

The Impact of the Experimental Colleges and the Raymond Experience

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1964-1988

(Note: A number of former Raymond students asked that I share the text of my high-table comments. They were intended to be the introduction to a structured dialogue among all of us about the impact of the Raymond experience on our lives. I regret that this group discussion was crowded out of the schedule. If some of you want to comment on Raymond's impact on your life, or on my reflections, my e-mail is rice@aacu.edu.)

I am delighted to be part of this reunion. What a great opportunity to be together. Thanks for the chance to initiate our discussion by sharing my reflections on our common Raymond experience. Also, I am pleased to share the podium with Jerry Gaff who has set the context in an informed way for our deliberations.

First, I bring you greetings from Warren (Dick) Martin, the founding Provost who gave us the original vision for our College. He would have loved being here. He lives in St. Louis and finds it difficult to travel. He is as sharp-witted, articulate, humorous, and insightful as ever. One of his primary goals for Raymond College was to bring us together for, as he put it, "the pursuit of truth in the company of friends."

For Jerry and me, this has been true over a lifetime of friendship—offices across the hall from one another in Farley Hall, often on the tennis court, fishing in the Chesapeake, meeting in conference bars across the country (where our best ideas were generated) and, more recently, spending New Year's Eve together trying to stay awake until midnight.

What Jerry and I took with us from the Raymond experience was a taste of what it meant to be part of a learning community. We were all learning together; most faculty were not much older than the students. All of us were given an open invitation to invest in an alternative approach to student learning—something that would make a difference.

Jerry and I have been engaged in an *absorbing errand* ever since. It was certainly what took me to Antioch College and Jerry to China on his recent Fulbright appointment. Many of you picked up on the same absorbing errand—a number of you have been involved in experimental programs across the country and others are going about it in your own ways. This is why we need to go to our conversations soon. Be thinking about what you want to say—what difference has Raymond made in your lives?

Remember David Riesman—*The Lonely Crowd*? Well, it was Riesman and Gerald Grant who did a study of the experimental colleges entitled *The Perpetual Dream*. They argued that colleges like Raymond were telic in nature. They challenged the emerging purposes of the University and proposed, instead, to focus on what was happening to students.

The early 1960s was a period of prosperity and higher education was expanding rapidly—those were the hay-days of American higher education (in sharp contrast to the present). In a very real sense, experimental colleges like Raymond were not revolutionary; we were counter-revolutionary. We came into being in opposition to the growing strength of the large research-oriented universities; what, in 1968, Jencks and Riesman described as the *Academic Revolution*.

What the experimental colleges were opposed to was the rise of an academic hegemony, dominated by an increasingly professionalized, research-oriented, discipline-driven, specialized faculty in graduate programs. All of this was being piggy-backed on the backs of undergraduate students being herded into large lectures staffed by one faculty member and a cadre of exploited teaching assistants (a very efficient economic model). This sounds almost conspiratorial—which fits the times.

The leaders of the free-speech movement in Berkeley put their finger on it. Remember Mario Savio (the philosophy student)? He gave us the rallying cry: “do not fold, spindle or manipulate.” [He was talking about the students.] The students wanted personal respect, decent teaching, a voice—to be heard—and participation in the decisions that shaped their education and their personal lives. The title of the book Dick Martin published in 1968, summarizing his strategies for reform, was called *Alternative to Irrelevance*.

In 1967, Gene Wise prepared a self-study of Raymond in which he wrote that the Raymond students saw themselves as “rebels against an imagined monolithic status quo.” In my sociology classes there was a lot of talk about “the system.”

In the early 1960s the relationship between education and democracy took on new life. John Dewey’s ideas were resuscitated (here at Raymond, Mike Wagner gave them special embodiment). Dewey had taken the key elements of democracy—freedom and equality—and given them new meaning. Among those experimental colleges, freedom became not just freedom from (tyranny and oppression) but freedom to—freedom to grow and develop, freedom to learn.

The early Raymond came out of a heady, utopian time (Camelot was in the air). Last fall I attended the 50th Anniversary of the Peace Corps; that sense of hope and shared

aspiration was palpable. [At this time Raymond students who had participated in the Peace Corps were asked to stand and a surprisingly large number rose.]

Jerry was here for the early Raymond (1964-67). A number of us shared that experience but stayed around to live through what seemed to be several different Raymonds. The early Raymond was unapologetically committed to, in Martin's words, "the life of the mind and the cultivation of the potentialities of the human spirit." This still sounds good.

We talked extensively about fostering curiosity, whetting the imagination, creativity and personal authenticity. Boldness and really clever experimentation that could cross the line were presented as a challenge—until someone tried it. At that point Dean Ed Peckham would step out of the shadows—his was a tough job. His successor, called an *ombudsperson*, Leslie Noble, is actually here. [She was introduced].

Todd Gitlin has written one of the best books on *The Sixties*. The subtitle was *Years of Hope, Days of Rage*. Those were difficult days of uncommon intensity and political seriousness. By 1967, Jerry had already written about the *post-utopian Raymond*. Critical thinking, in fact, biting criticism has always been part of the life of the mind and of the liberal arts. That's why mainland China is going to have difficulty with Jerry's Hong Kong efforts to introduce a 4th year of liberal arts into a utilitarian and instrumental university curriculum. The liberal arts can be liberating—and subversive.

