Phil Beta Kappa Colloquium
Are the Liberal Arts Distinctively Western?
February 6-8, 2003
Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts
Wabash College, Crawfordsville, IN
http://www.liberalarts.wabash.edu/

Participants: John Agresto, John Churchill, Len Clark, Mac Dixon-Fyle, Wendy Doniger, M. David Eckel, Rudolph P. Hock, Werner Kelber, Bill Placher, Valerie Ramseyer, Gretchen Reydams-Schils, Niall Slater, Bill Spellman, Raymond Williams, Lee Yearley

Convener: William (Bill) Placher
Recorders: Anne Bost and Richard A. Lynch

Session 1 (Friday, 9:00-10:30 AM)
Discussion of Wendy Doniger's lecture from last night

Bill Placher opened the session with a "thank you" to Wendy Doniger for the opening lecture, and then provided some background about the mission and history of the Center of Inquiry in the Liberal Arts. The liberal arts seem to be an endangered species these days—many people are suspicious of them ("My child won't get a job with a liberal arts education"). So our question is, what difference do we make in a culture in which we're marginalized. There are very few voices speaking for the liberal arts. That's what we're trying to do here. Among the questions being investigated are, what differences can be seen in liberal arts graduates' values, attitudes, and abilities? But beyond that, we're not good at articulating what liberal arts means for ourselves. This weekend is one among four different Phi Beta Kappa-organized colloquia trying to help us sort through this. Our task is to think about the extent to which liberal arts education is a part of Western cultures, and other cultures, and then to consider what the educational implications of that are. The general framework of the meetings will be a series of small groups and large groups, discussing what we mean by "liberal arts," and whether it is a part of Western culture. Tomorrow, we will turn to the question of what that means for how we teach this material, design courses, etc. John Churchill then offered a brief account of Phi Beta Kappa's stake in this enterprise. Phi Beta Kappa exists to promote excellence in higher education. The aim of these colloquia is to develop more effective ways to champion that cause. The four questions are not a grab-bag, but an attempt to see if there is a core terrain in the liberal arts.

Rudolph Hock began the discussion by noting that he had been thumbing through These Fleeting Years [Robert S. Harvey, ed., These Fleeting Years: Wabash College 1832-1982: A documentary history (Wabash College, 1982)], and had found the college's curriculum from 1883 [pp. 57-63]. The "classical course" included Livy and Xenophon in the freshman year, and readings in Latin and Greek continue to add up each year. Students had to know Greek and Latin already, he noted, and this reading schedule would kill a graduate student. We won't find anything like this curriculum in a college now. This recalls Moses Hadas, who popularized Classics at Columbia in the 1940s-50s—now the texts have been democratized; the texts are
readily available in translation. The issue of enrollment in classics is a critical one today. But not all students who want to learn about the ancient world need to know the ancient languages, as long as those doing the translations do it well. Wendy Doniger replied that, at the time, the assumption was that there were only two languages worth learning (Greek and Latin), so students could do that. Now that we recognize multiple languages, we either have to read in translation or we can only learn about one culture. If you open your world beyond classical education, you have to face your inadequacy. Lee Yearley asked, when do inadequacies become disenabling? Most people won't be able to translate or to be comparativist—so what kind of background would someone need to teach from a translated text? Doniger responded that she believes in disciplinary training (not just interdisciplinary studies). She offered as an analogy the image of a house. There are structural walls, and later room divisions. To be adequate, you need to know something about the culture and its big picture, but you don't have to know the particular language. There are limitations of translations: you can't do close reading in a translation—take for example Greek tragedy in English. There are many things you can't do in translation: you can't talk about how the poetry works, or the wordplays or ambiguities in the language. But there is an awful lot that you can learn from them in translation—you can talk about the characters, the plot, philosophy, the arguments... You can do lots with undergraduates. It's important that they have at least one language in which they can do close reading, and really read a text.

John Agresto observed that at St. John's, we ask every student to have a rudimentary knowledge of some classical languages, in order to make sure that we were trying to understand another culture as it understood itself, rather than using it within our own understanding, to some political or ideological end. Teaching languages serves as a check, to make sure that you're really teaching the culture in the way that it understood itself. Doniger asked, however, whether you have to do that for every culture? That check can be learned once and for all with the first foreign language, so that reading others in translation is done with that caution. David Eckel pushed further, asking what would constitute "basic knowledge of Sanskrit" in a 4-semester system? How much is enough of a rudimentary knowledge of the language to learn the lessons of what you can and cannot interpret from translations? Yearley offered an example: in a seminar he teaches on classical Chinese, we focus on one passage, 30 characters, and ask the students to translate it at the end of the semester. We can get a good sense of how far their translations are from the original. (Eckel added that you have to train the teachers to know how to do this.) Gretchen Reydams-Schils noted three main challenges. To work well, eclecticism requires an anchoring somewhere—whereas undergraduates tend to be unanchored butterflies. It doesn't need to be Greek or Latin, but there needs to be some anchor, because one will never learn that caution unless there is a commitment somewhere; our undergraduates need to make a commitment somewhere. Second, we must select texts for the right reasons. Whether they are Eastern or Western, why do we select them? Some texts entered our studies during colonialism; sometimes the texts entered our culture because of the misunderstanding of those at the time who wanted to use them for a certain purpose. Third, she continued, is it legitimate to talk about points of contact among different cultures? Take for example the recent book by Sara Grant, *Towards an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Non-Dualist Christian* ([University of Notre Dame Press, 2002])—I would like to think that this project is not *a priori* illegitimate. Doniger agreed, in this sort of case we are learning something, even if it isn't exactly how they understand themselves. This is only illegitimate if you say, for example, that this is what "India" is about.
Valerie Ramseyer noted that we're talking about the "West" as something based on Europe and fairly homogenous, with the "East" as everything else—is that fair? Doniger agreed, pointing to the Eurocentric basis of American attitudes toward the Orient. Japan is due west from San Francisco, for example. American undergraduates know a lot about America, but very little about any other part of the world. This argument about what is legitimate and illegitimate comes down to identity politics. For example, I am on one group's hit-list, because my construction of Hinduism is not theirs. It isn't, and I never said it was. Sara Grant, for example, seems to be saying "here's a piece of Hinduism that I've found very useful." As long as you don't claim it's "all of India", you're OK.

