

The Art Of Choosing A COLLEGE

by
Russell Kirk

col-lege (kol'ej), *n.* [O.F. <Lat. *collegium*, college < *cum*, with + *legere*, to choose], ¹, an incorporated educational institution in which advanced courses are given in the liberal arts and the professions; one of the separate schools that make up the university.



AMERICA'S  **FUTURE, INC.**

542 Main Street, New Rochelle, N.Y. 10801

The Art of Choosing a College is
published as a public service by:

AMERICA'S FUTURE, INC.
542 Main Street
New Rochelle, N.Y. 10801

Please help with the distribution of this pamphlet. Single copies 50¢, 4 copies for \$1. Bulk rates for larger quantities on back cover. No charge for school and student use.

Write for free information about America's Future, its services and publications.

The Art Of Choosing A COLLEGE

by Russell Kirk

INTRODUCTION

What college, if any, should a young person attend? The large majority of high-school seniors, like their parents, possess little notion of how to make a choice. In the United States there exist more than one thousand, five hundred institutions of higher learning that grant degrees after four years of study; and nearly a thousand two-year community colleges or junior colleges. Nobody in the land can be familiar with all these colleges, and there is no reliable standard guidebook that describes all possibilities — nor can there be any such manual, the complex alternatives and variety of higher education shifting so from year to year.

In this pamphlet, therefore, I can offer only some general principles in the choice of a college, together with a very few specific recommendations. For details as to what courses of study are offered at particular institutions, the size of enrollment, requirements for admission, church affiliation (if any), and related standard data, one may consult certain published compilations widely available in bookshops. One of the more recent and thorough of these is *The College Planning/Search Book: Steps for Successful College Planning* (American College Testing Program, P.O. Box 168, Iowa City, Iowa, 52242). Of course such guidebooks cannot well find space for, or indeed secure information about, the qualifications, preferences, and prejudices of professors; the strengths or weaknesses of particular departments; and many other essential concerns.

The only reliable way to obtain such knowledge is to make repeated visits to colleges in which a prospective student is interested; but such processes require inordinate time and expense, if they extend to several colleges. One can suggest merely that, assisted by the general principles I outline below, those genuinely interested in a particular college ought to visit its campus at least once and to converse, if possible, with professors at that college. Catalogues and

publicity-booklets of institutions will provide some information, but are not to be taken as infallible or innocent of self-praise.

I am acquainted with no college or university which seems perfect in all respects — not even the most famous ones. On the other hand, even the feeblest and most obscure colleges have on their staffs one or two first-rate professors (who may have arrived on such campuses by chance or providence) from whom young people can learn much. There is an element of luck, I am suggesting, in the sort of instruction students may obtain. Nevertheless, we should try to trust to more than luck; and so the following recommendations as to what should be considered in making a choice may be of help. I have organized this summary brochure into sections that examine in turn the chief factors to be weighed in a choice.

SHOULD ONE ATTEND COLLEGE AT ALL?

Ever since the Second World War, most parents have entertained the ambition of sending their sons and daughters to college. Nearly half the young people in America now spend at least one year on a campus; nearly a quarter of them, in many states, eventually obtain some sort of diploma or certificate of education or training beyond the high school. What with federal and state grants and loans for higher education, private or charitable scholarship and loan programs, "minority" educational opportunities, and abundant openings for gainful employment on campus or in part-time work elsewhere, it has become possible for any young person with even slight promise to attend some college.

The low fees charged by community colleges, combined with residence at home, have made the cost of attendance relatively slight at such institutions, even though residential colleges are more expensive than ever before. Never, in any country, at any time, was advanced education or training so easily got. Indeed, with the flood of students over the past three decades, the qualitative decay of most high-school standards, and the present eagerness of most colleges to fill their classrooms and dormitories in a time of static or declining enrollments (after the enormous boom of enrollments from about 1946 to the

early 'Seventies), standards for admission generally are less exacting than they were for earlier generations of Americans. Practically anybody can be admitted to a college somewhere.

So the first question is not whether one can go to college; but rather why, and if, any particular young person ought to attend. Too often, parents urge their sons and daughters to enter for inadequate reasons. It has been estimated that at least half of the students now on campuses possess only the vaguest notion of why they have enrolled — and have no real motive for studying anything.

Parental snobbery often has been an unfortunate element here: that is, the dispatching of young people to college because all the other parents seem to be doing that. Also parents have expected that social advancement and pecuniary advantage must result from obtaining a college degree. It is not wrong to desire these fancied gains; but often disappointment must result nowadays. Where future income was in question, formerly a college degree meant something — because college degrees formerly were scarce (relatively speaking) and seemed to guarantee a certain competence; therefore degrees commanded a premium in larger annual earnings. This is no longer so, however, except for graduation in particular disciplines from the more reputable institutions. In many fields, we suffer from a glut of college graduates; and no premium is paid for a surplus commodity. Besides, the average college graduate of 1981 knows less and is less diligent than was the average college graduate of 1941, say. Nowadays a good carpenter or mason may earn more money in his lifetime than does many a college graduate, and may be a more useful member of American society.

