

Spring 2000

Leading a College as a Liberal Arts Practice

Leon Malan
Colby-Sawyer College

Judith Muyskens
Colby-Sawyer College

Anne Ponder
Colby-Sawyer College

Ann Page Stecker
Colby-Sawyer College

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nhcjournal>



Part of the [Higher Education Administration Commons](#)

Malan, Leon; Muyskens, Judith; Ponder, Anne; and Page Stecker, Ann, "Leading a College as a Liberal Arts Practice" (2000). *Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council --Online Archive*. 203.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nhcjournal/203>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the National Collegiate Honors Council at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of the National Collegiate Honors Council --Online Archive by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Leading a College as a Liberal Arts Practice

Leon C. Malan, Judith Muyskens, Anne Ponder, and
Ann Page Stecker
Colby-Sawyer College

A common and rather prevalent model for leading and planning in higher education is a contest of wills optimizing local, current matters. In contrast, at Colby-Sawyer College, we are explicit, careful, and collaborative about working together respectfully on qualitative and institutional and long-term matters. We hope that the model for leadership that we have provided below, one that demonstrates how we make our decisions and conduct our business in a style that differs from academic political business as usual, will serve as a model for other institutions.

Recent articles in *Change* magazine and *Liberal Education* point to difficulties in preparing institutions of higher education to change. Frank Newman mentions that one of the present concerns in higher education is “that faculty have gradually acquired the ability to block changes that are seen as not in the faculty interest or, sometimes, simply seen as change” (Newman, 7). Richard Edwards describes the difficulties of our present administrative structures in providing the flexibility needed to be “responsive, focused, innovative, and entrepreneurial (Edwards, 20). At present, collaborative leadership is being held up as one solution to higher education’s woes. Jo Ellen Parker provides some suggestions on how to restore faith in academic management through collaboration. Furthermore, D. Bruce Johnstone, Nancy S. Dye, and Ray Johnson provide examples of collaborative leadership in a Spring 1998 article of *Liberal Education*. They note that the “challenge is to develop a culture of collaborative leadership focused on the effective accomplishment of institutional mission” (Johnstone *et al.*, 19).

At Colby-Sawyer College, we assumed that the organizational and cultural character of a college could mirror the transformative change we see in individual students. We have been working together for four years to move this particular college forward, expansively and creatively. Our contribution to this volume appears below as a conversation, because that is the way we have been achieving our vision. A fully engaged, intellectual conversation on crucial matters renders a much higher quality college than any one of us might imagine alone.

The conversation at Colby-Sawyer College includes Anne Ponder (AP), president of the college; Judy Muyskens (JM), vice president for academic affairs and dean of the faculty; Leon Malan (LM), associate professor of business; and Ann Page Stecker (APS), associate professor of humanities. Leon and Ann Page represent the faculty to the board of trustees, in an unusual manner, about which more later. Anne is a literature and film expert, who also served as academic dean and as a chief information officer at another college before coming to Colby-Sawyer four years ago. Judy’s field is second language acquisition and French literature and language. She was a director of honors at a university before coming to Colby-

Sawyer College. Leon's mind brings a lively combination of expertise from international business, labor relations, and organizational development. Ann Page, currently writing a history of the town in which the college is located, connects the fields of history and narrative as if they always overlap.

LM

One way we can approach the task at hand is to apply an ecological metaphor to the organization. Certain species require the right habitat to grow and prosper. In the case of a college, the habitat may be related to a steady growth pattern in student numbers, visionary leadership, financial stability, and evidence of success. Once the right conditions are in place, we can then look at the morphology, i.e. what is it that we find in this environment? Examples of collaborative success, committed faculty, engaged students, and a climate of healthy discourse may all be the result of the just the right conditions being in place at the college. Staying with the ecological metaphor, we need to explore and understand the interconnectedness of elements and we also need to see the college community in its larger ecosystem. Internally, the various college constituencies need to be aligned along the same strategic direction and externally the college needs to respond appropriately to external opportunities and threats.

