

# The Origin and Birth of the Hutchins School of Liberal Studies

By  
Warren E. Olson

Reminiscing about the conception and parturition of a twenty-three year-old innovative program in higher education is a privilege few academics have enjoyed. Even fewer have had the temerity to commit those reminiscences to the printed page. Indeed, simply contemplating writing that narrative awakens ancient fears that naming something will lead to its destruction. Shouldering aside such superstitions as an outcropping of post-modernism, I shall plunge into the stream of memory and attempt to describe, and account for, the coming into being of the Hutchins School of Liberal Studies at Sonoma State University. Telling that story may prove interesting at several levels. It may contribute in a small way to the reader's understanding of what had gone awry in undergraduate education by the 1960's and it will exemplify the clash of competing remedies current at that time. The tale will also clarify the assumptions, values, and goals, which brought the Hutchins School into being. Not to be ignored is the additional possibility that this story may have some utility for those idealistic academics who secretly pant to discover how undergraduate education might be rescued from its present malaise.

## Setting the Stage

As with all things human, the Hutchins School was conceived and birthed in a context, that of Sonoma State College. Founded in spring of 1961, Sonoma State was the latest addition to the California state College system. Situated 45 miles north of the Golden Gate in a semi-rural area, the college's mission was that of teaching the liberal arts and sciences. Its first faculty consisted of eight persons who had constituted the Santa Rosa Center of San Francisco State College; their spirit and views were an important influence on the early development of SSC. Subsequent growth of the faculty and students body was slow, but steady; curricular planning was conventional and congruent with norms of the 1950's. An important exception was the Psychology Department whose members were openly and proudly "humanistic," and in rebellion against the regnant "behaviorism" of the day. Student-centered, concerned with process, and committed to allowing the affective realm a central place in their teaching, the psychologists soon found allies and critics among the newly hired faculty. A majority were critical, often derisive, but the psychologists had an interestingly subversive effect on many of their critics who began to see their own students differently and who found that their teaching objectives and styles needed overhauling. I believe that the influence of the psychologists (who had been at the Santa Rosa Center) was an important factor in creating faculty willingness to consider the possibility of radical change at Sonoma State.

In considering the context into which the Hutchins School was born, one must factor in the prevalent mood of the mid and late sixties, a time of noisy dissatisfaction with many institutions and practices; everyone wanted change. Within higher education the area most needful of change was the undergraduate level; indeed, the journal most-read by academics interested in revamping their practices was entitled Change. Articles in the magazine reported on a wide variety of experiments and possible institutional structures. Writers offered advice and models to be emulated by hopeful innovators. Change helped to create a nationwide constituency of professors anxious to transform the educational process; the magazine also gave innovation a kind of legitimacy it otherwise might have lacked.

The ailment sapping the strength and effectiveness of higher education, for which innovation was the antidote, was generally recognized as consisting of: 1) Passivity, 2) Fragmentation, and 3) Alienation. Passivity was bred into students as a consequence of large lecture classes (or small ones, for that matter) in which they were charged with remembering what the lecturer had said and being able to reproduce that content on exams. Objective exams seldom asked the student to integrate what he had learned, thus requiring that he take an active role in his own learning. Students rarely had opportunity

to engage in dialogue, thus losing vital chances to do something with course content. Put another way, innovators believed that genuine learning occurs only when the learner makes material his own through his own activity. Since few colleges and university required that of students, passivity was the name of the academic game.

The second part of the ailment afflicting higher education was fragmentation. Because the American university adopted as its model the nineteenth-century German university with its disciplinary organization and enshrinement of the academic department, the curriculum was divided into neat little specialties, each owning its own portion of human knowledge. As specialization became ever-finer and more exotic, as specialists developed their own languages and were thus disinclined to build linguistic and conceptual bridges between their academic worlds, students were left in the lurch; they were seldom asked to integrate what they had painstakingly learned in their separate course, thus their education failed to help them make sense of the world they lived in and learned about. No wonder, then, that students of the sixties complained that their collegiate work was irrelevant to their lives. Furthermore, fragmentation reinforces passivity, for being active presupposes that one has a sense of direction. In turn, knowing where one is going presupposes a sense of how one's efforts fit into the scheme of things.

The third villain, alienation, follows close on the heels of passivity and fragmentation, for both contribute to a lessened sense of self and loss of meaningfulness of one's experience. By adding the anonymity imposed on student condemned to spending four years in large, impersonal institutions, the result seems to be a human product which has not only escaped being educated, but which emerges having lost much of its ability to act purposively and intelligently.

The foregoing description of the malaise present in higher education in the 1960's is reasonably close to what many academics had come to believe about the house they lived in. To them, working to change the structures and practices which bred Passivity, Fragmentation, and Alienation seemed eminently reasonable and, therefore, possible.

Meanwhile, Sonoma State College was taking shape: the faculty and administration were busily planning majors, hiring new faculty, working up new course, instituting faculty governance structures, and planning a brand new campus. Classes were small, relations between faculty and students were close; in brief, the malaise of passivity, fragmentation, and alienation did not exist on our small campus. However, the seeds of education sickness had been sown: while eschewing large lecture rooms, classes of 40 to 50 could easily be accommodated in the new building, thus keeping the lecture mode of teaching alive and well. In addition, academic planning presupposed that the academic department would be the programmatic building block, thus assuring that when the campus had reached its ultimate size of 13,000 students the fragmentation of the "multiversity" and the alienation of students would be solidly in place. Put another way, the inertia of conventionality and the failure to imagine better ways of doing undergraduate education bid fair to consign Sonoma State College to the fate of "clone-ism."

