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Renewing Our Shared Purpose: Considering Ernest L. Boyer's General Education Vision for Christian Colleges and Universities

Cynthia Wells
Messiah College, cwells@messiah.edu

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This article considers the significance of Boyer's work on general education for Christian colleges and universities. After beginning with a synthesis and analysis of Boyer's vast body of work on general education, this article then identifies the challenges facing those concerned with renewing the general education program in Christian colleges and universities. This piece concludes by illustrating how Boyer's ideals for general education relate to the educational aims of Christian colleges and universities and also provides concrete examples of how Boyer's ideals are evident in Christian higher education today. This article argues that Boyer's vision for general education is fully consistent with and necessary to advancing the aims of the educational program in Christian colleges and universities because it infuses commitment to coherence of purpose, connection, integration, and application of learning.

In the midst of the transformative period of the last quarter of the 20th century, Ernest L. Boyer consistently argued that higher education must renew its commitment to general education. Boyer's passionate and sustained dedication to general education was fueled by values he considered to be essential to higher learning and societal well-being. He argued for coherence of purpose, by which he meant a clear connection among institutional mission, social context, and educational program. He also contended that higher education ultimately fell short of its purposes if students were not helped to understand human interconnectedness, integrate bodies of knowledge, and apply learning to life. These four intersecting ideals—coherence of purpose, connection, integration, and application—provide a narrative thread across Boyer's body of work, but are especially evident in any analysis of Boyer's lasting impact on general education. While Boyer intentionally framed his vision to apply across a wide array of institutional types, there is merit in considering these ideals within a particular category of institution. Moreover, although Boyer spoke into the broad higher education context

in a manner that avoided religious particularity, his Christian faith commitments imbued his ideals. Given these undercurrents, there is merit in considering Boyer's vision for general education in Christian higher education specifically.

My argument in this article is that Boyer's vision for general education serves to further the distinct mission of Christian higher education in the current context. Toward that end, this article advances three tasks: (a) to synthesize and analyze and Boyer's vast body of work on general education; (b) to identify the challenges facing those concerned with renewing the educational program in Christian colleges and universities; and (c) to illustrate how Boyer's ideals for general education advance the aims of the educational program in Christian higher education.

BOYER'S PHILOSOPHY OF GENERAL EDUCATION

An Evolving Yet Continuous Vision

Boyer's particular approach to general education evolved over time, as is evident when one examines several of his seminal writings and speeches. At the same time, his appeal reflects a remarkable continuity. The ideals that infused Boyer's commitments to general education predated even his educational career. He spoke often of his most important mentor, his Grandpa Boyer, a minister who founded and led Taylor Street Mission in Dayton, Ohio, and reflected on how his grandfather taught him to view service as the central lens of life's meaning. Boyer's attention to general education was evident in his early years as a college administrator. For example, he implemented the innovative January term to advance interdisciplinary, campus-wide learning at Upland College. However, the fervor of his general education conviction, fueled by a sabbatical project in 1976, was most clearly evident throughout his service as president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Boyer devoted a sabbatical from SUNY to reflecting on the state of the common curriculum (Boyer & Kaplan, [17]). In *Educating for Survival*, the textual fruit of that sabbatical, one sees the interconnecting ideals of service and meaning applied to the role of higher education in society and specifically to the role of general education in serving that larger vision. *Educating for Survival* extends a critical look at the curriculum in American higher education and lays out several assumptions that grounded Boyer's

longstanding emphasis on general education and its significance. Boyer and Kaplan ([17]) claimed that the college curriculum is a value-laden aspect of human culture, that individuals are unique and diverse but also share common experience, and that higher education's merits lie beyond the functions of socialization and occupational training. The text first examines the state of the core curriculum in American higher education, by which they meant the "coursework that undergraduates pursue in common" (Boyer & Kaplan, p. 10).

From that analysis, Boyer and Kaplan ([5]) argued for renewed attention to a "core of learning" as a means to "social survival" and to larger national goals (p. 54). Essentially, general education was grounded as an effort to maintain a sense of common human experience while affirming the "thousand varied roots" of America's citizens (Boyer & Kaplan, p. 54). Unbeknownst to Boyer at the time of this sabbatical and writing project, he would move directly from this sabbatical into service as the first U.S. Commissioner of Education. In this position, Boyer would essentially create the post and shape the agenda for President Carter's initiative to establish the Department of Education.

Given this context, it is not surprising that general education was on Boyer's radar two years later when he was appointed to serve as president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. As president-elect of the Carnegie Foundation, he delivered a speech at the Colloquium on the Teaching of Ethics and Values at New York University. This moment was opportune for reflecting on his experience influencing the national education agenda, not to mention for shaping his vision for service at the Carnegie Foundation. In this speech entitled *The Common Core: A Search for Values*, Boyer ([6]) advocated for a common curriculum in higher education, by which he meant a "cluster of subjects and courses that an institution of higher learning insists be completed by all of its students" (p. 10). More important than the nomenclature of "core" or "common" curriculum was the underlying value placed on shared experience being embedded in the educational program and that the common experience distinctly reflect intentional connections between education and society.

