

– CHAPTER EIGHT –



a higher education presidential thought leadership series

2008/2009 SERIES: Best Practices in Higher Education

Achieving Enrollment Growth while Retaining Integrity

Achieving Enrollment Growth while Retaining Integrity

Dr. Mark Schulman: President, Goddard College

Six months before I arrived on campus to become Goddard College's president in January 2003, the Board of Trustees closed the campus-based, traditional-age, residential undergraduate program (RUP). All Hades broke loose, as you might imagine. Those of you familiar with the tumultuous controversy over the closing of Antioch College are aware of how such actions can play out.

In her *Boston Globe* article, "Campus Upheaval," Sally Jacobs followed the flippant journalistic style that often accompanied Goddard articles:

"Let it never be said that Goddard College, a revered icon among progressive schools throughout the nation (not to mention a mecca for good skinny-dipping), does not do it differently. Defined, in one sense, by what it is not, this is a school that has:

"No grades. There are self evaluations.

"No courses. There are group studies.

"No organized sports. There was once a tug of war called Struggle or Justice.

"No TV. (OK, OK. There are occasional movies, but only those with subtitles.)

"No dormitories. There is the Village of Learning.

"Soon it may have no campus, rendering it perhaps the un-college college or simply the most popular school in America." (Jacobs, 2002)

The title of this chapter suggests that Goddard has grown since 2002. Retaining the integrity exemplified by the college's core values is the explanation for that growth, I plan to unpack this idea as our best practice for your consideration.

And, a week later, the editorial board of the *Globe* opined, in an editorial headlined “Goddard’s Loss—and Ours”:

“The end of Goddard—a school deeply committed to educational experimentation—as a residential college is lamentable. The importance of physical place and human interaction in the educational process should not become lost in the trend toward independent digital learning....Goddard’s board claims it terminated the on-campus program in order to maintain Goddard’s independent name, since continuing residential classes would have forced the school to merge with another institution. But what is a name if the educational premise behind it no longer exists?” (Globe, 2002)

What, indeed.

My intent is not to deconstruct constructs such as these in this chapter. However, let me note for the record as I hope to demonstrate in what follows, that:

- Location is still an essential part of every Goddard program in Vermont and Washington state with the short residency format.
- While we use online learning, we encourage all forms of independent study.
- Nothing is more important to Goddard than its continuation in harmony with the premises that define who we have been for 70 years.

Lillian Hellman, in her letter to the House Un-American Activities Committee in 1952, said it best. When asked to name names, she declined, saying:

“I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year’s fashions...” (Hellman, 1952)

Over the years, as I told Goddard’s story internally and externally, I have used this quote many times. To me, it exemplifies the insistence on conscientious consistency through which we are not only surviving but, beyond survival, also prospering in a just and sustainable manner.

Growing Enrollment

The title of this chapter suggests that Goddard has grown since 2002. Retaining the integrity exemplified by the college's core values is the explanation for that growth. I plan to unpack this idea as our best practice for your consideration. First, "Just the facts, ma'am."

Typical of Goddard's way, let's look at a piece of the qualitative data first. I can capture some of our essence by describing recent students in our undergraduate and graduate programs:

- Sharon, 24, from Athens, Georgia, is a student in our B.A. program. She is disabled, in a wheelchair, and her passion is painting. She paints using a brush held in her mouth. She has artwork in a gallery in Atlanta and was recently featured in a segment on National Public Radio. This semester she is studying corporate responsibility for illegal dumping of toxic contaminants.
- Stewart, 33, from Rochester, New York, is in our individualized M.A. program. This semester he is studying the relationship between global climate change (specifically global warming) and how it will affect two sea level island cultures. On the recommendation of his faculty, and with support from Goddard, he attended a conference on sustainability at Harvard University in 2004.
- Robin, 34, lives in South Africa with her diplomat husband. Most recently, she completed a community action project for her psychology degree to connect children who have become heads of households through the AIDs-related death of parents, with other adults who can help them find work and budget money. Some of the adults she included in this project came from the international expatriate community there.
- Our M.F.A. in Interdisciplinary Arts Program tends to attract a lot of artists. One is Phil, 53, from Sarasota, Florida. He taught digital art and animation for years at an art school, and came to Goddard to develop his own artistic voice. His interest in sustainability, in particular using hydrogen as a new energy source, led to a project where he created the first Hydrogen Film Festival, bringing together the works of young animators and filmmakers. Public screenings of the festival took place in four major cities to more than 300 organizations.
- Dorothy, at 57, from Flint Hill, Virginia, came to Goddard as a trained massage therapist and is enrolled in our Health Arts & Sciences M.A. program. Her goal is to study lymph drainage therapy and produce a book about lymphedema for women with breast cancer.

