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Ideas

* Bascom and religious moral formation classes that he taught
* Ethics requirements – possibility for the addition of them
  + Maybe exists in some engineering and business capacities, but certainly room for improvement
* Did we shape character more extensively in the past? **Yes, why have we strayed from that?** 
  + Do we no longer shape character because of the changing perspective on education?
  + Changing from enlightenment to vocational preparation
* Possible outline
  + History-Daisy
  + Current-max
  + Conclusion–moral shaping pros and cons
    - Conducive to wisconsin idea
    - Ethical concerns?

Potentially we do some sort of poll or interview situation about whether or not students feel that their character has changed throughout their time here.

**History**

Colonial universities of the 18th and 19th centuries were very structured; at any given institution, everyone who attended took the same classes and learned the same things. Learning Greek and Hebrew were essential to engaging with mental, moral, and natural philosophy which essentially made up the basis of a liberal arts education. This sort of classical education was obviously a practice in moral formation of students, and was still what was considered necessary to be successful in any job.1

Up through the 1900s, higher education became increasingly specialized, making it easier for students to pursue their academic interests. This also led to a tension between the idea of university as vocational training and the idea of university as a vehicle for personal intellectual and moral development. Even before the Wisconsin Idea described public universities as a tool of service to the state, John Bascom was voicing his discontent with the trend of using education for self -interested ends, he thought it was necessary to use education to give back to the common good. According to Hoelever:

“He [John Bascom] once stated to the University of Wisconsin Board of Regents that he hoped that every course taught at the university would have a philosophical foundation. He warned against educating for merely practical ends and utilitarian purposes, lest the university feed the ‘blind rush’ of material forces that too much control our lives…He believed that university graduates equipped with this special kind of education could make a valuable contribution to the state. They will help inaugurate “the new era of collective power.”2

Despite Bascom’s warning against the use of higher education as merely vocational training, universities have only continued to remove requirements which would advance students’ thought processes about morality and the common good. The only general education requirement that necessarily fits under that umbrella is the ethnic studies requirement. This is “intended to increase understanding of the culture and contributions of persistently marginalized racial or ethnic groups in the U.S, and to equip students to respond constructively to issues connected with our pluralistic society and global community”3

There are always opportunities to use these kinds of classes to fulfill breadth requirements, but there are very few levers encouraging or requiring students to take them. The business school has an ethics requirement4 and the school of engineering requires a class which explores the intersection of ethics and engineering, but apart from that there aren’t very many windows for students to examine and interrogate their beliefs about the world around them, especially considering that most classes are taught rather passively, most students are capable of getting through the university without having developed the kinds of critical thinking which they can apply in their lives, politics and relationships.

**Current:**

Contemporarily, the university’s student body and discourse surrounding the university are plagued by an irreconcilable tension between two viewpoints about the direction the school and the Wisconsin Idea are headed. As previously mentioned, one perspective views college as a preparatory mechanism for the workforce, while the other views it as a place of enlightenment; a place that certainly aids in the molding and shaping of its students. A rational outside party might suggest that it is reasonable for students to prioritize their own financial well-being, and be more concerned with their future employment than an arbitrary idea of self-improvement and growth. This critique is fair; however, it is the university’s responsibility to ensure that the student also gains the intangible qualities that the Wisconsin Idea historically promotes. At UW-Stevens Point, there was a proposition to eliminate the humanities department to allow for more courses pertaining to job training. While many students go to college to better their chances of employment, the Wisconsin Idea firmly states that a university’s goal is more than simply educating students and then deploying them to various employers. The university clearly articulates in their mission statement that they desire to improve the human condition. This can only be done if the school remains true to foundational principles of the Wisconsin Idea. The Idea is elastic by nature; however, it cannot be stretched too thin that it loses all meaning and purpose.

After examining a brief history–and acknowledging the current state–of the Wisconsin Idea and whether or not the university should/does participate in shaping the character of its students, it is apparent that there is not one clear answer for this issue. Some people recoil in disgust when they hear that the university is concerned-whatsoever–with moral character. This fear largely derives from a misunderstanding of how classical education and the Wisconsin Idea intend to shape character. Rather than indoctrinating or imparting their own beliefs and values to their students, Professors simply provide students the tools to formulate their own character. The university does not mold students into one specific shape, but rather facilitates the broad construction of endlessly unique individuals.

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