Boyer's speech at the NYU Colloquium masterfully framed the history of American higher education to ground his argument for a coherence of purpose. He embedded his

case in the original purposes of American higher education, particularly in how the aims of higher education were connected to social context. He argued that the ideal of a common curriculum was not only displayed in the classical curriculum of the colonial college but also evident in the prominent curricular innovations over the subsequent 300 years. The classical curriculum, Boyer ([6]) contended, reflected "a shared social structure, a communal view as to how all young minds should be trained, and a common belief in God" (p. 3). The "modest reforms," as Boyer phrased it, instituted between the Revolution and the Civil War reinforced this coherence; science, technology, and modern history were added to the curriculum because "society's self-image had expanded, not fragmented" (p. 3). Finally, Boyer conceived even the movement toward "free electives" as rooted in the common ideal of "freedom of self-determination" and shared "right to be autonomous and unique" (p. 4). By examining the evolution of the American college within its sociohistorical context, Boyer drew out what he believed to be a sustained, guiding principle for higher education: a vision of coherence (Boyer, [6]; Boyer, [10]; Boyer & Kaplan, [17]).

By "coherence of purpose," Boyer meant higher education should intentionally respond to the time, place, and circumstance in which it is embedded. Coherence of purpose, from Boyer's perspective, is absolutely crucial for undergraduate education and serves as the central lens for determining the quality of general education. An excellent general education program, according to Boyer, is grounded in a clear vision and commitment to coherence of purpose, one that intentionally reflects institutional mission and the social context of higher education.

Boyer repeatedly emphasized that higher education should help students understand their interconnectedness even as it affirmed their diversity and individuality. In an era of heightened tension between commonality and diversity, Boyer emphasized that humans share a history, a present circumstance, and a future world even among quite varied roots. While he argued that elite determinations of the "great books" or "great ideas" of the past should not determine what is significant, he was, at the same time, gravely concerned that the time period's heavy emphasis on growing pluralism in the curriculum might eclipse the idea that all are human.

What is notable in this vision for general education is its attentiveness to a common experience, despite a divisive sociocultural and political context in which some suggested that such an emphasis was obsolete while others emphasized that a particular Western history was the only legitimate curriculum. Boyer fully recognized that a common curriculum was an immense challenge but emphasized that "[o]nly a common core of study confronts the fact that isolation and integration are both essential, that social connection points are crucial for greater understanding and survival" (Boyer & Kaplan, [17], pp. 54–55).

Boyer straddled the debate between the Western canon and pluralism by managing to emphasize *both* the importance of common learning *and* the diverse traditions people were becoming more aware of at that time. The primary issue for Boyer was that the well-being of a global society depended upon recognizing our common humanity. Moreover, Boyer argued that the undergraduate curriculum should require students to not only identify the common human condition but also to explore its implications. Drawing attention to the curricular ideal to help students understand human interconnectedness, Boyer's earliest prescriptions for general education argued for attention to past, present, and future (Boyer, [5]; Boyer, [6]; Boyer & Kaplan, [17]). Boyer ([6]) maintained that a shared understanding of history, those key moments that "contributed consequentially to human gains and losses" (pp. 5–6), serves as a starting point for considering the shared challenges humans face in the present. We share the "challenges of a common present," Boyer ([6], p. 6) reminded his listeners, and then outlined four aspects of that shared challenge.

First, humans must master language and recognize its consequences. For Boyer ([6]), language—broadly understood to include all communications, including everyday conversation and the arts—was essential because it not only served as the "connecting tissue of our culture" but also because it provided the "tool for other learning" (p. 6). Second, given that all human beings are deeply affected by social institutions such as "schools, banks, towns, health plans," Boyer ([6]) contended that education must "clarify for students how these structures came to be and where they fit into the broader social context" (p. 6).

Third, in order for undergraduates to understand themselves and their contemporary world, the full meaning of vocation must be grasped. Toward this end, Boyer ([6]) maintained that "colleges should be places where students come to understand that, for most of us, work is an expression of who we are and where we fit" (p. 8).
Finally, Boyer ([6]) framed "alternatives for the future" as a shared challenge for the present. He suggested that "images of the future" be engaged so that undergraduates grow ever more attentive to the implications of "present choices," including policy decisions, for the future of society (p. 8). Boyer emphasized that a shared grasp of the human experience through time is crucial for helping students make ethical decisions in the present and for the future.
Boyer continued to fine-tune his own ideas and partnered with Arthur Levine, then Senior Fellow of the Carnegie Foundation, to author *A Quest for Common Learning* (Boyer & Levine, [18]). The resulting recommendation for a "common learning program" addressed six areas of study that provided the necessary components of any undergraduate educational program precisely because these six frames were central to humanity's shared experience (Boyer, [9]; Boyer, [11]). A brief description of each of these shared foci follows:

- *Shared Use of Symbols*. All students should "understand that our unique use of symbols separates human beings from all other forms of life" (Boyer, [11], p. 6). By symbols, he meant language, numerical proficiency, and nonverbal communication. He argued that these goals were ambitious but essential "if students are to survive in a world where symbols provide the glue that holds the community together." (p. 7)
- *Shared Membership in Groups and Institutions*. All students must "understand our shared membership in groups and institutions," including an examination of the "origins" of institutions and how they operate (Boyer, [11], p. 7). General education should "help students see that everyone shares membership in the 'common institutions' of our culture—those social structures that shape our lives, impose obligations, restrict choices, and provide services that we could not obtain in isolation." (p. 8)