Raymond Williams then raised a question about the lecture: Doniger outlined three topics or contents and four skills, and a term she used was "discipline," which is essential. But one of the things that make up the liberal arts is a number of disciplines, which are constituted within a particular tradition. These disciplines are essential for certain kinds of analysis of the content, and for the development of those skills. How do you talk of disciplines as Eastern or Western? Doniger first replied by pointing to the rich complexity of a term like "discipline," citing Foucault. In part, she continued, what is at issue is the Enlightenment, and the claims of a kind of "objectivity," which is the hangover of the Enlightenment that postmodernists have tried to break down. In some sense we can't do without this "objectivity," even if it's not entirely tenable, and all the academic disciplines have hanging over them the ghost of this belief. It's impossible to entirely eliminate subjectivity from a knowledge-seeking enterprise. So the attack of Rajiv Malhotra [who has criticized her] is an anti-disciplinarian stance: we Indians own this subject. So what I'm saying is that the Enlightenment is wrong; we cannot study something without asking our own questions, and bringing our own concerns to it. Objectivity is not even a goal that we should have. What's at stake is the question: Can one say things about a religion that a practitioner wouldn't recognize as true? Disciplines say "yes, you can". The key is not to make a claim of universal truth. I am different from a Hindu, and therefore may see things that a Hindu cannot see. I cannot become Hindu. That's what is at stake in my part of the comparative enterprise. And that's why I'm on Malhotra's hit-list. Williams followed up, asking whether if you give Malhotra (or any other critic) the proposition that the disciplines, coming out of the Enlightenment, purport to have absolute truth and purport to exclude personal perspectives, then aren't you leaving the battlefield denuded, and saying that the liberal arts have no basis? Doniger hoped not, adding that she will keep one foot in the Enlightenment to say that there are many false claims, and incorrect translations, and therefore arguments that cannot be sustained. Caesar didn't kill Brutus. One can say "You are wrong." So there is something on that battlefield—this is, if you will, one of the structural walls of the house. But if you say "Hindus believe...," then you'll get into trouble. Many symbols function at multiple levels—for example, the Christian cross does not typically represent "murder by torture" to most who wear it, but rather a mark of their faith. I can be interested in different meanings than a believer—which is not to say that believer's meaning is false. Scholars can be interested in different aspects of others' cultures than those in the cultures, but some want to say that "only my meaning is correct." Doniger wants to hold both truths: the testimony of a believer and observations from an outside perspective. On this issue of political and power issues, Ramseyer added that we study in the United States, and the United States has also appropriated the cultures of other traditions—people can become angry at the power play involved in others' appropriating and altering their traditions. Doniger acknowledged that our academic investigations are embedded within a whole history of colonialism. That's why she emphasizes teamwork—why,
for example, she co-translated the *Kamasutra* with a Hindu Indian man—and has never felt imperialist in her own work—she is open to other views and interpretations. There isn't ever only one voice. Ramseyer added that some voices do speak louder than others, because of wealth.

Reydams-Schils noted that this problem is deepened when we are working with commentaries and commentaries upon commentaries—original texts can get lost. Werner Kelber observed that the notion of "the original authentic meaning" is a concept that has been problematized in hermeneutics. The notion of what literary critics call the "receptionist history" is at least as important as the original tradition. The *Ur*-text is taken for granted in the liberal arts today. There is a problem if "original meaning" is taken as real, and as the standard, the normative. Reydams-Schils replied that while a naive "original meaning" is inaccessible, there can still be a dialectic, unraveling layers of meanings. Doniger offered as an example the American constitution—it is an interesting document, but simply not relevant to much contemporary case law. Agresto interrupted to note that he does want to hang on to a sense of "original meaning." When we speak, we all want to be taken in our "original meaning"—we owe that respect to others. You are saying something, you have reasons, and we understand them. So, we may never understand the fullness of what an author's or a past understanding was, but unless we're willing to try to come close, we'll never understand anything about it. Doniger agreed, that there *are* things one can find out about the past. There is a flat-footed level at which there "is" an *Ur*-text. But when meanings become more subtle, it is difficult for us to discern.

Williams suggested that making judgments (not just opinions) requires having canons that make up disciplines (even if those canons change), and that lead us to make judgments in a certain way. Those canons allow us to say that, whatever else we are, we are scholars in the liberal arts. If, he continued, we were to say that it's all power-play, then the whole language of the liberal arts gets reduced, and even excluded. If we can't get over this hurdle, then we're dead in the water, there is nothing but political games. Doniger agreed that power should not be part of academics, but of politics. Ramseyer cautioned that while we may not want it to be, unfortunately, it is.

Churchill noted that issues of commensurability and incommensurability seem to be in play here. Are those who are committed to radical views that translation is in principle impossible and disciplines are necessarily distorting, are those people out of the conversation? Doniger added that this issue, or fight, comes up in issues of comparison as well as translation. Is *arête* "virtue"—are we talking about what the Greeks were talking about? Can a Christian understand a Buddhist? Is "god" the same concept in different religions? My own stance is that it's like Archimedes' paradox of the tortoise and the hare—you can get closer, without perfection. We can grant the ultimate logical impossibility of doing these things totally and completely, but it is a human necessity to try to get close. I grant the epistemological position, but that doesn't rule out the project of trying. And practically, one can make headway—one can learn a lot of Sanskrit in just four semesters. Churchill added that this issue is embedded—many Christians in Crawfordsville orient themselves religiously with respect to the "original meaning" of sacred texts that in fact require translation. The issue is literally right here on the sidewalk. Doniger added that this really is more of a cultural issues—we need to talk more about identity politics: the claim that "You can't understand me. You're white, I'm black/ You're male, I'm female/etc." The real fight about incommensurability comes not in disciplines but in identity politics.

Mac Dixon-Fyle noted that this discussion has been about texts. How does this approximate the African situation, oral culture and oral traditions? One example is the Griot
tradition in West Africa—people are literally walking libraries. Doniger agreed that this is a problem. She can't access an oral African text unless she goes to Africa, so she's still dependent on writing. That is a major act of translation, and an admission of inadequacy. Studs Terkel has made a career of writing down oral tradition. Niall Slater added that this offers an interesting and uncomfortable test case. In Southern African oral traditions, lists that were written down in the 19th century are different from oral lists recorded today. Doniger continued that we have to say that there are so many slips, that we have to collect as many different examples as possible and then compare. You can't say "we have the list"—maybe mistakes were made in the 19th century. All you can do is get as much data as you can. Slater added that these things are not all radically equal. Some modes of transmission are more accurate—but saying this from outside will not be congenial to someone inside. Doniger replied that we cannot capture an oral tradition in writing. It's a matter of degree about how inaccurate they are. Bill Spellman noted that in the UNC-Ashville core courses, they've changed translations of an oral "text." Now they use a Penguin edition of Griot's tales, in which two tellings are both present—this illustrates the variety of tellings, while simultaneously approaching the essence of the tale. Kelber agreed that the question of oral traditions is an important one. Of recent scholarship on this subject, John Miles Foley's *How to read an oral poem* (University of Illinois Press, 2002) stands out from other books—in it he tries to take a comparativist approach. And oral traditions are important: if you take the full sweep of human history, written texts appear in the last 5 minutes. Henry Louis Gates received a MacArthur Fellowship to do a PBS series on Africa. This series was centered not only on Gates himself, but was desperately trying to show that archeological ruins marked African cultures as "just like European"—the series hardly mentioned oral traditions. Dixon-Fyle noted that orality is not just a pre-literate phenomenon, it is very important in American culture today. Doniger added that American culture is largely illiterate—not so much among the elites that constitute academia and its students, but generally. We can use oral means as a legitimate source of education for people who won't use books anymore. We need to validate it as a mode of using knowledge. This is a ray of hope for inner-city kids.

