Montesquieu	Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu
Voltaire	F. M. A. de Voltaire (Francois Marie Arouet)
	Henry Fielding
	David Hume
Jean-Jacques Rousseau	Jean Jacques Rousseau

Table 2–*Continued*.

Edward Gibbon	Edward Gibbon
Adam Smith	Adam Smith
Immanuel Kant	Immanuel Kant
Goethe	Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
American State Papers	
Victor Hugo	
Georg W. F. Hegel	George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel
Sir Charles Lyell	
Balzac	Honoré de Balzac
Thomas Malthus	Thomas Robert Malthus
Jeremy Bentham	Jeremy Bentham
	Arthur Schopenhauer
John Stuart Mill	John Stuart Mill
Charles Darwin	Charles Darwin
	William Makepeace Thackeray
	Charles Dickens
Louis Pasteur	Louis Pasteur
Karl Marx	Karl Marx
Lyof Tolstoy	Leo Tolstoy
Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky	Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky
	Francis Galton
	Henrik Ibsen
	Thomas Hardy
Friedrich Nietzsche	Friedrich Nietzsche
William James	William James
	Sigmund Freud
Greek Art	

Note(s): Fifty-two authors and a general discussion on Greek Art comprised the originally published list. Twenty-eight authors were added during the three year period while only four were dropped along with the requirement in the discussion of Greek Art. They are listed here in the order in which they were to be read.

Erskine discounted originality as a defining factor of greatness. According to him, original works may be least favored. He equated originality with what we would today call fads. Something original, as Erskine would categorize as new and fleeting, does not warrant the respect of a Great Book. Yet, he somewhat contradicted himself with originality in that a new way of looking at a recurring theme of life is of value.

> There is nothing new about religion or love or friendship, war, sunsets, the sea, danger or death, yet something remains to be told of each eternal theme, and when a book comes which tells the whole, which satisfies some hitherto unexpressed yearnings or defines more sharply something hitherto half-seen, then that portrait of the human nature serves our purposes until we have a still finer, and other versions meanwhile are neglected and forgotten.[97]

Perhaps his clearest argument against originality, the first written work on a subject as the only determining factor for identifying a Great Book, is when he stated that "even stupid things have been said for the first time; do we wear the laurel for being the first to say them?"[98]

Instead, Erskine pointed to longevity as a better indicator. But this does not mean simply continuing to hold onto gibberish, but the active ability by successive generations to find value in a given book. Furthermore, "the Great Books are those which are capable of reinterpretations, which surprise us by remaining true even when our point of view changes."[99] There is a natural selection process that time provides to eliminate books from any Great Books list. "If a book no longer reflects our life, it will cease to be generally read, no matter what its importance for antiquarian purposes."[100] As an example of the timelessness of some works, Erskine noted that Euripides can speak to our

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[97] John Erskine, "The Literary Discipline," in *American Character and Other Essays* (Chautauqua, New York: The Chautauqua Press, 1927), 52.

[98] Ibid., 49.

[99] Erskine, *Delight*, 21.

[100] Ibid., 16.

own age as he did during his own. "Beyond question it is possible to quote from him passages strangely apposite to contemporary themes."[101]

So, longevity of existence really means that the topics written about are continually applicable to modern concerns. Yet, modern concerns stimulate yet more books by more recent authors. Would those qualify for a Great Books list? Erskine had a clever response to eliminate the need to worry about whom of the current authors could be included in a Great Books list.

> Of course I knew George Meredith, Thomas Hardy, Algernon Swinburne, Oscar Wilde, and Rudyard Kipling, but they were all still alive, and for that reason it was impossible as yet to determine the quality of their work. To be great, a writer must be dead.[102]

Erskine's point was that Great Books can only be determined over time. Without decades or longer to notice if a written work continues to speak to successive generations, it would be difficult or impossible to predict if it would do so. Indeed, Erskine elaborated on this point by claiming that reading only contemporary works limits the view on life. Older works address a greater variety of issues and are better "for the training of the common consciousness."[103] Furthermore, works that are too temporal/contemporary lose their appeal when the context changes.

According to Erskine, a great book is one that is timeless. But, there are many such potential works. Although Erskine did publish a required reading list, he believed and stressed that Great Books are also relative to each individual; others cannot select a list of works, it must be a personal choice. Each individual should read books "over and

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[101] Erskine, "The Kinds of Poetry," 69. Erskine failed to give specific examples of such quotes.

[102] Erskine, *My Life*, 20.

[103] Erskine, "The Literary Discipline," 166.

over. Until [one has] discovered that certain books grow with [his/her] maturing experience and other books do not, [one has] not learned how to distinguish a great book from a book."[104] (Later, I will discuss Mortimer Adler's concern about reading poorly which he identifies as a major problem with an individual's ability to read effectively, let alone being able to identify Great Books.) Yet, Erskine stressed that an individual must choose his or her own Great Books because "in all cases a book is to be measured, not by other books but by what we know of life, not by its author's private experience but our own."[105]

Although Erskine stressed the significance of Great Books being a personal affair, his General Honors program shows that he did not shy away from suggesting his own list of Great Books (see table 2). Indeed, in *The Complete Life*, he broadened his original focus of reading Great Books for literature and poetry and outlined what he believed are the components of a complete life which include reading and writing, music and dancing, painting, sculpture, conversation, manners, foreign awareness, religion, politics, love, marriage, and parenting. Notably, he used various literary references to establish or illustrate each area. Indeed, in the section on reading, he admited that he "shall suggest a list of books, representative examples of all Western literature, a list not too formidable for any reader."[106] And, to establish that he, at the time of his writing *The Complete Life*, was qualified to offer this list, he referred to his previously published lists as they appeared in the *Outline of Readings in Important Books* for his Columbia University

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[104] Erskine, *Delight*, 29.

[105] John Erskine, *The Complete Life: A Guide to the Active Enjoyment of the Arts & of Living* (New York: Julian Messner Inc., 1943), 22.

[106] Ibid., 35.

honors program and the follow-up publication by the American Library Association of *Classics of the Western World*. And, of course, the prize of his efforts was that "later the same list with further expansions became the basis of the courses around which St. John's College in Annapolis builds its curriculum."[107] And, as his final remarks about Great Books lists, Erskine mentioned that "most recently Professor Mortimer J. Adler, in *How to Read a Book*, gives the list again with a few changes and additions which seem to me excellent."[108]

But establishing a list of Great Books was not Erskine's only contribution to the St. John's College program. The instructional method was also cast in the Columbia University General Honors course. Erskine knew that the Great Books he had listed came with a stigma of being too intimidating to be tackled by an average college student. Indeed, that is the reason why the course was called General Honors; the other faculty members and the administration felt the same. However, even though Erskine acknowledged this perception, he did not believe it and tried to counter it.

> I proposed that Great Books, which gained their reputation when they were new and extremely up-to-date, should be read now as if they were just out today. The necessary commentary or scholarship should be supplied by the students, discussing the book with their teachers exactly as they would discuss a new novel or a new work on politics or economics.[109]

When trying to convince his students or even his colleagues that the classics were not as unapproachable as they thought, he would advise them that " the method I should advise in reading Great Books is a simple one. I should try, first of all, not to be awed by their

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[107] Ibid., 51.

[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid., 53.

greatness. Then I should read without any other preparation than life has given me – I should open the pages and find out how much they mean to me."[110] The following somewhat lengthy excerpt from Erskine's autobiography is important not just to underline his belief in students' being able to tackle the Great Books, but also outlines the format of instruction he pursued which would become that of the St. John's College program.

> We divided the class into small sections so that discussion might be easier. All the sections met at the same time, on Wednesday evenings, and over each section two of my younger colleagues presided. From the beginning it was the young teachers who made the course possible. We read a book a week, and spent all Wednesday evening talking about it. How often was I told by angry colleagues that a great book couldn't be read in a week, not intelligently! And how often have I retorted, with my own degree of heat, that when the Great Books were first published, they were popular, which was the first step toward their permanent fame, and the public who first liked them read them quickly, perhaps overnight, without waiting to hear scholarly lectures about them. I wanted the boys to read Great Books, the best sellers of ancient times, as spontaneously and humanly as they would read current best sellers, and having read the books, I wanted them to form their opinions at once in a free-for-all discussion. It would take two years of Wednesday evenings to discuss all the books on my list. Even by the end of the first year all the boys in the class would have in common a remarkable store of information, ideas about literature and life, and perhaps an equal wealth of esthetic emotions, which they shared in common. Here would be, I believed, the true scholarly and cultural basis for human understanding and communication. Compared with this result, what a waste of time it seemed to spend a term or a year mastering one book or one author in detail, and acquiring the mastery by yourself, as it were, in solitude. [111]

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[110] Erskine, *Delight*, 28.
[111] Erskine, *Memory*, 342-343.

Mortimer Adler was one of those students who then became one of Erskine's colleagues in teaching the course. The passion for this method of instruction was taken up by Adler and, later, by Scott Buchanan as well.

Mortimer Adler

Erskine is the mastermind behind the Great Books list as well as the discussion-based method of reading Great Books, and Mortimer Adler is his greatest disciple and popularizer. As a literature and poetry professor, Erskine just wanted students to learn how to fully appreciate what they read. Using what he identified as Great Books made the task a little easier because, according to his evaluation, there was something of value in each of the works. The student just needed to do his or her part. Adler saw the benefits of this method upon his recognizing that more than just literary works and poems could be discussed in similar manner. Indeed, Adler became the foremost advocate for the Great Books with efforts beginning with Erskine at Columbia University, moving on to the University of Chicago, working with the Encyclopedia Britannica, as well as advising on the formation of the St. John's College curriculum and many other endeavors. In one of his autobiographies, Adler claimed that "among the fortunate coincidences to which I am immeasurably indebted for the far-reaching effects they have had upon the course of my life, I would give top place to the good luck of having John Erskine as my preceptor in General Honors."[112]

Unlike Erskine, who grew up in a comfortable family situation, Mortimer Adler claims to have struggled financially. While definitely middle-class and not living in luxury, the Adlers were not necessarily struggling for subsistence; however, Adler's

[112] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 30.

family did not expect Adler to attend college. Indeed, Adler was even able to talk his parents into allowing him to start work prior to graduating from high school. While not clear as to exact dates, it appears as though this was around the year 1918 at the age of 16. His desire to drop out of high school came when he was removed from editing his high school newspaper due to a disagreement with the principal. Upon leaving high school, Adler obtained a job as a copy boy at the *New York Sun*.[113]

He soon found an opportunity to become the secretary to the editor and also began taking evening extension courses at Columbia University. While he was obviously successful in his newspaper occupation, he claimed that when he "chose a course given by Professor Frank Allen Patterson in Victorian literature, [it] was the start of [his] undoing as a journalist."[114] By 1920, Adler was hooked on college; he quit his job at the *Sun* and enrolled at Columbia University as a full-time student. His coursework with the extension school allowed him to have advanced standing which then prepared him to be eligible for Erskine's General Honors course that began fall of 1921 and was open only to juniors and seniors.

Yet, prior to that, Adler had become fascinated by written works. This early experience would later influence his ideas related to the Great Books program. The first of these experiences with reading was John Stuart Mill's autobiography. Reading this, Adler found that Mill was taught by his own father, but, more important, he learned much simply by reading what would later be called Great Books independently. Adler wished to emulate this behavior and was delighted to find a neighbor who had the recently

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[113] Ibid., 3.

[114] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 5.

released collection of *Harvard Classics*.[115] Furthermore, Adler's impression of self-study by reading Great Books was reinforced by this very neighbor, Sam Fledman, who was a Russian Jewish lawyer who also claimed to have taught himself by reading a wide variety of books. Even though Adler was instrumental in the attempt at implementing the Great Books program at the University of Chicago, followed by a successful implementation at St. John's College, he never lost focus of the belief that Great Books can be read by the average person independently.

But independent study of the Great Books was not the only belief Adler established at this time. He also found that reading excerpts of the Great Books or selections of works from authors identified with Great Books was not as beneficial as reading all works, in their entirety, by a given author. For example, when Adler found and read the *Harvard Classics*, he wanted to know what the missing selections from Plato were and had to hunt around to find other translations to fill in the gap.[116] This single encounter with the *Harvard Classics* forged Adler's belief in at least two significant requirements for a successful Great Books program. First, only entire works should be read; that way, the reader can determine what is of greatest importance instead of an editor making the selection. And, second, translations are acceptable and even of tremendous value if original languages are unknown.[117]

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[115] Interestingly, *The Harvard Classics* was compiled by Charles W. Eliot, the leading advocate of the elective system which frequently held up as being contrary to liberal education. However, while Eliot believed that students should be able to choose their own courses, he did not devalue liberal education.

[116] Ibid., 6. The *Harvard Classics* includes only the following dialogues from Plato: *The Apology of Socrates*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*.

[117] Adler seems to take pride in his lack of education while relying on the Great Books as he constantly points out his lack of a high school diploma, never completing his undergraduate degree, and even earning his doctorate without having to pass the German and French language requirements.

Indeed, Adler's preference for not selecting any subset of an author's works explains the tendency for Great Books lists to indicate authors rather than actual titles of works. The implication is that every work of a listed author is recommended and it is up to the reader to find value in any or all of a given author's works. In this dissertation, I will, necessarily, provide Great Books lists that indicate only authors rather than actual titles due to this perspective which seems to have been widely adopted. While a better term may be Great Authors, I will maintain the term Great Books to follow the accepted practice.

Over fifty years later, when writing *Philosopher at Large*, Adler claimed to have spent his first year at Columbia University perusing the library and taking inventory of books that he would like to read based on their titles and tables of contents. He also highlighted lunchtime discussions with two friends who had to pack their lunches as he had to do to save money. Those lunchtime discussions revolved around various books they had commonly read.[118] Thus, Erskine had at least one very prepared and willing student. Adler was to exit the General Honors course as the leading advocate for reading the Great Books. Indeed, Adler then became one of the faculty members of Columbia University and led, with Mark Van Doren initially, sections of the General Honors course as it had grown larger than Erskine could handle alone. Adler was officially a professor of psychology although he really wanted to be in the Philosophy Department. Notably, Adler did not technically even graduate from his undergraduate program; he refused to complete the physical education requirement. Yet, when an opening was available in the Psychology Department, those in charge noted his outstanding coursework and papers in

[118] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 23.

that field and thus he was employed. Indeed, Adler was to hold his position as professor of psychology for over five years without an earned degree of any type. In 1928, the head of the Psychology Department, Albert T. Poffenberger, convinced Adler to work on his Ph.D.[119] But, while Adler did take the advice, in typical fashion, he ignored a requirement for the degree. Although he never formally took the required French and German examinations, he passed his oral examinations. Adler is proud of the story of how his doctoral oral examination board gave him a cursory examination on these languages and signed off on the requirement. Thus, his excellent reputation in the department facilitated his earning a Ph.D. even without meeting the full requirements.[120]

Perhaps because he was not able to land a position with the Philosophy Department, Adler spent more time with the General Honors program at Erskine's invitation in 1923, which was not originally part of his regular workload. Shifting from student to faculty member, Adler developed his understanding of the program. Certain experiences would ultimately find their way into the St. John's College program. First, having multiple instructors countered the problem of a single person being unable to be conversant in every subject area that may arise.[121] Initially, as sections of General Honors were added, single instructors attempted to go it alone. In order to counter the problem of not being conversant in various areas, these instructors brought in guest speakers. But, that approach quickly turned into lectures which defeated the idea of a discussion format where students play the active role in the discussion.[122] Erskine and

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[119] Ibid., 119.

[120] Ibid., 124-125.

[121] Ibid., 56.

[122] Ibid., 58.

Adler advanced that it is the discussion that makes students think about what has been read instead of being passive absorbers of information – or worse, passively sitting in a room with someone speaking and no information at all getting through.

Second, Adler was impressed with Van Doren's eloquent way of leading discussions and learned how to ask leading questions and stimulate interest from the group. Adler pointed out the strength of this team approach, especially with a more experienced teacher, by stating that

> not only do I find it more enjoyable that way – one can learn from one's partner as well as from the other members of the group – but I also think that, with two leaders of discussion, the one who at the moment is not actively engaged in asking the question can be more attentive to indications, by facial or other gestures, that someone in the group has something to say.[123]

Both these ideas – having multiple tutors per class and pairing an inexperienced teacher with one who has greater experience – are still followed by St. John's College today.[124]

With such charismatic and eloquent mentors as Erskine and Van Doren, it is not surprising that Adler did not enjoy and was even bored with his required teaching duties in psychology.[125] He much preferred the interactive nature of the discussion sessions although he did have a rough experience in his first quarter teaching the General Honors class – even with Van Doren to assist on occasion. Actually, Adler's experience may have reinforced his belief in students dominating the discussion while the faculty members are there primarily to keep discussion going. One of his students, of similar age and far more eloquent than Adler, often asked more provocative questions or made more

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[123] Ibid., 57.

[124] St. John's College *Catalog: 2007-2008*, 27.

[125] Adler, *Philosopher*, 71.

subtle comments about the topic under discussion. Adler ultimately realized that he did not have to be the authority in the room and even teamed up with the student to have a more rewarding experience for the entire class.[126]

Between 1925 and 1927, Adler made himself instrumental with the discussions among all the faculty members teaching the General Honors course to update the list of Great Books. As would be expected, the various faculty members desired to have more authors related to their subject of expertise added. To help facilitate the decision, Adler compiled a list of the authors everyone could agree to include and likewise compiled the list of authors that everyone could agree should not be on the list.[127] Upon concluding the reviews and discussion, the resultant list was published as *Classics of the Western World* in 1927 (see table 2).

Adler did not just confine his work with the Great Books to activities at Columbia University. In 1926, Scott Buchanan, as Assistant Director at the People's Institute (an educational outreach endeavor), asked Adler to assist with implementing a program following the pattern of the General Honors program to groups of adults. With a Carnegie grant of $15,000, Adler and Buchanan began their joint effort and recruited a total of 30 instructors to meet the requirement of offering the program to fifteen groups. The instructors included individuals such as Mark Van Doren and Jacques Barzun[128] along with Adler and Buchanan. The Carnegie grant only funded this single two-year

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[126] Ibid., 65.

[127] Ibid., 62.

[128] Barzun was a graduating student at Columbia University at the time; "he went on to become one of the luminaries on the faculty of Columbia University, an internationally recognized scholar and author, a member of the History Department, dean of the Graduate Faculties, and provost of the University." (Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 67.)

experiment and would not fund a continuing program even though it was well received and Adler provided a report to the Carnegie Corporation indicating that it was a great success.[129]

This common experience between Adler and Buchanan would influence Adler's work at the University of Chicago and Buchanan's at the University of Virginia and contributed to the development of the Great Books program at St. John's College. But, first, Adler and Buchanan were to meet Robert Maynard Hutchins and work together at the University of Chicago. Adler had his opportunity first, in 1927, when C.K. Ogden, the publisher of Adler's first book, mentioned Adler's name to Hutchins.[130] Hutchins was interested in finding someone who could analyze the legal system, beginning with the law of evidence, from a logical, philosophic, or psychological perspective. His concern was that the legal system was filled with lawyers and judges who were making decisions and establishing precedence without fully understanding the non-legal aspects of those decisions.

Adler reported in his autobiography that he knew very little about law, but Hutchins was not looking for someone who knew the law; he was expressly looking for someone unfamiliar with it but very knowledgeable about logic, philosophy, or psychology. Adler met all three of these criteria and thus Hutchins was impressed. So much so, that when he became president at the University of Chicago just two years later, he arranged to have Adler join the faculty in the law school to teach philosophy and

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[129]Adler, *Philosopher*, 88. The Carnegie Corporation claimed that the grant was for a new program and was not designed to cover ongoing expenses.

[130] Ibid., 108.

psychology.[131] While Adler and Hutchins would have a difficult time at Chicago, especially with the faculty, this initial meeting and their continued collaboration on various projects had cemented their relationship.

Adler would also ignite Hutchins's interest in the Great Books. Indeed, early in his first year as president, Hutchins admitted to Adler that he had never even thought about the philosophical foundations of education before and Adler admitted the same. However, Adler mentioned that "reading the Great Books, both as a student and as a teacher, … had done more for my mind than all the rest of the academic pursuits in which I had been so far engaged."[132] Upon learning the details, Hutchins quickly made the decision that he would like to offer the General Honors program at the University of Chicago and he, along with Adler, would be the ones to teach it.

Thus, Adler had made the connection to the University of Chicago which would be the gathering and staging area for the leaders of the new program at St. John's College. I will cover that in more detail below, but a notable factor was the gathering of individuals at the University of Chicago to discuss the liberal arts – two of whom, Scott Buchanan and Stringfellow Barr, would become dean and president of St. John's College in 1937. Yet, while Erskine and Adler had personal visions that became vital components of the St. John's College program, making a Great Books program a four-year curriculum may have been much more difficult without institutional models as well. Buchanan and Barr not only believed in the personal ideas of Erskine and Adler, but also were able to benefit from their experiences with the institutions they attended either as

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[131] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 129-130.