Given this metaphor, I would say that Colby-Sawyer College has tremendous potential. If the right leadership, governance, examples of success, and opportunity for innovation and growth exist we can truly be the "best of kind." It can be a place where curricula are fresh and cutting-edge, pedagogy is exciting, students are challenged to reach their potential, and faculty are freed from obstacles in their abilities to grow personally and to create the most exciting learning environment for students.

APS

Isn't it interesting that the four of us have been or are classroom teachers, having had that experience first in our careers. We write syllabi for our courses and we describe, analyze and articulate the problems we want to examine and the goals for the course. But, colleges don't always take a similar approach—assuming that an institution would have to have a syllabus too. And if a syllabus is "subject to change" and a good syllabus, it is able to react to both internal and external pressures on it. All of us revise our syllabi I believe every semester, while still refining our goals. We sometimes forget what we know in our classrooms when we walk into an institutional meeting.

LM

What I think is useful in most of these conversations, discussions, discourse and also disagreement is to have an agreement of the common goal. Not all organizations are fortunate enough to have that and I don't think we have always had that. Our common goal is illustrated so well in the visual image of the strategic plan. The cover of the strategic plan is a collaborative model with eight different points of a compass all pointing in one direction. That direction is students in the center with three very simple goals: achieve academic quality (i.e. being the best of

our kind as a learning community), being financially healthy, and focussing our niche. Once we had a common understanding of that, we could frame all of our conversations and our perspectives in the same direction.

AP

When I arrived as president, I asked for a copy of the strategic plan and no one could give me a complete, current version. I met with everyone at the college in multi constituent group conversations. We assembled those ideas and winnowed them to the most important priorities, reporting back with drafts to the internal community and the Board of Trustees.

LM

What I think will be interesting to hear, since you did a similar exercise three years later, is your perspective on not only how the content of the discussions changed, but also how the culture, climate and flavor of the institution had changed.

AP

It was different. We revisited and updated our strategic plan just a year ago to help prepare for our next capital campaign, and to refresh our sense of whether we were looking at the right things and whether we were working on the right goals. The difference was that the first time through, people were listening but were somewhat tentative. Three years later we already had a sense of what it means to know what the institutional priorities are.

So, when I come to work every day, of the dozens or hundreds of things that present themselves for my attention, any one of which is important for Colby-Sawyer, which of those things do I do? So, I actually use the strategic plan on a daily basis to make decisions, and others in the institution have done that. One of the most frequently mentioned needs in the first strategic planning conversations was—for the health of the academic program and the quality of our learning community—that students needed a place, 24 hours a day, seven days a week that was theirs. In the time between the conversations, we built one.

LM

During the first strategic planning meeting I attended, I asked what the vision for the future was. Anne said that she did not have a preconceived vision and that she was allowing these meetings to form the direction. Three years later, the college has a much clearer vision. Anne used a process that cultivated a shared imagination and she gave us a way to talk about the college in common. We have deepened the extent to which, “We are all in love with the same college.” So, did you feel that the first time around the conversations were far more tentative and guarded than the second time around?

AP

Yes, more tentative, but not hugely guarded. People were tentative with each other, people were tentative about whether there would be significant outcome. That, of

course, was our common obligation to deliver. We are respectful about our complementary roles, and we trust each other ever increasingly, as we continue key conversations.

APS

I think that is a good point, and I think that it is also interesting that you keep using the word “conversations.” I think each of us has used it frequently and carefully. Rhetoric can be public posturing for the purpose of persuasion. One of the things we have been doing in the last two years and through the development of our new major, Community and Environmental Studies, is to privilege conversation over rhetoric. In conversation, we import into the public the value of looking at our neighbor directly, having to listen as actively as we expound. I think the new major will work because we are privileging conversation over rhetorical posturing and that fascinates me. That is a shift for any institution and it is interesting for me to think about as I remember and measure the larger goals of the college’s strategic plan.

JM

As leaders, no matter what our position, we are models of discourse. We need to set up situations where true conversation can happen rather than just rhetorical posturing. I recently heard Robert Kegan of the Harvard Graduate School of Education talk about leadership discourses at the Council of Independent Colleges—Chief Academic Officer meeting. For one, he talked about developing a discourse of ongoing regard for people. I think that many folks on our campus are good at that. I also try to understand how what they are saying is different from other people. Kegan also talks about establishing a discourse of public integrity. We are practicing and modeling this style of discourse in our liberal education conversations. We can show our own integrity by speaking our true mind. As leaders we need to provide people the space where they can express their true feelings and beliefs. At the same time people should expect that others will be honest with them. It is important that we can exchange ideas and see that, in fact, there are no winners and no losers.