- In the Education program, many students pursue teacher licensure. One of them is Linda, a 50-year old U.S. citizen living in Bulgaria, where she teaches French and Music at the International School. She is completing the Vermont requirements for licensure as a guidance counselor and conducting an internship at her school on the connection between music and drama in social health education.
- Our M.F.A. in Writing is one of our best known and largest programs. Students focus their work on a genre and often produce publishable manuscripts. Sandra, who is 31 and from Asheville, North Carolina, recently had a novel published by one of the leading small presses in the country.
- One of our newest programs, the M.A. in Socially Responsible Business and Sustainable Communities, includes student entrepreneurs and activists from their twenties to their seventies, all unpacking the real values of work, profit, and community.

The quantitative data demonstrates that these remarkable students, the outstanding faculty who work with them, and their compatriots are a fast-growing population. This year, Goddard achieved its largest enrollment in three decades. Below are the Fall headcounts for the past 10 years:

1998: 531

1999: 576

2000: 601

2001: 631

2002: 492

2003: 498

2004: 523

2005: 560

2006: 624

2007: 678

2008: 731

When you remove the programs associated with the closed RUP, the growth is even more dramatic:

1998: 353
1999: 383
2000: 432
2001: 460
2002: 451
2003: 498
2004: 523
2005: 560
2006: 624
2007: 678
2008: 731

Goddard College Enrollment



Goddard's low-residency enrollment, which regularly consists of more than 95 percent full-time students across programs, has grown an average of 7.5 percent annually, more than doubling in 10 years. We are on target to achieve our strategic goal of 1,000 full-time equivalents (FTEs) by 2013—an auspicious occasion, indeed, since that is the sesquicentennial of the corporation (Goddard Seminary) that became the College, the 75th anniversary of the opening of the College, and five decades since we began our adult low-residency programs.

Our finances, extremely fragile five years ago, are now far more robust. With tuition income representing more than 95 percent of the revenue, Goddard's budget has gone from less than \$8 million to more than \$10 million in six years, and we now have an accumulated surplus.

In this current period of great difficulty for higher education institutions, even in the severe downturn of the last year, how has Goddard managed to grow so dramatically, to create such a stunning turnaround after decades of decline and a near-death experience less than a decade ago?

Why Integrity?

Let's go digital and popular culture for a moment to consider the question. Google "integrity" and you come up with (on February 14, 2009) 72,800,000 hits. The first hit takes us to that bastion of instant Internet age wisdom, Wikipedia, which tells us:

"Integrity is consistency of actions, values, methods, measures and principles. A value system's abstraction depth and range of applicable interaction are also significant factors in determining integrity due to their congruence with empirical observation. A value system may evolve over time while retaining integrity if those who espouse the values account for [their beliefs]..."

Turning to a more staid representation, one with which Goddard must deal in its accreditation reality is The New England Association of Schools and Colleges' Standard 11, which deals with integrity:

"The institution subscribes to and advocates high ethical standards in the management of its affairs and in all of its dealings with students, faculty, staff, its governing board, external agencies and organizations, and the general public. Through its policies and practices, the institution endeavors to exemplify the values it articulates in its mission and related statements."

And it mentions the word in the 11 Standards at least 30 times.