In many occupations, all the same, a college degree is a formal prerequisite — including many routine civil-service posts, junior-executive positions in big business, and other skills and trades for which actually internship, apprenticeship, or on-the-job training would suffice. In industrial plants, often people with college diplomas in engineering now hold positions that formerly were occupied by foremen who had learned by doing — and were at least as competent as the present formally-schooled generation.

Therefore young people and their parents may feel compelled to take up college studies

even though they have no great interest in the Academy — with an eye to advancement. This is an unhappy situation, amounting to one cause of the lowering of performance-standards in the average college. But there is no ready remedy for these unnecessary irksome degree-requirements for employment: only when employers, public and private, seeing the error of this kind of degree-snobbery, reduce their arbitrary demands for diplomas will it become possible to proceed directly to satisfactory work, in many fields, without enduring two to four years on some campus.

So one can understand the decision of many parents to induce their offspring to attend college, even when those boys and girls display no marked aptitude for, or interest in, formal higher education. On the typical campus today, the typical student is the sort who would not have been called "college material" if he had been graduated forty years ago from a good high school. This typical student of today is enrolled in the hope of "certification" for some occupation — if he has any definite reason at all for being on a campus. It may be doubted whether a college campus is the best place for training such a one. Still, we must face the hard reality that as preparation for many forms of employment, little alternative to college exists.

This said, nevertheless there remain reasons why many young people ought not to be enrolled in college immediately upon graduation from high school. It should be remembered that college and university are places for improving the intellect, through certain regular disciplines: that is, college and university are centers for abstraction or theory; they are not by nature trade schools, nor yet mere staging-areas for fun and games. If a young person has no interest in abstractions, probably he will not do well in a genuine college. This is nothing to be ashamed of: if the majority of people were interested in theory to the neglect of the world's work, we all would be starving. To make headway in the "learned professions" — law, medicine, the church, the natural sciences, scientific engineering, and the rest — some mastery of theory is indispensable. But theory is quite dispensable for many occupations. If a young person, at present or perhaps permanently, dislikes abstract studies — why, it would be better for him if he might contrive to stay out of college. He might

become more productive, his preferences considered, if he would stay away from the campus: for boredom, and particularly school boredom, works mischief.

What decent alternatives to college exist? Work is the chief one: either gainful employment (even if temporary and at modest wages) or volunteer work for deserving causes. Enlisting in the armed forces is another, and a worthy alternative. For those who have the means, thoughtful travel — that is, travel with a purpose, such as studying foreign languages, or becoming acquainted with church architecture, or obtaining apprenticeship to some craft abroad — deserves consideration. For that minority who enjoy the prospect of inheriting family businesses (on whatever scale) and who are not eager to dabble in theory just now, the best policy would be to join father in the business. And there are other choices. Some of these young people who in 1981 are unattracted by the Academy — after all, they have been enrolled continuously in schools for thirteen years, and need fresh air — may decide by 1985, say, that college might suit them after all. Then let them enroll in 1985, not 1981: they will be the more mature and able students for having gained meanwhile some experience of the world.

To put the matter succinctly, a young person should be encouraged to attend college, probably, if he meets one or more of the following conditions:

1. He shows genuine interest in improving his intellect by systematic studies — for his mind's own sake;
2. He really is bent upon entering some learned profession, or at least some occupation requiring theoretical knowledge;
3. He entertains ambitions to public service at its upper levels — in elective office, in political administration, in volunteer and charitable activities on a considerable scale; or simply expects, with reason (perhaps because of inherited means or family influence) to exercise some leadership in his community;
4. He wishes to apprehend seriously theology, church history, and other religious studies — whether or not he means to enter the ministry (this especially if he enrolls at a church-related college);
5. He desires a tolerably good education in arts and sciences, a general culture, even if he

does not expect to become a fine scholar or to embark upon a learned profession.

Such are the motives of the young people who truly belong in college. Somewhat below them in fitness are a crowd of young men and women who *might* perform reasonably well in college (despite deficiencies in preparation), who would not be much harmed by their college years or greatly bored by them, and who conceivably might develop motives for study during college years. These are the debatable cases; other things being equal, one need neither encourage them to enter a college nor positively discourage them.