- *Shared Producing and Consuming*. Students should "understand that everyone produces and consumes and that, through the process, we are dependent on each other" (Boyer [11], p. 8). General education should explore the "significance of work," including how work shapes individual lives and reflects a culture's social climate.
- *Shared Relationship With Nature*. Students must gain "understanding of the ordered, interdependent nature of the universe" (Boyer, [11], 9). Toward this end, Boyer pointed to the importance of science for its "great power" and "pervasive influence." (p. 9)
- *Shared Sense of Time*. Students should gain "an understanding of our shared heritage—past and future" (Boyer, [12], p. 12). General education should focus on the "seminal ideas and events that have decisively shaped the course of history" (p. 12). Boyer emphasized how the past serves to influence the world today, expands perspective on the present, and illuminates a vision of the future.
- *Shared Values and Beliefs*. All students should "examine shared values and beliefs," including societal values and how these standards are "socially enforced" (Boyer, [11], p. 10). Boyer ([12]) pointed to both individual and social values, arguing that "each student should be able to identify the premises inherent in his or her beliefs, learn how to make responsible decisions, and engage in a frank and searching discussion of the ethical and moral choices that confront us all." (p. 14)

This fundamental principle of education for human interconnection remained a key strand in Boyer's subsequent iteration of a framework for general education as an "integrated core," an ideal highlighted in several speeches during the 1980s and detailed in *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America* (1987a). Boyer outlined the notion of the integrated core as a "program of general education that introduces students not only to essential knowledge, but also to connections across the disciplines, and in the end, to the application of knowledge to life beyond the campus" (Boyer, [15], p. 15). In articulating this vision, Boyer translated broad philosophical ideals into an incisive but adaptable curricular vision that advances consequential learning

outcomes. This approach outlined seven "areas of inquiry" that institutions should weave together in order to "enrich the lives of students, broaden their perspective, and relate learning to wider concerns" (p. 35). Briefly stated, these seven areas of inquiry and their rationale are as follows:

- *Language: The Crucial Connection*. Undergraduates should learn about the "power of language in the human experience," including developing proficiency in multiple languages and examining theories of the origins of language. (p. 19)
- *Art: The Esthetic Dimension*. Students need to understand the "unique ability of the arts to affirm and dignify our lives." (p. 20)
- *Heritage: The Living Past*. Students should learn about the people, events, and ideas that have "contributed consequentially to our own history and to other cultures." (p. 23)
- *Institutions: The Social Web*. Undergraduates should be acquainted with key institutions, including the family, the church, and judicial bodies, and their characteristics. He argued the integrated core should consider "what institutions have to do with us, how we are influenced by them, and how we can direct our institutions toward constructive ends." (p. 25)
- *Nature: Ecology of the Planet*. Undergraduate education should enable students to "explore the processes of nature, including its intricate underlying patterns and fundamental interrelatedness" (p. 28). Understanding nature also involves examining the connections between science and technology as well as considering the related "ethical and social issues" resulting from this connection. (p. 28)
- *Work: The Value of Vocation*. Students should explore the ethical dimensions of work, including "who works; what work is valued; how it is rewarded; how do people use their leisure time?" (p. 31). Boyer argued that everything we know about society points out that "work choices are exceedingly important in shaping the values and social relations of a time." (p. 31)
- *Identity: The Search for Meaning*. Undergraduates should wrestle with questions of identity, purpose, and community. Boyer argued the integrated core should

> consider significant questions such as: "Who am I? What is the purpose of life? What are my obligations to others; what are theirs to me?" (p. 33)

Boyer ([15]) emphasized the underlying values in each element of the integrated core and stressed that the "crucial step is to translate purpose into practice" by determining common themes cutting across the disciplines (p. 17). Boyer was careful to provide specific portrayals for implementing the integrated core while, at the same time, prudently emphasizing that this "academic framework for general education" was only one possible approach (p. 17).

While the language shifted ("core curriculum," "common curriculum," "common learning," "integrated core"), what remained constant in Boyer's vision for general education was its intentional, interconnected, interdisciplinary framework that sought to help undergraduates better understand themselves, their society, and the world. Notably, Boyer's vision of general education had particularly strong ethical dimensions. The point of examining the past, for example, was to better comprehend the present and how decisions affect the future. The aim of examining vocation was to consider the values that we have constructed around work and human worth in American culture. Boyer also embodied an inclusive view of the academic disciplines necessary to fulfilling the intensions of general education. Unlike many voices of the period who spoke only to the humanities disciplines as channels for advancing general education, Boyer emphasized the importance of mathematics and science. Finally, Boyer's vision for general education intentionally focused on a set of philosophical aspirations, stressing that the vision could be implemented in a variety of ways as long as the ideals themselves were realized.

