



**Project 2024**

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# Question #1

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How can we do what we do better?



# What we do



CC is a

- Selective, undergraduate, residential college
- Centered in the liberal arts
- Using a system of intensive study, the Block Plan

CC seeks to

"provide the finest liberal arts education in the country. Drawing upon the adventurous spirit of the Rocky Mountain West, we challenge students, one course at a time, to develop those habits of intellect and imagination that will prepare them for learning and leadership throughout their lives."

# The *artes liberales*

Ancient Greeks and Romans:

*liberales* meant fitted for freedom

Learning prepared citizens by focusing on their values and traditions.

or

*liberales* meant freeing

Learning liberated students from the authority of habit and convention.

## Middle Ages:

*artes* in *artes liberales* meant ways of knowing

these included the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and logic)  
and the quadrivium (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy)

the seven liberal arts prepared worthy citizens

they disclosed truths about society and the natural world and  
built noble character

## Contemporary:

Martha Nussbaum, Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics,  
University of Chicago

*libertas* means the freedom that prepares citizens of the world

by subjecting one's beliefs and traditions to the scrutiny of reason

by learning to see oneself not only in terms of one's own group but

in terms of all humans

by learning to tell others' stories from their perspective

learning involves

critical reasoning

broad, multi-disciplinary inquiry

imagination enough to see things from someone else's perspective

## Contemporary:

Michael Oakeshott, philosopher and political theorist

*artes* refers to different ways of constructing meaning

everyone seeks to understand the world and themselves

college students have a once in a lifetime chance to “learn what  
there is to be learned”

they enter a human conversation which includes both affirming  
and alien voices

that conversation enriches the meanings they give to  
themselves and the world



## Closer to home: the two Glenns

- J. Glenn Gray: professor of philosophy, Colorado College
- He asked: What is the purpose of higher education?

## He answered: to cultivate wisdom

- Pure or theoretical wisdom

Valuable as it is, it “does not make [a person] practically effective as a family man, citizen or community leader.” Very few people pursue pure wisdom.

- Practical wisdom: applies reason to daily activities

It enables people to achieve personally satisfying lives and lives that “carry significance beyond themselves.” We seek this wisdom for our students.



- Glenn Brooks, professor of political science and architect of the Block Plan
- He asked: What are CC's "basic purposes?"

He answered: “To remain a liberal arts institution” and to provide “five essential experiences.”

“To provide a pertinent body of knowledge, both general and specialized that will help a person live an interesting and productive life. The *scientia* in our emblem.”

“To enhance disciplined thought and work. The *disciplina* in our emblem. Provide a balance between general liberal learning and fairly rigorous instruction in a particular field of knowledge.”

“To provide opportunities for significant commitment for our students and ourselves.”

“To provide opportunities for creative leisure” in keeping with liberal learning.

“We seek to provide a community which undergirds and strengthens all experiences available at the College. In the simplest sense we want our students to learn to live together.”

# How, then, can we do what we do better?

What if we. . .?

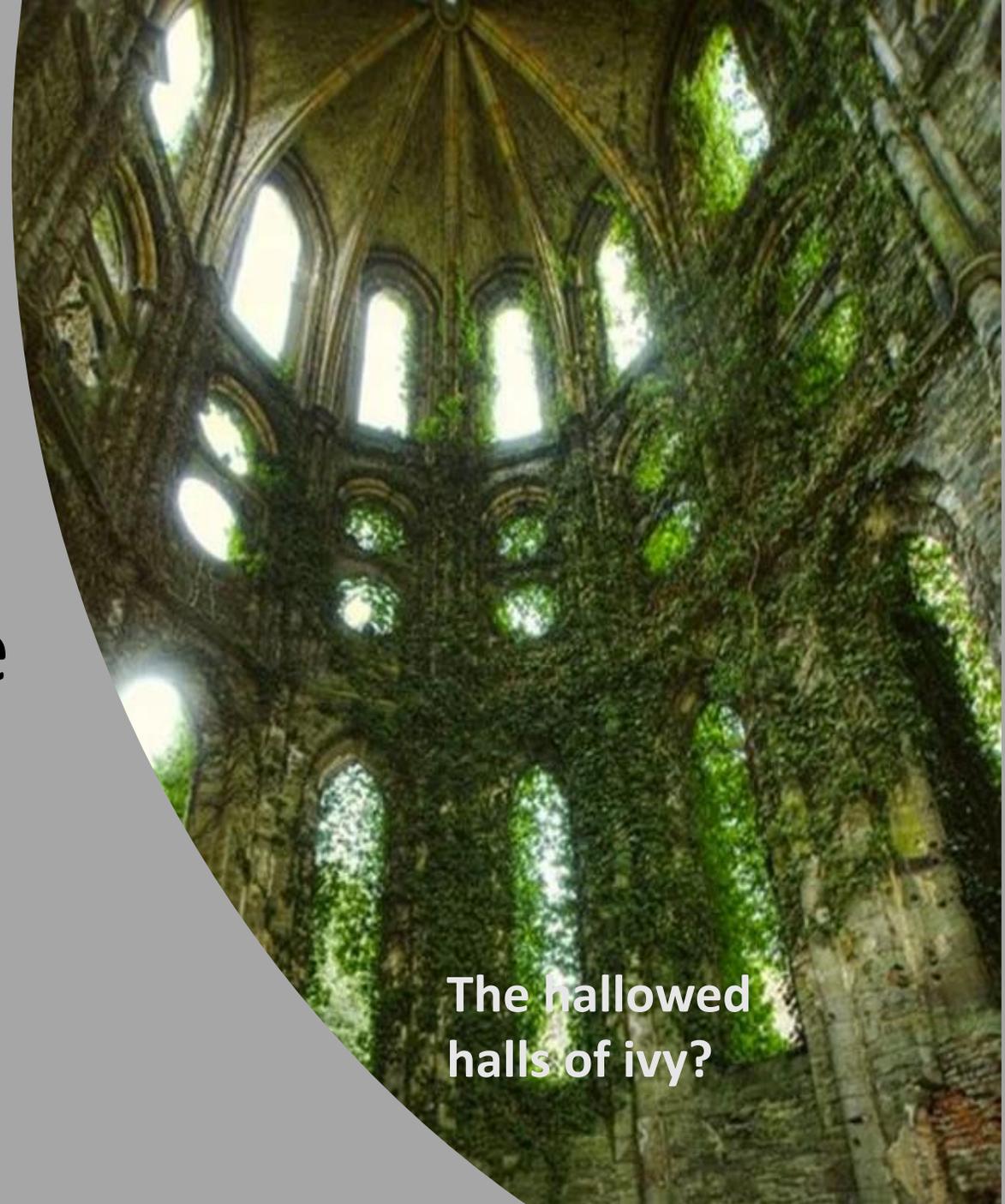
First, identify possibilities.