[132] Ibid., 129.

students or as professors. In the following chapter, I will take a closer look at Erskine's Columbia University as well as the University of Wisconsin and the University of Chicago to trace the progress of the idea of a Great Books program from its infancy as an honors course through to its introduction at St. John's College as a four-year curriculum. While there may have been other efforts with the Great Books at other institutions, I will focus on these three as they have direct connections to Buchanan and Barr and influenced their ability to successfully introduce the program at St. John's College.

CHAPTER 3

EARLY ATTEMPTS AT GREAT BOOKS PROGRAMS

Columbia University

Just prior to the United States' entry into World War I, Erskine had begun his efforts toward a Great Books course at Columbia College. But, it was not until after the war that the General Honors course, as it was to be called, actually took shape. In fact, "the phrase 'Great Books' was not current at Columbia when Erskine initiated General Honors. The books [they read] in that course, one a week over a two-year period, were assembled under the title *Classics of Western Civilization*."[133] While many now conflate the General Honors course with what is now called Contemporary Civilization, which was and is required of all freshmen at Columbia College, these two courses had parallel histories that would merge over time. They both had their beginnings during World War I. "The need to explain war aims generated a course known as An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West, compulsory for all freshmen. A year later, in 1919, came Erskine's reading course, for selected juniors and seniors."[134]

Nicholas Murray Butler, then president of Columbia University, "noted that the University was going to be a dramatically different place than it had been a year earlier,

[133] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 55.

[134] Jacques Barzun, *Teacher in America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954), 150.

when the country was still at war."[135] The Contemporary Civilization course took shape and was to cover "the historical development of the modern world since 1200," including the targeted study of institutions, ideas, and ways of making a living.[136] With a focus on the Americanization of students, this was a typical function of the college in the United States. What was new about this undertaking was not just that is was a reaction to the war to better ensure that students were aware of the wider world and ensuring that Western norms were instilled in the students. The execution of this course was to require cross-departmental cooperation because "from the start,… contemporary problems, not the boundaries of a single academic discipline, determined the content of [Contemporary Civilization]."[137]

In addition to the cross-departmental nature of the Contemporary Civilization requirement for all freshmen, initially this course had something else in common with the soon to be formed General Honors program – discussion-based instruction. But these would be the only two significant similarities between the courses. The Contemporary Civilization course did not rely upon the Great Books. Indeed, it did not rely on any selection of books. Instead, the syllabus that was developed over time became the textbook. Each instructor making his contribution to the syllabus "provided a remarkably complete outline of Western civilization since the Renaissance while also highlighting the major forces creating the problems of the present."[138] The syllabus became the textbook and, even though discussion was the instructional method, the content of that

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[135] Timothy P. Cross, *An Oasis of Order: The Core Curriculum at Columbia College* (New York: Office of the Dean, Columbia College, 1955), Chapter 1, Paragraph 3.

[136] Barzun, 151.

[137] Cross, Chapter 1, Paragraph 4.

[138] Ibid., Paragraph 24.

syllabus included the exact material that the students had to comprehend as evaluated on standard examinations.

The concurrent development of this required course may have contributed to the resistance Erskine encountered when he tried to introduce his course based on reading the Great Books. It would have appeared similar in its objective to that of the new Contemporary Civilization course. The only obvious difference is that his course would not necessarily focus on the contemporary. However, the major point of contention was the use of Great Books at all. Thus, no matter how much Erskine argued to the contrary, due to the perceived difficulty with reading such august books, Erskine was only allowed to offer his course to juniors and seniors as an Honors program.[139]

Yet, that may have contributed to the success of his idea. Considering the discussion-based Contemporary Civilization requirement pre-dated the formal start of the General Honors course, Erskine's students would have been somewhat prepared for that format. So, in the fall of 1921, Erskine "chose fifteen students and a second instructor, and the group began to read one book each week, meeting for discussion two or three hours on a chosen evening."[140] But, it was not the possible familiarity of the discussion format that helped as much as Erskine's belief that the books he selected were not as intimidating as others made them out to be. His point, echoed by Jacques Barzun years later, was that "Great Books have always been read in American colleges and universities, as well as in the lower schools. But they have not always been read entire, as *books*."[141]

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[139] Erskine, *My Life*, 166-171.

[140] Barzun, 139.

The historian Jacques Barzun, in his work *Teacher in America*, takes an irreverent view of education in the United States. However, after lambasting the common methods of instruction including lectures, discussions, tutorials, and even recitation,[142] he reluctantly admits that he found value in the method[143] of instruction he experienced with the honors program at Columbia College. Pulling from and slightly modifying Newman's philosophy of "merely bringing a number of young men together"[144] being of equal if not more value that actual instruction, Barzun claims that reading can be just as influential. "Let me say at once that all books are good and that consequently a child should be allowed to read everything he lays his hands on. Trash is excellent; great works containing passages of tragic or passionate import are admirable."[145]

With Great Books as a starting point, Erskine knew that, with the right teachers, students would gain more than from textbooks or other compiled works or digests. "Exchanging ideas for two hours, they will probably teach each other more about the rich aspects of Shakespere's [sic] genius than any one of them is likely to think out for himself, or than any lecture is likely to convey."[146] Furthermore, he argued that abridgments or even excerpts from Great Books are insufficient. Each great book should be read in its entirety to more fully understand it. There is no way for an instructor or

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[141] Ibid., 138. Italics in original.

[142] Ibid., 39-42.

[143] While I focus on the value that Barzun identifies with Erskine's method, Barzun would be appalled at my use of the word method. One of the primary weaknesses of education, he claims, is the fact that practices even by the greatest instructors, when identified at all, are turned into methods and therefore lose their effectiveness.

[144] Newman, 105.

[145] Barzun, 60.

[146] Erskine, *My Life*, 169.

editor to identify the passages within any given work that will speak to all students. Erskine elaborated on the importance of reading entire works by discussing Spencer's *Faerie Queen*, Byron's *Don Juan*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*; each of these works is incomplete without reading its entirety.[147] Without reading an entire work, the reader will find it difficult, if not impossible, to follow the arguments made therein or may come to the wrong conclusion due to missing information.[148]

But, what made the discussion method a success at Columbia University? Like Mortimer Adler, another student and disciple of Erskine's and subsequent teacher of numerous courses based on the Great Books, Jacques Barzun stated that "the chief need and the hardest to fill is a good staff, willing to work like dogs with small discussion groups. They must be well-informed, active, interested in students, conscientious in their preparation, and committed to the idea of interdepartmental work."[149] This applied equally to the Contemporary Civilization as well as the General Honors instructors. Yet, the two courses would remain separate and serve two distinct purposes for nearly two decades.

The Contemporary Civilization course was typically taught by a single teacher which was "not so much a problem to be overcome as an essential ingredient of the course."[150] Like General Honors, the idea was that each teacher was not to be the authority in all the areas covered in Contemporary Civilization, but to lead the discussion. With the syllabus compiled by instructors from various departments and reserved

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[147] Erskine, *Delight*, 161.

[148] Adler, *How to Read a Book*, 336.

[149] Barzun, 152.

[150] Cross, Chapter 1, Paragraph 29.

materials in the library as crutches, there was always a structure that the teacher could follow and learn along with the students. However, the General Honors course took a different approach. "With each group there were two instructors, selected for their disposition to disagree with each other. They were present, not to lecture nor in any way to behave like professors, but to add fuel when necessary to the argument."[151] Both of these strategies led to interdisciplinary familiarity by the teachers as well as nurtured the participation of students in the discussion.

The General Honors course would eventually merge with Contemporary Civilization to form the Columbia University core requirement that is still in existence today, but the life of General Honors took many turns along the way. First was the broadening of Erskine's focus on literature and poetry. But this did not really alter the intent behind the course; Erskine had always wanted to simply use literature and poetry – his specialization – as a way to start the discussion of life's concerns. Having a second teacher with a different background and interests assisted with this goal. "The inclusion of philosophers and theologians was perfectly consistent with the overall aim of the course, which was to produce educated men, not men with a strong literary background."[152]

When Erskine noted that "it is a saying among educators that any school which for five years teaches exactly the same courses in exactly the same way, had better look to itself; it will soon be out of date,"[153] he was referring to the need to constantly keep

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[151] Erskine, *My Life*, 169-170.

[152] Cross, Chapter 2, Paragraph 11.

[153] Erskine, *Complete Life*, 243.

watch over any stagnation; he saw change as necessary. Erskine always believed that the Great Books, ultimately called this to get away from the antiquarian-sounding term classics, should be interpreted in such a way as they can speak to contemporary issues.[154] Indeed, this same concept supported the idea of updating the list of Great Books if others were found to be more pertinent. At first look, I find that the concept of a timeless classic appears to contradict this concept. However, as Erskine warns, teaching the same work the same way over and over would cause stagnation. Yet, the key to justifying the continuing teaching of a given classic is that it still speaks to the contemporary individual. In other words, the book may be the same, but discussions revolving around a Great Book pull in concerns of modern-day. When it fails to do so, Erskine argued, that book should be removed from the list.

While the selection of Great Books included in the reading list of General Honors may have been discussed and modified over the years, it was never a strongly contentious issue. I could find no evidence of a specific reason for the discontinuation of the General Honors course. Indeed, the historian of the core curriculum for Columbia University, Timothy Cross, also admits defeat at determining the cause.[155] Yet, what may have gotten in the way of the continuation of the course was staffing. With the need to find faculty members able to lead discussion-based groups for the Contemporary Civilization course, the obvious pool of candidates was already teaching General Honors. In 1929, the university decided to convert the freshman requirement of Contemporary Civilization into a two-year program. With this additional demand, the General Honors course – still

[154] Erskine, *My Life*, 166.

[155] Cross, Chapter 2, Paragraph 13, Footnote 14.

labeled as Honors and therefore not as important as a university required course – was discontinued in order, perhaps, to free the teachers.

After only three years, though, the Great Books returned to Columbia University as the Colloquium in Important Books. And, for five years the course would continue to operate in much the same way as it had upon its inception. It was still an honors program for the select few juniors and seniors who were chosen by an interview process. The differences were that Erskine was no longer interested in leading the effort – presumably to focus on his writing.[156] Adler had moved on to the University of Chicago, and the list of Great Books went through yet another edit. The new faculty leaders for the Colloquium were Jacques Barzun, James Gutmann, and Raymond M. Weaver.[157] The list of books was compiled by J. Bartlet Brebner, history professor at Columbia University since 1925, the same who edited and published the first list of works established by Erskine, Adler, and the General Honors faculty in 1927.

I should point out a significant factor about the Columbia program as its development approached 1937, the year St. John's College implemented the Great Books program. Erskine never intended his idea to become a full-fledged and complete curriculum nor the only method of instruction. Furthermore, his course was to get individuals to think about life and prepare them to be good citizens but not necessarily to prepare them for a specific occupation. He recognized the importance of professional and technical education, but he believed in science having its own treatment separate from literature; science requires laboratories and should not be simply read about and

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[156] Cross, Chapter 2, Paragraph 13.

[157] Ibid.

discussed.[158] As an honors course, the Great Books at Columbia University was never in a position to be a full program of liberal arts and definitely not a curriculum with a concentration in any specific utilitarian skill as was common at other colleges.

Yet, Erskine did not wish the Great Books course to be an honors course either. He felt that Great Books, as popular[159] works when they were first published, were within reach of all students. Finally, in 1937, Erskine got his wish. The Contemporary Civilization course had been a tremendous success all those years. Yet, "within the faculty, it was widely felt that a required course in the humanities would complement Contemporary Civilization's introduction to the social sciences."[160] Thus, Humanities A was developed based on the reading of Great Books. This new course was required of all freshmen alongside the Contemporary Civilization requirement. The format of the course appeared to match that of Contemporary Civilization, but the syllabus was much less structured and was comprised primarily of just the list of books to be read.[161]

Due to Humanities A being required for all freshmen and being only one year in duration instead of the two-year course that Erskine had developed and had followed since 1921, the number of authors was drastically reduced. While numerous changes to the list would occur over the next seventy-two years as Columbia University maintained this requirement, the original list is shown in table 3. Once again, immediately apparent is the focus on Western authors. Yet, regardless of this narrow focus on Western norms,

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[158] Erskine, *My Life*, 174.

[159] Popular, in Erskine's sense, did not mean they were runaway bestsellers; rather, the books were written to be read by the general population, not only by scholars or pedants.

[160] Cross, Chapter 2, Paragraph 17.

[161] Ibid., Paragraph 19.

the Columbia University core requirement sequence has become a model for other institutions across the United States.[162] Columbia's core is now comprised of its two flagship requirements of Contemporary Civilization and Humanities A, which is now called Literature Humanities. Since 1947, additions have been made to these two core requirements to include Art Humanities and Music Humanities, which basically add a second year to the Humanities requirement (and were originally called Humanities B) just as Contemporary Civilization is two years.[163] What is even newer are the core requirement courses of University Writing and Frontiers of Science. All these specific course requirements are finished out with limited electives in more required core areas: Science, Major Cultures, Foreign Language, and Physical Education. But all of these requirements still focus on the core; it does not represent an entire liberal education culminating in awarding a Bachelor of Arts degree unless coupled with extensive study in a selected major.

Table 3. Humanities A Course Required Reading

Homer	Marcus Aurelius	John Milton
Aeschylus	Virgil	Benedict de Spinoza
Sophocles	Dante Alighieri	Jean Baptiste Molière
Euripides	Nicollo Machiavelli	Jonathan Swift
Aristophanes	Francis Rabelais	Henry Fielding
Plato	Michel Montaigne	Jean Jacques Rousseau
Aristotle	William Shakespeare	Voltaire
Lucretius	Miguel de Cervantes	Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Note: Authors are listed in the order in which they were to be read.

[162] Barzun, 150.

[163] Cross, Chapter 2, Paragraph 19.

University of Wisconsin

No review of the Great Books would appear complete without discussing the Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin and its director, Alexander Meiklejohn. Yet, upon closer inspection, there is very little substance to the claim of association. While the activities in Wisconsin roughly paralleled those in New York and preceded those in Chicago and Annapolis, the Experimental College had an abbreviated life and an even more abbreviated list of Great Books comprising its curriculum. Yet, it did play a role in the St. Johns' College story as Meiklejohn and his ideas influenced others such as Adler and Buchanan.

According to its charter when the University of Wisconsin was established in the middle of the nineteenth century, it was to provide a standard liberal education typical of the time.[164] However, the University of Wisconsin rapidly recognized and adapted itself to the demand for specialized studies, not to mention the focus on research expected of a University. The soon to be standard division[165] in many colleges in the United States of the four years of study required of a bachelor's degree comprised of "something like general education in the first two years of the undergraduate curriculum and a specialized major and related minor field in the last two years"[166] was introduced by President Thomas Chamberlin during his tenure of 1887-1892. The move to specialization was so rapid that by 1900, under the presidency of Charles Kendall Adams, Adams had to make

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[164] Allan G. Bogue and Robert Taylor, eds., *The University of Wisconsin: One Hundred and Twenty-Five Years* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1975), 20.

[165] Philo A. Hutcheson, "Structures and Practices" in *Handbook of the Undergraduate Curriculum: A Comprehensive Guide to Purposes, Structures, Practices, and Change*, ed. Jerry G. Gaff, James L. Ratcliff, and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997), 108-111.

[166] Bogue and Taylor, 24.

special efforts to reinforce study of the classics and build a teaching faculty qualified to do so.[167]

Along with specialization and departmentalization, the size of colleges and universities in the early 1900s grew at a rapid pace.[168] By "1925 the University [of Wisconsin] had eight thousand students, an annual budget of several million dollars, and a faculty of six hundred."[169] The University had also established its strength in research in highly specialized fields. Indeed, what would come to be called the Wisconsin Idea actually provided stimulation for research projects. The Wisconsin Idea established that one of the major responsibilities of the University was public service. Faculty members and students of the institution frequently conducted research and provided results, developed solutions to problems, and even assisted with implementation of those solutions for state government, the community, and significant groups such as farmers for the overall benefit of the state.[170]

Also, in 1925, the University was looking for a new president. This was a trying time, politically, for the institution. The Progressive Party, which played a significant role in establishing the Wisconsin Idea, had lost its controlling power in the state legislature a few years earlier and was now trying to reestablish its influence. Yet, during the Progressive Party's loss of power, the faculty at the University of Wisconsin had quickly come to recognize the freedom they had when the state was not constantly

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[167] Ibid., 26.

[168] Veysey, 264-268.

[169] Lawrence Larsen, *The President Wore Spats: A Biography of Glenn Frank* (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1965), 48.

[170] Bogue and Taylor, 31.

requiring them to act as advisors and researchers.[171] This made a presidential search difficult as there was a "reluctance of talented academic administrators to risk embroilment in the partisan political controversies associated with the University of Wisconsin."[172]

After at least one failed attempt at hiring an experienced academic leader, the Board of Regents decided on Glenn Frank. Frank, a graduate of Northwestern University, was not an academic administrator. His first endeavors were in the ministry and he spent a few years prior to and after college on the evangelical circuit. Then, following a few years as a personal secretary to the owner of a large dry goods operation, Frank found himself the editor of a major magazine, the *Century*. As secretary and as editor, Frank broadened his contacts in business and government from his humble beginnings as a traveling evangelist in Green Top, Missouri.[173]

The Regents, the legislators, and even some of the faculty members hoped that Frank would return the University to service to the state. Surprisingly, even for those faculty members who wished to be left alone, there was little animosity toward this new president. To be sure, "the deans were so accustomed to carrying out their duties and the general lines of the University's direction of development seemed so well settled that it seemingly made little difference to them who occupied the presidency."[174] However, one dean, George Sellery, felt that he was passed over for the presidency and, from the start, did not appreciate someone without an academic background, and an outsider to boot,

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[171] Larsen, 79.

[172] Ibid., 51.

[173] Ibid., 39-45.

[174] Ibid., 76.

being in that position.[175] Unfortunately, Frank's first and perhaps only educational reform directly affected Sellery as the Experimental College was to become a special unit of the College of Letters and Science, of which Sellery was dean.

While not an academician, Frank did have experience from which to draw ideas for his new responsibility as president. Earlier in 1925, prior to his accepting the role at Wisconsin and while he was still editor of *Century*, Frank had printed an article by Alexander Meiklejohn which laid out a new plan of liberal education that fascinated Frank.[176] With Meiklejohn's recent resignation from the presidency of Amherst College and willingness to come to the University of Wisconsin, Frank presented the idea of an Experimental College to the faculty. As a separate program with no real impact on any other department aside from being loosely attached to the College of Letters and Science, the faculty "agreed to the proposal simply out of good will to the new president."[177]

Meiklejohn, as Frank's first major appointment, accepted the post of Brittingham Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Experimental College in 1926.[178] Meiklejohn was looking forward to this opportunity after a less than satisfactory twelve years as president at Amherst. Yet, as I will share, Meiklejohn's past experience did nothing to ensure a success at the University of Wisconsin and may actually have contributed to the closing of the Experimental College in just six years.

The fundamental philosophy behind the curriculum that was implemented in the Experimental College can be found in Meiklejohn's earlier speeches and articles which

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[175] Ibid.

[176] Bogue and Taylor, 40.

[177] Larsen, 86.

[178] Ibid., 85.

he published in 1920 when he was president at Amherst College. First, and foremost, is Meiklejohn's belief in a unity of knowledge reminiscent of Cardinal John Henry Newman.[179] While Meiklejohn made the John Dewey-like claim that "the college tends to take itself too seriously; men learn to live by living and not by spending four short years cut off from life by college walls and college customs,"[180] he was very consistent in his belief that a liberal education could be developed, standardized, and presented to all students. Indeed, he believed that "certain elements of knowledge are of common value to all men whatever their difference of occupation or trade."[181]

Perhaps his strongest critique of the system of higher education of his time was the advent of the elective system.[182] Indeed, he may have offended his own faculty at Amherst College when he declared that if teachers believed in the elective system, which they did at Amherst at the time, "it seems to me to render them unfit to determine and to administer a college curriculum."[183] He argued that a random selection or one driven by personal interest would not lead to a coherent integration of the subjects; they would all remain separate without the student understanding how to apply each in its respective way in life. The unity of knowledge may start with numerous subjects, he argued, but they must not remain separated; each subject must be incorporated and related to all other

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[179] Meiklejohn, *The Liberal College*, 43-45.

[180] Ibid., viii.

[181] Ibid., 24.

[182] Ibid., 13-28.