SHARED IDEALS FOR GENERAL EDUCATION

Coherence of Purpose

Marty Kaplan (2012) reflected that Boyer's approach to education turned "first to the urgent social context, to the broader challenges and changes that were roiling society" (p. 3). Indeed, Boyer's body of work on general education is grounded in the central concern: "What are we trying to do? What are we educating FOR?" (Kaplan, [36], p. 3). Boyer beckoned educational leaders to consider the deeper questions of purpose,

including viewing their institutional missions within a larger social context. Coherence of purpose, for Boyer, meant clear connections among social context, institutional mission, and educational program.

Extending from this commitment to coherence of purpose, Boyer repeatedly emphasized that the aims of general education could be met in multiple ways. He advanced the idea that general education is a "program with a clear objective, one that can be achieved in a variety of ways. While great flexibility may exist in the process, it is the clarity of purpose that is crucial" (Boyer, [15], p. 39). Boyer did not argue that any particular curricular model was ideal for achieving general education outcomes; rather, he illustrated avenues for implementing the ideals of general education. At the same time, he prudently underscored that the frameworks he presented were simply exemplars intended to inspire and inform many possible models. His philosophical approach to fulfilling the purposes of general education lent itself to broad applicability across a wide array of institutional contexts and sociocultural circumstances. The pillars of his philosophical approach can be distilled into three concepts: connection, integration, and application.

Connection

Boyer's general education vision emphasized connection, which, in turn, was grounded in the shared human experience. He posited that general education signified the learning that should be shared because it was grounded in our common experience of being human (Boyer, [14]). Boyer essentially meant students should grasp their connection to all people, including those whose lives are characterized by profoundly different circumstances. For example, a Carnegie research survey in the mid-1980s identified that one third of college students indicated they "had nothing in common with people in undeveloped countries" (Boyer, [14], p. 7). Boyer ([14]) argued that higher education must contest the perspective we have "nothing in common with other human beings no matter how impoverished they may be" (p. 7).

Amid divisive arguments in the 1980s regarding higher education, largely polarized between those who advocated for greater plurality (Hall & Kevles, [30]) and others who staunchly supported a Western canon (Bloom, [3]), Boyer argued for a deeper

attentiveness to shared humanity that undergirds both diversity and commonality. He affirmed diversity and its presence in the educational program but suggested diversity is insufficient without a shared understanding of being human. Boyer's ([12]) essential vision for general education was that it should help undergraduates understand that they are "not only autonomous individuals" but also "members of a larger community to which they are accountable—and irrevocably connected" (p. 6).

Integrative

Boyer's vision for general education also emphasized integration, understood in multiple ways. Boyer argued that realizing the potential of general education depends upon shared content, essential skills, and a wide range of academic disciplines. Shared content was central to Boyer's vision for the educational program, as he advocated for a curriculum that addresses historical moments and contemporary challenges that are selected intentionally and considered in an interdisciplinary fashion. From Boyer's perspective, both particular disciplinary content and methodology play an essential role in general education. He viewed science as being crucial in the general education curriculum not only for its basic concepts, theories, and relationships but also for its "methodology," including the "trial and error" of discovery as well as the refinement of theory through "observation and testing" (Boyer, [11], p. 9).

In addition, Boyer considered the mastery of certain skills—reading with understanding, writing with clarity, listening and speaking effectively, proficiency with numbers—to be so crucial that in their absence the "goals of general education will be fatally undermined" (Boyer, [11], p. 6). Effective general education is *all* of these elements rather than any particular one. Pointedly, Boyer's vision suggests that none of these is an end in and of itself, but rather, all serve as means to a larger end.

Boyer's general education vision sought to help students navigate and make sense of the intersections between disciplines and to enrich the major. He thus adamantly contended that general education must serve an integrative function across the undergraduate experience:

[T]he general education sequence, regardless of its structure, is not something to "get out of the way." Rather, it should. . . extend vertically, from the freshman to the senior

years. And the integration of knowledge should also touch the major, as students move from depth to breadth and bring questions of value and meaning to their field of study. (Boyer, [15], pp. 39–40)

Boyer was a staunch advocate for integration, arguing that in a "complex, interdependent world, we simply cannot afford to graduate students who fail to place their knowledge and lives in perspective" (Boyer, [15], p. 15). He contended that the "central question is not whether the curriculum selected is old or new, disciplinary or thematic—but whether students are helped to see integration across the disciplines and discover the shared relationship common to all people" (p. 36). Above the uproar endorsing particular and conflicting models of general education, Boyer raised central concerns that, he believed, should be addressed across curricular designs.

Boyer also stressed integration as part of the students' ability to make sense out of their own lives, including but not limited to career. Finding a generative middle between arguments—that higher education serves either an instrumental purpose of advancing a career, on the one hand, or a purely intrinsic intent associated with a liberal arts education, on the other—Boyer (1980) urged that higher education should combine inspiration and utility. In this blend, he said, educational leaders will "simply begin to rediscover the true meaning of liberal education" (pp. 6–8). He insisted that the integrative aim of higher learning ensures that students relate the content of one course to another in order to "gain a more integrated view of knowledge and a more authentic view of life" (p. 17). Boyer's vision for integration underscored not only the content of undergraduate learning but also the process by which a coherent general education program would be achieved.