Then, choose the three most potent and/or promising.

# Question # 2

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What pressing issues face higher education in the next decades?



**The hallowed  
halls of ivy?**

# What's brewing now, and what's coming at us.

The established American model of higher education

- In-person
- Classroom-centered
- Credit-bearing, degree-granting academic programs
- Degrees combine general education and specialization.

- Institutions define education. They decide on its content, modes of delivery, and its systems of certification.
- The learning process matters more than its outcomes.

# Challenges to this traditional model

## 1. Finances

- Colleges and universities increasingly depend on revenue from tuition and board and room.
- The pandemic and the move to online and hybrid learning challenge this financial model.

*“The added stresses from the Covid-19 pandemic will further aggravate the untenable circumstances facing hundreds of institutions. This will be a difficult five years for higher ed, but the painful transformations to come may have one benefit: Colleges will be forced to focus more on their central missions, and forgo some of the peripherals that have led our sector astray.” [LeClair]*

# Consequences

Deficits lead to higher tuition and fees.

Higher tuition produces more student debt.\*

Rising student debt causes students to seek cheaper alternatives.

Their search for cheaper options intensifies competition for students.

\*\$480 billion in 2006 compared to \$1.6 trillion in 2020

## 2. Demographics

- Declining birth rates will shrink the pool of 18-year-olds beginning in 2026.
- Covid-19 restrictions and more attractive options outside the US produce declining international student enrollments.
- Enrollments matter, because colleges and universities rely increasingly on tuition and fees to pay the bills.

*“Each student lost to demographic decline would punch a revenue hole that would likely become larger with each passing year. The financial effects of demographic contraction might accelerate even faster than the population losses themselves.” [Harvey]*

# Consequences

- Declining enrollments + dependence on tuition intensifies competition for students.
- More competition for students encourages colleges/universities to discount tuition.
- Discounted tuition causes administrators to cancel programs and eliminate faculty positions.
- These cuts lower quality and reduce competitiveness.

### 3. Access

- Some progress in expanding access to higher education.
- Graduation rates, however, remain too low, especially for certain groups.
- Gender and racial disparities continue to characterize administrative leadership, faculty, and staff.

*“Higher education has made considerable strides to be more equitable, but our work is far from done.” [NACUBO]*

## 4. Digital knowledge

### A. The internet expands options for postsecondary education

- Enables any time, any place access to education.
- Gives students more options, including on-line learning platforms from prestigious institutions.

*“The looming issue for higher education is not just the explosion of alternative providers, but their world-class quality.” [Levine & Van Pelt]*

# Consequences

- Students as consumers increasingly define the content and the form of postsecondary education.
- Their goals shift the focus of learning from means to outcomes, process to product.
- Measures of achievement include not only units of credit, grades, and degrees but also certificates and badges.

## B. The internet also changes how we think

- Experts say that the internet carves different neurological pathways.
- It encourages skimming, reduces attention spans, and may limit our capacity for deep, sustained reading.
- Social media increases anxiety and discourages face to face connection.

*“In Google’s world, the world we enter when we go online, there’s little place for the fuzziness of contemplation. Ambiguity is not an opening for insight but a bug to be fixed.” [Carr]*

*“ I see within us all (myself included) the replacement of complex inner density with a new kind of self—evolving under the pressure of information overload and the technology of the “instantly available.”” [Richard Foreman in Carr]*

# Consequences

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How do these changes affect Block Plan learning?

Can students focus?

Have they lost the capacity for sustained, deep reading?

Will they engage in free-wheeling debate on contentious subjects?

## 5. Relevance

Does a liberal arts education

- give graduates an edge in the job market?
- prepare graduates for citizenship in a democratic society?
- prepare them to be citizens of the world?
- help graduates lead “personally satisfying” and “consequential” lives?

## 6. Capacity for change

- Some colleges and universities change, because financial and enrollment deficits force them to.
- Others choose to follow the latest trends.
- Highly-ranked colleges, however, usually resist change. Why change their formula for success?
- Where does CC fit? Would we change to meet oncoming challenges? How much?

*“Colleges must confront their tendency toward magical thinking — their belief that institutional challenges will somehow vanish. Another trap is complacency and an assumption of institutional exceptionalism — the idea that each college is special, shielded, somehow, from the woes confronting other institutions.”* [Levine and Van Pelt]

# What, then, must we do?

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Of the six hard realities coming our way, which threaten CC the most? Which ones can we hold at bay?

Identify the two threats you think we most need to prepare to combat.

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