VOLUME IV No. 4

BULLETIN OF

ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE
IN ANNAPOLIS

STATEMENTS OF EDUCATIONAL
POLICY AND PROGRAM,
1950-1952

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND

DECEMBER, 1952

Founded as King William's School, 1696. Chartered as St. John's College, 1785

Volume IV DECEMBER, 1952 Number 4

Published quarterly

Entered as Second-class matter, February 18, 1949, at the Post Office, at Annapolis, Maryland, under the Act of August 24, 1912.

STATEMENT OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PROGRAM OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE

In accordance with the Polity of St. John's College, the Dean prepares annually a statement of educational policy and program. The purpose of this document is to reconsider and restate the aims and program of the College, and to serve as a stimulus to Faculty thinking about the common effort of the educational community that is St. John's.

Initially the Instruction Committee of the Faculty discusses the statement. After concurrence is obtained, the Dean submits the document to the Faculty at its first fall meeting. Divergence of opinion in Faculty discussion may well cause the statement to be revised by the Dean and Instruction Committee.

When finally adopted by the Faculty, the statement of educational policy and program is presented by the President as a report to the Visitors and Governors. The first three statements of educational policy and program covering the years 1950, 1951 and 1952 follow.

RICHARD D. WEIGLE
President

STATEMENT OF EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PROGRAM OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE

1950

This is the first time that, according to the provisions of the Polity, the Dean, with the advice and concurrence of the Instruction Committee, has to present to the Faculty a statement of educational policy and program. The text of the catalogue, of course, is meant to be such a statement, and that not only for the public at large, but also for this Faculty and our students. The statement, called for by the Polity, must, therefore, presuppose and imply the relevant passages in the catalogue and, going a step further, emphasize crucial points in our actual teaching in terms of our past experience and our present necessities.

We are dedicated to a task which can be stated in rather simple terms. This task consists in helping our students to develop and to put to right use their intellectual and imaginative faculties. We are trying to teach them to listen to reason—an immeasurably difficult task. The means that the College has so far devised to accomplish this end are the Seminar discussions, supported by the Language and Mathematics Tutorials, the Laboratory and the Formal Lecture, to which the Freshman Music Tutorial has been added recently.

The first concern of this educational program is the subordination of all its various divisions to the one end we have in sight. That means in the first place that neither the Tutorials nor the Laboratory nor the Formal Lecture and the discussion period following it, and not even the Seminar, can be understood as autonomous and self-sufficient entities. The teaching and learning in each of the branches of the program (even if we consider the Seminar as the trunk of the tree) are regulated by three decisive factors:

(1) The community of the learning effort;
(2) the continuity of the learning process;
(3) the spontaneity of the learning itself.

(1) The community of the learning effort manifests itself or should manifest itself in three patterns:

(a) The classroom is a place in which knowledge is not imparted by the teacher unless the minds of the students and of the teacher meet on a common ground and unless the teacher is aware that the understanding of the students can go deeper than his own. The teaching attitude is not one of pouring, but rather of a pondering attention

that can transform itself into a decisive thrust. It may or may not take the form of questioning. It may or may not be characterized as dialectic. But it can never be a unilateral loving preoccupation with the teacher's own ideas on any given subject.

(b) The events in a classroom are not isolated from events in other classrooms that deal with the same subject: the conversations between students belonging to different tutorials should be exploited in each tutorial to the full.

(c) The cooperation among the tutors on all levels and within all branches of the program should go on all the time. The exchange of views between the tutors on the same level of instruction as well as the mutual auditing of classes serve this purpose well. One of the primary concerns of the Dean will be the convoking of groups of tutors to discuss concrete problems of instructions. The faculty meetings should always offer the opportunity to do this on a larger scale.

All this means that our work never begins and never ends in the classroom.