Consistent with his argument that elements of the general education program work toward a shared purpose, Boyer's vision for general education included the educational program beyond the curriculum. He suggested campus-wide programs and cocurricular initiatives such as convocations, residence hall seminars, and week-long colloquia. He suggested campus-wide attention to particular themes or concerns, viewing it as crucial that "all colleges set aside special days throughout the year when the campus, as a community, would bring faculty and students together from the separate departments

to focus on topics related to the goals of common learning" (Boyer, [15], p. 37). The aims of general education were not limited to the curriculum but extended to institutional ethos.

Application

Finally, Boyer emphasized that colleges and universities must be places in which service to others is encouraged and where learning finds its fullest expression in how we live. He argued the "campus must be a staging ground, not a monastic point of retreat from the realities of this world" (1987b, p. 8). Boyer often referenced Vachel Lindsay to evoke the consequential reality of this ideal of application, saying that the tragedy of life is to "die with commitments undefined, with convictions undeclared, and with service unfulfilled" (1987, p. 14). Boyer's vision for general education found its deepest fulfillment by helping undergraduates define their commitments, declare their convictions, and fulfill their obligations through service to others.

As Boyer emphasized repeatedly, his barometer for a valid general education program was a framework built on a series of ideals. In contrast to prescribing any particular curricular model, Boyer aimed to shape a general education vision broadly applicable to a diverse array of institutional types, from independent colleges to public universities, those with a religious affiliation and those without (Boyer, [8]; Boyer, [9]). Recognizing that no institutional type has a particular claim on Boyer's influence, it is nonetheless educative to examine the applicability and influence of his general education vision in specific subsets of higher education. This article now turns to the challenges facing Christian higher education today in order to set the context for considering Boyer's influence on general education in Christian colleges and universities.

DISTINCT CHALLENGES FOR THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM IN CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

General education faces very real trials in the current higher education context, and these challenges have particular significance for Christian colleges and universities. The meaning of general education is a fundamental point of confusion. A lack of clarity across higher education regarding the significance of general education contributes to its vulnerability in a cultural context where an education's worth is weighted heavily

upon economic utility and individual advancement. This context fuels the development of new and market-driven specializations that, without careful attention, further fragment an already divided academy. In a context overemphasizing personal economic benefit and occupational outcomes of a college education, attentiveness to life's meaning is a casualty. The Christian university is not exempt from this social context. Moreover, a distinctive task of the Christian university is to instill a sense of life's purpose in undergraduate students (Holmes, [32]; Mannoia, [43]). Attending to the general education program in the Christian college requires first that we wrestle with the lack of clarity surrounding general education. Understanding this dilemma more fully serves as a necessary precursor to considering the cultural assumptions that pose a threat to general education in our current social and educational context.

Ambiguity of General Education's Purpose

A recent flurry of critique of higher education reveals an astonishing ambiguity as to why or whether general education matters (DeMillo, [21]; Hacker & Dreifus, [29]; Keeling & Hersh, [37]; Keller, [38]; Kronman, [39]; Levine, [41]; Lewis, [42]; Menand, [44]; Taylor, [56]). This confusion stems from a long history in which countless aims have been ascribed to general education. The phrase "general education" has historically evoked a myriad of meanings and ideals: "a common stock of fundamental ideas" (Hutchins, [33], p. 59); "that part of a student's whole education which looks first of all to the whole of his life as a responsible human being and citizen" (Harvard University, 1945, p. 51); and even an "antidote to barbarism" (J. Ortega y Gasset, cited in Levine, [40], p. 4). Menand ([44]) points out that every one of these goals continues to "cling to the concept of general education today" (p. 31). The wide and often conflicting range of ideals regarding what it means to be "generally educated" in present-day commentary is rooted in this puzzling context.

The vital function of general education is a contested debate, but even more disconcerting than the varying ideals is the observation that, by every gauge, general education falls short. Some critics argue that general education is about introducing "basic subjects." From this vantage point, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni recently voiced a stinging critique, giving three out of five institutions a "C" grade or

worse in general education for not requiring such basic subjects as literature, mathematics, U.S. history, and foreign language (ACTA, [1]). Another critical lens focuses on general education as providing "fundamental skills." Arum and Roksa ([2]) brought widespread attention to general education by bemoaning particular skill deficits among college graduates in "critical thinking, complex reasoning and written communication" (p. 121). Yet another meaning of general education is that of "essential texts." Lewis ([42]) complains that undergraduates are not gaining a "common knowledge" which informs a "particular point of view from which they will have all seen the products of civilization" (p. 61). Multiple critiques using the same phrase of "general education" but reflecting such vastly different meanings ensures that we often talk past each other. These multiple meanings become particularly problematic when general education is often considered the antithesis of what is perceived to be of greatest value in higher education by our culture today: preparation for gainful employment.