[183] Ibid., 41. Negative comments such as this did nothing to ease the difficulties at Amherst, and Glenn Frank would commit the same mistake at the University of Wisconsin which would further ostracize Meiklejohn and his Experimental College.

subjects.[184] He acknowledged that electives focusing on personal interest to encourage education is fine, "but if the special interest comes into conflict with more fundamental ones, if what the student prefers is opposed to what he ought to prefer, then we of the college cannot leave the choice with him."[185] Of course, this begs the question, what does Meiklejohn believe a student ought to prefer? To answer this in his words,

> The liberal college would learn and teach what can be known about a man's moral experience, our common speech, our social relations, our political institutions, our religious aspirations and beliefs, the world of nature which surrounds and molds us, our intellectual and aesthetic strivings and yearning – all these, the human things that all men share, the liberal school attempts to understand, believing that if they are understood, men can live them better than they would live them by mere tradition and blind custom.[186]

To attain this vision, Meiklejohn identified five areas of study important to the student of liberal arts. Philosophy he defined as investigation into moral strivings, intellectual endeavors, aesthetic experiences, and religion. Humanistic Science investigates institutions such as property, courts, family, church, and working. Natural Science includes astronomy, geology, physics, chemistry, and biology. History traces the development of the other areas, and Literature would enable the student to not simply understand these principles but to be acquainted with them as they are depicted by artists. "These five elements, then, a young man must take from a college of liberal training, the contributions of philosophy, of humanistic science, of natural science, of history, and of literature."[187] Regarding the challenges that this list of tasks imposes on the freshman,

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[184] Ibid., 132.

[185] Ibid., 42.

[186] Ibid., 26.

Meiklejohn argued that "though he [the student] would be a sadly puzzled boy at the end of the first year, he would still have before him three good years of study, of investigating, of reflection, and of discipleships in which to achieve, so far as may be, the task to which he has been set."[188]

Meiklejohn's curricular suggestion focused on the first two years being the common or general education that all should experience while the latter two years were to be spent on more specific studies.[189] The first two years were where Meiklejohn proposed to provide the studies every student ought to know. One of the strategies suggested by Meiklejohn paralleled that of Erskine's; to ensure against too narrow a focus during classes, Meiklejohn proposed that at least two instructors be in every class. Like Erskine's system, this would allow each of the instructors to provide differing perspectives and stimulate further discussion.[190] But, during his time at Amherst College, with only a few willing faculty members and numerous other challenges facing him as president, Meiklejohn was not able to institute the curriculum to any great degree.[191]

In 1926, after arriving at the University of Wisconsin, and being wary of trying to impose his ideas on another faculty, Meiklejohn did nothing to integrate the Experimental College with the other departments. Of course, with President Frank constantly reinforcing the idea of its being a unique program and the isolationist attitude of the other

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[187] Ibid., 47.

[188] Ibid., 49.

[189] Ibid., 151.

[190] Ibid., 142.

[191] Adam R. Nelson, *Education and Democracy: The Meaning of Alexander Meiklejohn, 1872-1964* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 97-129.

faculty members, it would have been an imposing challenge if he had tried. Compounding the impossibility of integration was the language used to highlight the new method that would be used in the Experimental College. For example, the point was made that discussion sessions and dual-instructor teaching were to improve on standard teaching methods; obviously, if this new way was better, then the methods used by the existing faculty must be worse. But these comments were not limited to faculty meetings or even gatherings at the university. As a result of Frank writing for popular periodicals as a continuation of his editor background and bragging about the Experimental College, the faculty members in most other departments, especially Sellery's College of Letters and Science, felt they were the teachers that the experiment was supposed to prove were inferior. As Bogue and Taylor succinctly put it, "a segregated, noncoeducational, imported program administratively sponsored and approved only as an experiment by the faculty, should not have been expected to survive."[192]

As I alluded above, Meiklejohn attempted to insulate himself from the difficulties of trying to convince existing faculty to adopt his new content and format. Therefore, "the faculty, a number of whom were Amherst graduates, were chiefly brought in from the outside."[193] Their responsibility would be to cover, in the first two years of college, the five areas of a liberal education that Meiklejohn outlined. The mechanism for doing so would include reading Great Books to discuss issues related to the five areas found therein. With this new faculty and the plan for instruction in place, the first class began in the fall of 1927.

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[192] Bogue and Taylor, 40.

[193] Ibid.

Meiklejohn identified the initial list and table 4 shows the Great Books authors required of freshmen that first year. In addition to the Great Books in table 4, freshmen were also required to read seventy supporting books among which were:

Agard, Walter Raymond, *The Greek Tradition in Sculpture*
Anderson, William J., *The Architecture of Greece and Rome*
Atherton, Gertrude, *The Immortal Marriage*
Croiset, Maurice, *Aristophanes and the Political Parties in Athens*
Fowler, Harold, *A Handbook of Greek Archeology*
Fox, William Sherwood, *Greek and Roman Mythology*
Gardner, Ernest Arthur, *Ancient Athens; Six Greek Sculptors*
Heath, Sir Thomas, *A History of Greek Mathematics*
Horton, George, *Home of Nymphs and Vampires*
Howe, George, ed., *Greek Literature in Translation*
Jebb, Richard Claverhouse, *Attic Orators*
Moore, Clifford H., *The Religious Thought of the Greeks*
Norwood, Gilbert, *Greek Tragedy*
Savage, Charles Albert, *The Athenian Family*
Stace, Walter Terence, *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy*
Taylor, Henry Osborn, *Greek Biology and Medicine*
Zimmern, Alfred, *The Greek Commonwealth; Solon and Croesus*[194]

As these selections indicate, Meiklejohn's Experimental College chose ancient Athens as its model civilization to study. Relating back to Meiklejohn's requirements for a liberal education, the primary focus for freshmen was on philosophy and humanistic arts. Additionally, the teachers were able, again following Meiklejohn's formula, to use history and literature to stimulate discussion, thereby including another two of the five areas that Meiklejohn stipulated as necessary for a liberal education.

[194] Meiklejohn, *The Experimental College*, 368-371.

Table 4. Experimental College Freshman Reading List

Aristophanes	Herodotus	Plato
Aristotle	Hesiod	Plutarch
Demosthenes	Hippocrates	Sophocles
Epictetus	Homer	Thucydides
Euripides	Lucian	Xenophon
Galen	Pindar	

Yet, while reading Great Books and discussion sessions comprised the method of instruction, the heavy emphasis on supporting texts diminished the point that the teachers were to avoid direct interpretation of the work so as to allow the students to investigate on their own.[195] With so many supporting texts, there were plenty of ideas, opinions and preconceived interpretations available. In contrast, Erskine and Adler relied on other Great Books and guided student inquiry to motivate discussion. To separate the Experimental College from a Great Books program even further, even in its short life, the Experimental College ultimately reduced the Great Books in the freshman year to a heavy focus on Plato's *Republic* to the exclusion or superficial review of other works.[196]

Of the five areas of liberal arts outlined by Meiklejohn, the natural sciences were largely omitted in the freshman year and became the major component of the sophomore year. Indeed, Great Books such as those by Francis Bacon, René Descartes, Arthur Eddington, Albert Einstein, Robert A. Millikan, Henri Poincaré, and Alfred North Whitehead, would dominate the list.[197] However, the ultimate focus on the sophomore

[195] Ibid., 144.

[196] Ibid., 107. The reading list remained the same, but much less emphasis and time was spent on the other authors.

[197] Ibid., 394-395.

year would be to compare the United States with concepts learned while studying ancient Athens in the freshman year. Of course, in addition to a handful of Great Books, nearly fifty supporting books would be required of the sophomores. While all this reading would still be required, just as the freshman year was reduced to focusing on Plato, the sophomore year wound up primarily focusing on the *Education of Henry Adams*.[198]

There was no doubt that students were expected to work hard. This was no easy class for just sitting and chatting. "They read massive amounts of material, compiled comprehensive regional surveys of their home towns or districts, and made oral and written reports on the Athenian and Spartan mores, the role of the middleman in society, and the problems currently facing the federal government."[199] Yet, Meiklejohn's report on the experiment pointed out that students may have been too young or unmotivated to learn via this method. Some weaknesses identified by the faculty ranged from students being poor in English, to no motivation, to not understanding the intent of the course.[200] In another comment about a particular student, a faculty member lamented, "Buehler this year has been very young, very intelligent, very introspective – therefore very confused." Of course, in an earlier publication, Meiklejohn claimed that this was just the sort of puzzlement desired of a freshman who would then have three more years for further inquiry followed by a life of continuing to ask questions.[201]

The Experimental College had its challenges. As already described, the existing faculty members were offended by how it was publicized. Meiklejohn did nothing to

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[198] Ibid., 107.

[199] Larsen, 99.

[200] Meiklejohn, *The Experimental College*, 188.

[201] Meiklejohn, *The Liberal College*, 49.

integrate the program into the rest of the university. Students did not fully understand what the experiment was all about. But that was not all; advisors in the Experimental College were still "expected to spend a third of their time instructing in courses outside the College. Most of them owed their appointments to Meiklejohn's influence, but in matters of tenure, promotion, and salary they were at the mercy of the various [other] departments."[202] Meiklejohn's lack of concern with administrative matters, especially with not distributing materials to parents and prospective students, did not help. Thus, in 1932, with the university facing financial strains, the Experiment College was discontinued. "After four classes had passed through the two-year program the experiment was terminated, having provided an exhilarating and successful experience for many of the students but, as a model, having small effect upon the future program of the University."[203] Yet, noticing the challenges encountered by the Experimental College prompts investigation into how St. John's College avoided or overcame those same or similar concerns. But, prior to discussing that, I would like to review another influential institution that was making inroads to a Great Books program at the same time as Meiklejohn at the University of Wisconsin.

University of Chicago

The University of Chicago, under the leadership of Robert Maynard Hutchins, played a significant role in the development of the Great Books program. As a large, respected university with a new, outspoken, young president and a new course requiring reading the classics in a discussion format, the University of Chicago, under the

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[202] Larsen, 101.

[203] Bogue and Taylor, 40.

leadership of Hutchins, propelled the idea into the educational community. A significant factor making this newsworthy and controversial may have been that Hutchins decided to teach the course to a group of freshmen personally. Yet, while Hutchins and the University of Chicago certainly made the idea of the Great Books famous, today, it is surprising to note how few people know that this perception is incorrect and the Great Books course at that institution was a failure.

Unlike Glenn Frank when he arrived at the University of Wisconsin, Robert Maynard Hutchins, when he became president of the University of Chicago in 1929, had an academic background and most recently held the deanship of the law school at Yale University. Yet, the struggles that Hutchins experienced were to far outweigh those of Frank as the University of Chicago was a larger institution with an established and nationally respected faculty, not the least of whom included John Dewey. With recognized leaders in philosophy and education at the University of Chicago, it did not bode well for Hutchins who admitted not to have thought much about what education should be prior to accepting the lead role of a major university.[204]

Perhaps things would have gone more smoothly if Hutchins had called on his existing faculty members for advice. However, he decided to pursue a very different idea than the accepted norm at the time. His recent acquaintance and working relationship with Mortimer Adler had exposed him to the idea of the Great Books. Yet, the Great Books idea was not the initial catalyst of controversy. Adler had even grander ideas that appealed to Hutchins. As Adler's hopes of joining the Philosophy Department had been frustrated at Columbia, his consuming desire to be recognized as a philosopher had

[204] Dzuback, 93.

grown to now include a desire to make philosophy a central component of every department in higher education.[205]

What happened, instead, was that Hutchins decided to finally satisfy Adler's desire to be a professor of philosophy. Two senior faculty members were retiring, which provided that opportunity. Although this appeared to be an ideal situation, the common thought from the remaining faculty was that for each position "an older scholar of outstanding ability would be appointed to ensure continuity of the department's reputation."[206] However, as had happened at the University of Wisconsin with Frank's institution of the Experimental College under the leadership of Meiklejohn, "in a spirit of accommodation to the new president, and unaware at that point of Adler's grand plan, the department agreed to take him."[207] Adler was hired as associate professor of philosophy and started in September of 1930. With Adler on board, Hutchins could focus on administration of the university while Adler provided ideas and wrote speaking points and even entire speeches for the new president regarding educational goals.[208]

Commenting later on the difficulties encountered implementing any of his ideas at the University of Chicago, Adler pointed out one of the weaknesses in execution that he blamed on Hutchins.

> He [Hutchins] wanted to build Rome in a day and he felt that if he openly laid a well-designed blueprint on the table for his colleagues to examine, they would with equal frankness, either tell him how to improve the plan or else enthusiastically cooperate in carrying it out. He had not learned from his brief experience as

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[205] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 132.

[206] Dzuback, 94.

[207] Ibid.

[208] Dzuback, 109.

> dean of the Yale Law School that professors do not operate that way, least of all when their vested interests are threatened.[209]

Yet Adler did not make it any easier either. Prior to his start date at the University of Chicago,

> Adler could not keep his hopes, dreams, or opinions to himself…. Rumors and gossip about his plans for the department and his less than flattering assessment of his future colleagues reached the University of Chicago. These rumors did not portend a warm welcome for Adler. More to the point, they greatly damaged Hutchins' credibility with the department of philosophy and, eventually, the whole university.[210]

Indeed, in early efforts to reconcile, if not to fully redeem the situation, Hutchins moved Adler out of the department of philosophy and into the Law School.

Facing this setback immediately upon Adler's arrival, Adler and Hutchins could not pursue the grand plan to integrate philosophy into every department. The focus then shifted to implementing the idea of a Great Books discussion course that would comprise two years of study. Not only would this be a unique method of instruction, but the Great Books course would introduce yet another controversial practice, that of delaying the assignment of grades until the end of the two years and based on two oral examinations, one at the end of each year.[211] This, as I alluded earlier, was a newsworthy event which stimulated national interest in the Great Books. Unfortunately, that national interest would take the shape of controversy and negativity instead of embracing the idea with immediate recognition as a breakthrough in educational reform as Hutchins and Adler wished.

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[209] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 129.

[210] Dzuback, 95.

[211] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 140-141.

Yet, even facing these difficulties, the Great Books course did get underway. Upon Adler's arrival, Hutchins immediately asked him to select the students who would be the first participants. Of the eighty or so applicants Adler interviewed, he ultimately identified twenty to participate in the first course.[212] This method of selection by interview in addition to meeting various initial criteria increased the rigor of entry into the course from the selection process for the honors program at Columbia University. The selection process at both Columbia and Chicago were vastly different from the self-selection process that was used for the Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin. As mentioned above, the self-selection process contributed to students being confused and not understanding what was expected. The concept of self-selection in the Experimental College, while only one case, pointed out that students must have a grasp of what a Great Books course is prior to enrolling; it is not just another option to choose from among others. St. John's College would continue the idea of a selection process by building it into its admissions requirements in 1937.

Like Columbia University, the class was established as an honors course and met for two hours a week to discuss the book of the week. Also following the pattern established at Columbia, Hutchins and Adler taught the course together. Adler was the more experienced teacher in this format, having read the books more than once while Hutchins was reading most for the first time along with the students. One can only imagine what this did to Adler's already expanding ego[213] to have the president of the

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[212] Ibid., 101.

[213] As mentioned above, Adler had a high opinion of himself and did not know self-restraint when it came to criticizing his colleagues. As an example, Dzuback documents that "he wrote to Hutchins late in 1929… complaining about a departmental course in reflective thinking Tufts had asked him to teach. He described it as 'goddam Deweyized bunk,'" 95.

University as a mentee in the classroom. Adler's mannerisms during these sessions were described as didactic and often consisted of slapping the table and badgering students. "He pushed students to see the 'errors' in the books and contradictions between different authors' claims to truth."[214] Unlike Adler, Hutchins was described as being calmly collected and eloquent in his comments and offering gentle prodding and questioning.

It was obvious that Adler's brusque manner and quick evaluations and opinions about others did not just occur in the classroom. Similar behavior outside the classroom distanced him from the other faculty which made expansion of his desires almost impossible.[215] Yet, the Great Books course was a success and would continue for years to come. A major contributing factor to the success of the class was the newsworthiness (it was not all negative and controversial) of the young president teaching the course himself. News articles actually attracted celebrities to the classroom. As Adler recalls in his autobiography,

> I cannot recall all the transcontinental travelers who included a visit to the Hutchins-Adler seminar as part of their stopover in Chicago while travelling between the East Coast and California or the other way around; but I do remember the actresses Katharine Cornell, Lillian Gish, and Ethel Barrymore; the actor Orson Welles; the columnists Westbrook Pegler and J. P. McEvoy (whose son Dennis was one of our students); and also the publisher of the *Washington Post*, Eugene Meyer, and his wife, Agnes, whose daughter Katherine (to become Kay Graham) was also a member of the class.[216]

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[214] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 102.

[215] Ibid., 136.

[216] Ibid., 138.

Adler's greatest recollection was of Gertrude Stein, with whom he and Hutchins debated at length about the program as well as the use of translations as opposed to reading in the original language of the author.

Another indicator of success can be seen in that after the completion of the first two-year course, "part of the first group [of students] petitioned to extend the class over two more years to reread the books."[217] This, of course, was just what Adler argued was best for anyone reading Great Books. He had read many of the books on his list numerous times and was surprised and delighted each time he found something new to appreciate or interpret in some new way. While highly irregular to repeat a course for further credit, Hutchins gained the approval of the faculty and the extension was granted for that first class. This was a unique situation and I found no evidence that it was ever repeated. This was the closest Hutchins would get to implementing a four-year Great Books program.[218]

A major contributing factor for the limited application of a Great Books program was, if not active resistance, then the passive attitude of the faculty members. Hutchins, with his "aristocratic elegance,"[219] which separated him from the university community, and his presidential position with a broad responsibility to the entire institution which separated him from the faculty, "never understood why the faculty at the University of Chicago might consider him arrogant and authoritarian."[220] The Great Books course was

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[217] Dzuback, 101.

[218] Ibid., 109.

[219] Ibid., 100.

[220] Ibid., 104. It was not simply due to Hutchins's unintended posturing, but actions he took due to his positional power – actions he had no idea were frowned upon. Examples include "when he tried to overrule the proposals of the philosophy department in 1930 and 1931, or when he continued to advocate

a success in spite of the lack of enthusiasm from the existing faculty. Hutchins and Adler, and later, additional faculty members from outside the University, were responsible for teaching the course and ensuring its continuance. Other efforts would meet with similar resistance from the faculty, but would ultimately result in changes to the University of Chicago's course requirements – especially in regards to electives and general education. One such goal was Hutchins's desire to combine the Great Books concept with the concept of inter-departmental integration. Hutchins formed a Curriculum Committee with Adler as a leading member. The idea was to establish a required general education curriculum for the first two years of college. Adler was to come up with four lists of Great Books, one for each area of physical sciences, social sciences, biological sciences, and humanities.[221]

The Curriculum Committee was the formal beginning of the battle between the Adler-inspired ideas of Hutchins and the Chicago faculty. Hutchins's desire to integrate reading the Great Books was not to provide an entire four-year curriculum, but to provide a general education for all students. His wish was to reduce, if not eliminate, the widespread use of electives as well as to establish a common set of courses that could benefit all students.[222] When Hutchins arrived at the University of Chicago, he found that the first two years of college required students to take the introductory or foundational courses chosen by their major department; students of different departments rarely ever took a course in common. Acting against this practice, Hutchins was accused of being

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Great Books for the college despite the faculty's refusal to follow his program or when he made recommendations for university educational policy that bypassed the faculty," 104.

[221] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 144.

[222] Ibid., 178-179.

classical and antiquarian as opposed to the modern view of embracing pragmatism and science.[223] Within the first few months of its formation, the Curriculum Committee presented so much resistance to the idea of the four Great Books lists that the idea was scrapped.[224]

Adler retreated to other endeavors. With few friends among the faculty and his early failure with the Curriculum Committee, Adler focused on his Great Books classroom, worked on writing books, and accepted invitations to lecture away from the campus – usually in New York – whenever possible.[225] Interestingly, in a few years, Adler did attempt to integrate the Great Books idea into his role as associate professor of philosophy of law. Adler gained approval from the Law School administration to redefine the coursework required of pre-law students preparing to enter the Law School. Adler identified the requirements expected of law students as being grammar, rhetoric, and logic – the *trivium* of classical times. In order to approach this topic and apply it to law, Adler offered a course that involved a close reading of Plato's *Meno*. To understand how close a reading was involved, it must be noted that this course was to last the entire freshman year.[226]

Hutchins did not give up on his attempts at implementing a common general education. After continuing to struggle with the issue for six years, Hutchins made two moves in 1936 that would exacerbate the debate to such a level that it would have to be resolved or tear the university apart. The first was the formation of the Committee on the

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[223] Ibid., 149-190.

[224] Ibid., 144.

[225] Ibid., 149, 191-197.

[226] Ibid., 154.

Liberal Arts and the second was the publication in 1936 of *The Higher Learning in America*, which was actually a printing of Hutchins's lectures given at Yale as the Storrs Lectures a year earlier.