But if a young person shows the following characteristics or inclination, it would be well for him to make some other choice, at least for the present, than going to a campus:

1. He does not care much for books or for the scientific disciplines;

2. He prefers vigorous activity to study and meditation; or likes ready cash distinctly better than cloudy prospects of future advantage;

3. He is somewhat attracted to a campus, but mostly for the fun and games and the opportunities of a marriage market;

4. He has grown thoroughly tired of compulsory schooling, and apparently would profit from trying instead the School of Hard Knocks;

5. He is really talented at commercial pursuits, or at skills and crafts of the non-academic varieties, prefers such occupations, and would like to try his hand at them promptly. (Some Americans of high reputation and large means have risen precisely by those qualities; probably they would have been delayed or thwarted by college studies.)

So much for the important choice of whether to enroll at any college or university. I add only that more young people ought to make the negative choice than are so choosing today. To those who seem intended by character, preparation, and motive for college studies, the following systematic paragraphs of advice are directed.

THE ORDER AND INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE

The first necessity is to find for the entering freshman a college which teaches the

basic disciplines of "general" or "liberal" education. The end or object of higher education — indeed, of all education — is the acquisition of some measure of wisdom and virtue. The means to this desirable end are the ordering and integrating of knowledge. All colleges profess to make some endeavor to achieve such order and integration; but not many of them are good at the endeavor nowadays.

One way to ascertain whether a college gives more than lip-service to this attempt is to examine closely the college catalogue. (That publication cannot show whether the basic disciplines are taught well; but at least it will indicate whether they are offered and required systematically.)

For general education, the basic disciplines are literary, philosophical, and mathematical. Other conventional disciplines, in a good college, should be subsumed under these large studies. Literature should include the study of classical and modern languages, both as bodies of humane knowledge and as rhetoric. The emphasis of literature should be upon the philosophical and ethical *meaning* of great books — not merely *belles lettres* for *belles lettres* sake. This discipline should be humane, or humanistic, in the original signification of that abused word. In considerable part, history should be subsumed under literature.

Philosophy should include metaphysics, ethics, politics, and perhaps aesthetics, with considerable attention to physical and mathematical foundations. Mathematics, the most theoretical of the sciences, should be taught as the foundation of right reason. All lesser branches of learning would be related to these three basic disciplines. Economics, for instance, would be regarded both in the literature of the great economists and in the theories of political economy; it would not be shut off by itself. Biology would be related to the literature of that study and to the philosophical understanding of life.

If the curriculum of a college appears to be based upon an intelligent apprehension of the primacy of these disciplines and to relate these disciplines to each other — so as to produce, in some measure, what John Henry Newman called "a philosophical habit of mind" — why, that college ought to be taken seriously as a possible choice.

But few such colleges are to be found nowadays. The "elective" system, which

commenced at Harvard near the beginning of this century, by the middle 'Sixties had virtually wiped out all coherence in the curriculum, as the average college students, free to choose their own courses of study, often chose fad, foible, and boondoggle. We are just beginning to recover from the disaster. It is worth noting that Harvard has returned to a more systematic curriculum for undergraduates; other colleges and universities will emulate Harvard in this, as in much else.

As yet, ordinarily one has to settle for as near an approximation to an ordered curriculum as may be discovered. If you find that the college catalogue amounts to little more than a quasi-intellectual cafeteria, a mass democracy of "subjects" in which camp cookery and quantum mechanics are treated as equals — why, abjure that college. If an assistant dean suggests that a freshman may "comp out" of the standard course in literature and take "business English" instead — why, you may be sure that little liberal or scientific knowledge is imparted to students in that institution. Here I am assuming that the prospective student, and his parents, really are searching for a decent education. If the football stadium and the beer-halls across the avenue, however, are one's principal interest — why, you pay your money and you take your choice.

BIG CAMPUS OR SMALL?

At the moment of their graduation from high school, most boys and girls — if they mean to proceed to a college in the autumn — tend to think of applying to some huge university, "where the action is." They see the thousands, or tens of thousands, of new fresh faces there that might be made friends — a multitude of choices; they ramble about the sprawling "physical plant" of Behemoth University, with its Olympic swimming-pools and its skating rinks, a sort of country club for the young; they look at the fat college catalogue, with its hundreds of courses in almost everything under the sun. Many intending freshmen become worshippers of the Cult of the Colossal. Their yearning to apply at Behemoth U. may be approved by Dad or Mom, who went there when the place was smaller and different, but retain an attachment to Nostalgia Hall.

Yet it is imprudent to spend one's undergraduate years at a colossal campus, other things being equal. "It is not good to be educated in a crowd," we are told by Lord Percy of Newcastle, rector of a British university. The Lonely Crowd at Behemoth U. is readily converted into a mob, and the place "where the action is" ordinarily lacks those opportunities for study and meditation and good conversation that used to be the chief advantages of the college years.