### Beating Ideas into Institutions

At this point the narrative and my own story merge, for I had joined the faculty of SSC in 1962 as its first teacher of philosophy and humanities, hoping that a vital integrative general education program could be developed at this collegiate tabula rasa and that my experience in interdisciplinary studies and as the initiator of an Honors program at Chico State College would be of some use in building a model General Education program. Alas, I was to discover that few of my colleagues shared my vision or understood that something could be wrong with the status quo. Obviously, they had priorities, interests and ambitions different from mine, for my rhetoric had little effect. However, I had learned that finding help outside one's home turf can stimulate attentiveness and awaken neighbors to the need for change.

Quite by chance I happened to have lunch one autumn day in 1965 with Mervyn Cadwallader and five colleagues who were just beginning the Tutorial Program at San Jose State College. (Its twin

at U.C., Berkeley, Joseph Tussman's Experimental College, had also just begun.) As they explained the goals and nature of their program my excitement mounted, for it was clear that their game was the one I wanted to play; furthermore, the structure of the Tutorial Program could be replicated at Sonoma State! As I learned later, Cadwallader's innovative General Education program was inspired by Alexander Meiklejohn's Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin which existed from 1927-33.

Meiklejohn (1872-1964), a philosopher and former president of Amherst College, was a bold innovator who developed a program for the Freshman-Sophomore years which cut across disciplinary lines by concentrating on ideas and themes which would nurture the intelligence and awareness necessary if students were to become fully engaged citizens of a democracy. Small seminars replaced the usual lecture-discussion classes and student writing rather than exams were the test of learning. Meiklejohn's Experimental College was a resounding success and is generally regarded as the most daring innovation in higher education that this century has witnessed. Clearly the San Jose Tutorial Program had a most distinguished ancestor. Since the goals, structure, and teaching-learning practices of Cadwallader's program were intended to combat passivity, fragmentation, and alienation, it was evident to me that my colleagues might well be awakened from their slumber were they to know that such daring innovations were afoot.

Hibernation characterized the next eighteen months; one might aver that I lay in wait for an opportunity to ring the tocsin. That occurred in 1967 when an Accreditation Team from WASC visited Sonoma State to determine its fitness to educate Californian youth. Its report took the faculty to task for not embracing innovation, especially since long-standing traditions and well-defined territory had not been established. Quite fortuitously, I had been elected Chair of the Faculty of 1967-8 and as a consequence of the WASC critique was charged with organizing a Faculty Conference for Fall, 1967 devoted to innovation and experimentation. By that time many faculty had manifested interest in learning about such matters; after all, University of the Pacific had begun to develop cluster colleges, as had U.C., Santa Cruz; innovative ideas for teaching and learning seemed to emerge from every academic corner and, of course, we had our very own Humanistic psychologists as local models of how to innovate. At the other end of various spectrums Robert Maynard Hutchins, in his weekly syndicated column, maintained a steady barrage of criticism directed at the failure of the academy to educate for citizenship in a presumably democratic state. As ever, he argued the case for the importance of liberal education in a highly technologized society and for the necessity of trying new approaches. The time was ripe for changing the old order.

The conference went splendidly: a wide variety of reforms were discussed by interest groups which then formulated proposals to be considered by the whole faculty. The reforms considered ranged from cross-disciplinary courses, which would focus on a single era, event, or movement to breaking up the calendar so that a student could concentrate on one course at a time. Three of my colleagues (from Political Science, History, and English) and I settled on nothing less than proposing a Tutorial Program similar to the one at San Jose State. The conferees were most interested in our proposal, perhaps because it had worked elsewhere, but also because it addressed the problem of how best to do general education, an ever-present academic concern. On the strength of that encouragement our small committee drafted a formal proposal to be presented to the Academic Senate.

At this point I must say a word about the colleagues who joined forces with me. The political scientist and the historian were new to the faculty and were both eager to reform the College's General Education Program. The man from English, later referred to as a poet, had joined the faculty when I did; we had become good friends and had often discussed how we might adapt the San Jose innovation to our situation. We four were of one mind at the time of the conference and were ready to engage in heavy persuasion. (1) On January 5, 1968 the Senate approved the plan for Tutorials in the Liberal Arts and Sciences on a two-year trial basis. We described it as a two-year program of:

Reading, writing, seminar discussions and occasional lectures organized around central problems to themes . . . (it) will meet all the General Education requirements of the College . . . . Typically, the student will spend from four to six hours in seminar discussion, two hours in lecture, and an hour in individual conferences every week. Writing assignments are expected to be heavy and the student's own responsibility for doing the work of the program will be heavy.

Rather than teaching his own specialty, each tutor would facilitate the learning of all the material; in most cases he would be an "advanced learner." A common core of readings would be used and one morning each week would be devoted to the faculty's own seminar on the material.

The goals of the Tutorial Program were not understated. We saw it as a means whereby:

students will make considerable strides toward intellectual and emotional liberation and as a two-year occasion in which they will have a much better than average chance to become engaged with various worlds each of us lives in. We would hope to develop skills of analysis and criticism which would allow students to grapple with the persistent problems of man and society, to support students' growth toward lives of integrity and principle by studying the relationship of values to action, and of the significance of the individual in history, to improve the quality of their lives by adding the usable past to their experience, including cultural and aesthetic achievements, and to provide them with the tools and motivation for continual self education.

Despite the proffered riches of the Tutorial Program, its inauguration had to be postponed until Fall, 1969, for the simple reason that additional faculty positions would not be available until that time.