AP

You are really good at that. You are a wonderful listener and people will speak with you in a quiet but confident way. You are better at it than I am because you listen longer for difference than I do and you try to reconcile the difference only after you have understood that particular vantage point. I can leap too soon to listening and hearing what we have common which may be an advantage in my role.

LM

I remember during the interview for a new Dean of Faculty there was a question from one of the members of the faculty—an angry question. The person basically wanted to know if the Dean would be one of “us” or one of “them.” This was obviously not an easy question to answer. You can imagine a candidate hedging and thinking: “So I’m in a faculty environment if I’m saying I’m one of you, and members of the search committee will say, well we are looking for an administrator; if I’m saying I’m an

administrator, the members of the faculty will say, well she's one of them." The problem lies with the question. The separation of "us" and "them" is an obstacle to understanding and consensus about the overall direction and objectives of the college. And I think I now know that you couldn't answer the question because in your model there isn't an "us" and a "them."

APS

And you listened very carefully and you listened for difference. I remember also that you introduced yourself by speaking French and giving us a way of thinking about you as a scholar. You suggested right from the beginning that we should think metaphorically, which for me means thinking ahead with vision and holding contrast as a creative way of thinking, the way of the poets.

JM

I remember that meeting very well. It was important as a possible future leader at Colby-Sawyer that I listen carefully and begin to build trust. Open communication was important even in those first meetings.

LM

I think as a result of your style that you will find that you probably get a lot more disagreement or negative comment than what you might have because people feel comfortable to do that. They know that Judy will listen even if she may not agree. I have heard folks say, I can tell her this and I know that my head will not be lopped off or something bad will not happen to me. So, you probably end up getting some of those criticisms or negative comments that otherwise may not have surfaced. It is important in any organization not to assume that, if you do not hear anything negative here, everything is okay.

JM

I agree, I think it is important that I hear those negative things. I have a little sign on my computer where I remind myself to assign people responsibility. After they have complained to me and discussed something with me, I like to ask them to take steps to solve their problem and to talk directly to the person with whom they are unhappy. To me that is the discourse of public integrity. I believe that this is the way that Kegan uses that term.

APS

As Leon describes your style and as you describe your style, I am reminded, Judy, that our search for a new chief academic officer led us to you because everyone who met you saw and heard your ability to balance opposing points of view—warmly. When we started that search, we worked from a job description and set of expectations, which sounded generic; used what I will call "institutional-ese," well-intentioned but "institutional-ese." As the search continued, we changed the original language, privileging a more conversational, colloquial style that came directly from faculty and staff voices. We dared to use the phrase "the warmth we crave" to describe a collegial administrative style. We thought that unorthodox

words and phrases coming from the community's collective voice and imagination gave us a "living" set of criteria that could help us avoid projecting superhuman expectations. Now when I am thinking about creative ways to redesign our cumbersome governance structure, I try to remember how we changed the search process by listening and creating a process which could not only find the leadership we desired, but set the stage for that person to lead.

We are really talking about the balancing and sometimes competing goods of accountability and hospitality. Scholarly hospitality is not a habit one learns in graduate work. One learns to be inhospitable because we have such odd ideas about originality in our culture. A good institution, on the other hand, has to have reciprocity as the key to the way it operates intellectually. On the other hand, no institution can run on the "anything goes" scenario. But good liberal arts practice creates ambiguities, creates balancing needs. Those are two for me—hospitality and accountability.

I would like to see a governance structure (to use Anne Ponder's words) "authorizing work groups" (like the dean search committee) and letting the ineffective structures atrophy (like dead metaphors.)