Placher noted that if we had concluded that texts from cultures other than our own can't be talked about, it would have been a short weekend. But we're also reminded of the cautions that those texts involve. In small groups after a break, we should move us back to questions of liberal arts. Let's ask whether the liberal arts is a category that makes sense in three different cultural contexts: classical Western cultures, classical Eastern cultures, and today. (I'm happy to have these categories deconstructed, but we have to start somewhere.) Yearley asked for some sort of provisional definition of the liberal arts for these discussions, and Spellman cited the text of a core statement agreed upon at last week's colloquium.

**A statement on the liberal arts from last week's colloquium:** "The essential content of the liberal arts is a course of study that introduces students to the major areas of human knowing and their methods of inquiry through a study of texts and other materials from differing historical periods and global cultures that raise questions of enduring values. The pedagogy fosters in students the ability to express their understanding of these texts and to engage in deliberative discourse with others about their understandings, toward the end of producing informed, self-aware, reflective, values-conscious, life-long learners."
Session 2 (Friday, 1:30-3:00 PM)
Discussion of reports from the morning’s small groups

Small group discussion topics:
- **Group 1**: Was there “liberal arts education” in classical Asian cultures? (Doniger, Eckel, Williams, Yearley)
- **Group 2**: What did “liberal arts education” mean in classical Western culture? (Slater, Hock, Kelber, Reydams-Schils)
- **Group 3**: What do we mean today by “liberal arts education”? (Agresto, Churchill, Clark, Dixon-Fyle, Ramseyer)

The session began with a summary from each of the small groups, with Group 2 first, followed by groups 1 and 3. Thus the topics of conversation moved from the “Classicists” to “Non-Westernists” to “Presentists,” as Bill Placher designated them.

**Group 2 summary points:**

The conversation opened by noting the confusion resulting from the various uses of the term “liberal arts”—as a synonym for “humanities” as well as for a particular form of education. Variability in ideas regarding the goal(s) of liberal arts education was also discussed. For example, are the primary goals to gain certain skills or practical expertise, or to search for meaning and to seek knowledge for its own sake… or all of these? And can these different goals be combined into a “satisfactory whole”? In this vein, it was suggested that the “lowest common denominator” of liberal arts education is the pursuit of intellectual skills which can be considered also to be “practical,” to the extent that they “equip one for more than his/her present circumstance” and can be applied throughout one’s lifetime. Studying of the *artes liberales*—and drawing upon a geographically broad knowledge—rather than only relying on the inherited cultural standards of a given culture, was therefore considered an important part of liberal arts education. However, the participants also recognized the importance of considering the implications of how the concept of a broad knowledge base has changed. As Niall Slater and Werner Kelber mentioned, the original *artes liberales* included multiple disciplines such as mathematics and music, but as a result of the Enlightenment, the curricular breadth seems to have taken a different form. These changes have paved the way for today’s courses on cultural studies, gender studies, etc.

Participants then moved on to consider what it really means to study a culture for its own sake. Given that history is full of examples of conquerors studying the cultures of the prospective conquered, can we say that there is such a thing as “totally objective anthropology”? For example, the Romans had an intrinsic interest and respect for the culture they were adapting, but they also conquered the Greeks and despised aspects of Greek politics. Do we have similarly mixed motivations for studying other cultures or for having our students study them? The general response to this question was that although all studies are political in some sense (with respect to who funds the investigation into the culture, how knowledge is disseminated, whether we are interested in other cultures for their own sake or because we can benefit from their techniques, and who determines what becomes published), the understanding of other cultures is still “worth knowing” for liberal arts students because of its transformative potential.

The conversation next turned to whether or not liberal arts education today is as transformative for students as we would desire it to be. A suggestion by Gretchen Reydams-
Schils that more effort should be put into finding “analogies in the theoretical sciences and the liberal arts” led to Lee Yearley’s comment that we are at a transformative moment for liberal arts education: The new challenge is to discover “how to teach cultures that are at least as great as Western culture” and are perhaps dramatically different from ours. This comment provided a nice segue to the report from the first group.

**Group 1 summary points:**

The group had little consensus on whether classical Asian cultures had liberal arts education. On one hand, such cultures seemed to “appreciate a responsive encounter with the past and a defense of intellectual inquiry” and placed emphasis on reading texts and applying the lessons to present circumstances. On the other hand, the cultures differed in their emphases on critical thinking. As Wendy Doniger said, “We disagreed most about… what critical thinking meant and whether it should or should not be part of our definition of the liberal arts…. If critical thinking… is a part of the definition of the liberal arts, then ancient India did not have liberal arts, but I think they did and therefore I would modify our definition of liberal arts to leave out that…. and so the question was, ‘Are we teaching our students to think critically? Is that what it’s all about?’” To this, David Eckel responded that the type of critical thinking gained from an Indian guru would be sufficient for the liberal arts education definition implicit in the 3-fold division of a Buddhist curriculum: 1 To hear (“a respectful encounter with the past”), 2 to think (“a process of critical thinking and writing”), and 3 to apply (“application of both of these to life in the present and future”). Thus, several Asian traditions (including India’s) could be considered to have employed liberal arts education, even if critical thinking were essential for the definition.

The opposing view held that liberal arts education as it is practiced in the U.S. today was historically rooted in “Western”—not Asian—traditions. Raymond Williams articulated this position as follows: “The liberal arts is a tradition… coming out of Greece and Rome… through the Enlightenment and into the American political system that has developed a particular tradition of intellectual vitality that has brought us to this point…. Every culture has had its educational model/development… but that is not the liberal arts as it has developed because the liberal arts are not just the humanities…. They include the Western sciences. Getting to where we are now demands an understanding of those roots… and that’s a way of defining the liberal arts.”