Oddly enough, the Committee on the Liberal Arts had a similar goal as that of the failed Curriculum Committee five years earlier. This time, however, even though Adler was assigned to the committee, he had become less of a threat since his ideas had already been quashed for the most part. Yet, inflaming the faculty again, Hutchins brought in more outside experts to build the committee, among whom were Stringfellow Barr and Scott Buchanan, soon to be president and dean of St. John's College, respectively. While Barr and Buchanan may have caused controversy as being outsiders, another member of the committee, Richard McKeon, was the current dean of the Humanities Division at the university and a supporter.[227] With these additional supporters of the Great Books concept, Adler was less in the role of the fiery, over-self-confident catalyst than he was before.

Discussions commenced and lists of Great Books were formed, debated, revised, and criticized. Presumably starting with a list similar to the one Adler had helped form at Columbia and had been using at the University of Chicago, "Scott Buchanan recommended more radical innovations in the list…, introducing a much larger number of mathematical works and scientific treatises."[228] Ironically, even with common supporters of the Great Books idea, "the committee blew apart" as it "could not agree

[227] Dzuback, 127.

[228] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 62.

about what books to read or how to read them."[229] Despite the failure of this committee to work together, "it is fair and accurate to say that the committee's explorations and discussions during 1936-1937 laid the groundwork for the New Program at St. John's College in Annapolis."[230]

The other factor that ignited the faculty in 1936 at the University of Chicago, while simultaneously providing a guidebook of sorts for St. John's College, was the publication of *The Higher Learning in America*. In these Storrs Lectures, Hutchins shared his thoughts on the problems with higher education of the day. Among his concerns were over-specialization, free electives, and the love of money. Additionally, he identified three dilemmas: professionalism, isolation, and anti-intellectualism.[231] He lamented the shift of higher education toward professional and vocational training as opposed to educational centers to enhance the intellect and to gain a common understanding of the human experience.[232] His solution was a call for a required common general education – delivered via reading Great Books. After seven years as president of the University of Chicago, Hutchins had put his ideas – that were contrary to practice – in writing and shared it with the nation.

While the story of the University of Chicago was starting another interesting stage in its life,[233] it was then 1937 and Stringfellow Barr and Scott Buchanan were to finally

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[229] Ibid., 176.

[230] Ibid., 174.

[231] Hutchins, *The Higher Learning*, 54-55.

[232] Ibid., 69, 77.

[233] Dzuback, 128-129. In 1937, finally appointing an accepted faculty member and previous assistant dean, Araron J. Brumbaugh as dean of the college responsible for general education, Hutchins's

implement a complete four-year program of Great Books at St. John's College. The continuing saga in Chicago will be left here, but Hutchins's book that stipulated that a general education is sufficient for any field of study[234] would lend weight to implementing the New Program at the college in Annapolis.

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desire to have a common general education for all departments was on its way to becoming a reality – something he had been working on since his arrival in 1929, but it was not a Great Books program per se.

[234] Ibid., 63.

CHAPTER 4

ENABLING THE CANON

Although Barzun, in a footnote supporting efforts to "keep our civilization more nearly abreast of its own achievements," argues the validity of scholars selecting and translating the classics,[235] book lists were not the exclusive domain of scholars. Indeed, one of the most significant enabling factors for Great Books programs was the growing availability of those works – especially including English translations. Each of the important figures in the story so far – Erskine, Adler, Meiklejohn, Hutchins, Buchanan, and Barr – believed in reading original works whenever possible, but equally valued translations to make the content of Great Books more accessible and approachable. To be sure, the study of languages had itself become very specialized, which was frowned upon by these advocates of the Great Books.

Others, in and out of academia, were to play significant roles in this effort by publishing hundreds of authors, some of which would appear on the Great Books reading lists. Focusing on efforts in the twentieth century, the first of note was Joseph Dent who desired that good books be printed with high quality materials yet affordable for everyone; thus, *Everyman's Library* was established in 1906. Following close on Dent's heels, the president of Harvard University, Charles W. Eliot, edited the *Harvard Classics* which would colloquially come to be known as Eliot's *Five-Foot Shelf*. Finally, the *Loeb Classical Library* was underway prior to Erskine's honors course at Columbia University.

[235] Barzun, 273.

Its main purpose was to publish any and all known Greek and Latin works in their original along with an English translation on facing pages.

These three publishing efforts and others would make Great Books much more accessible to an average college student.[236] As the requirement for Greek and Latin for college entrance was waning,[237] English translations were of utmost importance for the return to reading the classics written in Greek and Latin. Although not published until three years after the start of the St. John's College New Program, Adler's *How to Read a Book* is also included here as it was, after its publication, frequently required reading for students entering the program and the book was commonly referenced whenever news articles about St. John's College's program were written. Finally, although not published until 1952, I include *Encyclopedia Britannica*'s *Great Books of the Western World* as it can be thought of as a culmination of effort beginning with Erskine and including Adler, Hutchins, Barr and Buchanan. To someone not intimately familiar with the St. John's College program, *How to Read a Book* could be thought to be a guidebook on how to prepare for classes at the college while *Great Books of the Western World* could be thought of as the required compilation of texts. Of course, as I will show below, although there is a small common core, agreement among all the Great Books lists varies widely – even among the individuals who worked so closely together.

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[236] Of course, Dent, of *Everyman's Library*, Loeb, of the *Loeb Classical Library* and even Adler did not necessarily wish these publication efforts or book lists to be used exclusively by college students. The idea, as the title of Dent's company indicates, was to provide access to Great Books to the common citizen.

[237] Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 180-188.

1906: *Everyman's Library*

The year 1906 saw the initial publication of fifty volumes of what Joseph Malaby Dent intended to be the first batch toward a total of one thousand volumes of the world's classics – *Everyman's Library*. Following a rapid printing schedule, over one hundred additional volumes were available within the first year and a total of five hundred volumes would be in print by the end of five years. While other publishing houses had printed classics before, Dent's efforts were unique in two ways. First was the scope of the endeavor; one thousand volumes was quite ambitious. Second, Dent wanted these books to be affordable yet made of quality materials to stand up to popular reading. "At that time cheap editions were rare, and it was indeed a boon to be able to buy, one at a time, a number of famous books that were more often talked about than actually read."[238]

This second of Dent's goals was tied to an underlying requirement that, on the surface, is different from what I have discussed thus far in this dissertation. Unlike Erskine, Adler and others discussed above, Dent identified works not solely because they were Great Books, but because they had an existing value to the common reader. In other words, Dent had to make a profit by offering what people were interested in reading; he was not trying to convince people to read Great Books but to provide inexpensive, quality books that were already in demand.[239] To identify which these were, Dent and his staff relied on

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[238] A. J. Hoppe, Ed., *The Reader's Guide to Everyman's Library* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1960), vii.

[239] As a further example that Dent's goal was less academic and more for profit is his inclusion of Herman Melville in 1907. Melville's works of *Moby Dick* and *Typee* were practically unknown in England at the time, but Dent knew they were popular in American and decided to take a chance on including them as volumes 179 and 180 respectively – he was not disappointed.

> the best academic advice available, which has been collected gradually over the years from professors in all the English-speaking universities, and "public opinion," that amorphous entity which can be gauged by sales over a long period.[240]

Reflecting the demand for popular works, table 5 lists the initial fifty volumes and shows a concentration of works of fiction.

Table 5. *Everyman's Library*: Volumes 1-50.

Volume #	**Author**	**Title**
1-2	Boswell, James	Life of Johnson
3	Lockhart, John Gibson	Life of Napoleon
4	Anderson, Hans Christian	Fairy Tales and Stories
5	Hawthorne, Nathaniel	Wonder Book; Tanglewood Tales
6	Kingston, Henry	Peter the Whaler
7	Kingston, Henry	Three Midshipmen
8	Lamb, Charles and Mary	Tales from Shakespeare
9	Aurelius, Marcus	Meditations
10	Bacon, Francis	Essays
11	Coleridge, Samuel Taylor	Biographia Literaria
12	Emerson, Ralph Waldo	English Traits; Representative Man
13	Froude, James Anthony	Short Studies
14	Lamb, Charles	The Essays of Elia
15	Lytton, Edward	Harold
16	Scott, Sir Walter	Ivanhoe
17	Edgar	Cressy and Polctiers
18	Lytton, Edward	Last of the Barons
19	Manning, Anne	Sir Thomas More
20	Kingsley, Charles	Westward Ho
21	Austen, Jane	Sense and Sensibility
22	Austen, Jane	Pride and Prejudice
23	Austen, Jane	Mansfield Park
24	Austen, Jane	Emma
25	Austen, Jane	Northhanger Abbey
26	Balzac, Honoré de	The Wild Ass's Skin
27	Eliot, George	Adam Bede
28	Kingsley, Henry	Ravenshoe
29	Reade, Charles	The Cloister & The Hearth
30	Trollope, Anthony	Barchester Towers
31-32	Carlyle, Thomas	The French Revolution
33	Finlay, George	Byzantine Empire
34-36	Macaulay, Thomas Babington	The History of England
37-39	Robertson, F. W.	Sermons
40	Latimer, Hugo	Sermons

[240] Hoppe, x.

Table 5–*Continued*.

41-42	Browning, Robert	Poems and Plays
43	Coleridge, Samuel Taylor	The Golden Book of Coleridge
44	Tennyson, Alfred	Poems
45-46	Malory, Sir Thomas	Le Morte D'Arthur
47	Huxley, Aldous Leonard	Essays
48	White, Gilbert	A Natural History of Selborne
49	Speke, John Hanning	Discovery of the Source of the Nile
50	Borrow, George	Wild Wales

Moving toward volume one thousand, further popular[241] authors would be added, including Dante, Dickens, Homer, and Virgil. But the list did not exclude the classical authors such as St. Augustine, Harvey, Machiavelli, and Plato.[242] To be sure, the inclusion of classical works reinforces the idea that Great Books were originally and continue to be popular works. Continuing interest in a given book is one factor of being a Great Book while simultaneously being the ideal candidate for publication when trying to make a profit.

Joseph Dent did not live to see the realization of his vision of one thousand volumes; he died in 1926. If he had been able to continue his original rate of one hundred volumes a year as he was able to do for the first five years, he would have easily reached his goal. However, after those first few years, the task of identifying popular books that were already or were speculated to become classics grew ever more

[241] The term popular, as used here, would be those books that were successfully marketed and subsequently purchased. While presumably for reading, that was not always guaranteed; some were purchased for display purposes only.

[242] Not to be overlooked is the value of *Everyman's Library's* publishing English translations of works such as Dante and Machiavelli. Erskine, Adler, and Meiklejohn were of like opinion regarding the benefit of translations and not demanding the discipline of mind to struggle through translations individually as was demanded by the likes of Cardinal Newman and the 1828 faculty at Yale University.

challenging. It would take another thirty years after Dent's death and fifty years since its inception for volume one thousand, Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, to be published in 1956.

Yet, in 1920, there were at least five hundred books comprising *Everyman's Library* that Erskine, Adler, and Meiklejohn could rely upon as being accessible to their students.[243] Another benefit of the *Everyman's Library* availability was the attention to detail of production including translations, notes, commentaries and introductory essays to the books. The publishers relied upon "findings of modern scholarship or changing literary tastes" to ensure that "up-to-date texts are substituted as far as commercial considerations permit."[244] Thus, while *Everyman's Library* may not have directly listed Great Books to be used as a curriculum for study, it suggested interest in those books for those who wished to pursue that goal. Indeed, by 1937, the first year of the New Program at St. John's College, over nine hundred books were available via *Everyman's Library*.

1909: The *Harvard Classics*

Unlike Dent's *Everyman's Library*, the *Harvard Classics*, also referred to as Charles W. Eliot's *Five-Foot Shelf*, was never meant to be an ongoing endeavor. Indeed, the idea of the collection of fifty volumes that would be published in late 1909 and completed in 1910 was proposed to Eliot by Norman Hapgood and William Patten of the P. F. Collier publishing house just months before the first volume went to press.[245] The *Harvard Classics* tied the commercial interests of the publisher with the educational

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[243] Indeed, in *How to Read a Book*, discussed below, Adler makes reference to *Everyman's Library* as one of the sources he recommends for the various Great Books he lists in his Appendix.

[244] Ibid., xii.

[245] Henry James, *Charles W. Eliot: President of Harvard University, 1869-1909* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1973), 193 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

ideals of Eliot. P. F. Collier wished to benefit from Eliot's reputation in order to sell books, while Eliot was believed to have "said that a five-foot shelf could hold books enough to give, in the course of years, a good substitute for a liberal education in youth to any one who would read them with devotion, even if he could spare but fifteen minutes a day for reading."[246] Thus, the scope of the project was set.

To help identify and edit the books to include in this project, Eliot asked for assistance from his friend William Allan Neilson, a professor at Harvard University. Neilson would also be responsible for adding, in 1914, the fifty-first volume to include recorded lectures regarding the *Harvard Classics*. In order to get the collection completed in so short a time, Eliot also called on others of his acquaintance for advice and suggestions. Yet, each selection was ultimately Eliot's. In a footnote in Henry James's biography of Eliot, James claimed that Eliot

> did not love books for their own sake or browse among the classics with a literary connoisseur's delight in their charm. But he *used* books; and in this he was aided by his talent for consulting other men and by the number of experts in different fields of knowledge who were always at hand and ready to supply him with information and references. (italics in original)[247]

Indeed, in volume fifty, where Eliot finally supplied an introduction to the collection, he required nearly two full pages to list those who assisted in the project.

Having a more scholarly basis for selecting works than Dent, Eliot's *Five-Foot Shelf* attempted to identify books that would be of benefit toward a liberal education. The focus was not on popular works with just a sprinkling of classics as in *Everyman's Library*, but contained works that would, to varying degrees, meet Erskine's and Adler's

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[246] Ibid.

[247] James, 199.

definition of Great Books. The very fact that Eliot chose selections because they could be *used* passes the Erskine and Adler test of a Great Book as one that is still applicable to current times. Indeed, while Eliot had access to a grand list of textbooks, some even written by members of his distinguished faculty, he did not include a single textbook in the *Five-Foot Shelf*. Eliot's and Neilson's work finally resulted in the fifty volumes shown in table 6.

Table 6. *Harvard Classics*.

Volume	**Contents**
I	Benjamin Franklin, John Woolman, William Penn
II	Plato, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius
III	Bacon, Milton's Prose, Thomas Browne
IV	Complete Poems in English, Milton
V	Essays and English Traits, Emerson
VI	Poems and Songs, Burns
VII	The Confessions of St. Augustine, The Imitation of Christ
VIII	Nine Greek Dramas
IX	Letters and Treatises of Cicero and Pliny
X	Wealth of Nations, Adam Smith
XI	Origin of Species, Darwin
XII	Plutarch's Lives
XIII	Aeneid, Virgil
XIV	Don Quixote, Part I, Cervantes
XV	Pilgrim's Progress, Donne and Herbert, Walton
XVI	The Thousand and One Nights
XVII	Folk-Lore and Fable, Aesop, Grimm, Andersen
XIX	Faust, Egmont, etc., Goethe, Doctor Faustus, Marlowe
XX	The Divine Comedy, Dante
XXI	I Promessi Sposi, Manzoni
XXII	The Odyssey, Home
XXIII	Two Years Before the Mast, Dana
XXIV	On the Sublime, French Revolution, etc., Burke
XXV	J.S. Mill and Thomas Carlyle
XXVI	Continental Drama
XXVII	English Essays, Sidney to Macaulay
XXVIII	Essays, English and American
XXIX	Voyage of the Beagle, Darwin
XXX	Faraday, Helmholtz, Kelvin, Newcomb, etc.
XXXI	Autobiography, Cellini
XXXII	Montaigne, Sainte-Beuve, Renan, etc.
XXXIII	Voyages and Travels
XXXIV	Descartes, Voltaire, Rousseau, Hobbes

Table 6–*Continued*.

XXXV	Froissart, Malory, Holinshed
XXXVI	Machiavelli, More, Luther
XXXVII	Locke, Berkeley, Hume
XXXVIII	Harvey, Jenner, Lister, Pasteur
XXXIX	Famous Prefaces
XL	English Poetry, 1
XLI	English Poetry, 2
XLII	English Poetry, 3
XLIII	American Historical Documents
XLIV	Sacred Writings, 1
XLV	Sacred Writings, 2
XLVI	Elizabethan Drama, 1
XLVII	Elizabethan Drama, 2
XLVIII	Thoughts and Minor Works, Pascal
XLIX	Epic and Saga
L	Introduction, Reader's Guide, Indexes

In his introduction to the set, finally presented in volume fifty, Eliot explained his selection process to some extent. He first outlined that his

> purpose in selecting The *Harvard Classics* was to provide the literary materials from which a careful and persistent reader might gain a fair view of the progress of man observing, recording, inventing, and imagining from the earliest historical times to the close of the nineteenth century.[248]

This objective would include the subjects of "history, biography, philosophy, religion, voyages and travels, natural science, government and politics, education, criticism, the drama, epic and lyric poetry, and prose fiction."[249] In addition to this overall objective and scope, he outlined the difficulties and restrictions to the selection. First was his reliance on English works or translations. Eliot lamented the loss of the full impact of poetry and other works in their original, but felt the importance of translations was justified to ensure citizens of the United States were not denied non-English works

[248] Charles William Eliot, Ed., *Harvard Classics* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son Corporation, 1910), 3.

[249] Ibid., 4.

entirely. Length was also a challenge for some selections. Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, for example, is represented by the first part only. The English Bible was left out altogether due to its length, and there were so many poets and authors of importance, that three entire volumes were dedicated to short selections of numerous authors instead of entire collected works of any of them. Finally, Eliot addressed the lean representation of scientific works by stating that "much of the most productive scientific thought has not yet been given a literary form."[250]

While neither Erskine nor Adler gives any credit to Eliot for his *Five-Foot Shelf*, in 1910,[251] Eliot put to paper what could have been the forerunner of the idea Hutchins would propose in his introduction to Encyclopedia Britannica's *Great Books of the Western World*. While Eliot never referred to it as a conversation as Hutchins would, Eliot championed the idea that "the collection gives many opportunities of comparing the views of contemporaneous writers on the same subject, and also of contrasting the prevailing opinions in different nations or different social states at the same epoch."[252]

Also in volume fifty, Eliot provided a general index that included names of authors, significant characters in history who can be found in one or more of the other volumes, places, and even ideas. This extensive index makes the *Harvard Classics* more like an encyclopedia than just a collection of books. A similar feature was provided by Adler and Hutchins in the *Syntopicon* that would be published as volumes two and three of Encyclopedia Britannica's *Great Books of the Western World*. Adler would publish

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[250] Ibid., 5.

[251] Indeed, most comments I have found from Erskine or Adler regarding Eliot have been against the idea of his elective system.

[252] Ibid., 6.

many books linking ideas with Great Books throughout the rest of his life. This feature was also included in *Everyman's Library* as its *Reader's Guide* first published in 1932.

The idea of using Great Books as a means of a liberal education can also be found in the *Reader's Guide* to the *Harvard Classics*. Immediately following his introduction and providing a list of the titles of all fifty volumes, Eliot included lists of readings within those titles "in order to enable the reader more easily to choose and arrange for himself… courses of study."[253] The lists include subject areas such as the history of civilization, religion and philosophy, education, science, politics, voyages and travels, and criticism of literature and the fine arts. I must point out here that Eliot identified works related to these topics and wished the reader to read the entire work identified. This was the *Reader's Guide* of 1910. In 1930, P.F. Collier printed another book called the *Reading Guide*; this time, the guide identified short excerpts of what should be read during that fifteen minutes each day referred to by Eliot. Furthermore, the *Reading Guide* implied that the promised liberal education accessible via fifteen minutes a day could be accomplished in a single year as the guide prescribed specific pages to read each day of a calendar year from January 1 to December 31.[254]

The *Reading Guide* was published after Eliot's death and, according to comments by Eliot about reading complete works whenever possible, would not have been something he would have favored. The *Reading Guide* may have been published twenty years after the initial collection to stimulate additional sales, but that is just speculation on my part. Eliot, Erskine, Adler, and others associated with the concept of reading

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[253] Ibid., 18.

[254] I wonder what dilemmas occurred with some readers when they encountered the reading for February 29 on those non-leap years?