Economic Utility

The perspective that is front and center in the contemporary conversation regarding the value of a college education is that of economic benefit. While the financial pressures facing colleges are significant, an underlying challenge to the Christian college is that the cultural conversation on the value of higher education in our current context has grown myopic in its focus on economic outcomes. Selingo ([54]) notes that in "trying to place a value on a college education we focus almost exclusively on the cost versus benefit to the individual" (p. 169). Similarly, Donoghue ([23]) complains that the university is "constantly judged by a standard in which usefulness, defined strictly in economic terms, stands as the ideal" (p. xiii). Kronman ([39]) laments the displacement of the "question of what is living for" and argues that colleges and universities have fallen short on their responsibility to equip students for a "challenge larger than that of succeeding in a career" (p. 6).

This focus on economic utility has marginalized attention to life's meaning in the conversation about the value of higher education. As Eaton ([24]) argues in discussing the Christian college in the current social context, it is as if the purpose of the university has been limited to providing persons with the "skills. . . to operate at the highest levels

of our society," but not to provide a "map of meaning by which [students] might effectively use those competencies" (p. 50). The Christian college, in attending to concerns of life's purpose as a central element of educational mission, is swimming upstream.

Fulfilling its ideal to educate for purpose in an era where preparation for a lucrative career has eclipsed the pursuit of meaning poses a genuine and distinct challenge for the Christian college. The vast majority of students place a higher premium on employment outcomes of a college education than on general education. In fact, the percentage of incoming first-year students citing "to be able to get a better job" as a very important reason for attending college recently reached an all-time high of 87.9% (Pryor et al., [50], p. 4). Getting a better job far surpasses the portion of incoming students (72.8%) who indicate a desire "to gain a general education and appreciation of ideas" to be a very important reason for attending college (Pryor et al., [50], p. 4). This myopia is not limited to students. A recent poll suggested that gaining "skills and knowledge for a career" far outweighed gaining a "well-rounded general education" in not only the general population but also among college leaders (Ripley, [51], p. 40). Attending to general education is difficult amidst an educational and cultural ethos simply less interested and invested in general education.

Fragmentation

The current emphasis on economic indicators intersects with a longstanding trajectory toward greater specialization in higher education. This merger presents a particular challenge for the advancement of integrated, holistic learning. The danger is not specialization per se but rather that unmediated specialization leads to fragmentation. Specialization as a dominant "centrifugal force" pushes knowledge into detached and distant categories (Delbanco, [20], p. 92). Levine ([41]) suggests that the current academic culture both favors and furthers specialization, and pointedly argues it "led to certain deficits, including the cultivation of increasingly specialized, mutually unintelligible languages," which "undermined the ability of educated citizens to live in a common symbolic universe" (p. 27). Similarly, Taylor ([56]) is troubled that "the explosion of information and unprecedented expansion of knowledge" led to more

specialized faculty interests and increasingly autonomous departments, dissolving the university into an "assemblage of isolated silos" (p. 139).

Fulfilling its commitment to wholeness is a genuine challenge for the Christian college in the current age. As Dockery ([22]) cautions, the "fragmentation of knowledge should alarm all committed to Christian higher education, for it strikes at the foundation of our purpose" (p. 12).

The forces of fragmentation oppose an authentic understanding of education in a Christian college striving to place learning within the "holistic nature of human commitments" (Glanzer & Ream, [26], p. 170).

Individual Advancement

Embedded in this economic shortsightedness as well as in the tendency toward isolated expertise is an overemphasis on the individual benefits of higher education. Extensive concern exists over the lack of attention to higher education's social benefits (Levine, [41]; Lewis, [42]; Shapiro, [55]). Bok ([4]) suggests higher education is less interested in preparing an educated citizenry and asserts that faculties "display scant interest in preparing undergraduates to be democratic citizens" (p. 30). An overemphasis on individualist outcomes stands in opposition to the aspirations of the Christian college to influence undergraduates to see themselves as part of the body of Christ (Mannoia, [43]). The tendency to focus on individual benefits of higher education in our current social context poses a formidable struggle for general education, and a task that the Christian college must take seriously if it is to achieve its aspiration of educating for community.

Despite these very real challenges, Christian colleges and universities have a distinctive context and a strong grounding from which to address the purpose of general education. The Christian college has an acutely honed vantage point from which to address the question of "What are we educating for?" It is this perspective that must take center stage in realizing the potential of general education in Christian higher education.

Glanzer and Ream ([26]) argue that Christian universities educate in order to draw out students' understanding of their "Christian identity" and "creational identities" (p. 190).

This vantage point, they argue, clarifies the Christian university's aim to cultivate humanity, acknowledges the intent to "form good human beings," helps to "order and integrate the curricular and cocurricular dimensions of the university," draws upon the "identities that are common to all humans everywhere," and recognizes the university's responsibility to "help students think about their future commitments more deeply and in more complex ways" (p. 191). Glanzer and Ream's theological framework for the educational program at the Christian university exemplifies what it means to address the central question of educational purpose. If we are to have a generative conversation regarding general education in Christian colleges and universities, it will be wise to begin with Boyer's prime directive for a coherence of purpose. From there, we can consider how Boyer's values of connection, integration, and application fit with and are embodied by Christian colleges. In the next section, I argue Boyer's ideals for general education are fully consistent with the aims of the educational program in Christian colleges and universities. I also illustrate some concrete manifestations of each of Boyer's ideals in Christian colleges and universities today.