(2) The continuity of the learning process confronts student and teacher alike with three fundamental difficulties:

(a) Some of the lines along which the program develops provide by themselves the organizing principles regulating the learning process: the great epic poems, the great tragedies, some of the great philosophies, the great story unfolded by Ptolemy—Copernicus—Kepler—Newton, the grammatical structure of languages, the methods of measurement in the Laboratory,—all of these are comprehensive units within which a continuous expansion of the student's understanding takes place. This kind of unity and continuity, however, is a property of the subject matter. The real problem of continuity affecting the learning process arises whenever the student has to cope with subject matters that are either dissimilar or involve mutually exclusive approaches. The great example is, of course, the conflict between the classical tradition as presented to the freshmen and the sophomores and the methods of inquiry they meet in the Laboratory. This problem cannot be solved by a simple classification or juxtaposition of the student's activities. Nor can it be solved by what is called "Integration," if this term is understood to refer to some alleged or arbitrary unity to be found in those divergent subject matters. The integration, or rather the continuity of learning, is provided by the all-important fact that every tutor faces this divergence together with the students, that he can share their perplexities in terms of their common experience. This continuity is achieved through the intellectual effort brought about by the necessity of closing the gaps of understanding.

(b) The material presented to the student in each branch of the program is immensely weighty and occasionally immensely difficult. Before anything else can happen the students and the teachers have to delve into the contents of the books they read, the languages they learn, the mathematical propositions they have to demonstrate, the scientific experiments and observations they have to perform. The very difficulty of this task can provoke, and should provoke, an absorbing preoccupation with the content in question, a necessary immersion in the details, a scholarly responsibility towards the subject under investigation. And yet, the continuity of learning requires a certain detachment from the material, requires a watching of the intellectual processes involved in the mastery of the subject. If the instruction can produce within the learners this fertile tension between the exploration of the material and the understanding of the intellectual operations involved in this activity,—then, and only then, do we teach the Liberal Arts.

(c) To achieve this continuity of learning, based not on the material but on the operations of the intellect, the College has tried, in the past, to find a universal pattern, the application of which could solve the problem of tying together dissimilar or conflicting disciplines as well as the problem of providing the necessary detachment from the material under investigation. This pattern was the matrix of the seven liberal arts. Its merits are unquestionable: it provides a network of references that seems to safeguard the continuity and unity of the learning process, without undue rigor and compulsion. Its defects are obvious: the vagueness and a certain artificiality in this kind of understanding of the liberal arts tend towards a sort of empty schematism and distract the attention of the students far too much from the content of their learning. It is our task to find a more adequate description of the liberal dimension of our learning. This much is certain: what is demanded is a never-ending examination of one's own assumptions; a rejection of the matter-of-course attitude towards the terms and categories in which the material is presented; the awakening of an awareness of the fundamental difficulties in every discipline.

(3) The spontaneity of the learning itself is the nerve of our program, and of any educational program for that matter. The means to foster this spontaneity are for the most part intangible. Certain conditions, however, under which this spontaneity could flourish and grow can be formulated in terms of three exercises in equilibrium:

(a) There must be an equilibrium between the daily and steady routine work in class as well as outside of class, that has to be watched and checked constantly, and the possibility of a questioning and wondering attitude on the part of the student arising from this routine and transcending it.

(b) There must be an equilibrium between the necessary work to be done by the student and his leisure. It will be the constant duty of the Dean to watch the work load imposed upon the students and the teachers. No single problem seems as important as this one.

(c) In a broader sense, there must be an equilibrium between the rigors of discipline to which the student has to submit and a sense of freedom as the prerequisite of all intellectual growth.

The image of equilibrium in all three cases is perhaps a specious one. It is perhaps better to say that at the point where routine and wondering, work and leisure, discipline and freedom merge, spontaneous learning takes place.

Spontaneous learning is the very essence of the Seminar and of the discussion period after the Formal Lecture. Tutorials and Laboratory exercises, although organized around a more rigid discipline, fail unless spontaneous learning takes place. In the Mathematics Tutorial the rigor of thinking ought to bring about the possibility of what we might term a spontaneous construction of the mind, while in the Language Tutorial the business of translation ought to be understood as a spontaneous reconstruction of intellectual patterns. In the Laboratory the entanglement with the un-yielding ought to lead to the spontaneous discovery of the means to overcome its resistance.

The spontaneity of learning is ultimately a function of the student's intelligence. Intelligence cannot be taught. We know, however, that intelligence can be misguided. The problem that we face is: how to equip the intelligence given to a student to make him avoid gross errors of judgment, how to free his intelligence from the obstacles that make him deviate from what the ancients called Right Reason. We go on the assumption that men can learn to use their reason rightly.