AP

We either assign appropriate people a task, or we create the right work group and then tell everybody about it and when it will report out and how to get involved with it. What we have discovered is that the un-lively parts of the governance structure are going dormant and may be starting to atrophy. We are governing the institution and leading the institution around specific opportunities for the college to become a better place. People are learning how to get a topic or an agenda or an idea on the table and it is different than getting it on the agenda of a committee, or getting air time before a particular governing body. It is much more animating and much more lively.

LM

You mentioned leadership style early on and I really wanted to bring our discussion around to that again. It is a different way in which leadership is being defined. Leadership is normally defined by title. You are a leader only if you are the chair of a committee or department. This is no longer the case here. By recognizing each individual's unique contribution, and by allowing that individual enough space to make his or her contribution as innovatively and creatively as possible, we have redistributed leadership. So now we don't have leaders only as those individuals that are leaders by title; we have now allowed individuals to be leaders in whatever they may feel best qualified. So, instead of counting the number of committees that someone is on or counting the number of times somebody has been chair, we say "this is your opportunity, how did you realize it?" I think by shifting that definition of leadership, you have allowed the institution to be far more creative, far more innovative, and more forward thinking than going along with traditional and hierarchical structures.

JM

Power becomes less the issue and authority becomes more the manifestation because there is a reliable assumption of kindness about our discourse. I think it is really interesting the way we have changed, and the way the present liberal education conversations are an example of what you are talking about, in terms of changing the governance structure. Faculty and staff have been talking together. We really do mean to listen to one another. At one meeting, Mike from Information Resources talked about liberal education and at another meeting Mark from Safety listened in on the conversation. Janet, a member of the support staff for student development, reminded us of what we are doing, kept us all on track. So it is really a sign that the governance is very different here. I think those conversations will lead to a very different kind of governance structure and community.

LM

That is really good modeling. What you are really doing in those conversations, you are modeling to the entire community that there is a way to participate. Your voice is just as important as everybody else's voice. Maybe, it is happening this way because we are in an area that we don't know an awful lot about.

AP

Isn't that humility important for every intellectual? Even in one's own field?

JM

I think William Cronon would say that is a mark of a liberally educated person—to be humble, to empower others.

APS

I think it is also an attribute of the imagination since we have been talking about collective imagination. If I think back to Coleridge's description of the power of the imagination, it is to be able to "willingly suspend disbelief." Not forever, but for the moment, allowing the possibility of a new idea to come in. I was at a meeting recently where I heard that phrase misused, suggesting that to be willing to suspend one's disbelief meant to let go and let something else take over. No, that is not what Coleridge meant. He believed in willingly suspending one's own point of view long enough to **imagine someone else's**. That would be called empathy by a psychologist. But, it is an intellectual power that is vital, and institutions that don't have that vitality will be taken over by any fly-by-night idea.

AP

It is what is permitting us to outsmart the competition, which is what we must do. It assumes, to use one of your examples, that a staff member in student development really understands the organization. Or that the weekend safety officer might have some insights in terms of what students are learning that are as valuable as those of a senior faculty member.

APS

If we keep privileging conversation over rhetorical posturing, this becomes the style of the institution. We are seeing this in the liberal arts conversations that Judy and the faculty/staff team have so beautifully designed. Voices rise, volume goes up and volume goes down, and there is not an attempt ever to flatten out thought and make it conformist. It is interesting, we talk about being uni-vocal. That doesn't mean saying the same thing, it simply means hearing the same way and vocalizing in a way that is as full of listening as it is of talking.

LM

I was thinking of how your comments on the liberal education conversations also related to the work of the Environmental Team, the group which brought forward a new major in under two years, from initial idea to implementation. I know we will talk about preconditions in a moment, but I was wondering whether it might have something to do with the fact that when we were discussing the Community and Environmental Studies program we weren't experts. None of us were in our field of comfort. Everybody had to operate in an area out of their comfort zone. By being forced to think beyond our area of specialization, we were automatically forced to think institutionally. If we couldn't think institutionally we had nothing to hang on to. Maybe that is one of the reasons why that whole exercise was so energizing.

AP

We are also getting a little better at letting the right person do the right job. We needed all of those voices inside the conversation but we wouldn't waste people's time in the Environmental Team's conversations. Other people have administrative roles and can do things like figure out when to cut the grass and what color to paint the classroom and how the money ought to be invested—the administrivia required to make an institution run. So, part of what Judy and I have been attempting to do as administrative leaders at the college is not to waste your time. We have been extremely respectful and have asked you for your engaged conversation only when it really matters.