CONSIDERING BOYER'S IDEALS FOR CHRISTIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Boyer rarely drew public attention to the particularities of his Christian faith perspective; nonetheless, much of his work clearly reflects his theology (Jacobsen, [34]). At the same time, if we are to consider the applicability of Boyer's general education ideals for the Christian college context, drawing out the Christian underpinnings of his work is appropriate. Analysis of Boyer's work on general education lends itself to four central principles on which to examine its relevance for Christian higher education: coherence of purpose, connection, integration, and application. For each of these ideals, I offer a theological rationale for why each is pertinent to Christian higher education and then illustrate how particular Christian colleges evidence that ideal in their educational program.

Coherence of Purpose

Boyer's fervent assertion that general education should embody "a coherence of purpose" should clearly influence Christian higher education. While a clear and distinct purpose for Christian higher education may initially seem self-evident, a coherence of

purpose is as much a challenge for the Christian college as it is for any other institution. Scholars have drawn specific attention to the "disunity and disorganization of the curriculum" of the Christian college in general (Sandin, [52], p. 80) and to the "haphazard" design of general education in particular (Mannoia, [43], p. 134). As Glanzer and Ream (2009) argue, "Christian colleges and universities must structure their curricula differently so that it coheres with their particular aims" (p. 204). Christian higher education is called to a "unity of purpose" (Eaton, [24], p. 138). Moreover, general education in the Christian college is an important avenue toward this end. How, then, does the general education program at Christian universities embody a coherence of purpose? One way of doing so is by aligning the aims of general education solidly with the mission of the institution. Calvin College's statement of purpose for its core curriculum explicitly makes the case for cohesion between institutional mission and identity and the aims for general education: "the purpose of a general education program should be fitted to an institution's understanding of its particular mission as shaped by its tradition" (Calvin College, [19]). Similarly, North Park University (NPU) argues that its core curriculum finds its starting point with the "framework of North Park's identity as a Christian, liberal arts institution" ([49]). Taylor University's general education "program grows out of the purpose of the University as expressed in its Christian faith, mission statement, and academic objectives" (Taylor University, [57], p. 38). Finally, the language of Messiah College's mission statement is embedded in the statement of purpose for its general education program: "The General Education program at Messiah College encourages the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes of intellect, character, and faith that Christians use in lives of service, leadership, and reconciliation" (Messiah College, [45], p. 88). While empirical research is required to assess the fulfillment of these aspirations, these statements on the whole reflect a philosophical alignment with Boyer's ideal for coherence of purpose in Christian colleges today.

Connection

Boyer's ideal that all students understand their shared connection as humans resonates with the Christian college mission. A creational theology affirms all of humanity is

created in the image of God; this reality brings us a point of commonality and connection while simultaneously affirming varied roots and traditions. It is precisely a rich understanding of the *imago dei* that undergirds and affirms both diversity and commonality. The Christian faith tradition affirms the uniqueness of each individual while, at the same time, calling us to see ourselves as interdependent beings. As was true in Boyer's time, the emphasis on human difference too often outweighs the emphasis on our connections. Christian tradition enables and requires the Christian college to bridge these two seemingly opposing ideas and to help students recognize their mutual importance.

How, then, does general education at Christian colleges enable students to comprehend their individual uniqueness as well as their interconnection with all people? One way Christian colleges seek to advance students' understanding of human interconnection is by adopting a common curriculum. At Seattle Pacific University, the common curriculum ensures "that all students, regardless of their majors, will enjoy some common educational experience" (Seattle Pacific University, [53]). In addition, Seattle Pacific encourages the campus community to advance these "common conversations" through "Chapel programs, lectures, concerts, and other community events" (Seattle Pacific University, [53]). The curricular design of a common curriculum creates space for undergraduates to discuss ideas and texts with those beyond their own disciplinary contexts and friendship groups. Moreover, the particular content of these courses can advance students' understanding of their uniqueness and shared humanity. Messiah College offers a common course in which students examine the creation narratives in Genesis in order to consider their own identities as created in the image of God, to affirm the divinely imprinted image of God on *all* of humanity, and to help students understand the interrelatedness of these realities.

Integration

Boyer's attentiveness to integrating knowledge should be evident in the Christian college, for Christian faith beckons linkages across areas of knowledge that are too often disconnected from each other in the academy. John Henry Newman ([48]) voiced vital Christian convictions for the academy in his *The Idea of the University*, saying, "I

lay it down that all knowledge forms one whole, because its subject matter is one; for the universe in its length and breadth is so intimately knit together, that we cannot separate off portion from portion, and operation from operation, except by a mental abstraction" and that all knowledge so greatly bears the imprint of a Creator that we cannot "truly or fully contemplate [knowledge] without in some main aspects contemplating Him" (p. 45). Similarly, Holmes ([32]) affirmed that "Christian faith enables us to see all things in relationship to God" and added that a connected view is crucial to counter the "fragmented view of life that lacks overall meaning" communicated in higher education (p. 57). The Christian college has a distinct call to integration, to overcoming the fragmentation of the academy.