It behooves us to be clear about what we mean by integrity. Starting from the concept as a personal trait from the online Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy:

“A number of accounts have been advanced, the most important of them being: (i) integrity as the integration of self; (ii) integrity as maintenance of identity; (iii) integrity as standing for something; (iv) integrity as moral purpose; and (v) integrity as a virtue.” (Cox, 2008, Web page)

Aspects of each of Cox’s points can be identified as the integrity that is Goddard’s foundation, fitting an institution rather than an individual.

Beyond the Personal: Institutional Integrity and Progressive Education

For Goddard as an institution which espouses progressive education, its organizational integrity can be traced to many of the concepts of John Dewey, one of which strikes me as particularly significant:

“The only freedom that is of enduring importance is freedom of intelligence, that is to say, freedom of observation and of judgment exercised in behalf of principles that are intrinsically worthwhile.” (Dewey, 1938)

RUP exhibited the characteristics of the “first wave” of progressive education:

“The combination of living, working, and learning together in a closely-knit community dedicated to the development of all its members was for many a liberating experience. The differences between a progressive and a traditional college education were marked. Instead of sitting through lectures in order to satisfy distribution or course requirements, students read about, applied, and discussed things that really mattered to them. Rather than cramming for exams and being graded in comparison to others, students set their own goals and their teachers and their advisors wrote narrative evaluations on their progress. And much could be accomplished when energy was directed to just three areas of study per semester. Outside of class, they set their own policies governing campus life, instead of coping with rules administrators imposed upon them. More was expected of these undergraduates than showing up for class, completing assignments, and passing exams. They weren’t only students, but members of a community. All of their interactions with others on and off campus were part of their education.” (Coleman, 2000)

To be more specific, articulating the reinvented College of 1938, the five principles listed in the Catalogue were:

- *“Education should be based in the problems and issues of contemporary life.*
- *“Work in the world should be a respected, vital, central part of education for, and through, intelligent living.*
- *“Education must deal with the whole lives of students: the aesthetic as well as the intellectual, feeling as well as thinking.*
- *“The college of the future must be concerned with social and moral responsibility, as essential elements of educated behavior.*
- *“College education must be open to adults as well as to persons of the college age.”*

That was then; this is now. If my analysis about Goddard’s integrity is correct, we should not be surprised to find something similar decades later.

Second Wave: Emancipatory Progressive Education

Let’s compare these principles to the statement in “Progressive Education and Whole-Person Learning,” 70 years later, in the 2008-09 Catalogue:

“... These principles form the basis for meaningful, lasting, progressive education. The college itself has had a rich history as a democratic institution, supporting students as they think and practice in ways that are personally and socially meaningful, and the mission of the college is, in part, “to advance the theory and practice of learning by undertaking new experiments based upon the ideals of democracy.” At Goddard, faculty and students are challenged to evaluate the meaning of democracy and its role in inquiry, collectively seeking to articulate a critical understanding of the structural dimensions of problems, to develop tools to challenge and recreate dominant structures, and to envision alternative social options. Goddard’s principles of progressive education include:

PRINCIPLE 1: *Knowledge and understanding are actively constructed by learners bringing their own rich life experiences to the process, assisted by teachers as guides. Knowledge is not a commodity produced and stored in institutions and transmitted to passive learners by “experts.”*

PRINCIPLE 2: *Deep learning involves the whole person—intellect, creativity, body, and spirit—and requires both sustained reflection and active engagement with the world.*

PRINCIPLE 3: *Understanding the critical problems of our time and developing nimble and effective approaches to their solution requires meaningful engagement with a diversity of ways of knowing and ways of being, and sustained practice at difficult dialogue across deep differences.*

As a consequence, education at Goddard does not look like education at most other colleges or universities....”

The similarities “in principle” are striking. At a more theoretical level, we have begun an extended community dialogue of what we mean by progressive education in the 21st century. In my inaugural address in 2004, I called for a revision of “classic progressive education” to be designated “emancipatory progressive education.”

I consider two characteristics of this educational vision to be essential:

- The first characteristic is creative praxis. I define this as the dialectic of theory and practice—the usual meaning of praxis—but we must add a particular spin: that the construction of new knowledge trumps all orthodoxies. That’s the creative addition.
- The second characteristic is principled engagement. I define this as a reasoned and reasonable stance of resistance to an oppressive, exploitative and anti-democratic social, political, and cultural order with the intention of building a better world.