During the Spring, 1968 term, the Appeals and Administrative Appointments Committee startled the campus by presenting a proposal that Sonoma State grow smaller as it grew larger by reorganizing as a "cluster" of semi-autonomous schools none of which would exceed 750 students and 50 faculty. The already-present collection of departments and the appropriate administrative structure would constitute School #1 whose student population would be limited to 7500. The intent of the plan was to preserve the best features of Sonoma State: the accessibility of faculty and administration to students, small to moderate-sized classes, relatively small departments in which the faculty know each other, ability to innovate without threatening fiefdoms and long-established program, and ability to participate meaningfully in college and school governance. The faculty responded readily and positively to the proposal. An Ad Hoc Committee was formed and charged with presenting a plan for Cluster School reorganization by March 1, 1969.

Composed of faculty, administrators, and students the committee met throughout the Fall semester of 1968, worked zealously and productively, and presented its recommendations for faculty approval in January, 1969. Basically, the plan stipulated that the present college be named Cluster School #1 and that all subsequent "schools" join in federation with it. Included was a proposal to establish Cluster School #2 as a four-year program which would grant a B.A. in Liberal Studies and whose "primary aim will be that of affording students an educational experience which is liberalizing and liberating; it will mark a significant departure from traditional liberal arts degrees, for this college will be experimental in both subject matter and educational methods."

The reader should not be astonished to find that the previously approved Tutorial Program was to constitute the first two, general education, years of this new Cluster School. The Junior and Senior years would allow students to pursue their own interests through a combination of seminars, tutorials, independent study and relevant classes in Cluster School #1 (later to be known as "Olde School.") The faculty approved the entire proposal, though not without misgivings on the part of some traditionalists, and the Fearless Four found themselves facing the daunting task of making abstract, idealized concepts real in concrete, particular ways, for Cluster School #2 was to be born in early September, 1969! It

should be noted that the historian had defected from our quartet and was replaced by a member of the Psychology Department.

Early in our deliberations we decided that “Cluster School #2” had decidedly little sex appeal as a name for the institution we were about to fabricate. Sufficient to our ends would be a name that suggested something about the nature of our enterprise and the tradition we wished to embody. I suggested that if we wanted a name, which would confer upon us instant recognition and success, we should call our school the Robert Maynard Hutchins School of Liberal Studies. Chuckling good-naturedly, my colleagues pressed me to justify my suggestion. I told them of a speech on liberal education Hutchins had given in 1942 at my high school in Evanston, Illinois and of the major impact it had on my thinking about education. Too, I pointed out, his current writing on the need for educational innovation was congruent with our intentions, that he had become famous for enabling important educational innovations at the University of Chicago when he was its president, and that, most important of all, Hutchins had engaged in a lifelong attempt to convince Americans that democracy will not be realized unless its citizens are liberally educated; a belief with which we were in complete accord. In addition, Robert M. Hutchins represented that intellectual tradition associated with Socrates which we sought to embody in our school.

To my delight both my colleagues and the college’s president, Ambrose R. Nichols, endorsed calling Cluster School #2 the Hutchins School of Liberal Studies. But, would Robert Hutchins agree? In a longish letter I make our pitch to him; in a very brief letter he replied:

I am deeply honored by your suggestion regarding lending my name to your new experimental school. I hope you will not feel bound to adhere to it if you find the name does you more harm than good. The idea of the college is one with which I am happy to be associated.

Several months later Hutchins responded to another of my missives:

I only hope that the name doesn’t do you harm. What will happen when Governor Reagan finds out what you have done? I am deeply honored. I hope you will let me know if there is ever anything I can do for you. And I authorize you in advance to drop the name whenever it becomes embarrassing!

How satisfying! Now that we had a good, solid, recognizable name, we could get about the work of school building!

At that point we (a philosopher, a political scientist, a poet, and a psychologist) were faced with the difficult task of translating noble rhetoric into real structures and educational substance. We had a near-encyclopedic knowledge of what was wrong with higher education and had a solid grounding in most of the slogans then extant, but was that a sufficient basis for building an exemplary four-year liberal education? For example, we had been impressed by the Hazen Foundation’s booklet, which called for the “education of persons” and a balance between cognitive and affective education; however, getting clear about those issues alone would have taken time we did not have. Clarity about goals and pedagogy, however, was sorely needed, as this narrative will demonstrate.

We did, however, have a structure for the lower division of seminars, tutorials and weekly lectures, thanks to the San Jose State Tutorials Program; thus, we had at least one foot hovering over reality. Our plan called for seminars of ten persons each led by a faculty member who would set aside his disciplinary habits and become an “advanced learner” in an interdisciplinary, or integrative, consideration of various themes and ideas. Since the seminar was to be the major pedagogical feature of the program, and because none of us had conducted seminars wherein students bear great responsibility for the seminar’s success, we were understandably anxious, though convinced, that we were on the right track. Tutorial sessions would focus on the individual student’s writing, while weekly

lectures would combine actual lectures on the subject matter with something approaching a “town meeting.” The faculty would have its own weekly seminar at which problems and prospects of the program would be discussed and whoever had a keen grasp of the week’s reading would seek to enlighten his colleagues and lead a discussion.

Having settled on the structural format of the Hutchins School’s lower division, the four faculty planners turned to the curriculum. Since each seminar would account for four-fifths of a student’s normal load, we could afford to be ambitious in building seminar content. “Images of Man” was the title of the first semester’s seminar; that involved exploring a variety of conceptions of man’s nature drawn from ethnographic materials through works in literature, philosophy, psychology and the social sciences. Semester II would examine “Man in Civilization,” focusing on American values and their expression in a variety of institutions. The third seminar (twelve units of credit, remember) was to examine “Change and Continuity in Civilization” as witnessed in the various intellectual and social revolutions of the Nineteenth Century, while Semester #4 would concentrate on “Alternatives for the Future,” in some sense a response to the previous term’s work.