Importantly, it was made clear that the latter type of historical definition of liberal arts education is not antithetical to the study of “non-Western” traditions. In fact, today’s ever-diversifying U.S. population makes the study of cultures which have not been part of our Greco-Roman past all the more valuable for liberal arts students, as they daily interact with others who have not come from the “Western” tradition. The task then is to learn how to integrate “non-Western” cultural studies into a historically “Western” liberal arts education. As indicated by Valerie Ramseyer, the first steps in this process are to re-examine the terms “Western” and “non-Western,” to realize the intrinsic egocentrism in assuming that all the cultures outside the American/European customs can be lumped together in a single phrase (“non-Western”), and then to determine how to join the studies of different cultures to accomplish the aims of liberal arts education.

At this point, the conversation shifted to consider how and to whom to market a multicultural liberal arts education, and how to justify including courses on “non-Western” cultures in the liberal arts educational curriculum. Several audiences were identified, each likely
requiring a slightly different promotional approach. Chief among them were high school students (who want jobs after college), parents (who have to pay for tuition), and state and national legislatures (desiring measurable student benefits), as well as citizens at large who have no interest in the liberal arts or have not considered the value of an education that does not claim to provide purely technical skills. In order to reassert the idea that benefits may be valuable even if not immediately “practical” in the modern sense, a terminology shift from talking about the “uses” of liberal arts education to the “value” of this form of education was suggested. Wendy Doniger noted that a number of older professionals with “useful” skills (lawyers, etc.) are now coming back to college to begin to answer their questions about the world and about life… in other words, to gain a liberal arts education. Such students are convinced of the value of a liberal arts education and could be an important resource for learning how to promote liberal arts education to a broader audience. John Churchill’s summary of this discussion, that the liberal arts are justified by engaging breadth of understanding with questions of meaning and value, met with general agreement.

**Group 3 summary points:**

In considering what is meant today by the term “liberal arts education,” the third group built upon Group 2’s comments and made a distinction between the questions “Are the liberal arts *historically* Western?” and “Are the liberal arts *essentially* Western?” John Agresto elaborated on the latter: “How could [the liberal arts] be geographically bound?… [if the questions are] ‘What’s the difference between nature and convention, what’s justice… what’s the truth of things I could know, what do I owe myself and my neighbors?’… those are not geographic questions.” Instead, as others pointed out, even if the liberal arts were *historically* Western, liberal arts education has since continued to grow as a process (not a certain curriculum) characterized by openness of inquiry. In this sense it is similar to models of reflective equilibrium and moral maturity. That is, a liberally educated person will grow in his or her ability to use theory more effectively while simultaneously using experience to criticize theory more effectively. Inherent in this growth is the understanding that inaccuracies may reside within previous assumptions and therefore that a constant reassessment of truth and beauty is a basic hermeneutic of the liberal arts education.

Discussion ensued on whether 18 year olds are the appropriate recipients for liberal arts education, given that they often lack the life experiences which enrich studies of the classical texts of the West and allow one to balance theory and empiricism. While some participants felt that older students would benefit more (breaking up the “mindless progress” from high school to college), others asserted that immediately after high school is precisely the right time to introduce students to big questions. In this debate, Niall Slater asked the provocative (and largely undiscussed) question of whether a liberal arts education can be obtained in bits and pieces throughout a lifetime (some at age 18, some later, and a final installment after retirement) or if there is value in compressing it into four years immediately after high school. Len Clark concluded the session by remarking that the definition of liberal arts education is actually a rhetorical one that changes depending on the age of the student.
Session 3 (Friday 4:00-5:30 PM)
Are the "liberal arts" a distinctively Western idea?

Bill Placher opened the third session, noting that we left off with a question, "Are the liberal arts inevitably an offshoot of modern Western liberal consciousness?" to which he had added a second, "Can one be liberally educated here and now without knowing something of a "non-Western" culture?" Niall Slater suggested that one might reformulate the first question as follows: Are the liberal arts evitably an offshoot of Western philosophy? To ignore the way they are historically situated now, and to suggest that they have nothing to do with modern Western liberal consciousness, would be to evade something significant (if not essential) about them. Wendy Doniger added that while they begin in the West, that does not mean that the liberal arts are an offshoot of Western consciousness. Valerie Ramseyer suggested then that perhaps the first question should ask not "Are the liberal arts…?" but "Were the liberal arts…?" John Churchill observed that the work being done by this new question is, in a Nietzschean way, shifting us from ontology to genealogy; moving from "what is this thing called liberal arts?" to a question of historical roots before essence. It thereby asks, given the historical context in which it is found, is this the story to be told? This could significantly shift the grounds of the discussion. Gretchen Reydams-Schils noted that she would like to have an ontological statement—if it's phrased in terms of perspective, in terms of cultural and historical epochs. Churchill offered an analogy: The hovering and nectar gathering capacity of the hummingbird is a function of its own specific evolutionary history. Similarly, these capacities of the honeybee are functions of its own specific and different evolutionary history. This is convergent evolution. Maybe the case is similar here, in considering the liberal arts? Similar functions can be arrived at in very different ways. John Agresto interrupted, noting that he isn't sure he understands what's at stake here. What do we mean by this term, "modern"? Is what we have today a product of what we have today? Of course. Does this mean that someone like Erasmus or Aristotle didn't have an understanding of the liberal arts, because they were pre-modern? Doniger agreed, noting that the question here is whether it is more useful to conceive of the liberal arts as a unique historical enterprise or an ancient and pan-cultural enterprise. We can get whatever answer we want by defining it in certain ways. Do we want to say "Hey, we moderns invented the liberal arts!" A different approach, noting that people have been doing this kind of thing for a long time and it must be important, would be more politically useful for us—we shouldn't exclude India, China, etc. from this discussion. Placher then asked, what is unique to the West in the 19th and 20th centuries?

Lee Yearley attempted to give a sort of an answer to this question: Part of what is most constitutive of the 19th century view is that there are a plurality of human goods, there is no way to choose between those goods, and any educational system that doesn’t endorse those claims is in error. (Individuals have grounds for a choice, but there are no grounds for institutionally hierarchical judgments among them.) It's not relativism—rather a form of pluralism. It's an extremely powerful tradition. Len Clark, thinking of the Crito, asked whether this is akin to saying each individual has her own access to divine insight? Yearley replied that the Western liberal would say "Let's not use this language of divine insight," unless one is willing to make that equivalent to one who claims to have no divine insight. It becomes a question of arguments and reasons. Ramseyer asked how long does this tradition go back, on this view? Yearley drew one possible line, claiming that Locke and following generates something like this, but of course
there are monumental permutations. (Is Kant the great God of the tradition, or an errant member of it?) He predicted that, if we talked long enough, we would find that this room is filled with card-carrying Western liberals. Clark added that some refinements would have to be made to exclude people who have chosen a way of life that impinges on those of others. Doniger objected that this is not so modern, citing Herodotus. Yearley replied that yes, some people in every culture have said something like that. The question is whether this is the dominant mode. I think that is uniquely modern.