Because that pressing critique was fundamental to the Raymond experience, Raymond changed. It changed because it was being Raymond. By 1972, Raymond had evolved from a largely required curriculum to individualized learning. That year the *Stockton Record* carried a lead article featuring Provost Berndt Kolker, entitled: "Raymond College, No Requirements." That was the year the college had one of its largest enrollments; again, Raymond was leading the way.

It was at a Raymond Reunion during the later years that I was asked to convene a discussion session on the significance of Raymond College for its students. I had just agreed to go to Antioch College as Dean of the Faculty. The participants sat in a circle—by class. I expected a radical disparity between the experiences of the students from the first years and those from the later incarnations. What struck me as we went around the circle was that there was largely one Raymond. What was it we shared in common? What was Raymond? What worked for us? What didn't? [I hope this is what we will talk about.]

For me, it was the concentrated focus on learning—learning in community. Much of our confidence in the experience could have been chalked up to the *Hawthorne Effect*: we were being watched and we saw ourselves as special. But, it was more

than that. Raymond had the capacity to cultivate a sense of agency; students found their own voices, the knower and the known came together, we all had responsibilities for constructing our own meaning. I trust there was little imposition of meaning.

I've been long convinced that learning is relational, that there is a connection between the quality of community and the depth of learning. Relationships provide a context for learning: connections are made, complexities and contradictions cannot be avoided, and there is an abundance of conflict—the more diverse, the better. Actually, our success here was limited.

William Perry, who has written wisely about the stages of moral and intellectual development in the college years, spoke often about the need for balance between challenge and support. Too much support leads to complacency; too much challenge leads to retreat and defensiveness. At Raymond, in the early years, we probably had too much challenge; in the later years, too much support.

Outside the Raymond Quad, our world was in turbulence: in the 2nd year of the college President John F. Kennedy was assassinated, the civil rights movement was gaining force, also, there was the military build-up in Vietnam and the grappling with the draft.

Then, there was the major struggle subsumed under the tarnished banner of the counter-culture—sex, drugs and rock & roll. It could be that in 50 more years, as people look back in retrospect, it will turn out that, at a deeper level, this is what the experimental colleges of the 60s was all about. What we were engaged in was a part of much larger cultural forces. Your cohort of students helped usher in the civil rights movement. You contributed to the ending of a devastating war. The role of women and sex in society was fundamentally altered. Established institutions were losing their legitimacy. How we made meaning of the world changed and our experience at Raymond was a part of that. Our conception of what it means to be human was challenged; the best and the darkest passed before our eyes.

About the education reforms—I agree with Jerry, the experimental colleges had a lasting impact. There is a lot of research being done on how students learn and what practices have a high impact on learning. Most of these high impact practices can be traced back to the cluster colleges and the other 1960s reform efforts:

1. Active, engaged learning has been found to be most effective. The service learning movement, co-op education (introduced in the 1920s as Antioch's work/study program and has been widely adopted), internships (Berndt Kolker gave this whole emphasis serious intellectual leadership using his extraordinary business and government connections--Raymond was fortunate to have the leadership that was

ours. Worthy of special note is Callison's approach to global engagement--those year-long experiences in India and Japan had to be transformative.

On the power of the relationships of active practice and intellectual development, William Butler Yeats said it best:

The human soul is always moving outward into the external world and inward into itself, and this movement is double because the human soul would not be conscious were it not suspended between contraries. The greater the contrast, the more intense the consciousness.

2. Learning communities are now spreading across the country, although they don't have the support ours had. One of the courses I remember most was a Winter Term course in 1973 entitled *Community and Autonomy*. Thirty-five students and my family spent most of January camped on a bluff looking out over the Pacific far down on the Baja peninsula. We met under a parachute. In addition to the long list of readings we had prepared before going, we had extended discussions of what it means to be a community and the importance of autonomy. Changing gender roles were addressed. The women's movement was taking off and the women on the trip were still doing the dishes. We addressed violence in the community and the role of the stranger. The counter culture was lurking in the background—sex received a lot of attention. Drugs: the way they were opening people up to the spiritual but not to organized religion, were grappled with. The dark side, the growing threat of addiction, was raising its ugly head. Rock and roll: it seemed that every student could play the guitar and knew the lyrics of the songs we sang long into the night as the winds of the Pacific rustled the edges of our protective canopy.

3. The integration of knowledge—interdisciplinarity—that was so central to Raymond continues to grow. Its power at Raymond had a lot to do with size, architecture and proximity. In the early Raymond this was encourage by a common curriculum. Science could not be avoided. If Gene Wise was teaching *Moby Dick* in American studies, I had to bring Melville into sociology and religion. Plays fundamentally shaped our environment; Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, and in the later years *Marate Sade* swept us all away.

For me, Raymond was a liberal arts education; the best possible preparation for retirement.

In closing, I am reminded of an admonition used by Dick Martin to close the first graduation from Raymond. These words have a different ring in this context, but have special meaning for this group of friends decades later:

Take good care of your life;
Make good use of your life;
For this now, is your time on earth.