Given that thematic framework we proceeded to flesh-out the first term’s academic content. (By that time we had hired a young theoretical physicist, fresh from graduate school, whose presence would justify our including natural science in the curriculum and who suggested readings for the Fall term.) Having no particular insight into how much reading should be required, I suggested that since students in my humanities courses generally plowed through ten to twelve books per semester, we could hardly ask less of our bright-eyed charges than four times that number, that is, forty! After all, they would have to earn those twelve units of credit! We finally agreed that thirty books would be preferable. Whom did they read? Beckett, Feynman, Schrodinger, Gamow, Weiner, five ethnographies, Malcom X, Lorca, Eliade, Kafka, Jung, Hess, Fromm, Joyce, Tillich, Buber, and a few others! (See Appendix) Having accomplished that much, we turned to other, more mundane matters, the chief one being recruitment of a student body. Consideration of the upper division program was postponed until the next year.

Slightly more than 200 daring souls applied for admission to the Hutchins School, but only the first hundred could be accommodated. We did not intend to become an Honors program, hence first-come-first-served was the only criterion for admission. They were invited to the campus for an orientation meeting in early May of 1969. It was difficult to discern whether the soon-to-be freshman were as excited as we were. Here, at last, was hirsute and rumpled teenagers eager to participate in Sonoma State’s entry in the Cluster College Sweepstakes. Everyone wore grins of delight, the speeches were short, the question period long, and a sense of bonding pervaded the room. Ah! How sweet it was!

## A Tragicomedy in two Acts:

### Act I

Little did we realize that characterizing the Hutchins School as “free” and “experimental” would have near-cataclysmic consequences. Those emblematic slogans of the 1960’s had a power no one interested in changing higher education could resist, especially in the context of educational institutions grown rigid and insensitive to individual needs and desires. Agreement on what those slogans meant, however, was not easily attained. As a rule, interpretations of those meanings fell into two basic clusters, or perspectives, which separated faculty rather fundamentally, as we were to discover. Inhabiting one major perspective was the innovator who sought new means in order to achieve old goals: placing reliance on the seminar in order to work toward the traditional goals of liberal education, for example. The other notable point of view was that of the experimenter who sought new means to reach new goals. (2) That more adventuresome fellow would change higher education’s priorities, for

example, by attempting to improve the student's mental health through the use of encounter groups, a favorite tool of psychologists during the 60's. Innovators and experimenters fought often and noisily over that issue, particularly when the mental health enthusiasts attempted to blend the encounter group with the subject matter seminar. Perhaps the contrast between the two dominant camps might be clarified through yet another distinction.

In the late nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche distinguished two principles lying at the heart of Greek tragedy: The Apollonian and the Dionysian. The contest between them, the agon, is what makes tragedy dynamic, for it corresponds to the eternal struggle within the human personality and in society as well. The Greek god, Apollo, represented reason, the rational impulse, which was conscious and form-giving; indeed, reason is man's chief defense and bulwark against the chaos which threatens him on all sides, and . . . from within. Dionysus, on the other hand, represented the irrational principle which beckons man to embrace chaos, to enter a realm of emotional frenzy in which he is utterly isolated from his fellows, free of all fetters and ties, including all bonds to his community. These antithetic principles/myths are in perpetual struggle with each other, in a dialectical tension. Like Odysseus, each of us negotiates passage between the chaos of Scylla and the stultified order of Charybdis. Each of us, then, charts for himself a "worldline" in virtue of his choosing where he will stand between Apollo and Dionysus. Much of the anxiety which attends our existence must arise from this dialectical tension.

Imagine, then, the impact on a faculty member of reading Rousseau's Emile, A. S. Neill's Summerhill, or the latest issue of Change! If he had been chafing at the frustrations endemic to the bureaucratized university or hungering for the vaunted satisfactions of genuine community, not to mention the joys of working with students who were eager to learn, he probably felt the pull of Dionysus away from the ossified, hallowed forms and practices of the Apollonian multiversity. Enlisting in the service of Dionysus meant experiencing real freedom, throwing off the spirit-killing formalisms of the academy, divesting oneself of burdensome, inauthentic roles, and turning to the really important issues of human existence. Some faculty joined the Dionysian revels, some liked the music and danced a few steps, other chose to observe and learn, while the true Apollonians dismissed the revelry as meaningless, ugly, and evil. Except for the latter, all responded to the arrival of the "stranger-god" and were changed by the event, each in his own way. Differences in degree, however, often appear to be differences in kind, particularly when disagreements arise. Therefore, those faculty who chose to stand closer to Apollo than to Dionysus were viewed by their Dionysus-leaning colleagues as rigid, rule-encrusted bureaucrats enamored of a stale rationality which was chiefly responsible for the various crises peculiar to Western Civilization; those within the ambit of Apollo judged their opponents as loose, permissive, irrational and anti-intellectuals fools besotted by the cult of youth and suspicious of all authority. When both camps found themselves separated only by a seminar table and pledged to undertake a common endeavor, which required mutuality, disaster hovered in the wings.

The first meeting of the miniscule, five-person, faculty of the Hutchins School occurred in early September, 1969. Our agenda consisted of a discussion of Camus' The Stranger, the first book on our reading list, as well as working out details for the next day's Hutchins School Retreat for our hundred eager freshmen at a nearby, appropriately funky resort. Expecting to participate in a scintillating discussion of the novel, I was astonished when the poet and the newly-hired young physicist announced, separately and without collusion, that each had decided not to use the book list because he wished to embrace "freedom" rather than "structure" and to take seriously our proclamation that faculty should be "co-learners." When reminded of our prior agreement on the book list, they countered that we had also subscribed to "experimentalism," whose banner they would hold high. To that end they would plump for participatory democracy by letting their seminars decide which books should be read, if any! Well, the glove hit the table with a genuine "thump." Apollo and Dionysus had squared off; Act I suddenly became Round I.