Werner Kelber noted that what has been called relativism, he would call exquisite cultural sensitivity. This sounds, in fact, like modern religious studies departments, where one is not supposed to teach the superiority of Christianity. Reydams-Schils added that this illustrates why pluralism isn't relativism. Even if you have a strong position, a truth you're committed to, you have to be prepared to give arguments. Yearley qualified that we're not talking about someone who refuses to give reasons. But Clark pressed, asking whether we can ask if that is inherently Western? Is there a way to say that without stipulating individual rights? Yearley replied that he has the highest respect for the Confucian tradition—a person has to be able to claim their life for themselves in their own understanding. Agresto then asked whether "modern liberal consciousness" is the judgment that we will not make judgments? Yearley replied that, no, judgment is the stuff of life; you have to adjudicate among those judgments in a principled manner, and one of the principles is that there isn't any guaranteed right answer. Agresto replied that the liberal arts has always said, "Here are alternatives, how do we choose between them?" We ask positions to make an account of themselves. That is what the liberal arts do—and this presupposes that there is a right answer, it's not just a collection of opinions. Yearley asked in reply whether the educator's business is then to make students understand why a given way of life is best? He added that there is lots of give-and-take in Confucian/Buddhist education, perhaps more than in Western.

Churchill observed that he is now confused about what the position is. One element is a de facto recognition of the plurality of visions about human goods—that's just the terrain. But then a distinction is made between that an individual can do some things on his or her behalf in embracing such a view, but a social unit cannot? Yearley replied that these are questions within political philosophy. Giving of reasons is the coin of the realm. Churchill pressed, asking whether those reasons can be better or worse? By which criterion?, added Reydams-Schils. Yearley appealed to the well-known criteria of thinking. Agresto added that we can start with the principle of non-contradiction; with which, Reydams-Schils noted, Aristotle was not familiar. Doniger noted that one of the possibilities, not built in, is to assume that there is more than one good life. Churchill agreed that that makes a big difference. Clark continued to balk, noting that these reformulations are improving this position, but it still doesn't acknowledge that an assertion of rights is fundamental. We're trying to make it more epistemological than metaphysical. Most of us would argue that no assertion that "this is the best life for x" had been proved. Such a proof would be tantamount to proving a miracle, in Hume's sense. In principle there are more reasons for suspecting any such claim than accepting it—so something else seems to be going on, and that seems to be "rights." Reydams-Schils wanted to push us further, noting that the judgment that "there is a best life" is, in itself, not problematic. The problem is when you start whacking people over the head or putting them in prison to impose the judgment. Perhaps individual dissent is not acceptable elsewhere in the world as in the West. But it still gives you alternative perspectives, with far-reaching effects on the way people live their lives. No system will be totally devoid of critical inquiry, or a critical stance. For us, the claim may be that the Western
liberal tradition perhaps offers a particularly strong form of critical inquiry. Yearley replied that he doesn't see a claim about strong or unique roles being made here. Rather, by and large, in the modern secular academy, students learn critical inquiry about whether there is a best way of life, as opposed to a faculty member telling a student that a certain way is best.

Placher then suggested that we turn to the second question, whether one can be liberally educated here and now, without knowing something of a non-Western culture? Doniger opened the discussion, "That's easy: No." She continued to note that, for example, even if you say that the liberal arts are Western, the West has Chinese in it today. Agresto then asked whether we'd have to say that the ancients, who didn't have Chinese in their world, were not liberally educated if they didn't know about China. Doniger replied that, to be liberally educated, one has to know about one's world. So if the Chinese are part of your world, then you should know something about China to be liberally educated. Agresto noted that he would agree that one can't be liberally educated without knowing something other than one's own culture. But he wouldn't want to say "It must be this." Greece and Rome used to count as something "other" to us, and the idea of understanding the "other" has always been a part of a liberal arts education. Slater added that he would be willing to defend a position that said otherness could be grasped across time, not just geography. Mac Dixon-Fyle then asked how different are non-Western cultures, anyway? Most cultures are hybrids, are globally contaminated by other cultures—take Japan for example.

Placher then shifted the question: Do we have to know about everybody? Given the argument that understanding the "other" helps us to understand ourselves, do we need to know about every different culture? There is so much to be known about our world… Doniger replied that we have to get the principle that not everybody is like us. That's the most important part. Of course, you can't know something about everybody. She would settle for knowing something about a few different cultures. There has to be a beginning. Reydams-Schils noted that this goes back to the problem of eclecticism. As long as you have a firm anchoring point, eclecticism can be very enriching. It's also about openness, inquiry. Doniger continued that it doesn't really matter where one begins. The point is to have had enough of an education to be able to recognize that when something falls into your lap, it's worth looking at. Placher replied that we do have to plan what we're going to teach our students. Clark noted that he's tempted to think that a Quaker way is helpful. George Fox said that, "There is that of God in every person." Epistemologically, Quaker educators take that to mean that "You don't know the truth unless you know the perspectives of others different from you." So you should start with the most different. That should be easy to adopt for liberal arts education. One essential component is to understand the possibilities, to understand the different framework assumptions that could be applied to a body of experience. But Placher cautioned that there might be a danger in finding an otherness so vast that it would have been better to start with something easier. Take for example Tristes Tropiques—when Levi-Strauss finally finds people who've never seen Westerners, he can't communicate with them. Agresto suggested that we're looking then for both real difference and distance (adding that there might then be more value in studying classical than modern China, since modern China was so profoundly shaped by that Westerner, Marx).

Kelber noted that the issue of eclecticism is not new to the liberal arts—even if the liberal arts is restricted to something Western, one still faces the problem of eclecticism, of which period in the West one will privilege and focus on—we shouldn't pretend that eclecticism is a new obstacle. But, Reydams-Schils noted, the problem is greater now than it used to be—our view of antiquity is so much different from the view of antiquity in 12th century, because we have
so many more materials available to us. Dixon-Fyle observed that in our quest for eclecticism, we also have a quest for alterity. We look for exotic communities, and romanticize them. We don't hold them to the same exacting standards as we would a Western culture. How do we combat that, which is a huge problem in liberal arts? (He cited as an example his disagreements with the Afrocentrics at Temple, who portray Egypt as more important than Greece.) Kelber agreed that even Africans can articulate Western, even racist, understandings of Africa. Dixon-Fyle continued that the Afrocentrics argue against this Europeanized view of Africa in the wrong way—they make claims that cannot reasonably be sustained. Afrocentrics' work aims to raise Africa to the level of European esteem. Kelber agreed that the Afrocentrics' is an image of Africa based on European models.