At Behemoth State U. or Brummagem U. or Dismal Swamp A. & M. Technological University (fanciful names, but sufficiently suggestive of existing institutions), with enrollments of forty or thirty or twenty thousand undergraduates, the typical student literally never comes to know a professor; he may never even speak with one; his relationships with the faculty are confined to occasional interviews, at best, with a graduate assistant, a junior instructor, or a member of the counselling staff. This representative undergraduate will spend most of his first two years in amorphous and mass-produced "survey" courses, intended (though usually not well designed) to diminish the inadequacies of his high-school preparation. He will be installed in some titanic dormitory, probably, with at least three roommates, in which edifice it is impossible to study because of the TV sets and record-players blaring in lounges and bedrooms alike. The ideal college education, it used to be said, would consist of Professor Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student sitting at the log's other end. That sort of discipleship is inconceivable at Behemoth State U. Our representative student will find himself instead in a teenage ghetto, engulfed by his "peer group", a pseudo-academic collectivity that does not in the least resemble academic community.

As for his course of study, our typical undergraduate will discover that despite the proliferation of course-offerings in the college catalogue, the calendar and the clock limit him to some fifteen credits per semester; that many of his course-hours must be devoted to prerequisites less attractive than "advanced color photography" or "applied cybernetics"; and that the famous professors whose names adorn that catalogue either are absent from the campus on sabbatical or foundation-grant leave, or else engage in research to the exclusion of teaching undergraduates.

Our hypothetical undergraduate will encounter a great many other young people bewildered as himself; it does not follow that he will find lasting desirable friends among them. He may succeed in marrying while a student — to repent at leisure; for among the Lonely Crowd at Behemoth U., an intimate relationship is snatched at, often, as a placebo against incipient solipsism. When he is graduated (if indeed he endures four years of this intellectual and social confusion) he may find that he can obtain no job-recommendation; for to no professor has he ever been more than a number.

I am willing to confess that some undergraduates surmount these obstacles on the mass campus, finding or creating their own little circle of friends, and ingeniously cultivating the acquaintance of genial professors, and by hook or crook enrolling themselves in sound curricula. Some, because of the fell clutch of circumstance, have no alternative to enrolling at Behemoth U.; some are not repelled by the Lonely Crowd. But I do not know why a young person should seek out such obstacles if he has tolerable alternatives. Eschew bigness on principle, where study and academic community are in question.

It does not follow, conversely, that all small colleges are sound or pleasant colleges. Too many of our small colleges are poorly staffed, shallow in their curricula, inadequately supplied with important books, and generally complacent in their mediocrity. Yet all the small colleges do have the considerable advantage of humane scale: of personal relationships among professors and students, and among the various classes and groups of undergraduates. Thus it is possible to know well some reasonably intelligent and imaginative people. Possessing only limited financial resources, small colleges indulge themselves less in the way of time-wasting boondoggles. And because the "action" is hottest at Behemoth State U., a measure of academic quiet and leisure may be enjoyed at Our Lady of Sorrows or Podunk Christian College (again, fictitious names).

One must pick and choose among these small colleges, true — and warily. Yet it is not smallness that diminished their merit. The student body may consist of merely a hundred young people — and yet, given earnest professors, a well-planned curriculum, and a selective policy of admissions, a tiny college

may offer instruction more thorough and more enduring than that of any vast campus. I do not mean that most small colleges are first-rate; I suggest merely that smallness is not in opposition to quality. Perhaps a thousand students is an ideal enrollment: I found it so during my years as a research-student at the ancient University of St. Andrews, in Scotland.

You object that small colleges tend to lack modern laboratories, research libraries, and famous professors? Well, those desiderata are not essential for satisfactory *undergraduate* instruction; they appertain to graduate schools of universities. Perhaps you fancy that the author of this pamphlet is an "Ivy League product." *Au contraire*, I was made a bachelor of arts by a gigantic state university which I sardonically call Behemoth State U.; I became a master of arts of a medium-sized southern university, Duke; and a doctor of letters (earned) of Scotland's oldest university, St. Andrews. The more I advanced in my studies, the smaller the scale of university I sought. It is almost true that an inverse ratio may be described between educational bigness and educational accomplishment — in general or liberal education, that is. Other things being equal, I repeat, do choose a small college rather than a huge one.

COLLEGE AS AN INSTRUMENT OF ORDER

"Order is the first need of all," Simone Weil wrote in her moving little book *The Need for Roots*. Time was when colleges were expected to impart some order to mind and conscience, and promised to do so. "Order" means "harmonious arrangement". College and university are concerned with both order in the soul (personal order) and order in the commonwealth (public order) — or at least they ought to be. So it is well to inquire, when choosing a college, just what that institution offers that may help to develop an orderly mind — the first step toward attainment of inner and outer order. So far as college disciplines are concerned, this inquiry pertains especially to what is taught about religion and ethics in a college, and what is taught about society.