APS

I think coming around to the ability to risk something is certainly one of the qualities of a vigorous mind and a vigorous institution.

LM

The new Community and Environmental Studies program is a great example to illustrate just that. Let me recapture what I think happened. You had a junior member of the faculty taking a risk, saying, "I have an idea, it doesn't fit 100% in my department, I don't see any space for it yet in the curriculum, but I have this idea." You encouraged him to work on it in light of the strategic plan. This preliminary thinking then attracted a group of individuals that were interested in the topic and were prepared to bring their intellect to this particular idea. And it also brought the particular leadership style from the President of the college to say,

“Don’t confine yourself. You have permission to think big. Think about how we could do something distinctive and tell me what comes up.”

So, that to me is a great example of empowering (although the word “empower” is becoming a bit of a tired buzzword) by giving individuals the necessary freedom and the necessary space and allowing them to flirt with their creative abilities. Then in a period of eighteen months to have a program that is not only a great program but has already attracted an awful lot of goodwill and financial resources for the institution: that I think is a very powerful example of the leadership style that will allow for truly innovative and creative things to happen.

AP

We listen better than most institutions. For example, our Community and Environmental Studies major has grown far beyond the original notion of the aquatic toxicologist who brought the idea forward. On the occasions when I participated with the E-team, the designers of this program, you were flying intellectually about the caliber of the discourse.

What we did not incorporate were appeals for political expediency or for personal preference. Those arguments don’t really carry very much weight in a liberal arts argument, as we found them peripheral rather than central to what we had in mind. Any frustrations we had with peripheral arguments did not prevail, because we entered the conversation at the right intellectual level. We are developing some confidence that, if we discuss something, we will be able to come to not only a modest agreement, but we will be able to invent something new and better. We can conceive what will be optimal, not just adequate for an institution.

APS

I think that is part of the key too; thinking institutionally is an acquired habit in academia because some of us have been narrowed into disciplinary areas so early on in our young and foolish lives. Even though we were uncomfortable with that, it takes a while to think beyond our discipline and some of our colleagues might say, well, thinking institutionally means thinking with the enemy. But we know that thinking institutionally means that if my program is vital then the whole institution becomes revitalized.

And at the fall 1999 meeting of the Board of Trustees, Leon and I tried to re-create for the Board the kind of conversation about curriculum planning and development you observed and have just described. We revisited the type of conversation (Leon talked from the business management perspective, I talked from a historical and literary perspective) that led the Community and Environmental Studies planning group to design an innovative interdisciplinary addition to the college’s curriculum.

JM

In the future, I hope the college can continue to work on leadership development of faculty, staff, and students to help us in our discourse with each other. I think that as an institution we can do even more to help people think outside their disciplines

or groups. I'm convinced that we will find even more ways to talk together as liberally educated folks.

The revision of the honors program will develop an even stronger academic ambiance on campus and be another way to liberate learning conversation. We are already using a collaborative model to discuss the program. This program should be another way to encourage the campus community to think beyond disciplines or beyond local matters.

APS

I think collaboration, real collaboration, requires practice—the kind of sorting and creative critique which the liberal arts teach us. For me the study of literature, for instance, requires disciplined close reading and awareness of the cultural contexts which create the text. So, another illustration for me of the sort of collaboration you are talking about, Judy, would be the collaboration Leon and I invented when we stood for election successfully as ONE member, with ONE voice as the faculty representative to the Board of Trustees. I initiated the idea because I felt some divisions, you know, that old sort of “wills optimizing local/current matters.” In approaching Leon, I knew if he agreed to collaborate we would be breaking some dearly held views. At the beginning it was assumed that our collaboration would represent different factions of the faculty. Now I think we have learned by speaking with one voice, while listening to all voices, how much more richly we can “read” the texts and contexts in the faculty culture.