Placher observed that we've been talking about the value of a model different from ourselves. But we haven't talked about why we would choose to teach, for example, Indian culture instead of Ancient Greek culture. Yearley noted that ancient China is dramatically different from Western culture—sorting out these principles can be very important. Doniger replied, that Confucius is more like an ancient Greek—he's rational, he seems like a sensible fellow—whereas no one in India seems like a sensible fellow. Eckel agreed that it's useful to emphasize differences pragmatically in a course. It is useful to emphasize differences, because it's out of difference that certain forms of understanding arise, but what we're really doing is deciding how to select what is studied. We're trying to choose things from our own pasts. India is very much a part of the living past of our students, so they need to study it—because it's close to them, not necessarily because it's the “other.” Students need to be led into the living religious options. Plato is less available than the Tao te Ching might be in religious marketplace of ideas. Sensing two competing justifications emerging, Placher then asked whether we're learning this because its radical difference helps us understand ourselves better, or because it's not different and therefore helps us understand ourselves? Yearley observed that part of what goes on now in liberal arts is teaching young Chinese Americans about their culture. Doniger added that you teach what you know, until you get tired of it; you teach what students ask you to teach. There are lots of irrational reasons behind these choices—of course, whatever we choose to teach has to make the cut. Clark observed that with respect to how our discussion influences choosing a liberal arts curriculum, there's always a danger that—we may miss the mark by a wider margin if—we give students texts that they can't manage. He and his wife, for example, failed to successfully teach a high school Sunday school group, because we didn't understand where they were, which questions would engage them. Determining who or what or which culture seems to be a smaller problem than choosing things that the students will understand.

Reydams-Schils remarked that she is always puzzled when the question of choice comes up. Why can't one institution teach about China, and another teach India? There is a tyranny of conformity in academia. Once you make a choice, stand for it. But of course we want to win in the US News and World Report rankings. Clark suggested that we could extend Yearley's earlier statement: There is no right to enforce a vision of the best curriculum. But Churchill asked who would be constrained by this claim? Minister of education, deans, faculty, individuals designing course syllabi? Doniger added that it is also a question of timing. After 9/11, many people brought in new materials, not just about Islam, but also about evil. This was in response to popular demand. Certain events prompt a need to study certain things in a class—racial issues, etc. And teachers should alter their plans to respond to the need. (Yearley observed that new questions these days would address empire—texts like the Aeneid become appropriate.) Hock then asked whether anybody here would object if, teaching a class in the ancient world, one were
to ask a student to give reasons to choose either Rome or Athens as the more influential ancient power? His worry is that we're suggesting that the idea of privileging anything in any way is abhorrent—is that correct? Kelber replied that we should encourage students to engage in critical inquiry. To which Raymond Williams asked, on what criterion do you determine what constitutes critical inquiry? At what point does one come to judgments? Until we can answer these questions, we can't evaluate other cultures. For example, he could claim that African sculpture is better than Greek or Roman sculpture, but his criteria come out of a non-African tradition—he is himself outside of that culture's definition of beauty.

Placher observed that we had talked about fundamentalists earlier. Fundamentalists have a vision of the good life. Assuming that that vision is not totalitarian with respect to other lives… (Doniger interrupted, "Which it is.") "Necessarily?" Placher replied, and continued, So a fundamentalist Southern Baptist from a small town in Indiana… (Doniger: "Needs to learn to stop that.") Kelber continued that such a student should learn to look at fundamentalism critically. Which, Reydams-Schils added, is against principles of fundamentalism. Agresto replied that he would welcome fundamentalists into his classroom, because they are committed in an odd way to the truth, and we can then argue about that truth. At least this person wants to know the truth about things, even if his sources are wrong. Dixon-Fyle disagreed, that a fundamentalist is not open to reasons and argument, since he "already knows" the truth. Agresto continued that he is more worried by the total relativist who doesn't care—one can't argue with him. Williams suggested that the liberal arts are best protection against fundamentalism, because the rules of the game imply commitments that are antithetical, not to deep belief, not to the distinction between right and wrong, but to the closed mind. The value of the liberal arts are that they can protect us from that—liberal arts are just about our only protection against that. We live in a dangerous world. Fundamentalisms are enhanced by globalization and immigration—people have to figure out who they are in opposition to other groups. This is a critical time. Being educated requires you to understand other views so that you can't go out and simply kill them. Doniger recounted an anecdote of one Indian fundamentalist who, after telling her that her understanding of Hinduism was all wrong, when she asked him to point out her mistakes, replied that "of course I'd never read any of your books." You can't argue with someone like that.

Ramseyer asked the group to define what is fundamentalism. Doniger noted that religion as such is not fundamentalism. Kelber continued that historical critical analysis of the Bible is an important contribution that the liberal arts can make to challenge fundamentalism. Agresto recalled the important question in the Euthyphro: Is X good because God said it, or did God say X because it's good? Only religious students in class get that question, and understand its importance. But, Reydams-Schils noted, the fundamentalist is one who will not respect others. Williams added that totalitarian states can be a kind of fundamentalist. Yearley noted that a certain kind of "secular relativist" can be a fundamentalist. There is no way to ask that person how their position might be wrong. Clark suggested that we are fundamentalists about assertion of rights. Yearley continued that it seems that there is something about this civil society that we're committed to. Churchill then attempted to offer a definition of fundamentalism that highlights its antagonist relation to liberal arts education. Suppose fundamentalism is fundamentally an epistemological position that holds that all questions are to decided by dictates of an authority who is established by the fundamentalist as absolute, except that the fundamentalist does not recognize that creation of that authority is an act by the fundamentalist himself. This represents a displacement of responsibility from the fundamentalist to the authority. The paragraph that we discussed from last weekend articulates qualities about one's
attitude toward one's own beliefs, which are antithetical to the fundamentalist. Churchill then recounted as an example an incident at a wedding he had attended. A fundamentalist had chosen particularly misogynist passages from the Bible for the reading, and as he was reading them he looked up and said, "Ladies, don't blame me, it says so right here." Reydams-Schils noted that with fundamentalism, there is always a threat of violence under the surface, because there's no response to rational argumentation. Spellman then suggested this might constitute another argument for exposure to non-Western cultures. If the potential for fundamentalism can be caught early on, then those examples might serve to alter the fundamentalist's trajectory.