How does the general education program in Christian higher education facilitate integration across disciplines and between curricular and cocurricular arenas? When Boyer's ideals for integration are implemented, general education works with rather than against specialized education (Boyer & Boyer, [16]). What this assertion means in practice is that students "move easily between general education and specialization during all years of study, carrying ideas from one to another" (Boyer & Boyer, [16], p. 68). To achieve these ends, the Christian university must be intentional in its curricular design.

Many Christian colleges pattern a general education curriculum as a narrative thread throughout the curriculum, creating space for enriching the major by broadening student's perspectives on life and faith alongside the development of expertise. Seattle Pacific University's aforementioned common curriculum spans the students' four years. Similarly, Gordon College offers a core curriculum that includes several common courses, which are "required of all students" and "explore topics and cultivate skills that are valuable in the development of a Christian perspective on life and learning" (Gordon College, [28], p. 63). The general education program at North Park University is also interdisciplinary and multiyear, intentionally integrating first year and senior level coursework in order to serve both students who complete all their coursework at NPU as well as students who transfer in previous coursework (D. Parkyn, personal communication, May 3, 2013). In each of these cases, the design of the curriculum

requires students to take general education courses alongside their major courses across the educational experience. These efforts create the conditions in which integration of knowledge can be realized.

Another way integration is fostered at Christian colleges is through bridging the curricular and cocurricular arenas. As Glanzer ([25]) argues, "a college attempting to promote Christian humanism should set forth a coherent human vision that applies to and integrates both the curricular and the cocurricular realms" (p. 395). This conviction is often potentiated and realized through the residential nature of many Christian colleges, where learning is intentionally bridged with living in a variety of ways. For example, students are sometimes assigned to residences in order to ensure that their neighbors are engaging in the same coursework at the same time. Bridging the curricular and cocurricular is not limited to those campuses that are residential. Another way integration is fostered is by attentiveness to the ethos of the institution, to shaping a campus community through shared conversations around consequential issues. North Park University, for example, augments its general education curriculum with campus-wide experiences. The university offers a Campus Theme Lecture Series, which purposes to enhance student learning and help them "engage with the full campus community around life's compelling questions" ([49]). These initiatives enable general education objectives to extend beyond the curriculum, permeating the campus as a whole.

Application

Human interconnectedness and an integrated perspective of knowledge undergird Boyer's ideal that a commitment to service be an explicit element of general education. Boyer's emphatic commitment that learning should be applied to consequential issues in the world fits squarely with the mission of Christian higher education. The application of learning, as articulated by Boyer, reflects a commitment to Christian discipleship as the full "unity of knowing and doing" (Neufeld Harder, [47], p. 194). It is, in fact, the merging of academic content with service experiences that ensures our aspirations not be confined to efforts "merely to comfort those in pain but to change the world so there will be less pain to experience" (Jacobsen & Jacobsen, [35], p. 92). Authentic Christian

service is fully realized by actively addressing areas of need in order that our world ever more faithfully aligns with God's vision.

Eaton ([24]) argues the "clear and critical direction for the future of the Christian university" is a commitment to engaging the culture in order to change the world (p. 127). Eaton pushes against the notion of the "ivory tower model" of higher education, which suggests students must withdraw from the world in order to pursue their studies. Rather, Eaton's argument echoes Boyer's reminder that higher education serves within and ultimately transforms society. Christian higher education finds its fullest expression in shaping values and commitments for making a difference in the world. Indeed, education in the Christian context advances the ideal that "God's passion for justice must become ours" (Wright, [58], p. 13).

How does the general education curriculum at Christian colleges and universities invite students to apply their learning to challenges in the real world? One way is by making explicit that values rooted in Christian faith should be evident in human conduct. Ethics instruction, for example, embodies the ideal of application; research demonstrates that ethics instruction remains a central element of the Christian college curriculum (Glanzer, Ream, Villarreal, & Davis, [27]). In addition, educational initiatives requiring students to utilize their academic knowledge in service to real-world problems embody this principle in many Christian colleges. For example, the Collaboratory for Strategic Partnerships and Applied Research Development at Messiah College inspires students to draw upon and apply the learning in their academic disciplines to address challenges facing local and global communities. In recent years, Collaboratory initiatives have developed and implemented a number of solutions to real world challenges, including the design of assistive technologies to increase the mobility of persons with physical disabilities and the design and implementation of ozone-based water purification systems for schools and communities in rural Honduras ([46]).

As I conclude, it is important to emphasize that I am not recommending that Christian colleges and universities turn to Boyer's work as *the* model for general education. Such a recommendation would counter Boyer's own argument that the vision laid out be considered a potential framework. However, having argued that Boyer's ideals are

consistent with the theological commitments inspiring Christian higher education, value exists in considering Boyer's ideals as we think through the vital role of the general education program in Christian colleges and universities.

Ultimately, Christian higher education advances an interpretive community in which sense-making is grounded in God's larger redemptive narrative. This aspiration is consistent with Eaton's (2011) contention that the "Christian university stands the best chance in our time to articulate and model a vision of human flourishing that will make the world a better place for all of God's children" (p. 17). If Eaton is accurate, then perhaps the Christian university is not simply one of many contexts for considering Boyer's ideals. In actuality, it has the best chance for implementing his ideal that higher education serve to make the world a better place.

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