Our American colleges commenced as religious foundations, meant to educate

candidates for the ministry and to preserve religious and ethical knowledge generally. Such was the origin of Yale, Harvard, Princeton, William and Mary, and our other early colleges. Presently these colleges took on other functions; but the typical American college did not neglect its original religious purpose until quite recent years. (As late as the end of the Second World War, the majority of college students was enrolled in "independent" colleges with some church connection.) If the independent colleges fail to impart religious knowledge of the more complex sort, and fail to develop the moral imagination among the rising generation — why, in this country state institutions cannot assume the burden. What a college teaches about religion — that is, about the order of the spirit and of morals — ought to be of concern to prospective students and their parents. It has become a frequent complaint of undergraduates that their college offers them no first principles, metaphysical or moral, at all.

At most of our liberal-arts colleges, the connection with some church-body has become vestigial. I have spoken in more than one college chapel, and have been told afterward that my remarks — though I am no clergyman — were the first touching upon religion or ethics that undergraduates ever had heard in that half-disused edifice. Compulsory chapel attendance has vanished almost everywhere. Not seldom college chaplains have turned ideologues, preaching the case of revolution in Latin America or Africa or Lord knows where — but seldom referring to any order of the soul. Many "Bible colleges" flourish; but they do not pretend to be full liberal-arts colleges, confining themselves chiefly to preserving the doctrines of their parent denomination. Many Catholic universities and colleges virtually have secularized themselves in recent years, even removing objects of religious art from their walls. At a time when much of the public seeks recovery of order in mind and conscience, usually our colleges and universities seem ill prepared for the task — offering, some of them, amorphous "value preference" courses as a shoddy substitute for the forgotten religious foundation of higher studies.

But enough! Despite the preceding chronicle of woe, it is still possible to choose a college which unites intellectual respectability with some degree of religious understanding. Of

course it is not possible to catalogue here the church-related colleges of America according to their merits. Doubtless a good many such colleges that I never have visited remain sound institutions. One model is Calvin College, in Grand Rapids, Michigan — the only college of the Christian Reformed denomination; all members of its unusually able faculty are communicants of that denomination. It is possible to obtain a good liberal or scientific education at such old Catholic universities as Georgetown, Fordham, Catholic University, and Notre Dame — all of which gradually are recuperating from various blunders during the past quarter of a century. Thomas Aquinas College, at Santa Paula, California, is the best example of a new Catholic college which relates all learning to what Chateaubriand called “the genius of Christianity.” On a larger scale, the youngish University of Dallas unites high standards to Catholic orthodoxy. Although nearly all the “main line” Protestant denominations pay too little attention to the colleges they founded many years ago, there remain such very good colleges as Davidson (Presbyterian), in North Carolina, or the University of the South (Episcopalian), in Tennessee, which have not severed the links between intellectual disciplines and religious insights.

In the search for a college still intelligently mindful of spiritual and moral order, one might begin by some inquiry into those colleges of one’s own faith or denomination that retain at least a nominal church-connection. College enrollment officers may be surprised to receive such inquiries, but they ought to be pleased, too.

Above we have just been discussing the part of colleges in maintaining the order of the soul. Of equal interest to the more able high-school graduates, and to their parents, is the part of the college in teaching about the order of the commonwealth — about the “social sciences”, that is. Despite the periods of radicalism through which most colleges and universities pass occasionally, the basic function of institutions of higher learning is socially conservative: their historical, political, economic, and related curricula inform the rising generation about politics as the art of the possible and suggest the consequences of arrogance and utopianism in human affairs. The notion that the “intellectual” ought to be a subversive, gnawing at the foundations of

society, is of Marxist origin; it is exploded by the terrible lessons of our age, though some professors are slow in recognizing those consequences of social illusions. I do not mean that colleges ought to be centers for indoctrination in the political creeds and institutions of the hour; but I do suggest that colleges and universities were developed to shore up, rather than to demolish, a healthy social order.

A good many parents, and some students, occasionally write to me asking for a list of "conservative colleges." It is not possible to supply such a list. For one thing, there exists no college which is intelligently conservative in every respect, nor any college staff which numbers only conservative scholars among its members. For another thing, in this time of flux the character of certain colleges may alter abruptly, with a change of administration or of policy. A third consideration here is that even though a college may be conservatively inclined, it may not otherwise be a first-rate college. I can suggest, nevertheless, some possibilities.