What was the lineup of forces? Dionysus claimed the poet and the physicist, while Apollo could count on a philosopher and a political scientist. In between stood the psychologist who attempted to be a mediator and referee; his recent experience in a mental hospital promised to be of great value. We might think of him as Hephaistos, the lame god of Homer's *Iliad* who sought to maintain order among Olympians.

The Apollonians, also known as the Innovators, responded to the Dionysians, or Experimenters, by arguing that our conception of the lower-division seminars was a far cry from the "unstructured model in which faculty and students had complete latitude to "do their own thing," an *au courant* slogan of the times. Rather, our plan committed us to conducting seminars in which students would be able to develop their own styles of learning in the context of a cooperative community of inquirers. Who, we said, could ask for an innovation more far-reaching than that? Further, the interdisciplinary (or, transdisciplinary) approach to subject matter would derail the rigid boundaries between academic disciplines which, we believed, undercut a comprehensive general education for undergraduates. The seminars could not function without a center, something studied in common, for they were to be cooperative. In an academic setting that focal point is a text. Put succinctly, we held that the learning experience must be structured, in an elastic and flexible fashion, in order for personal and intellectual development to take place.

Not so, flashed back the Dionysians, you are simply adopting the tired old goals of liberal education and pumping life into them by using new pedagogical techniques, thereby deceiving yourselves that any real changes have been made. Rather, they said, we aim to achieve true liberation for students by letting them decide what will be discussed and studied, whether singly or as a group; indeed, we will scrap all requirements, thus removing any punitive motivators.

Well, the Apollonians, light-headed and somewhat giddy from being exposed to the real Dionysus, rallied in time to aver that even if the Dionysians' intentions were desirable and "do-able," it was clear to any rational person that the college had approved a plan which could not be reconciled with the unstructured model of education our more radical colleagues wished to promulgate. To no avail we argued that unless we tried the approved plan, we could never determine whether it would work; only by following through could we discover, after two years, whether our "experiment" was successful. Not being in vogue that year, reason did not prevail.

Our meeting ended in a dissonance which affected the subsequent retreat: each contingent subtly sought to enlist student support for its conception of the academic program. I could see that students were likely to become unwitting pawns and the do-or-die conflict could wound us all. On the other hand, I thought, perhaps we could learn from each other, thus crafting an eventual synthesis of Apollo and Dionysus, an outcome superior to what each faction originally intended. Such was not to be, however; the schism widened with each passing week. Cadre meetings were a 'brim with scarcely concealed acrimony; agreement on most anything was impossible to achieve. As a consequence, the faculty found themselves isolated in a structure designed for collaboration; the knowledge and talents of colleagues were not available, a fact which severely hampered the interdisciplinary nature of our endeavor. Too, our fragmentation deprived us of information about what was happening in other seminars, thus precluding our gaining insight from each other's experience. In addition, where mutual respect and caring might have existed, rancor and loathing took their place.

As the Apollonians and Dionysians avoided each other (each encounter increased the flow of stomach acid), the students began to suspect that something had gone awry, that vast disparities existed among the faculty concerning the goals and pedagogy of the school, not to mention faculty expectations regarding the level of student accomplishment and to what extent they should participate in the academic program. The "stodgy" faculty kept faith with their interpretation of academic integrity as well as with the original agreement while the "swingers" used the seminar as a meeting place (attendance optional) where students could "interact" in order to discover what they were interested in learning and whether it would be "fun" to do so. Though there was no direct evidence (we *really* didn't

communicate) of the Dionysians' divergence from the curriculum, an occasion arose which made the hiatus clear.

Early in our discussion of "Alternative Ways of Being Human," perhaps while considering Newman's Knowing the Gururumba, a student in one of my seminars (each of us had two ten-student seminars) suggested that we might all learn more were each seminar to construct an imaginative account of a culture which would be presented at one of the three-hour Monday meetings. I liked the idea, presented it to my colleagues as a possibility, found it warmly received by my ally and the psychologist, but stonewalled by the Dionysians on the grounds that it would force students to do something that did not originate with them. The Apollonians agreed to implement the idea. What followed not only created a stark contrast between the two conceptions of our educational enterprise, but also illustrates vividly how collaborative learning functions. The following account deals only with my seminars.

Composed of stalwart, serious folk, most of whom seemed satisfied with reading and discussing books and ideas (at least none of them were in open rebellion), my morning seminar quickly embraced the plan to create and present a fictive culture. One fellow, having a strong reality-orientation, opined that we really must fine an actual place for the culture before getting about the task of imagining it. So, one fine autumn morning we journeyed to a nearby state park, hiked up to a promontory overlooking a lovely valley and held a seminar crowded round a picnic table. Inspired by their surroundings the students did a fine job of sketching-out the distinguishing features of the Native American culture which well might have lived there. Each student took responsibility for describing a specific aspect of the culture, for example, the land and economy, mythology, rites of passage, kinship and family structure. Seminar time was devoted in part to progress reports.

My afternoon seminar accepted the task with delight and verve. A "place" didn't matter much to this bunch: they had a ready store of ideas about what culture ought to be and that's what they designed. Basic to their culture was "androgyny;" that is, everyone in the society was physically able to have sex with any other member of the society, male or female. That pleasant capability gave rise to an appropriate mythology and highly unusual art. Interpersonal relations took precedence over economics while self-actualization stole the privileged position of politics. Our seminar sessions were often laced with exuberant mirth.