AP

I do think that integrity requires that one show up with one's view and speak one's mind. If you withhold that, at the point in the conversation when it can be fruitful, and complain later, that is unacceptable in terms of intellectual integrity. It is bad scholarship to let something go forward that you do not think is clear-headed. So, it does require a higher order of academic connection from everybody in the institution. If someone stands apart without that integrity then I am, after a certain point, not willing to listen.

LM

I think we have reached the point where we can quite safely say that no one will be penalized for disagreement.

JM

Leon, I'm glad that you think the environment at Colby-Sawyer is a safe one in which to disagree. The key to good disagreement, in my opinion, is the way that people respond to each other. If they converse at the level of ideas, concepts, or principles, they do not take the disagreement personally. By that I mean that they do not feel personally attacked. Each person in a collaborative community needs to take responsibility for framing the discussion in a constructive way so that the community can talk at the level of issues and ideas.

LM

Yes, I do believe that we are moving from a place where conflict and disagreement were not tolerated to a place where we appreciate the different interests and perspectives of groups and individuals. How we tolerate that disagreement is important. If we are true liberal arts scholars, we will appreciate that there are multiple perspectives and paradigms and we will be open to listening to and trying to understand those views that may not conform with our own and try to learn from them. We will also know when and how to question the underlying assumptions of some views and perspectives. When we engage in dialogue and disagreement at this “scholarly” level, we are bound to find suitable accommodations.

AP

That is the best definition of academic freedom I have heard. Academic freedom is not something that the organization grants to individuals, it is something that is practiced by the whole institution and extended to all the individuals in it. So we have come back around, I suppose, to a political point, a little sooner than I thought we might.

Well, I think that Leon helped to model that when you and Ann Page both stepped forward. Ann Page is protected by tenure and you are not. So, you put yourself at some risk. But I have often thought that institutions are made better and colleges are made better not only by the intellect of the people involved but by the courage of the people involved.

APS

I did want to mention another example that really builds on what you just said. Last year the faculty proposed an expansion of our sabbatical leave policy. When the first proposal came to the faculty at a very fractious meeting, it was amended in a way that you and Judy found unacceptable. Several years ago that would have put us in a logjam that might have lasted for years. Instead, the phrase that came to us was, “think it over,” “think what you have done, go back and look at what you have done and come back to us.” Not “see you next year,” but “come back to us.” I think that the conversations that developed in the several months after that resulted in a happy outcome, a policy that changed, but changed reasonably.

LM

With the sabbatical leave policy, we made real progress in finding an appropriate solution when we reminded ourselves of what we all agreed our common objective is. Our common objective is to make sure we achieve academic quality for the student in the center of our strategic plan. Given that, we could work on a sabbatical leave policy that would allow the best possible way to do it.

AP

The balance of continuity of continuing faculty members could be over-stretched if too many people could be on sabbatical, so all of us had to weigh competing goods.

It was a thoughtful and articulate conversation. I don't know about Judy, but the final solution was not precisely what I would have preferred. But it was quite well reasoned and met our objectives, not just adequately, but well. So, I was comfortable.

JM

For me, as someone new to campus, those conversations were very important. That issue was my first difficult one on campus. The resolution proved to me that we could work through a conflict. We didn't agree, but we could exchange ideas and accept what others were saying.

LM

That is a lot different from saying, "no, and this is what I am going to do." It is a case of saying, "no for these reasons, and let's talk about that, let's engage in a discussion about this." I think it was very clear from the beginning that we had the opportunity to talk and we had the opportunity to make convincing arguments one way or the other and that everybody was given that opportunity. So, the process I think was also very good, not just the outcome.

APS

I think maybe, Anne, your use of the phrase "competing goods" is a really interesting way of thinking about how we, as scholars, bring whole intellects to institutional imaginings. Framed that way people started thinking about a future, started thinking about wanting to stay affiliated with a college that planned thoughtfully and coherently.

AP

The conversation when I used that term, "competing goods," was one of the best conversations we've had. It was complicated and was intriguing as a conversation. I had prepared, in order to dignify the importance of both the topic (the capital campaign) and the occasion. I think that I mentioned to you that everything that I had planned to include, possibly, came into the conversation during the meeting, plus some. So, as an institution we really moved that conversation so that I think the faculty understand the basic structure of a capital campaign and what it will and what it won't do for our college.