Great Books would disagree with identifying as few as three pages within a work as sufficient material to understand that work, clearly preferring the full work.[255] The *Reading Guide*; however, suggests that excerpts are sufficient, with selections of only three to fifteen pages in length. Yet, regardless of the commercial influence of the collection, the *Harvard Classics* made available to the public works that were not previously so readily available. Indeed, Eliot, in the introduction found in volume fifty, identified length and availability as reasons for excluding more popular and more contemporary works – they were already readily available and need not be included in the *Five-Foot Shelf*.[256]

1911: *Loeb Classical Library*

In 1890, William Heinemann, after gaining experience in book publishing while working for publisher Nicholas Trubner in London as well as building relationships with publishers during his travels in France, Germany, Scandinavia, Russia, and Italy, opened his own business. In order to establish his own company, Heinemann initially published fictional works that were likely to sell; the first of which was *The Bondman* by Hall Cain.[257] Heinemann followed his successes, relying primarily on publishing individual fictional works, by establishing what was called limited companies within Heinemann. One such endeavor was Heinemann & Balestier and would be responsible for publishing *The English Library*. *The English Library* would include such authors as Rudyard

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[255] The introduction of the *Reading Guide* does briefly mention that the excerpts are intended to grab the reader's interest for further reading, but the intent of the book is definitely to lay out a fifteen-minutes-a-day plan of reading to meet the public's expectation set by Eliot years earlier.

[256] Charles William Eliot, ed. *Harvard Classics* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son Corporation, 1910), Volume L, 4.

[257] John St. John, *William Heinemann: A Century of Publishing 1890-1990* (London: Heinemann, 1990), 3.

Kipling, George Meredith, Henry James, R.L. Stevenson, and Oscar Wilde.[258] While this collection met with limited enthusiasm from buyers, it set a precedent for Heinemann, which he would repeat throughout his career, to establish limited companies with special purposes.[259]

Thus, in 1911, when Dr. James Loeb approached Heinemann with the idea of publishing Greek and Latin works that were to be translated with utmost care into English, Heinemann was enthusiastically agreeable. Loeb was "a wealthy American banker of German extraction who had settled down near Munich."[260] His proposal was to publish Greek and Latin works in their original language along with the translated English on facing pages. In his words,

> To make the beauty and learning, the philosophy and wit of the great writers of ancient Greece and Rome once more accessible by means of translations that are in themselves real pieces of literature, a thing to be read for the pure joy of it, and not dull transcripts of ideas that suggest in every line the existence of a finer original from which the average reader is shut out, and to place side by side with these translations the best critical texts of the original works, is the task I have set myself.[261]

The goal "was to include everything of any importance from the time of Homer to the fall of Constantinople."[262] Heinemann immediately accepted the proposal and established the new limited company called the Loeb Classical Library.

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[258] Ibid., 21-24.

[259] Other subdivisions included Heinemann Medical Books, The World's Work company, and the children's and educational departments.

[260] Ibid., 151.

[261] Ibid., 152.

[262] Ibid.

After making their arrangement, Loeb and Heinemann hired editors and scholars to perform and check translations. Many of the Greek and Latin works had never been translated before and would add to the list of accessible works for eventual use by St. John's College in 1937. Although Heinemann was a London-based publishing firm, William Heinemann speculated that the collection would be popular in the United States and contracted with the publishing house of G. P. Putnam's Sons to publish the library there. After twenty years of providing the financial support for translating and publishing books for the *Loeb Classical Library*, James Loeb died in May 1933 at the age of sixty-five. Yet, his will, providing $300,000 to continue work on the library, ensured that "the great work of translation could continue with a stated goal of about 375 volumes."[263] Hundreds of volumes have been published and the collection has been very successful as indicated by its surviving the ebb and flow of reader interest for nearly a century.[264] By 1939, 350 volumes had been reached. The first fifty-four authors published are listed in table 7 as a sample of who was being translated.

Table 7. *Loeb Classical Library*: Volumes 1-54.

Volume	**Author**	**Volume**	**Author**
1	Apollonius Rhodius	28	Greek Bucolic Poets
2-5	Appian	31, 38	Suetonius
6	Catullus	32, 37, 53	Dio Cassius
7-8, 30, 40	Cicero	33	Horace
9-12	Euripides	34	John Damascene
13, 29	Julian	35	Tacitus
14, 54	Lucian	36	Plato
15	Petronius	39	Caesar
16-17	Philostratus	41-43	Ovid
18	Propertius	44	Apuleius

[263] St. John, 268.

[264] By the catalog listing of volumes in the *Loeb Classical Library* as of 2008, there are 501 books.

Table 7–*Continued*.

19	Quintus Smyrnaeus	45	Achilles Tatius
20-21	Sophocles	46-47	Plutarch
22-23	Terence	48	Procopius
24-25	Ehrman	49-50	Strabo
26-27	Augustine	51-52	Xenophon

The *Loeb Classical Library* provided two benefits that were of value over and above the previous two publishing efforts I have outlined. The first was the addition of Latin and Greek works in English that had not previously been available. The second was that the original language and the English were on facing pages. While Erskine and Adler and even Buchanan and Barr valued translations, the curriculum at St. John's College was not to exclude the requirement to learn Latin or Greek. Having the original along with the translation on facing pages would have made it easier for students to see how the translation was made. Indeed, the *Loeb Classical Library* translations have been criticized in more recent times for their literal interpretations and lack of scholarly interpretation,[265] which would have been ideal for someone trying to translate word for word.

There were other libraries and collections such as the *Modern Library* (est. 1917), *World's Classics* (est. 1901), and *Open Court Library* (est. 1887) that were available for students attending St. John's College in 1937. Like *Everyman's Library*, the *Harvard Classics* and the *Loeb Classical Library*, these additional libraries and collections were established for one or more of the same reasons: scholarly desire, popular interest, and to make a profit. Review of these additional libraries and collections would be redundant, but the significance of mentioning them is to point out that they existed and increased the

[265] Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library website. "The History." http://www.hup.harvard.edu/loeb/history.html (accessed June 15, 2008).

selection and availability of works to the students of St. John's College and that this availability was a relatively recent development. While these were available at the beginning of the program, in the following two sections, I will discuss two more publishing developments that would influence the St. John's College program after 1937.

1940: *How to Read a Book*

As I have already shared, Mortimer Adler played a significant role in the formation of the St. John's College Great Books program. Yet, Adler may be remembered more for his publication of *How to Read a Book* in 1940, three years after St. John's College implemented its new curriculum. This book, with its appendix delineating a selection of Great Books, reached a far wider audience than the relatively few who were aware of the St. John's College program – and the even fewer students who were to actually be in the program.

While the book became famous for its appendix, Adler's intent for publishing the book was to address a problem he had identified during his years of leading discussions of the Great Books at Columbia University, the University of Chicago, and other locations not affiliated with institutions of higher learning. He found that the greatest barrier for those who wished to learn from books, great or not, was that they did not know how to read effectively. In *How to Read a Book*, Adler took over one hundred pages to make his point that people do not know how to read. He identified the use of digests and textbooks as one major contributing factor to the general degradation in ability to read effectively.[266] His point was that digests and textbooks are secondary

[266] Adler, *How to Read a Book*, 56-57.

sources at best and only share a subset of what could be gleaned from reading original works.[267]

Adler then identified the growth of the elective system in higher education, triggered by the advance of science and specialization, as the other significant factor leading to the decline in reading ability.[268] Specialization encourages students to focus on one or a limited number of subject areas which then discourages students' desire to seek relations to other areas. Ironically, the elective system offers a wide variety of subjects to the student where they have the opportunity to see how they interrelate, yet Adler points out that each elective is presented in such a way that it is isolated; students are not encouraged to find ways that one subject relates to another. Each must stand alone due to there being no prerequisites or progressive sequence that teachers can rely upon.

Adler then spent another one hundred and fifty pages laying out his recommended rules for reading effectively. While a simple list of these rules cannot do them justice, they are:

I. THE ANALYSIS OF A BOOK'S STRUCTURE
   1. *Classify the book according to kind and subject matter.*
   2. *State what the whole book is about with the utmost brevity.*
   3. *Enumerate its major parts in their order and relation, and analyze these parts as you have analyzed the whole.*
   4. *Define the problem or problems the author is trying to solve.*

II. THE INTERPRETATION OF A BOOK'S CONTENTS
   1. *Come to terms with the author by interpreting his basic words.*
   2. *Grasp the author's leading propositions through dealing with his most important sentences.*

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[267] This is not to say that Adler believed all original works are Great Books. His point is that digests and textbooks provide a type of filter where the reader cannot know what has been omitted, thus prohibiting the reader from making his or her own evaluation.

[268] Adler, *How to Read a Book*, 81, 88.

3. *Know the author's arguments, by finding them in, or construction them out of, sequences of sentences.*
4. *Determine which of his problems the author solved, and which he did not; and of the latter, decide which the author knew he failed to solve.*

III. THE CRITICISM OF A BOOK AS A COMMUNICATION OF KNOWLEDGE

1. General Maxims
   i. *Do not begin criticisms until you have completed analysis and interpretation. (Do not say you agree, disagree, or suspend judgment, until you can say, "I understand.")*
   ii. *Do not disagree disputatiously or contentiously.*
   iii. *Respect the difference between knowledge and opinion, by having reasons for any critical judgment you make.*
2. Specific Criteria for Points of Criticism
   i. *Show wherein the author is uninformed.*
   ii. *Show wherein the author is misinformed.*
   iii. *Show wherein the author is illogical.*
   iv. *Show wherein the author's analysis or account is incomplete.*
   Note: Of these, the first three are criteria for disagreement. Failing in all of these, you must agree, in part at least, though you may suspend judgment on the whole, in the light of the fourth point.[269]

While Adler claimed that these rules are most effective while reading Great Books, he also pointed out that they can be used to identify Great Books from those that are not. But, to get the interested party started, Adler decided to include a list of Great Books in his book's appendix. Adler's idea of reading effectively was to have the reader gain the most from reading any chosen book. He recognized that there are too many books to read. "The point is to read well before you read widely. It is better by far to read a cornerstone group of the Great Books effectively than all of them ineffectively."[270] Furthermore, Adler did not demand that everyone read all of the Great Books he listed or even agree with the list; "the most important thing about any list of books is that it should provide a good beginning."[271]

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[269] Ibid., 266-267.

[270] Adler, *How to Read a Book*, 323.

[271] Ibid., 323.

With this in mind, Adler encouraged his reader to start somewhere, read well, and identify his or her own Great Books. Of course, Adler did not just share his ideas on how to read well, but also listed criteria to be used to determine if a book is great or not. The first of his six criteria is that a great book should be widely read. The greater the number of people who read a book, the more likely that book is to have proven that it is understandable and applicable to a wide range of people, not being too narrow in focus or special interest. The second criterion is that a great book is typically a popular book rather than one that is pedantic. Great Books, while commonly believed to be difficult to read, were originally written for the average, attentive reader. The third criterion is that the work should be always contemporary. Similar to a narrow focus on subject such as specialization encourages, a narrow focus on time-sensitive issues likewise limits the interest of a book. The fourth criterion is that Great Books are most readable. A book is not great only in the reading; the author should have spent time writing a work that is coherent, logical, and, if possible, even eloquent. This leads naturally to the fifth criterion which is that the book should be instructive or enlightening. These terms are fluid in that each reader may gain something slightly different from a given book or even the same reader can gain something new upon subsequent readings. And, finally, Great Books should "deal with the persistently unsolved problems of human life."[272]

As the title of his book suggests, Adler encouraged individuals to read Great Books independently. During his long career, Adler attempted, with various degrees of success, to implement educational programs based on the Great Books in every way possible. As discussed above, he was a student in the General Honors course at

[272] Ibid., 328.

Columbia University under Erskine where he then became one of the professors leading the discussion in later classes. He worked with Robert Maynard Hutchins attempting to implement the program at the University of Chicago. He worked with Scott Buchanan, assistant director of the People's Institute – an educational outreach endeavor affiliated with Cooper Union College in New York City – leading groups of adults at libraries, gymnasiums, and other public venues in New York.[273] He helped Buchanan and Barr implement the program at St. John's College. He also tried his hand at implementing a form of Great Books study for children as his Paidea Proposal in the 1980s. Yet, Adler's consistent goal was to provide individuals with ways to approach the Great Books on their own.

Whenever discussing education, Adler frequently lamented the poor performance of the school system, including college. Although he did attempt to integrate the Great Books into the education system, most of his publications related to the Great Books revolved around an independent study to continue throughout life, not as part of any formal curriculum. *How to Read a Book* was just the first step Adler made to assist those who wanted to start their reading-based education. "Perhaps the only [way to get an education] is to learn to read better and then by reading better, to learn more of what can be learned through reading."[274] With this method, a reader can follow the thread of any issue of interest from one Great Book to another. Indeed, the way authors of Great Books refer to previous authors is the only structure that Adler recommended for readers. The background necessary for reading even the most difficult Great Books, he claimed, is by reading the Great Books in that subject that came earlier. Here, Adler agreeed with

[273] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 87-88.

[274] Ibid., 11.

Erskine's belief that "Great Books, read in succession, gradually form the best of commentaries on each other."[275] Indeed, Adler's later efforts focused on creating various indices to topics found in Great Books, something that would eventually be called the Great Ideas.

Adler acknowledged the paradox inherent in attempting to read only Great Books when it is not known in advance which books are which. Therefore, he provided the following list of one hundred thirteen authors as a starting point. This list (see table 8), as many of those based on Erskine's and Adler's lists, is chronological according to publication date due to the idea that later Great Books can be better understood after having read earlier Great Books.

Table 8. Adler's Great Books List

Homer	Erasmus	Jeremy Bentham
The Old Testament	St. Thomas More	Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
Aeschylus	Francois Rabelais	David Ricardo
Sophocles	John Calvin	Thomas Robert Malthus
Euripides	Michel Montaigne	John Dalton
Herodotus	Miguel de Cervantes	Georg Friedrich WilhelmHegel
Thucydides	Edmund Spenser	Francois Guizot
Hippocrates	Francis Bacon	Michael Faraday
Aristophanes	William Shakespeare	Nikolai Ivanovich Lobachevski
Plato	Galileo	Auguste Comte
Aristotle	William Harvey	Honoré de Balzac
Euclid	Grotius	Charles Lyell
Cicero	Thomas Hobbes	John Stuart Mill
Lucretius	René Descartes	Charles Darwin
Virgil	Pierre Corneille	William M. Thackeray
Horace	John Milton	Charles Dickens
Livy	Jean Baptiste Molière	Claude Bernard
Ovid	Robert Boyle	George Boole
Quintilian	Benedict de Spinoza	Karl Marx
Plutarch	John Locke	Herman Melville
Tacitus	Jean Racine	Fyodor Dostoyevsky
Nichomachus	Isaac Newton	Henry Thomas Buckle
Epictetus	Gottfired Wilhelm von Leibnitz	Gustave Flaubert
Lucian	Daniel Defoe	Francis Galton

[275] Erskine, *Complete Life*, 53.

Table 8. Adler's Great Books List

Marcus Aurelius	Jonathan Swift	Bernhard Riemann
Galen	Montesquieu	Henrik Ibsen
The New Testament	Voltaire	Leo Tolstoi
St. Augustine	George Berkeley	Julius Wilhelm Richard Dedekind
Volsunga Saga	Thomas Fielding	Wilhelm Max Wundt
Song of Roland	David Hume	Mark Twain
Burnt Njal	Jean Jacques Rousseau	Henry Adams
Maimonides	Laurence Sterne	Charles Peirce
St. Thomas Aquinas	Adam Smith	William Sumner
Dante	Blackstone	Oliver Wendell Holmes
Geoffrey Chaucer	Immanuel Kant	William James
Thomas A. Kempis	Edward Gibbon	Friedrich Nietzsche
Leonardo Da Vinci	Stendahl	Georg Cantor
Niccolo Machiavelli	*The Federalist Papers*	

Note: Authors are listed in the order in which they were to be read.

Again, Adler insisted that this list is only a starting point. It is not intended to be the definitive list of Great Books, nor did Adler expect every author on the list to be read. "Ultimately everyone should make his own list of Great Books."[276] Indeed, this is an abbreviated list of Great Books identified by Adler in that he only included those that had readily available, inexpensive, editions in English. Adler wanted to assist individuals who wished to improve their lives by independent reading – not furthering scholarship by learning multiple languages or investing in obscure, difficult to acquire manuscripts.

1952: Encyclopedia Britannica's *Great Books of the Western World*

Finally published in 1952, Encyclopedia Britannica's *Great Books of the Western World* grew from the original efforts in 1936 of Hutchins's Committee on the Liberal Arts. I have already discussed how this committee brought together Buchanan, Barr, Adler, and Hutchins, among others. The Encyclopedia Britannica project would also bring in Mark Van Doren, John Erskine, and Alexander Meiklejohn. With Hutchins and

[276] Adler, *How to Read a Book*, 376.

Adler as editor and associate editor, respectively, the other five, along with Clarence Faust, president of the Fund for the Advancement of Education and Joseph Schwab, science professor at the University of Chicago, would comprise the advisory board.

By the time the encyclopedia was published, the St. John's College Great Books curriculum had been in place for fifteen years. While, at first, it appears that the encyclopedia could not have influenced the curriculum at St. John's College, one only has to realize the effort involved with this endeavor to understand the close relation it had to the St. John's College curriculum. I found in the St. John's College archives correspondence among the various advisors as part of the documents of Stringfellow Barr. Throughout the 1940s, memoranda, lists, and letters debated the content of the encyclopedia. Mortimer Adler, along with St. John's College dean, Scott Buchanan, comprised a working sub-committee of the advisory board which was responsible for compiling the list of works proposed for inclusion in the Great Books project for Encyclopedia Britannica.[277]

Reviewing this correspondence, I found that the committee had to maintain its vigilance in ensuring that the project would not be a simple compilation of Great Books that were popular, but one that consisted of Great Books "best adapted to use in adult education."[278] As Adler and Buchanan included in the introductory note to one of their compilations for the board,

> The intrinsic criteria for choosing single books are excellence of construction and composition, immediate intelligibility on the

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[277] Mortimer Adler and Scott Buchanan, "Report of Sub-Editorial-Advisory Committee" (St. John's College Archive. Series 2, box 5, folder 47.)

[278] Stringfellow Barr to Robert M. Hutchins, memorandum, 5 May, 1944 (St. John's College Archive. Series 2, box 5, folder 51), 1.

> aesthetic level, increasing intelligibility with deeper reading and analysis, an avenue to maximum depth and maximum range of significance with more than one level of meaning and truth. It should be clear from these criteria that the ordinary publisher's notion of readability is only a small part of the combined criteria.[279]

It appears as though the entire advisory board was of like mind. Yet, judging from the final selection for publication, I wonder at the pressure that was ultimately felt from Encyclopedia Britannica to ensure that most, if not all selections should be popular. Looking at the inclusion of the likes of Euclid and Johannes Kepler, it could be argued that the advisory committee stayed true to its ideals; however, noting the controversy within the advisory board revolving around Laurence Sterne and Henry Fielding, I am not so sure. Regarding Sterne, Barr diplomatically responded to Hutchins's inclusion of that author by stating: "I admire your loyalty to *Tristram Shandy* without knowing your reason for believing it belongs in this particular list."[280] Likewise, Adler and Buchanan recommended omitting all works from Fielding along with William Gilbert, Charles Lyell, and *Burnt Njal* because they did "not appear to be overwhelmingly important… and… [had] weak context."[281] Interestingly, the second edition of the encyclopedia, published nearly forty years later in 1990,[282] omitted these authors.

Yet, even with occasional disagreements among themselves and pressure from Britannica, the advisory board did not pander to popularity of works just to ensure sales;

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[279] Adler and Buchanan, 1.

[280] Stringfellow Barr to Robert M. Hutchins, 30 November, 1944 (St. John's College Archive. Series 2, box 5, folder 40.)

[281] Adler and Buchanan, 3.

[282] For the second edition of *Great Books of the Western World*, Alder had taken Hutchins's place as chief editor.

it was an attempt to identify books, as the St. John's College program had done, that could be used by individuals seeking a liberal education. The advisory board members faced difficulties not only to ensure that the encyclopedia would sell, but they also wished to ensure that their educational message was heard and not discounted as valueless in a modern era. As Hutchins stated in the introductory volume, "This set of books is offered in no antiquarian spirit…. [Furthermore,] we have not thought of providing our readers with hours of relaxation or with an escape from the dreadful cares that are the lot of every man."[283] Instead, the set was for adults to gain a liberal education which the advisory board believed was vital for citizens of a democracy and was not attainable through the educational system of the day which was becoming more and more specialized. While the encyclopedia was designed and intended for adults, Hutchins also indicated that the set could be read by persons of any age. Indeed, even if a young person did not understand a work on first reading, one of the benefits of Great Books is that they are re-readable; no matter what age, a further reading with additional experience and knowledge leads to additional understanding, insight, and thus benefit.[284]

As this endeavor proceeded alongside the four-year Great Books curriculum, called the New Program when it was introduced at St. John's College in 1937, the philosophy of constant debate and updating of a Great Books list was reinforced. Indeed, Mark Van Doren commented that

> controversy can rage among educators over the composition of the perfect list for a curriculum. It is a sad sign when there is no such controversy because there is no general belief in lists of books – that is to say, in books. All good lists will be much alike, for there

[283] Hutchins, *Great Books of the Western World*. Vol. 1, xii.