Those few colleges which have resisted governmental direction from Washington generally can be considered conservative politically in their administration; so can those colleges which have refused governmental subsidies from any source. Among the colleges conspicuous for their independence from political direction are Grove City College (Grove City, Pennsylvania); Pepperdine University (Malibu, California); Hillsdale College (Hillsdale, Michigan); Rockford College (Rockford, Illinois); Brigham Young University (the biggest "private" college in the United States, and the only Mormon University, in Provo, Utah); a number of others exist. In the state of New York, only two Catholic institutions have preferred oldfangled independence to receiving the subsidies (and accepting the state regulations) of the "Bundy Money" from the state treasury: Molloy College (Rockville Center, Long Island) and Niagara University (Niagara).

Aside from the above, some long-established colleges of deserved fame have the reputation of being conservative in many respects. Among these are the University of the South (Sewanee, Tennessee); Davidson College (Davidson, North Carolina), Hampden-Sydney College (Hampden-Sydney, Virginia) (which, with Wabash College at Crawfordsville, Indiana, is one of the two surviving liberal-arts colleges for men only);

and Claremont Men's College (Claremont, California) (no longer rejecting women students, incidentally). Of the "Ivy League" institutions, a degree of conservative opinion may be discerned at Dartmouth (Hanover, New Hampshire). State universities and colleges ordinarily are not conspicuous for conservative social opinions; of famous state universities, it may be said that conservative views have some hearing at Louisiana State (Baton Rouge) and the University of Virginia (Charlottesville); also at the second-oldest college (really a university) in America, the College of William and Mary (Williamsburg, Virginia) now a state institution.

It should be understood that even at the institutions named in the preceding two paragraphs, only certain departments and certain professors fall into the "conservative" category. A student interested in the conservative understanding of social order may do well to try to study with a particular professor, rather than seeking for a conservatively-minded institution. Thus undergraduates conservatively inclined could study with Dr. Gerhart Niemeyer, who teaches political theory at both Notre Dame University and Hillsdale College; with Dr. Peter Stanlis, in the department of English at Rockford College; with Dr. Claes Ryn, in the department of politics at Catholic University; with Dr. Thomas Howard, in the department of English at Gordon College; with Professor James Schall, at Georgetown University's department of political science; with Dr. Jeffrey Hart, in the department of English at Dartmouth; with the historian Dr. John Lukacs, who teaches at both La Salle and Chestnut Hill Colleges, in Philadelphia. At least a hundred other conservative professors might be listed here. There is Dr. M.E. Bradford, in literature at the University of Dallas; Professor Marion Montgomery, in the same discipline at the University of Georgia; Dr. Ernest van den Haag, teaching sociology and other disciplines at New York University and the New School for Social Research; Dr. Digby Baltzell, the historical sociologist at the University of Pennsylvania... But I cannot undertake a full roster here. At almost any college, some conservative professor may be encountered, though his name may not be known beyond the boundaries of his campus.

American university and college reeled through a radical era during the 'Sixties and

'Seventies; indeed, the radical excesses of that period chastened a good many liberal professors, so that they now are less hostile toward ideas and institutions not born just yesterday. On the campus, as in American society generally, we may be entering upon a time of more moderate views, in which respect for order in the commonwealth will have primacy over revolutionary slogans.

EXTRAORDINARY COLLEGES FOR REAL STUDENTS

It is possible, despite impediments suggested previously in this pamphlet, to obtain a tolerable education at a fair number of colleges in this country — some of those colleges famous, others obscure. But what of college study for that rather small minority of young people who genuinely desire a rigorous intellectual discipline, calculated to impart some measure of wisdom and virtue? Why, even they may be accommodated. I suggest below some healthy alternatives to ordinary college — alternatives which do result in the conferring of a good degree, but are unconventional in the sense that their programs of study are more lively than those of the typical college, less bound by the routine of usual college course-work, and more demanding of individual effort.

One of these hopeful alternatives is enrollment in a college that is committed to a Great Books program. The advantages of a Great Books curriculum are discussed in my book *Decadence and Renewal in the Higher Learning* (Regnery/Gateway, 1978). In general, the plan is to develop students' minds through close examination of selected great works of literature, from the fifth century before Christ to the present age. I mean that books, rather than conventional "courses", are the framework of instruction. These books are read thoroughly and discussed in depth. The original method of imparting knowledge at Oxford, Cambridge, and other great universities was to deal with a body of *literature*; that is precisely what the American Great Books colleges and programs within colleges aspire to do.

This method requires right reason, imagination, and diligence on the students' part. All

enrolled are expected to prepare themselves for study in more than one language. The range and character of the books selected may be suggested by looking at the readings selected for the first semester of the first year at the Integrated Humanities Program of the University of Kansas. Selections from, or whole books of, these great writers form the content of the program: Homer, Plato, Aesop, Herodotus, Thucydides, Aeschylus. In roughly historical sequence, other writers of such stature follow in the second semester, and for a sophomore year. Elsewhere, such Great Programs sometimes extend over a full four years of college.