When the "Day of Telling" arrived the only seminars participating were those of the Apollonians. My morning group did a fine, solid job of reading descriptions of their culture: I was inordinately proud of them. My ally's two seminars did equally well. However, the final act of the morning was my afternoon seminar: the androgynous ones. One young lady and her boyfriend baked a five-foot-long, whole wheat, androgynous human (a totem?) which was placed on a grand piano, ready to be cannibalized. Rather than reading their descriptions they chose to present a modified tableau; "modified" in the sense that the local canons of decency were respected. . . despite the spirit of the times. The "native" danced and pranced accompanied by a bongo drummer and their and their seminar leader who improvised on a soprano recorder. They managed to convey the essence of their fictive culture rather well in the process of raising everyone's spirits.

The Creating A Culture game worked well because every member of each seminar developed a specific aspect of an imagined culture, but always in relation to what everyone else was doing. Their work was guided by the principle that all aspects of a culture are internally related, thus whatever anyone imagined had to be checked with their fellows for consistency and integration. One might aver that the development of each participant was a condition for the development of all. Their work was collaborative and productive of self-esteem. In fact, this exercise became a standard part of each year's freshman seminar for about ten years. Dropping it was largely a result of changes in student motivation and of faculty ennui.

That morning's demonstration of the power of collaborative learning was immensely gratifying to the Apollonians, for it underscored our claim that students working together in a structure which rewards collaboration are able to learn more than if they embrace a decentralized, "do your own thing"

ethos. Feeling vindicated, the Apollonians hoped that their Dionysian colleagues (and their students) would see the error of their ways, thus bringing us back to the harmony of mutual intention and act which was to have obtained from the outset.

The state of utopian bliss was not to be; the contending forces remained divided on just about every issue. Indeed, one might infer that the Creating A Culture game served to deepen, as well as illustrate, the gulf which separated us.

Another, rather upsetting, development occurred somewhat later when the parents of a student in one of the poet's seminars asked to meet with him and me concerning their son's progress. The mother, an alert, attractive and socially adept Berkeleyite took the initiative by asserting that her son was depressed, possibly suicidal, because he wasn't learning and had nothing to show for two months of being in my colleague's seminar. The boy's older brother was finishing a Ph.D. at Yale and was a role model for the younger brother whose spinning in the void could best be explained by lack of accomplishment. The father, a Harvard Ph.D., seconded his wife's analysis and asked my Dionysian colleague if he would please require the young man to at least write some essays. The poet responded by thoroughly explaining why such a requirement would contradict the experiment he was conducting. He could have quoted Nietzsche (in Thus spoke Zarathustra) who said: "One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star." It is not clear that Nietzsche had college freshmen in mind, but there was no doubt that the elder Dionysian was acting in harmony with his own version of what the Hutchins School was about. The concerned parents left dissatisfied while I concluded that if the Hutchins School were to last more than a year, faculty agreement on goals and pedagogy would be necessary.

Since every day brought further evidence of factional digging-in, the hope that we might effect a grand synthesis of Apollonian structure and rationality with Dionysian individualism and affectivity was decisively negated. Toward the close of the Fall semester recommendations for renewal of faculty appointments had to be made. Having been appointed Provost of the Hutchins School by the President of the College, I recommended that the poet be returned to the English Department at the end of the academic year. My justification was that he was not in agreement with the goals and minimal structure of the Hutchins School and that his continued presence would be destructive of the school itself. A similar fate was meted out to the young physicist, except that his employment at the college was terminated in June, 1970. The President and various intermediate faculty committees concurred.

A harsh decision, undoubtedly, but one that was necessary were the school to continue. In the best of circumstances a new educational program largely founded on a rejection of the academic status quo is risky, for it appears as a statement to other faculty that their craft is suspect and mediocre. Our civil war, therefore, gave the real Apollonians on campus possible ammunition for a battle to do us in. Not being willing to give up our school, we had no choice but to part ways with the Dionysians, and to live with the decision.

## Act II

Knowing that many of our students would be seriously angered and upset by the "firing" of the Dionysians, I addressed a letter to the returnees which emphasized the fact that the Hutchins School had a constitutional status and authority to which all of us must be committed if we were to be tolerated, let alone allowed to exist. I also pointed out that most innovative programs have had a stormy first year and that the issue over which controversy usually boiled was structure vs. non-structure. Obviously I hoped that the students would see that much more was at stake than personal differences between faculty members.

A goodly number of the students were infuriated by the decision to terminate the poet and physicist: they held a few rallies, wrote letters to the editor of the campus newspaper denouncing me as a "fascistic dictator" and vented their displeasure in various forms of behavior. The physicist urges his

students to fight the recommendations, while the poet remained fairly passive. Another clustering of students was in basic agreement with the Apollonians; yet another group was indifferent to the fracas.