[284] Ibid., xv-xvi.

> are no alternatives to Homer, Plato, Shakespeare, Newton, and Tolstoy. But any time must be sure that its own list is right at the edges; and a time which does not care about this is simply not interested in itself, however much it thinks it is interested in current institutions and events.[285]

The constant review of Great Books for the Encyclopedia Britannica project during the formative years of the New Program at St. John's College ensured that the list identified as the curriculum at St. John's College was not implemented as a constant. Buchanan and Barr, knowing that the list at St. John's College would change over time and even encouraging that change, prevented the curriculum from getting stale. Their participation on the Committee on the Liberal Arts at the University of Chicago in 1936, their transition to St. John's College in 1937 and their participation on the advisory board for Encyclopedia Britannica beginning in 1943[286] ensured their continued interaction with experienced educators who had worked with the concept of the Great Books as a changing curriculum.

At the time of publication in 1952, the *Great Books of the Western World* included an introductory volume titled *The Great Conversation* by Robert Hutchins followed by two volumes entitled *The Great Ideas: A Syntopicon*. The remaining fifty-one volumes included Great Books from the authors listed in table 9. Similar to *Everyman's Library, Harvard Classics,* and the *Loeb Classical Library*, the final selection of *Great Books of the Western World* included compromises and exclusions that limited the Great Books that were included. While there were numerous reasons for this, Hutchins outlined a few that he felt were important to mention in the introduction. First,

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[285] Mark Van Doren, *Liberal Education* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1943; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 154 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

[286] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 238-239.

the Bible was excluded due to its size and its ready availability.[287] Second, the advisory board avoided works that were too contemporary; Sigmund Freud, the final author, was the only author to be included whose work was completed after 1900. And finally, while some of the included works had no previous English translation before this project, other works were not included as a satisfactory translation could not be found or executed prior to publication.[288]

Table 9. *Great Books of the Western World*.

Volume	**Author**	**Volume**	**Author**
4	Homer	31	René Descartes, Spinoza
5	Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes	32	John Milton
6	Herodotus, Thucydides	33	Blaise Pascal
7	Plato	34	Sir Isaac Newton
8-9	Aristotle	35	John Locke, George Berkeley, David Hume
10	Hippocrates, Galen	36	Jonathan Swift, Laurence Sterne
11	Euclid, Archimedes, Apollonius, Nicomachus	37	Henry Fielding
12	Lucretius, Epictetus, Aurelius	38	Montesquieu, Jean Jacques Rousseau
13	Virgil	39	Adam Smith
14	Plutarch	40-41	Edward Gibbon
15	Tacitus	42	Immanuel Kant
16	Ptolemy, Copernicus, Kepler	43	American State Papers, *The Federalist*, Mill
17	Plotinus	44	James Boswell
18	Augustine	45	Antoine Lavoisier, Joseph Fourier, Michael Faraday
19-20	Thomas Aquinas	46	Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel
21	Dante	47	Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

[287] While the Bible was not included in the actual encyclopedia, the Syntopicon does include references to the Bible as appropriate for each subject area.

[288] Hutchins, *Great Books of the Western World*. Vol. 1, xvii-xix.

Table 9–*Continued*.

22	Geoffrey Chaucer	48	Herman Melville
23	Niccolo Machiavelli	49	Charles Darwin
24	Francis Rabelais	50	Karl Marx
25	Montaigne	51	Leo Tolstoy
26-27	William Shakespeare	52	Fyodor Dostoevsky
28	William Gilbert	53	William James
29	Miguel de Cervantes	54	Sigmund Freud
30	Sir Francis Bacon		

Note: Volumes 1-3 were the introductory volume (*The Great Conversation)* and a two-volume index of topics called the *Syntopicon*.

Building the educational value of this set, Hutchins and the advisory board compiled their list with the following in mind. First, they did not include just literary works, but scientific as well. The scientific works they chose were also deemed Great Books since great science works "like literary books, they have beginnings, middles, and ends that move from familiar situations through complications to unravelings and recognitions."[289] In addition to the inclusion of scientific works, the advisory board decided not to include excerpts or digests, but only complete works. The reader was to make his or her own decision about what was of value as each work was read. There is no right or wrong selection as upon further reading, the value seen in those selections may change; therefore, it would be impossible for an editing team to make that determination in advance. Finally, while the set was to serve in an educational capacity, the advisory board believed in the concept that the Great Books were written for a public audience and not just scholars.

> Great Books contain their own aids to reading; that is one reason why they are great. Since we hold that these works are intelligible

[289] Ibid., xxiii-xxiv.

> to the ordinary man, we see no reason to interpose ourselves or anybody else between the author and the reader.[290]

Therefore, no introductory materials or scholarly reviews or digests were included.

As stated above, *Great Books of the Western World* was published fifteen years after the introduction of the St. John's College program. Yet, the influence of this encyclopedia is obvious for the college's program as it benefitted by the discussions of the advisory board which included members who influenced the creation of such a canon such as: Stringfellow Barr, Scott Buchanan, John Erskine, Alexander Meiklejohn, and Mark Van Doren. The associate editor was Mortimer Adler and the editor in chief was Robert Maynard Hutchins. It would not be until nearly forty years later, in 1990, that *Great Books of the Western World* would be revised – to include an additional six volumes with twentieth century authors and some minor changes in earlier authors. While I found that the St. John's College selection of Great Books had a core selection of works that were remarkably stable, the Great Books list of the program would find itself under constant revision throughout its seventy year history. That is the next part of the story.

[290] Ibid., xxv.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION AT ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE

The preceding chapters traced converging paths of history for St. John's College. While the people and events thus far have had no relation to St. John's College prior to 1936, the history of that college, as it has operated for the subsequent seventy years, would be incomplete without a full understanding of the origins of its curriculum. Indeed, as the following brief history of the physical institution of St. John's College will illustrate, the New Program implemented in 1937 redefined the college in such a way that it, aside from the physical buildings, established a new institution.

St. John's College claims 1696 as its founding year as that was when the Colony of Maryland's General Assembly established King William's School. King William's School was established as a public school for the general education of the population, which, at that time, meant the general population of boys. The idea of a college did not arise until 1732 and took over fifty more years before it came to fruition. Finally, after the American Revolution, in 1784, the General Assembly of the then State of Maryland transferred the property, funds, masters, and students of King William's School to St. John's College.[291] "The General Assembly also contributed four acres of land and a large building now known as McDowell Hall, which originally had been designed as the Royal

[291] Richard D. Weigle, *St. John's College, Annapolis: Pilot College in Liberal Arts Education* (New York: The Newcomen Society in North America, 1953), 11. The students were still comprised of only young men when St. John's College was established. It would not be until 1951 that women were admitted. ("A Brief History of St. John's College.")

Governor's mansion."[292] It appeared as though St. John's College was off to a running start with a substantial foundation. Yet, even with this foundation and a further good omen of a promise of a perpetual grant of state funds, the college found itself "almost from its inception… in financial embarrassment."[293] A major contributing factor to this condition was due to vital start-up funds being raised by subscription yet experiencing difficulties with collection. Compounding this shortfall of funds, the General Assembly did not follow through with its promise of funds for current operations for a period of time in the early years.[294] While there would be periods of stability and even growth, financial burdens were a recurring theme throughout St. John's College's history.

In addition to financial trouble, the leadership of the college had its ups and downs. The Board of Visitors and Governors had a difficult time attracting and retaining candidates for the top position of the college. Indeed, during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, "the principalship changed hands too frequently, and sometimes simply remained vacant."[295] It was not until Hector Humphries became Principal in 1831 that St. John's College experienced a period of success and growth. For twenty-six years, Humphries led the college and built its campus by adding four buildings. Humphries also "revamped the curriculum and added modern science to the traditional teaching of

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[292] Ibid.

[293] Ibid.

[294] Ibid., 14. Rudolph discusses the struggle for financial support as a common element of higher education in the history of the United States. The state was not the reliable source that some have come to believe; colleges had to rely on other means such as philanthropists, alumni, their own faculty, general fund-raising, and even paid agents to raise funds. (Rudolph, *The American College and University*, 177-200.)

[295] Ibid.

classics, mathematics, and moral philosophy."[296] Yet, at the end of Humphries's tenure, St. John's College once again found itself in a period of instability.

Shortly thereafter, the Civil War compounded the college's operational problems. Indeed, for five years during the war, the St. John's College "campus was taken over by Northern troops and used as a receiving station for prisoners of war who were landed at the port of Annapolis."[297] Strategically, to ensure that the allocation from the state did not disappear altogether, the college continued during this time in a room or two. Limping along in this manner, the college survived the war. However, even after the war, with the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis[298] directly adjacent to the St. John's College campus, each time St. John's College found itself in troubled circumstances, the Naval Academy threatened to take over the facility.[299] It is surprising that St. John's College was able to survive as a separate institution during this time – especially in light of not having a strong leader for the institution.

At some time during or after the war, the top position of the college changed title from Principal to President – perhaps in an effort to make the position more attractive as the Board of Visitors and Governors had a revolving-door experience with the lead post for nearly thirty years. "Only in 1886 did stability once again arrive with the inauguration of Dr. Thomas Fell,"[300] who would serve St. John's College for thirty-seven

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[296] "A Brief History of St. John's College" (St. John's College website; available from http://www.sjca.edu/college/history.phtml; Internet; accessed 7 October 2003.)

[297] Weigle, 15.

[298] Established in 1845.

[299] Weigle, 17.

[300] Ibid.

years. Not only did the position gain stability, but the program at the college developed and kept up with the times. In addition to compulsory military training, the curriculum during Fell's administration "included four courses – Classical, Latin Scientific, Scientific, and Mechanical"[301] which was the first deviation from the predominantly classical curriculum it had maintained to that time. The new curriculum introduced technical courses that stressed practical skills like engineering and mining yet did not introduce electives, but "required students to follow a rigid course."[302] By 1905, St. John's College itself became recognized "as one of the six leading military colleges of the Country."[303] Yet, even with this distinction, conflicts between faculty and officers, along with identity issues where the college felt it needed to distinguish itself from the Naval Academy, motivated St. John's College to discontinue its military program in 1924.

Once again, this time triggered by the retirement of Dr. Fell in 1923, the college experienced its "familiar pattern of administrative difficulty"[304] and rapidly went through three presidents and even operated with the dean as president for a period of time. These difficulties culminated with the tragic performance of President Amos Walter Wright Woodcock who took the helm in 1933. Within two years of accepting the position, Woodcock would bring the college to its knees and nearly close its doors with one fateful action. In conflict with the faculty's recommendation, Woodcock granted a degree to a student who had failed his examinations. This action resulted in the ultimate sanction

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[301] "A Brief History of St. John's College."

[302] Ibid.

[303] Weigle, 16.

[304] Ibid.

against the college by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, revoking accreditation in 1935. Obviously, the Board once again was looking for another president.

Before moving on to the New Program that was introduced in 1937, I need to describe St. John's College's organization and curriculum as it had evolved into the early 1930s. According to the catalog of 1933-1934, the college felt it had always and was still meeting its chartered mission of a liberal college. That charter of 1784 read:

> *Be it enacted*, by the General Assembly of Maryland, that a college or general seminary of learning, by the name of Saint John's, be established on the Western Shore, upon the following fundamental and inviolable principles, namely: *first, the said college shall be founded and maintained forever on a most liberal plan, for the benefit of youth of every religious denomination who shall be freely admitted to equal privileges and advantages of education, and to all the literary honors of the college, according to their merit.*[305]

While this liberal foundation had originally begun with study of the classics, St. John's College evolved by adopting new courses in science, engineering, and mechanical science, among others, as mentioned above. By 1933, the authors of the catalog tried to maintain their claim on liberal arts by stating that, "primarily a college of liberal arts, St. John's prepares its graduates to enter professional schools."[306]

Yet, students were required to choose a major such as biology, chemistry, economics, government, philosophy, physics, pre-medical sciences, or psychology. To earn a Bachelor of Arts degree, all students were required to take at least one English course and at least one foreign language course that varied based on the chosen major. In

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[305] St. John's College, *Catalog 1933-1934*, 18.

[306] Ibid., 24.

addition to these general requirements, six courses were required in the student's chosen major. To provide a more well-rounded education, St. John's also required three courses in what was called the distribution areas of Language, Literature, and Art; Social Sciences and Philosophy; and Sciences and Mathematics. In addition to the academic coursework, students were required to take Physical Hygiene and Physical Training. These courses were supplemented by another typical college activity of the times – athletics. St. John's College participated in many sports such as football, basketball, lacrosse, boxing, and cross-country. Finally, St. John's had even adopted the elective system to a degree by allowing students to choose any other courses desired to complete 17 units of coursework.[307]

The curriculum does not appear to have been a destabilizing aspect of the college; it resembled many colleges of its time and even today.[308] The difficulties of St. John's College revolved primarily around two elements: 1) lack of funding, 2) weak leadership. Yet, even with two strong, long-term presidents, St. John's College still did not experience any lasting stability after each of those presidents retired. Therefore, in 1935, "the board, fed up with the instability of the last ten years and still smarting from the fiasco at the end of President Woodcock's administration, realized that St. John's would have to change fundamentally, or it would die."[309]

Fortuitously, within a year of Woodcock's departure, Hutchins's book *The Higher Learning in America* was published and stimulated debate among educators in higher

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[307] Ibid., 54-55.

[308] St. John's College, *Catalog 1935-1936*.

[309] Emily A. Murphy, *'A Complete & Generous Education', 300 Years of Liberal Arts: St. John's College, Annapolis* (Annapolis, St. John's College Press, 1996), 84.

education. Simultaneous with the book's publication, Hutchins established the Committee on the Liberal Arts, some of whose members would ultimately play an active role in proposing reforms for St. John's College. "Through a chance friendship, the Board had learned of the Committee on the Liberal Arts"[310] and contacted Hutchins in the hope that he would be interested in assisting their college. While one would expect Hutchins not to be interested in moving from a large university to lead a small liberal arts college, the Board was trying anything. Its members were hoping to at least get advice or recommendations on a viable candidate for the presidency. The Committee on the Liberal Arts, established to investigate the teaching of Great Books at the University of Chicago and including as members Scott Buchanan and Stringfellow Barr, among others, was experiencing difficulties finding agreement on how to proceed. The opportunity to investigate how their ideas could be implemented at a smaller institution fascinated the group. As would be expected, the Committee made recommendations based on its focus on providing a liberal arts education through reading Great Books. The Committee also encouraged Hutchins to lead the effort by filling the position of president at St. John's College, but realizing that he was not interested, Stringfellow Barr became president and Scott Buchanan took the role of dean.[311]

Buchanan and Barr were not simply members of the Committee, but qualified individuals ready to take on the reinvigoration of St. John's College. Scott Buchanan had attended Amherst College during the years of Alexander Meiklejohn's presidency where he was introduced to educational reform focusing on general education. This interest led

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[310] Stringfellow Barr, "A College in Secession," in *This America*, ed. John D. Kern and Irwin Griggs (New York: Macmillan, 1942), 268.

[311] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 211.

Buchanan to the position of Assistant Director of the People's Institute, an organization dedicated to adult education. In 1926, Buchanan joined with Mortimer Adler to develop a program similar to that which Erskine and Adler had created at Columbia University, only this program would be for adults after college or who had never attended college.[312] While sometimes at odds with each other, Adler and Buchanan would continue to work together for many years.

Buchanan first met Stringfellow Barr at Oxford University in 1919 where they were both Rhodes Scholars. Buchanan and Barr would cross paths again at the University of Virginia In 1929. "Buchanan accepted an appointment to the philosophy faculty … where Barr had joined the history department five years earlier."[313] It was here that Barr and Buchanan established a bond revolving around Great Books being used as a curriculum. To be called the Virginia Program, Buchanan and Barr participated on a newly formed Honors Committee at the University of Virginia to "rejuvenate the idea of reading basic works for intensive discussion."[314] Buchanan and Barr, working with approximately seven others on the Honors Committee, formulated a Great Books program. While similar in concept with Erskine's Honors program, the Virginia Program added works of science and mathematics to literature and poetry. Unfortunately, after working on the plan from 1934 to 1935, the governing body of the university "denied the request [for funding] and the plan was aborted."[315] It is difficult to justify including the

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[312] Ibid., 88.

[313] Charles A. Nelson, ed., *Stringfellow Barr, A Centennial Appreciation of His Life and Work: 1897-1982* (Annapolis: St. John's College Press, 1997), 15.

[314] Warren C. Bomhardt, *The St. John's College Program* (Annapolis: St. John's College Library, 1968), 10.

[315] Ibid.

University of Virginia in the list of institutions that previously attempted a Great Books program since it never really got off the ground. However, Stringfellow Barr and Scott Buchanan, as key players in the formation and attempted introduction of the Virginia Program's Great Books curriculum, gained experience from this quiet failure. And, due to the inclusion of mathematics and science, the potential for a complete four-year program was evident.

The same year that the Virginia Program was scrapped, Buchanan and Barr accepted Hutchins's invitation to join the faculty of the University of Chicago and participate in the Committee on the Liberal Arts. Bypassing the normal hiring procedures for new faculty members, Barr and Buchanan did not have a warm welcome.[316] Therefore, when the Board of Visitors and Governors came seeking help, there was little keeping them from going to Annapolis once the St. John's College board found that Hutchins was unwilling and Buchanan and Barr were qualified and capable. Of course, "Buchanan at first tried to persuade Robert Hutchins to leave the University of Chicago and become president of St. John's. Hutchins refused."[317] Ultimately, Stringfellow Barr accepted the presidency of the struggling college while Scott Buchanan filled the role of dean.

Not Repeating Others' Mistakes

Buchanan and Barr, with their ties to Hutchins, Adler, Erskine, and Meiklejohn, were able to look back on nearly twenty years of efforts to introduce a college Great

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[316] Dzuback, 127.

[317] Murphy, 84.

Books program in various ways. Four years after assuming the presidency, Barr reported that

> the College had installed a new administration for the express purpose of introducing the new curriculum, had reorganized its Board with an eye to giving that curriculum maximum support, had dropped a goodly share of its student body for poor academic standing, had made sweeping changes in its faculty in order to secure the knowledge and teaching skills the new curriculum would require, had restored its physical plant from ruin to efficiency, had emerged from financial desperation to economic stability, and had found almost three hundred friends, most of them new, willing to make the financial sacrifices without which the College could not accomplish the task it had set for itself.[318]

In short, the entire college was redefined.

Significantly, the entire controlling administration was new and in support of a Great Books program. While Hutchins had refused the presidency of St. John's College, he accepted the chairmanship of the Board where he "served on the board…, advised Barr… about administration and fund raising, and contributed one hundred dollars a month to the college in the early years."[319] There was little that the new team of Buchanan and Barr, along with Hutchins as chairman of the Board, did not change. As Barr's comments four years after arriving indicate, these changes occurred quickly. Of course, these changes had an impact on the students. According to the St. John's College catalog of 1938-39, "in September, 1937, a new College administration introduced the so-called 'New Program,' a four-year all-required curriculum, based on the study of some hundred Great Books from the Greeks to the present."[320] At that time, all new students were required to enter under the new catalog. Existing students were given the option to

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[318] Barr, "A College in Secession," 266-267.

[319] Dzuback, 128.

[320] St. John's College, *Catalog 1938-1939*, 17.

continue with their previous catalog or adopt the New Program. However, existing students were granted no credit for advanced standing;[321] they entered the program as freshmen and were required to complete the entire program. This was not an incentive, but some students did take the option.

"The phase-out and the transition were not particularly difficult and there was much friendly exchange of ideas between 'old' and 'new' students on the campus regarding the two approaches to liberal education."[322] But, the faculty had a more difficult time as its members had to struggle with two completely different ways of teaching.[323] Yet, the difficulty experienced by the faculty appears to have contributed significantly to the success of the program's introduction. "Many of the Old Program faculty left; some stayed for a little while; and four, George Bingley, Ford K. Brown, Richard Scofield, and John Kieffer, gracefully made the transition to the New Program, staying for the remainder of their teaching careers."[324] With this quick look at faculty attrition, with only four original faculty members staying on to finish out their careers, it is obvious that any established structure such as was encountered at the Universities of Chicago and Wisconsin was not encountered at St. John's.

Looking into faculty attrition a little deeper, I checked the list of faculty members in catalogs over the years surrounding the introduction of the New Program. Using the 1933-1934 *Catalog* as a baseline due to its being the final year prior to losing accreditation, the college had a total of thirty-three faculty members, one of whom was

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[321] St. John's College, *Catalog 1937-1938*, 19.

[322] Bomhardt, 64.

[323] Murphy, 90.