The original Great Books college was old St. John's College, Annapolis — which now has a second campus at Santa Fe, New Mexico. Any graduate of St. John's is a genuinely educated man or woman. I do not advise the mediocre to enroll there; but I most definitely recommend St. John's, and its emulators, for young men and women who desire to be intellectually stimulated, rather than coddled.

St. Mary's College, in northern California, has a Great Books curriculum patterned after St. John's. On a ranch nestled in the Sierra near Santa Paula, California, is a second Catholic Great Books college, Thomas Aquinas — with about a hundred and fifty students, every one of them enthusiastic about the Aquinas program. At the University of San Francisco there is the recently-created St. Ignatius Institute, also primarily a Great Books undertaking. Both Thomas Aquinas and the Ignatius Institute, incidentally, are unabashedly but imaginatively conservative in their political leanings. At the University of Notre Dame, the Program of General Studies has a Great Books framework. And there are other undertakings of this character — some even at state universities. The professors in such programs generally are superior teachers, for their minds too are enlivened by daily renewal of acquaintance with the greatest intellects of more than one civilization.

I am not arguing that the Great Books provides a perfect scheme of education; but it is one very good approach to systematic learning. What becomes of the graduates of Great Books colleges and programs? Why, first of all, they usually live very satisfactory lives, because they have learnt how to order their own souls and how to discern order in society. And second, they have a considerable

choice and range of vocations and occupations, because young men and women of genuinely disciplined intellects are prepared for many undertakings. The real need of our time is not for more narrow specialists; we want instead people of broad views and talents that may be applied to all sorts of fields.

The Great Books approach is not the only alternative to conventional colleges. During the 'Sixties and 'Seventies, there sprang up a number of "free colleges," experimental and innovative, which promised to emancipate young people from collegiate boredom and bureaucracy. What with eccentricity and bad management, most of these ventures failed. But some survive; and I find the most promising of these Old College, at Reno, Nevada — only a few months old, at this writing.

Old College is ancient only in the sense that it is concerned with the wisdom of our ancestors. It was founded by an experienced educator and university administrator who saw that the "free colleges" had rushed rashly into obsession with "current awareness" and ephemeral studies. The tone of Old College is suggested by the following titles of courses offered just now: "The Problem of Change (Metaphysics from Aristotle to Ortega y Gasset)"; "What Makes a Classic 'Classical'?" (a Graeco-Roman Literary Quest)"; "The Psychology of Hope and Despair and Burned-Out Cases"; "St. Paul: the Man and the Myth"; "What Use Is History?"; "Problems of Urban Environment"; "Is There Anything to Laugh About? Humor in the American Novel." There is a tutorial in the visual arts of western Europe, Romanesque to the Renaissance; another tutorial in three plays of Shakespeare. It will be perceived that Old College's program (which is not compartmentalized into rigid departments) is at once "relevant" to our present discontents and concerned with those intellectual giants on whose shoulders we stand. Of course it is not intended for students who are nothing more than passive vessels, demanding that some Dr. Dryasdust fill them with the milk — skimmed milk, that is — of learning.

Not being residential, Old College escapes the burdens of the catering business, the dormitory business, and all that; but it is a genuine academic community. It is possible to acquire wisdom, or at least much knowledge,

without visiting a regular campus at all. (Old College does possess a campus in the sense that it is lodged in one building.) Such "decampusing" is another alternative to attending a conventional college.

"Decampusing" takes various forms. Advanced study — that is, at the level of the undergraduate college — through correspondence courses has been going on for several decades. Some first-rate universities sponsor first-rate programs of this description. The trouble with correspondence-schools, however, is that there is no personal relationship between professor and student, or almost nothing of the sort; that there is no fellowship or exchange of ideas with other students; and that most people who enroll fail to complete their intended courses of study. Besides, study of the arts and sciences is a full-time affair, really, if one aspires to proficiency; and because most correspondence-school students are engaged in full-time remunerative employment, they lack the requisite academic leisure.

In an attempt to reduce these difficulties, there have arisen several colleges which try to combine correspondence methods and isolated private study with some degree of tutorial instruction and periods of residence at the institution. Some of these undertakings are mere "degree mills" whose degrees obtain little credit anywhere; others, though honestly meant, rarely succeed in giving so good an education as might be got at an ordinary residential college. One should look very carefully at the character and offerings of such collegiate "halfway houses" before investing much time and money in them.