With those two characteristics as the foundation of our educational and structural practices, an emancipatory, progressive Goddard will have at its core seven imperatives. They are:

- To embrace difficult dialogues
- To strive to be a good neighbor—locally, nationally, and globally
- To sustain a just and humane work place
- To engage in committed scholarship
- To center on the learning experience
- To practice radical democracy
- To dwell in the world with panache, grace, and humor

This, it seems to me, explains through years of tumult and experiment the college's raison d'être. It also links us to the movement to update the concepts of progressive education—going beyond Dewey. We find ourselves in agreement about the applicability of Dewey's work in terms The John Dewey Project on Progressive Education at The University of Vermont stated:

"Today, scholars, educators and activists are rediscovering Dewey's work and exploring its relevance to a "postmodern" age, an age of global capitalism and breathtaking cultural change, and an age in which the ecological health of the planet itself is seriously threatened. We are finding that although Dewey wrote a century ago, his insights into democratic culture and meaningful education suggest hopeful alternatives to the regime of standardization and mechanization that more than ever dominate our schools." (Dewey Project, no date, Web page)

Remembering our roots, our intellectual project is to be a leader in building education for democracy and democratic education.

How We Grew Enrollment

What has preceded is necessary but not sufficient to address the essential best practice question: How did we achieve such impressive enrollment growth?

What Goddard has done may be only partially applicable to other institutions. Here are some of the questions to consider for your own institution as you build on your own integrity:

What are the optimal sizes for each of our programs? What strategies can we use to achieve those enrollments? As an institution-wide strategy, can we set up additional instructional locations where we offer our most successful programs?

At Goddard we have ongoing discussions with each program director about program size and growth potential. We set up our West Coast location in Washington State (which, after only three years, has 10 percent of the total enrollment) to make the college more accessible to people far from Vermont.

How careful have we been to cultivate a sense of place associated with our campus? Have we attended to the major cosmetic flaws to make our campus attractive to visitors and potential students? What about our location makes it unique, something we can boast about?

Despite deferred maintenance and limitations on what we can and cannot do with many of our buildings on the National Historic Trust, the steady improvements in campus livability have been greeted enthusiastically by students and by alumni returning after many years to a campus about which they can be proud. We have historic formal gardens, unique in Vermont, and we have striven to return them to their prior glory, garnering much praise and publicity.

How can we take advantage of good word of mouth as a recruiting method? How can retained students and satisfied graduates add positive influences to the enrollment management mix? Can we concentrate on relationships with the various constituencies and play down marketing?

We are in the midst of a transition of how we manage enrollment, away from marketing (for which we never had enough money) and toward managing relationships: the community of communities concept. Coupled with our successful word of mouth (which is really part of viral marketing and social networking in a Web 2.0 world), our year-to-year retention, extremely high in all programs, creates an atmosphere of stability and felicity, which bodes well for recruiting and alumni relations.

What proportion of our stakeholders is committed to our mission? How do we increase awareness and belief in the core values?

External reviewers and colleagues from other institutions remark that Goddard faculty, staff, and students show a deep understanding and lived experience in the college's essential qualities. New arrivals sense this and become enthusiastic along with the old timers, thus building community.

Do we experiment? Is it okay to fail? Do we celebrate our successes? Do we learn from things that do not work?

In Goddard's mission statement, one important construct is the notion that we undertake "carefully planned experiments." We define ourselves as an experimenting college. We may be (probably are) experimental as well, but those are two different characteristics. Often we fail, as happens with experimentation, and we learn much from those failures.

How do we understand the role of advancement in the recruitment effort?

We continue to work to align the offices of development and alumni relations with the enrollment operations; they will be organizationally combined next year. Often in the past, when the president travels to meet with alumni, there has been a joint meeting with potential students at those events.

Are we cautious about jumping onto the distance learning bandwagon? Are we alert to make sure that technology does not determine our values but instead the reverse is true, and ideas trump machines?