Placher seized this occasion to think about plans for tomorrow's discussion, and ways to bring all this back down to earth. It seems that we've agreed provisionally on some principles—what does that look like in a class full of students? Clark asked whether Placher intends the group to discuss issues of practice, or marketing? They are differing destinations. Kelber added that how the liberal arts relates to community might also be a worthwhile topic—a kind of translation. Placher suggested that we should probably focus on these issues of translation rather than marketing. He then defined the question for tomorrow morning's small groups: Given what we've said, and focusing on the place of non-Western material in liberal arts, how do we explain why it's worth doing? Kelber added a note about audiences: to ourselves, to colleagues in sciences, to general public, to state legislatures.
Session 4 (Saturday, 10:45 AM-12:15 PM)
Discussion of reports from the morning’s small groups.

Pre-discussion reminder: Before beginning the session, participants were reminded of the request for each person to write a short essay (250-500 words) about topics related to the conference, for LiberalArtsOnline. Essays may be submitted online at http://www.liberalarts.wabash.edu/liberalartsonline/laosubmit.html

Small group discussion topic (identical for each group): Given what we have thus far said about liberal arts education and the place of “non-Western” material in such an education, how can we make the case for a liberal arts education in our modern world? Additional topics considered were as follows:

- **Group 1**: Western civilization as the core of liberal arts education
- **Group 2**: Required courses in non-Western material as part of a liberal arts education
- **Group 3**: Integrated courses including Western and non-Western material.

To maximize the diversity of discussion, participants were divided into three new small groups rather than re-forming groups identical to those of Session 2. Groups met for 1.5 hours prior to gathering for large-group discussion. The summaries below are listed in the order in which they were presented.

**Group 3 summary points:**

Werner Kelber presented the group’s reflections on what they considered to be two defining properties of liberal arts education: 1. The liberal arts are rooted in the ancient Greco-Roman concept of *humanitas*—the seven “liberal arts” including arts, music, science, mathematics, and astronomy. 2. Although these are the roots of liberal arts education, the notion of *humanitas* is a developing one which has been supplemented and expanded in the many years since its inception. Central to the development throughout the years was the emphasis on freedom of inquiry, defined by qualities such as critical thinking, the ability and methodology to pursue comparative thinking, freedom of conscience, and the exercise of global citizenship.

Given freedom of inquiry as “the most important attribute of the liberal arts,” the group questioned how to judge which curricula should be included in a liberal arts education. The phrase “the greatest manageable difference” was coined to describe the optimal theoretical limits of curricular inclusiveness. That is, students pursuing a liberal arts education should be exposed to materials or cultures of the greatest difference from their own native experiences, up to the point that can be intellectually and emotionally managed by the student, in order to develop openness to inquiry. To test the validity of “the greatest manageable difference” criterion as a means of identifying successful forms of liberal arts education, a hypothetical model of a curriculum based on Hindu intellectual life was introduced. If a Hindu school in the United States were to present a primarily Hindu curriculum in which the concept of “difference” was introduced to students by the study of Buddhist culture (without including any historically “Western” tradition), would graduates of the school have received a liberal arts education? The answer to this question was not clear. The general consensus of the small group was that the curriculum should be accepted as a liberal arts one provided that the criteria mentioned above (development of critical and comparative thinking, freedom of conscience, etc.) were met.
However, there was uncertainty about whether the criteria could be met without including concepts from the “Western” scientific tradition of comparison and criticism of ideas.

Mac Dixon-Fyle built upon the hypothetical scenario by asking if a model based exclusively on African and Chinese material would be sufficient for a liberal arts program or if even this type of institution would have to rely on Western concepts. To this, Gretchen Reydams-Schils responded that the idea of “critical inquiry” can perhaps be expanded beyond the typical Western view to include ontological criticism. In this case, Western tradition might not be required for students to achieve a sense of critical inquiry. Yet, at the same time, an understanding of the Western viewpoint would likely be valuable for students engaged in a non-Western course of study, just as the reverse is true. In both cases, studying a culture dissimilar to one’s own can encourage questioning one’s own assumptions. This was viewed as a strong reason for including the study of other cultures in a liberal arts education.

A subsequent conversation focused on the issue of how different two cultures must be in order to satisfy the “greatest manageable difference” requirement. Some pairs of cultures are obviously “different enough;” for example, Hinduism versus Buddhism, African versus Chinese, and “Western” versus “non-Western.” What about other less clear-cut cases, such as introducing African-American students to traditional African culture? Is this exposure sufficient enough to bring about the desired student growth? This question led David Eckel to propose that having exposure to “difference” as a main criterion for liberal arts education is not sufficient. Rather, liberal arts education should allow students to use the study of different cultures to situate themselves in a certain time and place, re-constructing their pasts in a way that uses the realization of “difference” not only to challenge them but also to connect to them. Thus, the study of African history might be “just right” for the liberal arts education of African Americans.

The diversity of a faculty at a liberal arts college was also considered as a means of introducing independent ways of thinking to students (another avenue to the “greatest manageable difference”). Although participants generally agreed that a liberal arts education could not be obtained at an institution that does not allow freedom of inquiry, views varied on whether it is appropriate for an institution to adopt hiring practices intended to increase faculty homogeneity on issues such as religious beliefs or specific disciplinary perspectives. Of most dispute seemed to be whether such institutions (for example, ones that accept only faculty who view history through a particular scholarly lens, or hire only members of a certain church, etc.) can or do actually allow freedom of inquiry. While a number of people cited examples of religiously-affiliated colleges where freedom of inquiry abounds, others held that colleges that limit their faculty to members of a certain religion are by definition in violation of the commitment to openness of ideas and freedom of inquiry perceived to be essential to liberal arts education.

John Churchill brought the issue closer to home by reflecting that a department’s ability to hire someone subscribing to a particular historical canon (or, by analogy, an institution’s ability to hire only members of a given religious background) is important for maintaining the intellectual community of the department (or institution). Forcing the hiring of someone outside of the desired canon could be suicidal to the department’s identify, which is centered on a shared philosophy of how to teach history. From this assertion erupted several adamant reactions which can be jointly summarized as follows: While departments should perhaps be able to monitor their own hiring practices, what must not happen is for a department or institution only to share one viewpoint with students and declare that all other viewpoints are incorrect, without at least the possibility of discussion. Thus, departments or liberal arts institutions may differ from one
another in their primary views of certain topics, but a common element should be intellectual openness and a willingness to hold one’s views up for examination. Consistent with this idea of maintaining openness of inquiry, although the institution’s faculty does not need to consist of individuals representing each possible view of an issue, the professors should be familiar with (and talk about) the views of those who are not physically represented on the faculty. In this way, even an institution where the majority of the faculty use a single academic or non-academic lens can preserve students’ freedom to decide with which of the voices within the liberal arts they will agree.