APS

We've certainly tried to make it clear to our colleagues not that we had been part of pre-planning but that we knew when we were listened to.

JM

The present conversation reminds me of a review of Neil Postman's latest book that I read recently in the *New York Times*. In that review, Lind mentions Postman's description of a community. To quote from him, "I have the impression that 'community' is now used to mean, simply, people with similar interests, a

considerable change from an older meaning: a community is made up of people who may not have similar interests but who must negotiate and resolve their differences for the sake of social harmony." So, even though we're all focused on the students, we do have different interests and roles. If, however, we can talk about how we are different, share our ideas, and resolve those differences, we can build a stronger college and keep moving in a forward, positive direction.

AP

Postman's challenge invites us to sum up. Thank you for this glorious conversation. Would each of you be willing to sum up, in your own words? Let's offer several versions of the meta-argument.

APS

I believe institutions, our institution and others unlike ours, can become vital and remain vital when they employ the liberal arts practices of creative and critical thinking, connected learning, and collaborative problem solving. The vehicles for this include employing collectively imagined strategic goals, lively conversation, and active listening.

LM

Let me return to the ecological metaphor. The question is whether these wonderful examples were just luck or whether they will only occur under certain conditions. I am not sure that you will find such a consistent and coherent message without certain preconditions. Examples of creative innovation, distributed leadership, constructive disagreement, and even this very dialogue we are having, are no accident. In our case, there was a conscious effort to introduce a vision that did not exist before, to lead in a way where people feel inspired, and to infuse the whole institution with meaning. Colleges that do the same are bound to experience similar results.

JM

We're really fortunate to work in an environment that is collaborative and dynamic. I'm sure that other institutions can develop the same ambiance by finding settings where all members can come together to practice the best principles of a liberal education. By that I mean thinking creatively and critically together, understanding multiple perspectives, practicing respect and humility, nurturing freedom, and empowering each other. If all of us in higher education work from the base created by a liberal education, we can build a context where individuals have the right and responsibility to speak with integrity. We will then be creating respectful environments that will help each institution identify its best practices.

AP

We have been learning from one another. For example, I have honed my own ideas about how organizations can be led with Leon, whose field is more nearly pertinent. Leon has adopted the use of metaphor, a contagious idea he probably got from Ann

Page, to describe the changes he sees at the college. We have all learned about collegueship and leadership from Judy.

Colby-Sawyer employs some leadership strategies used in the most forward looking for-profit companies, creates a climate for conversation where collective imagination is invited and rewarded, and makes changes in programs and policies which reflect everyone's best thinking. Current results from our case study of one college are extremely positive. Colby-Sawyer did not begin this era with any particular advantage, but we have made "leading a college as a liberal arts practice" an institutional advantage. We think this experiment is safe to try at home, and we invite your consideration of our approach. In this context and by keeping students at the center of all plans, we can build vital colleges and universities that will sustain themselves into the next millennium.

Works Cited

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria* (1817): Chapters 13 and 14.

Cronon, William. "'Only Connect': The Goals of a Liberal Education." *Liberal Education* 85 (Winter 1999): 6-13.

Edwards, Richard. "The Academic Department: How Does it Fit into the University Reform Agenda?" *Change* 31 (September/October 1999).

Johnstone, D. Bruce, Nancy S. Dye, and Ray Johnson. "Collaborative Leadership for Institutional Change." *Liberal Education* 84 (Spring 1998).

Kegan, Robert. "Beyond Praise and Policy Manuals: The Leadership Discourse on Ongoing Regard and Public Agreement." Council of Independent Colleges, CAO Institute, Williamsburg, 7 Nov. 1999.

Lind, Michael. rev. of *Building a Bridge to the 18th Century: How the Past Can Improve Our Future*. Neil Postman, *New York Times Review of Books* 14 Nov. 1999.

Newman, Frank. "The Academy in Transition: Lead or be Led." *Liberal Education* 84 (Spring 1998).

Parker, Jo Ellen. "Leading as Scholars & Educators: The Case for Collaboration." *Liberal Education* 84 (Fall 1998): 8-18.