Though most of the study at Goddard takes place at a distance, and people communicate online, we do not define ourselves as an online college. The short residency, beginning every program every semester, is a crucial component and a competitive advantage over Web-based and other distance delivery systems. While it is not unimaginable to us that we might one day offer Goddard curricula solely online, it is unlikely. That ideology works for us and we always ask the value questions before we look for technological answers.

Why Integrity Matters

What does this mean for other institutions? It will differ for each of you, but the essential message for the hard times ahead is: Don't go after markets for survival's sake (In other words, don't cut your conscience).

In mid-February 2009, Goddard's Board of Trustees scheduled a retreat to discuss "What Next?" for the institution. How should Goddard change over the next five years?

In the discussion, several Board members stated variants of the point that the key task was to make sure that "Goddard continues to be Goddard." One member, a businessman new to the Board, was surprised by the collective intensity of this sentiment: "Are we saying," he asked, "that rather than reengineer our product we should fall on our sword?"

The response, unanimous and robust, was that, faced with that uneasy choice, we should choose to fall on our swords.

This brings us full circle, returning to the *Boston Globe's* question I cited in the beginning of this chapter:

“But what is a name if the educational premise behind it no longer exists?”

The answer, I hope, is self-evident: That is, in fact, the wrong question. The right one would be: With the essence of its integrity maintained through the organizational changes of its 70-year history, what exciting meanings will the Goddard name connote in its next 70 years?

William Wootton, President of Sterling College in Vermont, commented in a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* review piece, on the difficulties for small rural colleges, such as Sterling and Goddard, in this time of deep economic distress:

“This is what you learn: While economic slumps might shutter a business, at these small, mission-driven colleges such downturns provide impetus to change, adjust, work harder. It is management by tenacity.” (Wootton, 2009)

Manage, govern, and lead by tenacity and with integrity. Mission matters, vision matters, values matter.

Goddard’s particular approach to growth with integrity is not for everyone, but I urge you to re-examine your own college’s strategies in light of its capacity to use the strengths of the past to combat the weaknesses of the present and grow into a sustainable future.

Bibliography

“A Brief Overview of Progressive Education.” The John Dewey Project on Progressive Education at The University of Vermont. URL=
<http://www.uvm.edu/~dewey/articles/proged.html>.

Coleman, Stephen R. *To Promote Creativity, Community and Democracy: The Progressive Colleges of the 1920s and 1930s*. Doctoral Dissertation, Columbia University, 2000, p. 300-01.

Cox, Damian and Marguerite La Caze and Michael Levine. “Integrity,” The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition). Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/integrity/>.

Dewey, John. *Experience and Education*. New York: Collier Books (Collier edition, 1963), page 61.

“Goddard’s Loss – and Ours,” *Boston Globe*, page A22, August 29, 2002.

Hellman, Lillian, Letter to HUAC, May 19, 1952

Jacobs, Sally. “Campus Upheaval,” *Boston Globe*, page D1, August 22, 2002.

Wootton, William R. “Predictions of Small Colleges’ Death Could Be Premature.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 16, 2009, Volume 55 issue 19, p. A19.



About the Author

Dr. Mark Schulman has been President of Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont since January 1, 2003. He received his Doctor of Philosophy in Communications from The Union Institute and University. Prior to joining Goddard College, he was President and Professor of Humanities at Antioch University Southern California; Academic Dean/Vice President, Dean of the College, and Professor at Pacific Oaks College; Chairperson, Communication Department/Director, Graduate Media Studies/Lead Faculty, Distance Learning/Distinguished Lecturer in Communications at the New School for Social Research; Chairperson/Deputy Chairperson, Communications, Film and Video Department/Associate Professor at City College of New York.

Dr. Schulman has extensive background in communications and education consulting and higher education administration. His media experience includes working with the Antioch Record; Dayton Journal-Herald; J. Walter Thompson Agency; New University Conference Publications; Newhouse National News Service; and the Yellow Springs News. He also has consulted with numerous organizations.

**PRESIDENTIAL
PERSPECTIVES**



www.PresidentialPerspectives.org



Helping Campuses Thrive