[324] Ibid.

listed as on leave. Of those thirty-three faculty members, only nineteen appear in the *Catalog* of 1937-1938, the first year of the New Program. And, by the *Catalog* of 1939-1940, there were only nine left of the original thirty-three. All nine had relinquished their departmental designations as professors of biology, chemistry, classical languages, English, German, and mathematics and adopted the single title of Tutor.[325]

It is apparent that Buchanan and Barr did not encounter a well-entrenched faculty with a high commitment to its departments or the institution. But, to ensure their efforts to implement the New Program and minimize or even eliminate any resistance, Buchanan and Barr made two sweeping changes. The first, as mentioned above, was that all old programs of study based on majors and departments were discontinued. Only the New Program would be available for new students. Unlike Erskine's, Meiklejohn's, and Hutchins's Great Books courses that were offered to a select group of students alongside other offerings, the New Program completely replaced the existing curriculum.

The second change that contributed to avoiding faculty resistance was bringing in new faculty members who were familiar with the Great Books concept and teaching method. All four of the new tutors joining St. John's College that first year had previously taught at the University of Chicago.[326] Interestingly, Mortimer Adler was also listed in the *Catalog* of 1937-1938 as a Lecturer; Adler never actually led a course at St. John's College, but was a visiting speaker for various lectures that students were required to attend. Like Hutchins, Adler did not wish to give up his job in Chicago and viewed

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[325] St. John's College *Catalog 1939-1940*.

[326] St. John's College *Catalog 1937-1938*, 9. All four, George Comenetz, Holloway (no first name given), Catesby Taliaferro, and Charles Glenn Wallis, were listed in the *Catalog* indicating the University of Chicago as their prior institution of employment. Additionally, Catesby and Wallis were at the University of Virginia with Buchanan and Barr, moved to Chicago to participate on the Committee for the Liberal Arts, and moved on to St. John's College. (Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 174.)

himself as a lecturer and philosopher as opposed to a teacher who is required to hold class at regular intervals. Adler also justified his declining to actually teach a class at St. John's College by indicating that he and Scott Buchanan disagreed on the required frame of mind of the tutor. Adler viewed himself "as a teacher leading students to a better understanding of the book by persistent interrogation and argument" while Buchanan "regarded himself as first among equals."[327] No matter what the rationale, the combination of abolishing all old programs, former faculty members leaving, new, yet experienced faculty members joining the college as course tutors, and Adler providing an example for lectures, Buchanan and Barr had effectively avoided the potential for any faculty resistance.

But the drastic changes did not stop with the faculty. Also helping with the transition was Barr's banning the use of college buildings by fraternities along with the elimination of intercollegiate sports.[328] These actions were justified based on financial challenges and a need to focus efforts on academics. Yet, academic changes that affected students did not stop there. Of the thirty-four students of the old program[329] who opted to continue with their original program, "twenty-five had to be dropped for poor work"[330] within the next year. Buchanan and Barr were serious about focusing exclusively on the New Program and were not catering to old program students.[331] Buchanan and Barr

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[327] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 211-213.

[328] Murphy, 106.

[329] Twenty students under the old program had chosen to enter the New Program.

[330] Barr, "A College in Secession," 275.

[331] With comments like "It became obvious fairly early that the student habits of the Old Program would hinder our building of the New. A healthy portion of students under the Old Program had not been

eliminated anything not part of the New Program, but they justified everything based on their belief in the strong academic program they were implementing. According to one source, approximately fifty percent of the first full cohort of students who began the New Program in the fall of 1938 did not complete their course. "Some found that they just did not fit into the program. Others were asked to leave at various times due to persistent academic deficiency, and still others felt the need to abandon college for the armed services."[332]

After years of experience with honors courses, personally facilitating untold numbers of Great Books discussions, and hashing out a complete curriculum over a number of years, first at the University of Virginia and then at the University of Chicago, Buchanan and Barr had established a fully prescribed four-year program of study based on reading Great Books. All courses and readings were required and there were no electives. The course of study included readings not just from literature and poetry as Erskine's program had started, but included mathematics, science, history, and philosophy. According to Buchanan, who would take the lead on implementing the New Program so Barr could focus on the administration of the college, "to ignore the sciences, which is much too easy to do in some elective programs, is to deprive the student of certain basic knowledge on which he may predicate his future."[333]

Therefore, the seminars, where students were joined by one or more tutors to discuss required readings and were the exclusive mode of instruction on all former Great

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accustomed to work and didn't propose to begin now," it was obvious that Barr did not have any sympathy and provided no support for students in the Old Program. Barr, "A College in Secession," 275.

[332] Bomhardt, 64-65.

[333] Ibid., 53.

Books efforts discussed so far, did not stand alone. While it was the heart of the program, the seminar was supplemented by lectures, tutorials, and laboratories – all required. Each served a vital role in the complete four-year program. First, the seminar provided an avenue for a liberal education as defined by the *trivium* of grammar, rhetoric, and logic. During each seminar,

> the argument will drift and it should be followed wherever it leads, but all opinions should be advanced with reasons; this is what makes the seminar somewhat Socratic. The meanings of terms are essential – this is grammar. Persuasion of others regarding the validity of opinions is used and this is rhetoric. Understanding is sought, and this is logic. If followed, the discussions will clarify an original notion or lead to a reduction to the absurd and hence a new start.[334]

Since educators always wish to attempt to measure learning, students were required to demonstrate the effectiveness of the seminar by writing essays at the conclusion of their first three years and a thesis their senior year. They were also required to defend their thesis orally. By the time a student had to defend his (and eventually her) thesis,[335] oral examinations were familiar as that was the method of evaluation used at least twice each year. The examinations throughout their study, which has remained the method of evaluation over the years, could include questions about any topic the student had studied prior to the evaluation.[336]

While all readings were to be read and discussed by students to gain a first-hand relationship and personal interest and interpretation of a book, lectures were not missing from the educational environment. While far less frequent than seminars and

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[334] Ibid., 27.

[335] Women were finally admitted to St. John's College in 1951. ("A Brief History of St. John's College.")

[336] St. John's College *Catalog 2007-2008*, 30.

subsequently touching on far fewer topics, the lecture requirement was frequently satisfied with the assistance of guest speakers from outside the college who were experts in their fields. The lecture requirement also encompassed musical performances – again, by established musical artists. An informal question period after the lecture provided a format for further understanding.

Finally, the St. John's College program included tutorials and laboratories. The tutorials included language, mathematics, and music while the laboratories gave students the opportunity to investigate and test for themselves the claims made or described in the readings. For example, mathematics tutorials at St. John's College aligned with the historical era being studied. Since freshmen usually began with ancient Greek writings, their initial introduction to mathematics included Euclid, Archimedes, Aristarchus, and Nicomachus. With the theories, formulae, and conclusions of these authors as a base, the student continued to the application of the theoretical with such ideas a Ptolemy's astronomy. Of course, all along the way, the tutors prompted investigation into difficulties with initial theories that might no longer be valid. The mathematics tutorials continued to advance into such areas as conic sections, calculus, and physics. To more fully understand the concepts introduced by the readings and tutorials, students quite frequently built their own models in a laboratory.[337]

The language tutorial, as one would expect, focused on learning additional languages. However, in addition to learning simply the semantics and grammar of Greek and French, the language tutorial attempted, by encouraging students to find the abstract messages in original works, to develop logic skills. Similarly, music as part of the

[337] St. John's College *Catalog 2007-2008*, 17.

curriculum was considered a form of communication just as is language. "Two different but complementary aspects of music are reflected in these tutorials. On the one hand, music is related to language, rhetoric, and poetry, while at the same time it is a unique and self sufficient art, a mode of symbolic expression that, along with mathematics, is natural to the human mind."[338]

This was the new format for instruction introduced at St. John's College and, as stated above, the entire college was redefined to adopt this new method completely. By including tutorials and laboratories, Erskine's concerns were addressed regarding a seminar-only format being insufficient when science is added to the curriculum. And, in order to counter yet another concern that Buchanan, Barr and Hutchins had – specialization and its resultant departmentalization of the college – all tutors at St. John's College were and are still encouraged to "re-educate themselves to acquire increased understanding in those parts of the program that are outside their field of post-graduate training."[339] The ultimate goal for all tutors is to teach every class of the program. As one would guess, this requirement was quite a challenge for any tutor, but the goal was ever present. Of course, Buchanan understood that it would take time. Working in teams of two tutors for each class helped to ensure that tutors could help each other understand different areas of discussion – similar to working with students. This only reinforced the concept of tutors simply guiding the seminar instead of lecturing; the tutors were themselves students at times. "This expectation [of teaching all courses] never became an ironclad requirement; if it had been rigorously enforced, the college might not have

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[338] Bomhardt, 48.

[339] St. John's College *Catalog 2007-2008*, 27.

survived, or at least some members of the faculty might not have; but for the most part, the rule was adhered to, and still is."[340]

The New Program strove to eliminate the departmentalization of a college. Even though there were seminars, lectures, tutorials, and laboratories, the concept of one tutor being able to teach all courses kept these elements working together. "Each branch of this program supports every other branch. The success of the whole depends upon the active participation of all students, as well as all tutors. In a very real sense St. John's is a community of learning."[341] The unifying factor is the required list of Great Books. The readings drive all seminar discussions, the need for language tutorials, and the experiments in the laboratory. Now that I have described the framework of the New Program, what was its content and how has it survived since its implementation in 1937?

Seventy-two Years of Great Books

It is a difficult task to uncover the changes to the Great Books curriculum at St. John's College. For the most part, early histories of the New Program focus on the challenges of implementation; specifically, the challenges facing the faculty members and students in adjusting to the new teaching method of seminars rather than primarily lecture. Indeed, as discussed above, the term teaching no longer applied under the New Program. The former faculty members, as well as new faculty members, were to become tutors whose roles were primarily to stimulate discussion – not even to necessarily direct that discussion to any specific end, but to prompt questions and encourage others to ask questions for further discussion. The mathematics tutorials and laboratories had their

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[340] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 59.

[341] Weigle, 20.

own challenges as the instructional method had to be adjusted to discuss mathematical works and then move to a laboratory to build models and execute experiments to contradict, reinforce, or expand the discussion.

Later histories tend to focus on the administration of the college. This may be due to the long term of President Richard Weigle (1949-1980) who focused on eliminating St. John's College's debt, renovating and upgrading its facilities, and even opening an additional campus in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Discussions of changes to the list of books identified for the canon are conspicuously missing.[342] One conclusion would be that the canon is, indeed, a set selection of works that represents what every individual needs to know. Yet, simply because changes have not been overtly documented – especially not the discussions as to the reasons for any changes – that does not lead to the conclusion that there have been none.

Changing the canon at St. John's College is actually encouraged, at least from a philosophical standpoint, by the administration to support the idea that Great Books must mean something to those who read them. Due to changing times and interpretations, books may come and go. A common statement that can be found in one form or another in numerous publications about and by St. John's College is:

> In selecting books for use in the curriculum, St. John's has definite criteria in mind. It has been said that the authors of these books are the real St. John's faculty. If so, they are subjected to more

[342] It is understandable that survey works reviewing experimental programs do not delve into the details of the changes of St. John's College curriculum over time – an example being *The Perpetual Dream* by Gerald Grant and David Riesman. Yet, even histories of St. John's College itself, such as those by Richard Weigle (*Recollections of a St. John's College President*, 1988), Tench Tilghman (*The Early History of St. John's College in Annapolis*, 1984), Emily Murphy (*A Complete and Generous Education*, 1996), and Winfree Smith (*A Search for the Liberal College*, 1983), do not discuss changes to the list of required reading.

> severe standards of selection than most faculties. Furthermore, they are never granted tenure.[343]

In short, a given author may never be admitted to the list and if fortunate enough to make it, can be removed.

The Core Canon

According to the college catalogs from 1937 to 2008, the Great Books list has, indeed, changed. But, what types of changes occurred? Before looking at the details of the changes, it may be helpful to define the scope of the canon as it developed at St. John's College. The first observation of note is that, while the list has sometimes been referred to as the One Hundred Great Books, there has never been exactly one hundred works on the list. Yet, the selection for any given catalog for entering students has been right around that number. More accurately, the number of authors has been just around one hundred for each catalog whereas the number of actual works is sometimes significantly more as multiple works by a single author are frequently required. Erskine, in 1928, set the stage for the use of authors as a method for approaching the Great Books. He encouraged the reading of one author – and multiple works from that one author – "over and over, and after a while to read out from him, into the authors who seem kindred spirits. When the reader has found himself in two great authors, he is fairly launched."[344] Also along these lines, St. John's College rarely assigns excerpts of works; this is so the reader can extract what he or she feels is relevant rather than the college identifying the significant sections.

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[343] *The St. John's Program: A Report* (Annapolis, St. John's College Press, 1955), 45.

[344] Erskine, *Delight*, 29.

With this in mind, over the seventy-two years of the life of the program to date, there have been 180 authors ever to have been on the list. With millions of authors, and many with multiple works to their credit, available in the world, a list this size is exclusive indeed. Yet, St. John's College has been able to reduce this limited group of authors even more. As shown in table 10 in alphabetical order, only fifty-two authors have been a part of the St. John's College Great Books program since the beginning of the program. As the discussion below will show, there has been plenty of opportunity for any of these authors to have been removed from the list. Considering they remained, these fifty-two authors are what I will call the core canon of the St. John's College program.

Table 10. Authors Surviving Seventy-two Years at St. John's College

Aeschylus	Hegel	Plato
Apollonius	Herodotus	Plotinus
Aquinas, Thomas	Hobbes, Thomas	Plutarch
Aristophanes	Homer	Ptolemy
Aristotle	Hume, David	Rabelais, Francis
Augustine	James, William	Racine, Jean
Cervantes, Miguel de	Kant, Immanuel	Rousseau, Jean Jacques
Chaucer, Geoffrey	Kepler, Johannes	Shakespeare, William
Copernicus	Lavoisier, Antoine-Laurent	Smith, Adam
Dante	Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm von	Sophocles
Darwin, Charles	Lobachevski, Nikolai Ivanovich	Spinoza, Benedict de
Descartes, Rene	Locke, John	Swift, Jonathan
Dostoyevsky, Fyodor	Lucretius	Tacitus
Euclid	Marx, Karl	Thucydides
Euripides	Milton, John	Tolstoy, Leo
Freud, Sigmund	Montaigne, Michel	Virgil
Galileo	Newton, Isaac	
Harvey, William	Nicomachus	

Note: Two other works, or more accurately, collections – typically not attributed to a single author, have also been on the St. John's list for the entire seventy-two years: 1) The Bible – both Old and New Testaments or portions thereof and 2) American Papers such as the *Declaration of Independence*, the *U.S. Constitution*, *The Federalist*, and Supreme Court Opinions.

But, what more do I mean by core canon? While St. John's College would rather not label authors or books into categories and would rather that students find whatever they wish to find within the pages, each author is associated with a primary classification "according to conventional subject matter."[345] There are four such classifications at St. John's College: Literature; Philosophy and Theology; History and Social Science; and, Mathematics and Natural Science. Of the fifty-two authors who have been consistently required reading at St. John's College, sixteen fall in the classification of Literature. Sixteen more fall in the classification of Philosophy and Theology. Perhaps surprisingly, a respectable thirteen authors who have remained consistently on the list fall in the classification of Mathematics and Natural Science. And, finally, only seven authors are in the classification of History and Social Science.

This last may seem a little out of line at first, but as one student clearly articulated in an interview given for a 1955 investigation into the program, "we didn't need any preparation in history. By reading the books, we gained whatever history we needed."[346] So, reading Herodotus and Thucydides along with Plutarch and Tacitus gave specific historical records, but reading Homer and Virgil, along with Swift, Locke, and various American papers – especially under the influence of knowledgeable tutors who could point out issues and stimulate inquiry – filled in historical record in practically every seminar.

But, perhaps the most notable component of this core reading list is the significant requirement in Mathematics and Natural Science. Unlike Erskine's primary focus on

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[345] The classification of each author is listed in the annual catalogs. See, for example, St. John's College *Catalog 2007-2008*, 34.

[346] *The St. John's Program: A Report* (Annapolis, St. John's College Press, 1955), 66.

literature, and specifically poetry if he had his way, the St. John's College program was designed by Buchanan and Barr to include a strong mathematics and science content. Instead of focusing strictly on literature and social issues or waxing philosophic about abstract issues that have no ultimate resolution, the St. John's College program has always had this more assessable component.[347] This is yet another factor differentiating the St. John's College program from others and perhaps contributing to its longevity.

Contenders

There were one hundred fifteen authors on the original list of required reading for the St. John's College program in 1937. I have shown that only fifty-two of those remain and I have called those the core canon. However, there is another group of authors who have had a distinctive run on the list. As shown in table 11, authors have been added over the years and there are twenty-six who, once added to the list, have remained on the list to the current catalog of 2007-2008. The year of addition is indicated in parenthesis. Of course, this type of list must be qualified. It is somewhat easier to accept that Christiaan Huygens, Niccolo Machiavelli and Blaise Pascal may have a strong claim to be Great Books due to their names being added during the second year of the program and having remained for the subsequent seventy-one years. Other authors such as Epictetus, Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Alexis de Tocqueville, likewise have a strong claim as each of these has been consistent for at least sixty years. But, since timelessness is one factor defining a Great Book, some of the later authors, while being consistently renewed since they were added, have not established themselves

[347] Not that I found any evidence that it was ever actually isolated for assessment as a separate component of the program. I am referring here only to the nature of mathematics and science as it may be perceived by students, parents, educators, or critics.

according to that criteria yet. Obviously, the later they were added, even though they are still on the list, they have not accrued a significant number of years to ensure their remaining indefinitely. The extreme case, while technically qualifying for the distinction of remaining after having been added is Edmund Husserl. Husserl was added in the most recent catalog of 2007-2008.

Table 11. Authors Added and Kept on the St. John's College Reading List

Huygens, Christiaan (1938)	Eliot, T. S. (1974)
Machiavelli, Niccolo (1938)	Lincoln, Abraham (1974)
Pascal, Blaise (1938)	Millikan, Robert A. (1974)
Epictetus (1940)	la Rochefoucauld, Francois (1974)
Kierkegaard, Soren (1948)	Viete, Francois (1974)
Nietzsche, Friedrich (1948)	Yeats, William Butler (1974)
de Tocqueville, Alexis (1948)	Conrad, Joseph (1984)
Baudelaire, Charles (1949)	O'Connor, Flannery (1993)
Donne, John (1949)	DuBois, William Edward Burghardt (1998)
la Fontaine, Jean de (1949)	Eliot, George (1998)
Einstein, Albert (1957)	Faulkner, William (1998)
Anselm (1958)	Washington, Booker T. (1998)
Bohr, Niels Henrik David (1974)	Husserl, Edmund (2007)

Note: Authors are listed in the order in which they were added to the reading list. The first year of appearance on the list is indicated in parenthesis.

The inclusion of these twenty-six authors – even if not permanently because the future cannot be predicted –modifies the balance among the four classifications. The number of authors in the Literature classification is increased by ten. An additional five authors are in each of the Philosophy and Theology as well as the History and Social Science classifications whereas, once again, the Mathematics and Natural Science classification holds its own with six additional authors.

Transients

But, consistency, while an indicator, is no guarantee either. There have been authors such as George Berkeley, Michael Faraday, and Henry Fielding who have been included on the list for fifty-nine, fifty-two, and fifty years respectively but who have either been dropped and re-added some time during the years or were simply dropped altogether. For example, table 12 shows a list of forty-five authors who were on the original list of 115 and who were dropped at some point – never to return. The year in parenthesis indicates the first year the author was dropped from the list and has not returned. A handful, such as Aristoxenus, Charles Friedrich Gauss, Horace, and Ovid did not survive the first cut leading into the second year of the program. Others, such as Archimedes, Gibbon, and Galen survived thirty-two, thirty-four, and forty-three consecutive years respectively before being removed from the required reading list.

Table 12. Authors Removed from the Original St. John's College Reading List

Aristoxenus (1938)	Bentham, Jeremy (1948)	Hilbert, David (1949)
Galois, Evariste (1938)	Bonaventura (1948)	Ibsen, Henrik (1949)
Gauss, Carl Friedrich (1938)	Boyle, Robert (1948)	Bernard, Claude (1950)
Horace (1938)	Cicero (1948)	Mill, John Stuart (1954)
Ovid (1938)	Fourier, Jean Baptiste J. (1948)	Montesquieu (1958)
Quintilian (1938)	Grotius, Hugo (1948)	Boole, George (1959)
Volsunga Saga (1938)	Joule, James Prescott (1948)	Cantor, George (1959)
Zola, Emile (1940)	Leonardo (1948)	Poincaré, Henri (1961)
Clifford (1942)	Lucian (1948)	Hippocrates (1963)
Dickens, Charles (1942)	Malthus, Thomas Robert (1948)	Voltaire (1963)
Galton, Francis (1942)	Peacock, Mervyn (1948)	Archimedes (1969)
Schopenhauer, Arthur (1942)	Riemann, Bernhard (1948)	Gilbert, William (1969)
Thackeray, William M. (1942)	Russell, Bertrand (1948)	Gibbon, Edward (1971)
Veblen & Young (1944)	Song of Roland (1948)	Calvin, John (1979)
Aristarchus (1948)	Erasmus (1949)	Galen (1980)

Note: Authors are listed in the order in which they were removed from the reading list. The first year it was found missing from the list is indicated in parenthesis.