JACOB KLEIN
Dean

(Adopted by the Faculty, November 18, 1950)

1951 STATEMENT

The annual statement of educational policy and program, required by the Polity, cannot greatly vary from year to year. Such a variation would indicate a continuous shifting of the educational aims of the College and defeat the very purpose the statement means to serve. It is possible, and useful, however, to formulate anew, as often can be done, the means to achieve those educational aims. The recent decisions of the Instruction Committee provide an outline of what the College considers as necessary devices to strengthen our teaching at the present moment. They can be summarized briefly as follows:

(1) A greater emphasis on the means to articulate, to expound and to co-ordinate thoughts, i.e., a greater emphasis on the *development of syntactical and rhetorical skills,* best shown in *writing.* This, in turn, demands a greater concentration on Grammar, especially in the Freshman year.

(2) A better *organization of the material* to be absorbed: accordingly, a suitable re-arrangement, condensation and shortening of the reading assignments for the Seminar and a re-distribution of the material for the first and second year Mathematics Tutorial.

(3) A much more careful *supervision of the Laboratory* work. Beyond that, an attempt will be made to reach, through periodically recurring mutual exchanges and common discussions of all relevant problems, a better understanding of the Laboratory program and its unifying principles. The primary task of these weekly Laboratory Seminars will be to free the work in the Laboratory from its technical and conventional features and to discover the threads that bind it to the work in all the other branches of the Program. While, in the beginning, these meetings should be attended by the Laboratory tutors only, they should be open, in the future, to all members of the faculty.

(4) An *extension* of the obligatory part of *the Music program,* designed to put into practice musical understanding and also to relate it directly to the Seminar work.

(5) A stricter and more methodical attention to the problem of *absences.*

Almost all of these measures have a common source in a problem familiar to, and pressing on, all tutors at St. John's College. This is the disparity in the native abilities, and—to a lesser extent—in the preparation of our students. It has always been the policy of the

College to allow for a very great latitude of aptitude and intelligence among its students. It has always been a tenet of the College doctrine that one of the best educational devices to be used within a learning community is the help extended by the more gifted students to the less gifted, so that actual teaching can take place among the students themselves. On the other hand, there has always been an undercurrent of opinion in the faculty which tends to consider the less gifted students a grave handicap to efficient teaching and learning.

Certain experiences seem to confirm the College's official position; other experiences seem to refute it. The College has had enough examples of sudden awakenings and radical changes in its students. It has also had enough examples of persistent sleep. It is true that the College has contributed markedly to the intellectual development of some of its students who were not enabled after their third year but whose subsequent career vindicated our having carried them for three years. On the other hand, it is hard to deny that some seminars and tutorials suffer heavily from the activity, or rather inactivity, of vegetative or at best appetitive souls. It is with regard to these souls that most of the disciplinary difficulties arise.

To determine the minimum of docility required of a student is a problem that cannot be solved by any general formula. The College should be able, however, to set the general conditions under which the solution of this problem appears possible in any individual case.

The measures recently adopted by the Instruction Committee are a step in this direction. They are meant to benefit the less gifted student without impeding the progress of the more gifted one. They are meant to remove external difficulties obstructing the student's work and to help his teachers to evaluate his real progress or his real failure. They are not meant to curtail the student's opportunity to learn freely and spontaneously.

In line with these measures are also the projected revision and condensation of the texts used in the Mathematics Tutorials. It is highly desirable that this work should be begun as early as possible.

Finally, there is a long range task of a very different and much more difficult nature. Last year's Statement of Educational Policy and Program called for a more adequate description of the liberal dimension of our learning and teaching. This is equivalent to an attempt to re-define the Liberal Arts and their function within the educational process. However complex this task might appear, a program devoted to the study of the Liberal Arts cannot avoid posing

this problem. The guiding question should perhaps be: What fundamental arts and skills follow from our elementary acts of distinguishing and combining? The answer to this question would have to take into account not only the nature of our logical powers but also that of our imaginative powers. The daily activities in our seminars, tutorials, and laboratory provide ample material for the continuing discussion of this problem.