To understand more adequately the student reactions to the “firings” and the polarization within the faculty, one must take into account the sociopolitical climate of 1969-70. As one of those students recently reminded me:

For me, as a student, things like the Vietnam War (from Golden Gate park anti-war rallies to the Kent State killings) were very much “in my face.” I had no intention of going to ‘Nam and the student deferment available via Hutchins was an enormous incentive to stick around for another year. That was the year of the Altamount Rock Festival, open dope smoking on the Sonoma State campus, along with sweat lodges and skinny-dipping. The college was at the height of its Granola U period. Many students showed up for Hutchins seminars stoned, even at 9 A. M. Others were emotionally overwrought by the social turmoil around them. Don’t forget, Eva Blau died of a drug overdose that year, and Stacy Gleason’s father, Ralph, was flying high as the guru of Rolling Stone magazine. LSD was a very popular recreational drug, along with other psychedelics. Cotati’s Inn of the Beginning was as popular a hangout as the classroom. We were experimenting with free love, “living together” and brand new causes like Earth Day. (3)

Small wonder, then, that my entreaty during the holidays fell on deaf ears. We Apollonians three (the psychologist had clearly committed himself to our cause) had to face the possibility that our “bold innovation” might succumb. However, we found comfort and strength in realizing that our endeavor had an importance transcending our own ambitions or academic fantasies: that the Hutchins School was really an attempt to find a more effective way of transmuting the intellectual tradition of the West. That meant that we defined ourselves in relation to that tradition and saw the intellectual life as a good in itself. Not the only good, but that one to which higher education is dedicated. In failing to attract American youth to intellectual pursuits, higher education was in need of alternative pedagogies. That, after all, was our charge and goal: to see whether California students could become intellectually engaged as a consequence of learning in a collaborative fashion and of learning how to become life-long learners. Believing that gave our efforts a significance sufficient to carry us through whatever traumas the Spring term might bring.

Many of the returning students sensed our renewed seriousness and commitment to making the Hutchins School work as intended. My only seminar was composed of young people who were eager to participate and to learn, who did the reading and writing required of them, and who appeared to enjoy the entire process. One young woman, very rational and critical, enjoyed a brief period of rebellion against rationality, but evidently found no rational grounds for her temporary departure. While some students did not return, presumably because of the controversy or because the program did not meet their expectations, a significant number of returnees sought to effect a reconciliation with the faculty. A student advisory committee was established (the first incarnation of an Academic Council) which met with the faculty to plan curriculum and to advise us on other matters. (The lame-duck Dionysians did not, of course, participate in any of these activities.) The rapprochement was very successful; for the first time students had a say on important matters. There were probably fewer jokes about “warren’s little acre” than in the past as a sense of communal purpose began to emerge.

Our growing feeling of hope for the future was reinforced by our being given five additional faculty positions to accommodate an expected increase of one hundred students in the Fall of 1970. Since our psychologist ally had decided to return to his department and because the poet and physicist were to be replaced, we had eight faculty positions to fill! Much of my non-teaching time during the spring was devoted to the hiring process. Applicants were many; indeed, an impressive number of new Ph.D’s were very eager to join us. Given that our troubles of the Fall term were very much on our minds, we sought to avoid even a minimal repetition of that misery. Accordingly, each candidate was provided with a “Statement of Instructional Responsibilities” which tersely stated what would be

expected of a faculty member regarding seminars, curriculum, independent study and staff conferences. 1A “Cautionary Note” was appended:

The Hutchins School is not a “free university” or a collegiate level Summerhill. Our primary aim is to enable students to become self-motivated and responsible for their own learning, and, to that end, students are freed from many of the traditional academic pressures and requirements. However, such an increase in student freedom does not imply abandoning intellectual standards or a lessening of rigor in the pursuit of knowledge.

Conformity of thought was hardly our goal; rather, we hoped to weed-out applicants whose presence on the faculty of our struggling school would lead to dissension and conflict known to us all too well. We wanted candidates who chose to teach with us because our goals and pedagogy appealed to them, not because they believed the Hutchins School would give them a chance to devise their own educational utopias.

Our recruiting was very successful: the six men and two women we hired were quite aware of the dangerous waters we negotiated in Fall, 1969. Most of them joined us for an orientation meeting in May, 1970 at which all manner of topics were hashed over, including the recent town gown clash over nude bathing in the campus lake. The meeting was often punctuated by roars of laughter, a phenomenon in short supply during our brief history. As our students would have observed, we shared a “high” on humor. The new academic year looked promising indeed!

Our physical quarters then consisted of a “temporary” building made up of fairly adequate administrative space and a number of faculty office seminar rooms. While fine in the short run, our housing would not allow for growth; hence, we worked with the architects charged with designing the Cluster School buildings. They responded positively to our suggestions that the complex consist of small one-story buildings dispersed around a number of piazza, as in medieval towns, and that one should be able to get lost while wandering through the area. In essence, these requirements were aimed at keeping the building within human scale as well as introducing a complexity of arrangement in contrast to the simplicity of the structures. Happily our suggestions carried the day. Clearly, the prospect of an aesthetically pleasing and functional “home” helped dissipate the darkness of our birthing process.

The natal year of the Hutchins School of Liberal Studies ended on notes of hope, celebration, relief, and exhaustion. Much had been accomplished regarding the next year’s curriculum, thanks to the efforts of the new faculty, and a faculty-student committee had labored many hours designing models for school governance, thus creating the mutuality we had desired from the outset. Not everyone, of course, had experienced the spirit of community; however, its promise must have affected those who were not severely disaffected, for 55 out of the original 100 students returned for the sophomore year, a statistic which compares favorably with traditional rates of return. (Ultimately, 25 of the pioneers graduated with degrees in Liberal Studies.)

### Any Enlightenment

Any dramatic episode darkened by elements of the tragic should provide its characters (and audience) with insights and knowledge. Did we learn anything as a result of our experiences? Yes, a fair amount.

As we had hoped and expected, the seminar proved to be a powerful tool for learning, if its members prepare for and participate in the discussions. Given the overwhelming fallibility of college freshmen, one cannot count on their devoted participation. However, if the faculty seminar leader is patient and helps his charges discover their responsibility for the seminar’s success, they will likely make genuine progress. As one student put it: “Your job is to get a hook into us during the freshman year, but you can’t yank us out of the water, else you’ll break the leader. You must play us throughout the year and by the time we are sophomores we’ll be ready to net.” The trout-fishing metaphor is apt:

“landing” the student is the ultimate goal. However, from a faculty perspective the highly personal situation which a seminar creates allows one to experience and appreciate intellectual and affective changes in students which traditional pedagogies seldom make possible. That is why faculty become ecstatic when seminars really work.