What is most telling about the authors who were on the original list and ultimately removed is that the classification of Mathematics and Natural Science had the greatest loss. While it would appear that this subject area was not desired enough to retain its authors, even though eighteen Mathematics and Natural Science authors were removed from the original list, those eighteen are not included in the numbers listed above in the core canon nor in the number of authors who were subsequently added. These eighteen who were removed simply reiterate the focus in this area that Buchanan and Barr originally made; this significant loss still did not place mathematics and science lower than any other category. The original list also lost eight authors in Literature, eleven in Philosophy and Theology, and seven in History and Social Science.

Visiting Professors

As St. John's College's marketing efforts like to point out, the authors of Great Books are identified as the professors of the college. Keeping with this analogy, the authors who have been added and then dropped may be thought of as visiting professors. Unlike the authors just discussed who were on the original list and then dropped at some time after 1937, the authors in table 13 were added at some point after 1937, but were also dropped from the list at least once since then. The numbers in parenthesis indicate the year the book first entered the list, the last year it appeared and the total of years of inclusion between 1937 and 2008. The authors are listed in order of the number of years they were required reading.

Table 13. Authors to Come and Go on the St. John's College Reading List

A – Single, Uninterrupted Run	B – Repetitive, Sporadic Inclusion
Berkley, George (1939-1998, 60)	Bacon, Francis (1937,2008, 64)
Valery, Paul (1950-2007, 58)	Fielding, Henry (1937, 2007, 63)
Kafka, Franz (1974-1998, 25)	Goethe,Johann Wolfgang von (1937, 2008, 61)
Stendhal (1950-1970, 21)	Faraday, Michael (1937, 2008, 57)
Joyce, James (1979-1998, 19)	Dedekind, Julius Wilhelm Richard (1938, 2008, 54)
Justinian (1938-1953, 16)	Luther, Martin (1948, 2007, 51)
Schiller, Friedrich (1950-1964, 15)	Molière, Jean Baptiste (1937, 2008, 50)
Hoelderlin, Johann Christian Friedrich (1950-1962, 13)	Austen, Jane (1950, 2008, 50)
Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim (1950-1962, 13)	Twain, Mark (1954, 2008, 40)
Oresme, Nicolas (1940-1951, 12)	Maxwell, James Clerk (1937, 2008, 37)
Saga of Burnt Njal (1938-1949, 12)	Whitehead, Alfred North (1950, 1998, 35)
Grosseteste, Robert (1938-1948, 11)	Melville, Herman (1948, 2008, 35)
Pierce, Charles (1962-1972, 11)	Flaubert, Gustave (1937, 2008, 33)
Bunyan, John (1950-1959, 10)	Mendel, Gregor (1937, 1970, 30)
Keynes, John Maynard (1976-1984, 9)	Dalton, John (1940, 1962, 20)
Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1976-1984, 9)	Pico de Mirandola (1940, 1962, 20)
Lamarck, Jean-Baptiste (1974-1981, 8)	Vico, Giambattista (1940, 1962, 20)
Thoreau, Henry David (1970-1977, 8)	Heisenberg, Werner Karl (1974, 2008, 19)
Herder, Johann Gottfried (1950-1956, 7)	Virchow, Rudolph (1937, 1956, 18)
Diophantus (1974-1979, 6)	Balzac, Honoré de (1937, 1962, 17)
Dewey, John (1950-1954, 5)	Heidegger, Martin (1974, 2008, 15)
Prevost, Antoine Francois (1950-1954, 5)	Mann, Thomas (1955, 1979, 15)
Proust, Marcel (1950-1954, 5)	Corneille, Pierre (1937, 1954, 14)
Scotus Erigena (1938-1942, 5)	Aurelius, Marcus (1937, 1984, 10)
Villon, Francois (1938-1942, 5)	Douglass, Frederick (1993, 2008, 6)
Carroll, Lewis (1974-1977, 4)	Woolf, Virginia (1993, 2008, 6)
Turgenev, Ivan Sergeyevich (1950-1953, 4)	Maimonides, Moses (1974, 2008, 6)
Bridgman, Percy Williams (1954-1956, 3)	Bacon, Roger (1937, 1954, 6)
Coleridge, Samuel Taylor (1940-1942, 3)	Wordsworth, William (1979, 2008, 5)
Nicholas of Cusa (1938-1940, 3)	Jung, Carl Gustav (1962, 1977, 4)
Ostwald, Friedrich Wilhelm (1938-1940, 3)	
Pavlov, Ivan (1977-1979, 3)	
Gide, Andre (1954, 1)	
Hooker, Richard (1954, 1)	
Schumpeter, Joseph Alois (1954, 1)	

Note: Authors are listed in the order of longevity on the reading list – indicated by the last number in the parenthesis. The first and last years of inclusion are also indicated in the parenthesis; a hyphen indicates continuous run whereas a comma between the years indicates an interruption between the first and last year indicated.

Table 13, column A, specifically shows those authors who made the list, continued for some period of time, and then dropped off the list without ever coming back. Table 13, column B, shows those authors who made the list at one point, were dropped and then re-added at a later time. Some authors, such as Francis Bacon and Michael Faraday, have been on the list in this off-and-on fashion for fifty-two of the seventy-two years of the study. As one would expect, the majority of the authors in column A who were added once, lasted for some period of time and then fell off the list typically spent less overall time as part of the curriculum than those authors as show in column B who were added and dropped multiple times. By keeping an eye on the required reading list and making periodic adjustments, the curriculum avoided the feared stagnation.

Today (2008)

Surprisingly little can be added to what has already been said regarding the original St. John's College program compared to how it appears today. A list of Great Books, with a core list of authors who were on the list in 1937 is still the driving force behind the curriculum. Tutor-supervised seminars are the dominant method of instruction with lectures, tutorials, and laboratories supplementing the seminars for deeper investigation, practice, and understanding. Yet, there was one change to the method of instruction over the years; the preceptorial was introduced in the 1962-1963 academic year.

The preceptorial addressed a perceived weakness in the liberal curriculum in that graduates were generalists with no specific knowledge of any one topic. While this is

still argued as a strength of liberal education, St. John's College succumbed to the demand that its students should have a deeper understanding of at least one topic of their choosing. Thus, St. John's College introduced the preceptorial which required students in their junior and senior years to focus on the study of a small group of topics in addition to maintaining the required reading list for all four years. The decision of topic for each student would be made in conjunction with his or her advisor and a thesis would be required prior to graduation.[348]

Also catering to the accepted format of higher education, St. John's College created a "Supplement to Transcript" that aligns the required readings of the program with conventional college subjects. This form, available through the Registrar's Office, provides St. John's College's recommendation to other colleges on how to accept transfer credits so students may continue their education at other institutions – either to complete a four-year degree begun at St. John's College, or to continue on to graduate work. For example, a graduate of St. John's College would have a total of eight semester hours in literature, one semester hour in history, one semester hour in economics, nine semester hours in geometry, three semester hours in chemistry and one and one half semester hours in physics.[349] But aside from these two modifications catering to the rest of the higher education world, St. John's College still maintains its emphasis on the seminar and its use of the Great Books as its texts.

In addition to maintaining the seminar format (along with supporting tutorials, lectures, and laboratories) St. John's College has stayed true to its Western European

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[348] St. John's College *Catalog 2007-2008*, 10.

[349] "Supplement to Transcript: Class of 2006-Present" (St. John's College Office of the Registrar, 2007.)

focus on its selection of Great Books. While it is difficult to deny that this focus adds stability to the curriculum by not rapidly broadening its scope, many would argue that this is a weakness of the program as it ignores the contributions to the human condition from the rest of the world. Indeed, the selection of Great Books at St. John's College is biased not only toward Western European, but toward a United States filtered Western European set of works. As a comparison, one only has to look at efforts such as that by Raymond Queneau, a French poet and novelist working for Gallimard publishing house in France in the 1950s. Queneau surveyed French authors asking what they believed were the greatest works ever written. Queneau then published his own list of one hundred Great Books[350] at the end of the book he wrote on the results of the survey.[351] While it was not surprising to see the Bible and authors such as Dante, Homer, Blaise Pascal, William Shakespeare, Sophocles, and Voltaire; it is obvious that Queneau and the French authors he surveyed likewise had a bias toward French works. For example, in addition to the likes of Michel Montaigne, Marcel Proust, and Stendhal; Queneau's list included Tristan Cobiere, Alexander Dumas, Comte de Lautreamont, Mme de La Fayette, Gerard de Nerval, Jules Renard, Cardinal de Retz, Arthur Rimbaud, Henri de Saint-Simon, Pierre Beaumarchais, and others not seen on any of the lists I have encountered researching the development of St. John's College's program.

With this simple comparison, it is obvious that the required reading list of Great Books at St. John's College is not all-inclusive. It becomes even more apparent when looking at major contributions from the East such as the *Bhagavadgita*, *I Ching*, *Mahabharata*, *Rig Veda*, and authors such as Confucius (numerous works attributed),

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[350] Or, in his term: Bibliotheque Ideale – the Ideal Library.

[351] Raymond Queneau, *Pour Une Bibliotheque Ideale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1956).

Lao Tzu (*The Art of War*), and Wang Wei (poet). An investigation into Eastern works and authors is an obvious omission from the St. John's College curriculum, but a far more subtle and just as critical evaluation can be made regarding works much closer to home – the relative lack of works from non-white male authors. While Jane Austen joined the curriculum in 1950, giving a single nod to women authors, it was not until 1998 that Booker T. Washington and William Burghardt DuBois joined the list as its first black authors. This was such a recent addition that the only author added since these two has been Edmund Husserl.

With calls for inclusion[352] such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. did when he wrote that "to reform core curricula, to account for the comparable eloquence of the African, the Asian, and the Middle Eastern traditions, is to begin to prepare our students for their roles as citizens of a world culture, educated through a truly human notion of 'the humanities,'"[353] it is difficult to justify the steadfastness of the St. John's College curriculum. Elizabeth Minnich likewise argues for the elimination of a dominant view that excludes the non-dominant population. In her words,

> there is a *root problem* at the base of the dominant meaning system that informs our curricula – a tangle that results from taking the few to be the inclusive term, the norm, and the ideal for all…. That problem… is compounded by the (not surprising) consequence of privileging central *singular* terms, notably "man" and "mankind," which lead directly to such singular abstract notions – and ideals – as "the citizen," "the philosopher," "the poet."[354]

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[352] Gates's call for inclusion was not specifically to be in the St. John's College curriculum, but for inclusion in the canon of works in general.

[353] Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "The Mater's Pieces: On Canon Formation and the African-American Tradition" in *The Politics of Liberal Education*, ed. Darryl J. Gless and Barbara H. Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 31.

[354] Elizabeth Kamarck Minnick, *Transforming Knowledge* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 177.

I found little evidence that St. John's College has responded to the pressure of inclusion by making any major revisions to its required reading list. However, it has avoided or minimized criticism, perhaps, because of its constant claim that Great Books, no matter which, contain material enough to discuss topics such as gender, race, and origin even if not represented directly by diversity of the list; this is one of the greatest strengths of the seminar format. St. John's College's Great Books list is unapologetically based on works of the Western tradition for white males. However, while eastern works have not made it on the list of the undergraduate program, the Graduate Institute, established at St. John's College in 1967, created an Eastern Classics program at its Santa Fe campus in 1998, but I found no evidence that this relatively new program has affected the long-standing undergraduate program.

I do not wish to argue the merits of inclusion (and demerits of exclusion) versus the stabilizing effect of minimizing change; that would be a discussion for another dissertation and is already addressed well by Elizabeth Minnich. Yet, I do find that St. John's College has acted consistently. Just as it consciously decided to minimize special subject-area interest groups from dominating the curriculum which was feared would result in the establishment of departments, St. John's failed to respond to calls for diversity in the reading list. Just as documents, histories, and even marketing materials proudly claim that there are no departments or majors; St. John's claims that the program is designed around works of the Western tradition which makes the canon exclusive. For better or for worse, this exclusivity may also have been a contributing factor to the survival of the program.

While I can make a point about the stabilizing factor of this lack of diversity for the program's survival, there is room for further research into the area of diversification of the Great Books list. Pamela Joseph, after advocating the positive aspects of "Connecting to the Canon" which is the title of her chapter in *Cultures of Curriculum*, states in her final paragraph,

> If students connect to a single intellectual and moral tradition and do not attain a deep and rich knowledge of at least one other culture's wisdom and experience, it is unlikely that they can have a standpoint to critically examine dominant beliefs and values; accordingly, they cannot vigorously appreciate the wisdom of the canon because they have not genuinely challenged it. Also, lack of scrutiny may mean that they have difficulty modifying their beliefs and actions in light of real and changing social conditions. Moreover, it is "tunnel vision" and "racial chauvinism" to assume that one culture has the best answer, the one true story, the only keys to civilization.[355]

As was my original intent, it would be worthwhile to review faculty meeting minutes to search for discussions about the required reading list. Perhaps some conversations directly addressed diversity that, regardless of any evidence of debate, ultimately resulted in little increase in diversity for the published required reading lists. Additionally, a comparison of instructional methods and content of St. John's College's Graduate Institute's Eastern Classics program may be of some value, perhaps by looking at it, instead, as if it were an undergraduate program or perhaps integrated into the existing four-year curriculum. Further research could also delve into other, more recent, developments of Great Books lists such as that by Queneau outlined above.

As a final recommendation, another source of investigation could be the honors programs and Great Books programs that have been established at other institutions since

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[355] Pamela Bolotin Joseph, "Connecting to the Canon" in *Cultures of Curriculum*, ed. William F. Pinar (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2000), 68.

1937 that may have adopted a more diverse selection of books. However, most that I found, such as Thomas Aquinas College in Santa Paula, California; Shimer College in Waukegan, Illinois; and Gutenberg College in Eugene, Oregon; follow the same curriculum as found at St. John's College. Of course, there are programs of specialized studies in race, class, and gender that may assist diversity in a liberal arts curriculum, but these specialized studies programs do not necessarily encourage inclusion; indeed, they may reinforce the dominant culture by specifically separating the other from the accepted norm. But, even with these difficulties, further research is needed to address the lack of diversity in a Great Books program limited to Western, white male authors.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

When I began my investigation into the St. John's College Great Books program, I expected to find a long history of controversy and a constant effort by St. John's College to defend its program of study. I was looking for evidence showing, if not drastic modifications to the curriculum, then perhaps a series of small modifications in submission to the dominant trait of higher education with its departments and specialization. At minimum, I expected to find a highly fluctuating list of Great Books. However, what I found was quite different.

I have found a number of factors that contributed to this relative calm and lack of controversy. First, is that St. John's College is a small college that had no interest in forcing its own ideas on other institutions. Nor did it claim that its program was necessarily the ideal curriculum that should be followed by all. "St. John's is not interested in becoming the temple of a cult dedicated to reading only the Great Books as a panacea for the world's ills. It is, in fact, even more skeptical of such veneration and more alert to the dangers of such shallow cultism than its most vigorous critics."[356] Dovetailing with this belief, even though Barr frequently claimed that the New Program

[356] *The St. John's Program: A Report* (Annapolis, St. John's College Press, 1955), 44.

was not an experiment or a pilot project,[357] many of the country's educators and commentators appear to have seen it as such and thus were not threatened by it. The experimental view of the college came from both inside and outside St. John's College. For example, Grant and Reisman described the program as such in 1979 in their book *Perpetual Dream: Reform of Experiment in the American College* while Richard Weigle, president of St. John's College from 1949 to 1980 wrote *St. John's College, Annapolis: Pilot College in Liberal Arts Education* in 1953, only one year after regaining regional accreditation. If there were a time to attempt to convince others that the institution was not experimental, Weigle missed his chance in 1953 when he decided to focus, instead, on the uniqueness of the college.

Another significant factor contributing to the continuity of the New Program has been the belief, established as early as John Erskine and adhered to ever since, that the selection of Great Books can always be questioned and updated. Questioning the canon at St. John's College is not a unique phenomenon. Columbia College, influential in the formation of the St. John's College program and now renowned for its general core requirements has gone through similar revisions as Daniel Bell has noted: "Favored in the past by a general education program that has proved itself both distinguished and effective, Columbia College nevertheless cannot for the future complacently and without reflection persist in an undertaking that may conceivably be out of date, and not merely out of fashion."[358] Erskine instilled this concept of a changeable list of Great Books that

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[357] Barr, *A College in Secession*, 273. Indeed, Barr felt that the idea of the New Program being experimental was somewhat ironical. "Actually, except for the inclusion of science, the Program was mossy with age, while the 'traditional' elective system was born only the other day, as such things go."

[358] Daniel Bell, *The Reforming of General Education: The Columbia College Experience in Its National Setting* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), viii.

not only influenced the Columbia College general education program, but was also accepted by Adler, Hutchins, Buchanan and Barr. Therefore, it made its way to the tutors at St. John's College, where the curriculum is under constant scrutiny. Yet, while there have been a number of changes over the years to the St. John's College required reading list that have countered stagnation, there is a significant number of works that have, intentionally or unintentionally, acted as a stabilizing factor by providing continuity from year to year in the canon (see table 10).

But the most significant factor I found contributing to the program's seventy-two years of stability is the firm foundation upon which it was built. I have traced the origins of the program and shown over two decades of development of the concept. From Erskine's establishment of a discussion group in 1909 through the creation of the honors course at Columbia University, the idea of reading Great Books grew. Adler picked up the idea and became its greatest advocate, but I have also shared the influence of and developments by Meiklejohn, Hutchins, and Buchanan and Barr. While Columbia University demonstrated a successful option as an Honors program, the course was limited and got no further than establishing the now renowned general core program of that institution. Meiklejohn's Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin, while embracing a wider selection of readings beyond poetry and literature, failed due to not integrating with the rest of the university. The University of Chicago demonstrated the difficulties of implementing a vastly different program within an established institution.

All of these lessons were not lost on Buchanan and Barr. Instead, these two had a chance to try out their ideas with the intent to implement a four-year Great Books

program at the University of Virginia. The failure in Virginia that occurred with no negative repercussions that could have marred their reputations – as had happened to Meiklejohn and Adler – gave the duo a valuable experience in discussing and planning what would be required to implement such a program. They benefitted from faculty input at Virginia and then were also able to gain further input and feedback when they moved to Chicago and became members of the Committee on the Liberal Arts. Finally, when given the opportunity to implement their ideas at St. John's College, Buchanan and Barr were able to separate themselves from any dissenting colleagues while benefiting from the experience of having heard all the arguments of the time.

Of course, the greatest factor that helped facilitate the program was the growing availability of the Great Books themselves. With *Everyman's Library*, *Harvard Classics*, *Loeb Classical Library*, and a growing general publication of books, the Great Books were becoming much more accessible. Furthermore, many of the Great Books were not only available, but available in English translation. The St. John's College program included and still includes tutorials in languages, including Greek and French as a minimum, but the focus of the curriculum was on the content and ideas presented in the Great Books more than an intellectual exercise revolving around disciplining the mind through translation and grammar. Continuing into the twentieth century, more and more translations were available of more and more books identified as Great Books.

In a cynical (or, perhaps, realistic) state of mind, Adler suggested that

> only a small college about to go out of business offered a fertile field for proposals as revolutionary as Scott's. No flourishing institution with a tenured and indentured faculty could be expected to turn the somersaults that the St. John's program demanded.[359]

[359] Adler, *Philosopher at Large*, 214-215.

While I believe that Adler is correct in his evaluation as to the initial factor allowing the New Program its opportunity to gain entry, the scenario he described and which was a reality at St. John's College in 1937, was not the most conducive to ensuring ongoing success of such an endeavor. The firm foundation created by prior experience and thorough discussion by multiple individuals and groups provided the necessary underpinning to establish the New Program as a viable curriculum and also to demonstrate its strength in surviving the other ills of the college.

I have shown how the St. John's College curriculum has survived for over seventy years. I have focused on the events leading to the program's introduction and covered the changes to the canon during this time. During my research, I also found much material on justifying the program as a valid curriculum of liberal arts. While the concept of using the Great Books as a liberal arts curriculum defines why I questioned how it has survived for over seventy years, I did not set out to establish or question its viability. The debate continues and, like the educators included in my research, I encourage others to continue to debate the question of the best liberal arts curriculum.

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