JACOB KLEIN
Dean

(Adopted by the Faculty, October 6, 1951)

1952 STATEMENT

I

The College is currently engaged in a great effort to make its material existence more secure. Its precarious financial condition and the shrinkage in enrollment compel the College to take resolute steps in both directions: new ways in fund-raising and new methods of attracting students had to be devised. These ways and methods stem from the general task the College has set for itself and, to some extent at least, are bound to impinge upon its educational activities. It seems necessary, therefore, to relate the annual statement of educational policy and program to this situation.

It should not be forgotten that the external difficulties in which the College finds itself are, in small part only, of an accidental nature. For the most part, they can be traced back to the nature of the College's educational program. It may be doubted whether the College will be able to overcome these difficulties. Not for a moment, however, can the College afford to lose sight of its own purpose and the ways to achieve it. To do that would jeopardize the integrity of our teaching and the very source of our existence.

II

The educational program of the College is a program of Formal Education. We know that men become what they are mostly outside of schools. Family, contemporary society, the innumerable pressures and influences bearing on us, contribute to our education. We are bound by tradition and traditions. The task of any formal education seems, thus, to be twofold:

(1) It has to deal with these traditions, go to their roots, clarify their meaning, criticize their distortion;

(2) It has to emphasize aspects of our lives which are not tradition-bound, separate habits of thoughtlessness and unfounded opinions from attitudes founded in deliberation and insight, provide channels of clear thinking, and counterbalance the traditions in which we live with the tradition of an examined life.

In both respects the task of a formal education is to help to find common ground, common assumptions, and common knowledge. Its task is a "formal" one because it seeks the common and not the individual, the general and not the particular, the universal and not the case. It ought to help the student to formulate the intelligible and not to "express himself." It ought to help the student to organize his future life according to intelligible patterns and not according to his whims. This common discipline lays the ground for individual in-

ventiveness and spontaneous discovery, imaginative work and deliberate action. To become mature means to reach the stage of individual responsibility based on what is common in human experience.

III

In the laboratory, the tutorials, and, above all, the seminars, the twofold task of formal education seems to find a firm grip. The proper nourishment given to the mind of our students is taken directly from the whole intellectual tradition of the Western World. The first phase of their learning consists in their becoming explicitly cognizant of facts, relationships, specific problems and issues of which they are either already confusedly aware or not aware at all, although these facts and issues are likely to belong to the tissue of our contemporary life. This is the way in which the elucidation of their own traditional background begins to take place or in which the intellectual vacuum that surrounds some of them begins to be filled. This is their first practice in the liberal arts.

The second, and more important, phase of their learning consists in the recognition of the universality of these problems and issues. This is the stage at which the liberal arts are not only being practiced but begin to be understood in themselves as means of grasping the world in which we live, the principles that govern our actions, and—ourselves. Grave contradictions might arise on this level, a maze of difficulties might frustrate the patient or impatient efforts of the learner.

The third phase of their learning—which may not always be attained—consists in their attempt to reach some final conclusion and thus to find a way out of that maze of difficulties. To help a student attain this end is possibly the highest function of a teacher.

IV

There is one thing, however, that might get in the way of the common effort of learners and teachers alike: the desire to "get results." In any educational enterprise, it is impossible not to be concerned about results. The necessities of orderly procedure, the legitimate demands of the student (and of the student's parents) to become prepared for future work, the exigencies of life,—all tend to put the emphasis on results. It is dangerous, moreover, to insist upon continuous exploration and never-ending dialectical pursuit. Yet, it is fatal to set arbitrary limits to this pursuit. The expanding capacities of a student, his growing and maturing, require the shadow of doubt and lingering meditation as well as the light of decisive and final insight. Periods of sluggishness or stagnation may well be fruitful. That is why the emphasis on results and objective achievements may prove as disastrous as it seems inescapable. The paradox of any educational

situation, and particularly at St. John's, is precisely this: one has to look for results, and yet true results can be achieved only when they are not sought and no attempt is made to measure them objectively. To forget this is to condemn an educational system to sterility.

Inviting the world, in the face of our difficulties, to look at us and to appraise us—*as the College has to do at this juncture*—entails inevitably a preoccupation with demonstrable results. I think it appropriate that we remind ourselves of the dangers inherent in this situation and face it with open eyes and an open mind.

JACOB KLEIN
Dean

(Adopted by the Faculty, November 1, 1952)