Another item: utopian assumptions about students who select an innovative college are counter-productive. About a fifth of our first-year students found the Hutchins School to be exactly what they wanted: time to follow their own interests and to explore new areas, an integrated course of study, and opportunities to develop their own standard and styles of learning. Another 20% were “floaters,” the opposite of those just described; uninterested in learning and not motivated to do much of anything, these students dropped out after a semester. The remaining 60% lacked customary faculty direction. They were the trout for whom we fished. Accustomed to academic passivity, these students floundered and flailed about, but usually came to have confidence in their abilities as learners. They also came to understand what our fledgling innovation was about and how it could satisfy their educational needs.

An innovative education program owes the students who select it an accurate description of what goes on there. Much of our misery during that first year was caused by the variety of conceptions of the school brought by both faculty and students. We discovered that we could not be all things to all people. Indeed that principle was implicit in the Cluster College Plan of 1968. Thus, a careful description of the program, agreed upon by the school’s faculty, is of prime importance.

We also learned that those entering upon the perilous path of institutional change require an ideal to light the way and to provide energy for their quest; however, they must not be possessed by the ideal, for in that direction lies rigidity and tunnel vision. Avoiding single-mindedness is not an easy task, however, when one’s creation is being assaulted from without or undermined from within, or both. It is likely that we Apollonians did suffer from possession and possessiveness during the 1969-70 year, but in semi-consciousness of what we were doing. Had we not held fast to our vision of what the Hutchins School ought to be, its life would have been short indeed.

Were we to need justification for holding the line, it occurred in early November, 1991 when the first graduating class held a reunion to which everyone who had participated in the turbulent first year was invited. Some sixty-five brave souls returned to Sonoma State for the celebration. One feature was a yearbook which contained responses to a questionnaire circulated prior to the reunion. Those comments amply demonstrated that almost all of the responding student-veterans felt positively about their experiences in the school, praising many elements of the curriculum and pedagogy which they had experienced 22 years before.

Veterans of educational experiments often claim that the early years were the most exciting and rewarding. That is true of the Hutchins School generally for the first five years, but the initial year stands alone. The teaching and one-to-one work with students was immensely rewarding: I can recall those seminars and students with greater clarity than more recent ones. However, the emotional and psychological toll of our internal warfare was considerably less than productive. As I often have said of my experience as a combat infantryman in World War II, “I am glad that I went through it, but, please . . . not again!” The following four years were a different matter. We hired strong faculty who were committed to the Hutchins School, its goals and its pedagogy. They knew that the real building of the program was in their hands. They brought much energy and intelligence to that task, and although a somewhat subliminal Apollonian/Dionysian dialectic was in evidence, they used that agon positively rather than be destroyed by it. They learned from our initial mistakes and made some of their own; none of the latter were critically serious to the well being of the school.

In its twenty-three years of existence the Hutchins School has become accepted and valued part of Sonoma State University. The road has often been rocky, but always negotiable. Our school has institutional rigidities of its own which deserve scrutiny, yet the inclination to innovate remains alive and well. The first, explosive year is seldom mentioned now; after all, who remembers his own birth process? Perhaps the principal reason for this exercise of putting memories in order is to let future

faculty and students know what vision inspired the school's founders and what the founding faculty and students experienced during the trauma of birth. Perhaps they will conclude that Nietzsche's aphorism applies to institutions as well as to persons: One must still have chaos in oneself to be able to give birth to a dancing star.

#### END NOTES

1. I have decided not to provide the names of the principal actors in this small drama with one exception: I must recognize the truly important role of Professor Jerry L. Tucker, the political scientist. He was a staunch ally, a fast friend, and fellow-sufferer during the year of our travail. In every way imaginable, he was the cofounder of the Hutchins School.
2. I owe the distinction between "innovation" and "experimentation" to Warren Bryan Martin, the first Provost of Old School.
3. Letter from Richard Mahler, January 27, 1992.

#### APPENDIX

##### LIBERAL STUDIES 101

##### A. Man and the Absurd

1. Beckett, Waiting for Godot
2. Camus, The Stranger and The Myth of Sisyphus
3. Sophocles, Oedipus Rex
4. Nietzsche, Thus Spoke Zarathustra

##### B. Man and the Cosmos

1. Bondi, Cosmology
2. Feynman, The Character of Physical Law
3. Hoffman, The Strange Story of the Quantum
4. Schrodinger, What is Life? And Mind and Matter
5. Gamow, One, Two, Three . . . Infinity
6. Weiner, The Human Use of Human Beings

##### C. Alternate Ways of Being Human

1. Kroeber, Ishi
2. Newman, Knowing the Gururumba
3. Simmons, Sun Chief
4. Thomas, The Harmless People
5. Malcolm X, Autobiography
6. Lorca, Blood Wedding

##### D. Alternate Systems of Belief

1. Heinlein, Stranger in a Strange Land
2. Book of Job
3. Smith, Religions of Man
4. Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane
5. Kafka, The Castle

##### E. The Self: Images, Concepts

1. Jung, Memories, Dreams, and Reflections
2. Hesse, Steppenwolf
3. Fromm, M for Himself
4. Frontiers of Psychological Research, (Scientific American)
5. Joyce, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man
6. Tillich, Courage to Be

7. Kazantzakis, Zorba the Greek
8. Herrigel, Z and the of Archery
9. Buber, \_ and Tho