From personal acquaintance, however, I can heartily commend an undertaking which superficially resembles "decampused" study of the preceding sort, but actually is of another breed. This is International College, with offices (but no campus) at 1019 Gayley Avenue, Los Angeles, California, 90024. International College, established a few years ago by reputable educators, actually is a guild of tutors — rather famous tutors. International grants its own degrees, although ordinarily a student is required to have spent two years at a conventional college before enrolling at International; also it has cooperative arrangements with various conventional universities and colleges by which a student can spend a year or two with International's tutors, but obtain his degree from the regular institution

at which he does most of his course-work.

The International tutor may be a famous humane professor, or a distinguished scientist, or a great architect, or an influential writer or painter or sculptor, or a creative musician, or even a public official. He accepts a very limited number of students, who reside near him (in various states and countries), and sometimes even in his house. This is the medieval pattern, a successful tested one, of internship through the close association of senior scholar and junior scholar.

These several alternatives to conventional colleges are not suited to every young person — indeed, not to the majority of undergraduates, or even of graduate students. Some strength of character and originality of mind are required. But aspiring students who really seek the cultivation of intellect and character can turn, in our era of standardized educational mass-production, to modes of learning often superior to either the monotony of the typical campus or the isolation of individual private study.

WHAT TO AVOID IN THE CHOICE OF A COLLEGE

It always is difficult to hit upon an ideal college; but it is relatively simple to avoid enrolling at an unsatisfactory college. The following general rules ought to be followed in this negative process.

1. Avoid bigness: the larger the enrollment at an institution, the poorer the individual instruction and the feebler the academic community, ordinarily.

2. Avoid "activism": the more "relevant" diversions from study, the less impressive the ultimate degree.

3. Avoid the "fun and games" campus: though mass sociability may be enjoyable for the time being, that approach suits delayed adolescents better than it does young adults.

4. Avoid the former liberal-arts college which abruptly and recently has converted itself into a business and vocational college. (There are scores such.) Such institutions commonly fail either to develop the mind or to open the way to a first-rate job.

5. Avoid snobbery: do not choose a college merely because the sons and daughters of affluence are given to going there in numbers,

or because its tuition-charges are high; wisdom is not for sale, nor is virtue.

6. Avoid ugliness: a drab utilitarian campus, badly designed, has a depressing effect upon the youthful imagination.

7. Avoid dullness: mankind can abide anything except boredom; collegiate study ought to be awakening.

8. Avoid neoterism, the lust for change: a college ought to be a center for intellectual and moral continuity. Healthy change is the means of our preservation, as Burke put it; but academic change for the sake of change produces bird-brained graduates.

The reader of these pages may have gathered that the choosing of a good college amounts to an art, rather than a systematic science. College catalogues and college recruiters should be received with a salutary skepticism. It has been said that an educated man is one who knows how to ask the right questions.

About the Author

Russell Kirk's fame as one of the nation's leading conservative thinkers and spokesmen reaches beyond our borders. He has served as professor of history, politics, or literature at several universities and colleges. He is editor of the quarterly review *The University Bookman* and has served as one of the founding members of the America's Future Textbook Evaluation Committee.

His books include *The Roots of American Order*; *Decadence and Renewal in the Higher Learning*; *The Conservative Mind*; *John Randolph of Roanoke*; and *Eliot and His Age*. Dr. Kirk's columns and articles have appeared in *National Review*, many learned quarterlies and daily newspapers. His special reports containing reading recommendations for young people of various age groups, published by America's Future, continue to be in high demand (a list of the reports is available on request).

*Pamphlets on the Subject of
Freedom and Communism*

America's Future, Inc. publishes this and other pamphlets as a public service. The titles listed below can be obtained in small or large quantities — in any combination — by ordering from America's Future:

**American Freedom —
The Next 200 Years**
by Allan C. Brownfeld

**The Art of Choosing
a College**
by Russell Kirk

**Communism —
A Plan for World Conquest**
by Reuben Maury

**Freedom or Communism —
a Comparison**
by John C. Wetzel

**Free Enterprise —
The Road to Prosperity**
by Dr. Clarence B. Carson

The Fruits of Détente
by Allan C. Brownfeld

**National Defense
and the Soviet Threat**
by Philip C. Clarke

**The New Race in Space:
Lasers and "Lightning Bolts"**
by Philip C. Clarke

**The Nuclear Option:
A Question of Survival**
by Philip C. Clarke

**The Untold Story of South Africa —
Its Importance to the Free World**
by Allan C. Brownfeld

**Whatever Happened to the
Public Skools and Why?**
by Solveig Eggerz

*Any combination of four pamphlets —
\$1.00; 50 pamphlets — \$10.00;
100 pamphlets — \$17.50;
1,000 pamphlets — \$150.00; postage paid.
Free pamphlets available for school
and student use.*

Please write to:
America's Future, Inc.
542 Main Street
New Rochelle, NY 10801