Group 2 summary points:

As Gretchen Reydams-Schils reported, group 2 discussed the practical issue of how to integrate non-Western material into a liberal arts education. Possible models included adding on extra units to an existing curriculum, introducing a Great Books of the East program similar to that of St. Johns, or asking faculty to bring in a non-Western component into their “Western” courses (for example, bringing a Chinese section into a classics class). Each of these models faces the challenge of relying on faculty members who are not experts in non-Western traditions. However, it was noted that summer seminars and the internet can be tremendous resources for information on choosing a text translation or gaining ideas of especially effective teaching practices outside the professor’s specialized field. Such tools can also help bridge the gap between the new subject matter and the faculty member’s own area of interest, coordinating the different course components. Regardless of how the non-Western material is integrated, the main point is that the subjects be taught with intellectual rigor, rather than merely giving students “a bit of everything” without any depth or challenge for inquiry. Importantly, this point is based on a definition of liberal arts education that relies to a greater extent on a process of teaching than on a pre-defined core curriculum (which might or might not include non-Western materials).

Having discussed ways of introducing non-Western texts into liberal arts education, the group moved on to consider how to convince others that this type of education has value. Lee Yearley indicated that there is extraordinary difference even among faculty in how to approach this subject, particularly in how faculty members would answer the question of what would lead one to believe that Plato has any relevance for an 18-year old in today’s world. In order to make a case for liberal arts education, we must acknowledge the competing mode for training a national leader: “Professional” education. Even if one assumes that understanding other cultures is necessary in the modern world, is studying texts from those cultures the only path toward understanding, and is such study critical for one’s professional development? To this query, Gretchen Reydams-Schils suggested that stories of people’s own experiences in liberal arts classrooms are a powerful way of bringing attention to the benefits of the kinds of studies undertaken in a liberal arts education. Databases with survey information of recent and not-so-recent graduates from liberal arts programs are underutilized as a means of increasing a broader audience’s awareness of the goals and successes of liberal arts education. In addition, as Raymond Williams pointed out, promotional efforts need to recognize the cultural disjunction that sometimes (in a stereotypic sense) exists between people in high-level positions who are aware of the value of liberal arts education and those who may not have experienced this form of education but are responsible for hiring entry-level candidates in the business arena.
Group 1 summary points:

Bill Spellman introduced Group 1’s reflections on how best to relay the value of a liberal arts education by suggesting a change in terminology. Rather than speaking of the advertising process as “translating” the value for a broader audience (a term indicating that liberal arts goals are somehow foreign to the audience), we should refer to it as “communicating” (a term assuming the audience is already familiar with some elements of the goals of liberal arts education and/or is easily able to identify with them). In addition, proponents of liberal arts education should make the case that the merits are both intrinsic and extrinsic/practical (not just one or the other). John Agresto’s LiberalArtsOnline piece describing the practicality of liberal arts ideas for the Founding Fathers is a good example of this type of effort. [See “Reflection and Choice,” http://www.liberalarts.wabash.edu/publications/liberalartsonline/archives/choice.html.]

Focusing on the sense of community that develops at liberal arts colleges outside as well as in the classroom is also important, since parents who are skeptical about the perceived elitism of such colleges will be glad to know that their children will be able to apply their community-building skills after leaving college and entering the greater societal community. This aspect of the Center of Inquiry’s “operational definition” of the liberal arts is especially appealing.

Finally, we should realize that the introduction of non-Western ideas into primarily Western curricula will likely be assumed to harbor a political agenda which may or may not be enticing to incoming students or their parents. A more fruitful way to disarm fears about this is to consider the non-Western course requirements from the point of view of common human problems. For example, the following are possible means of explaining the importance of studying non-Western texts as part of a liberal arts education. The texts (1) aid our understanding of community and how communities may be organized in different ways, (2) help us to understand our history and learn about our ancestors in the context of the history of others, (3) may be useful for identifying the strengths of our own institutions/ways of living and also reforming aspects that would benefit from improvement.
Session 5 (Saturday, 3:30-5:00 PM)
Pedagogical conclusions: what is the place of the "non-West" in liberal arts curricula?

In the fifth session (Saturday afternoon), our attention was turned to concrete examples, different methods or approaches to bringing non-Western materials into the curriculum. A number of examples were presented, ranging from particular courses to larger curricular units. In the course of these discussions, a number of pedagogical issues were also raised, which are addressed below.

Examples of integrative approaches
Participants could illustrate a variety of different approaches that integrate Eastern cultures and perspectives into a liberal arts education. These range from efforts within single courses, to course sequences and inclusion in core and general education requirements, to interdisciplinary majors, to a master's degree program devoted to the Eastern classics.

Howard University: a 100-level classics course, "Slavery in the Ancient World." Because many students at Howard assume that Blacks were the only people historically enslaved, this course looks not only at Greek and Roman slavery, but also the Law of Hammarabi, and ancient Egyptian materials. [Rudolph Hock]

Rice University: a team-taught (by 3 colleagues) course in the Religious Studies department on "Sacred Scripture in Judaism, Christianity and Islam." [See attached syllabus] Students must immerse themselves in each particular faith and tradition, and must do some comparative work. The role of interpretation and commentary in each tradition is examined. This is a junior-level course but without prerequisites; of 28 students, only 3 are religious studies majors, perhaps 3 others have taken prior courses in the department. [Werner Kelber]

Boston University: a course on "pilgrimage." This comparative course includes some material from Native American peyote quests, Basho's Narrow Road to the Interior, the Islamic Haj, and other pilgrimages. http://www.bu.edu/religion/courses/coursespage/courses-new.html#rn102 [David Eckel]

Wellesley College: medieval history courses that integrate East and West. In fact, for the medieval period, an East/West distinction doesn't necessarily work. A course on the Eastern Mediterranean from 300-1200 CE covers the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, Islam and the Crusades. http://www.wellesley.edu/Courses/history.html#305 [Valerie Ramseyer]

DePauw University: a number of new courses are being developed as part of a new African Studies major: [For the time being see web information about a Black Studies minor at http://www.depauw.edu/acad/black/.] An interdisciplinary major like this brings with it many benefits of cross-fertilization, across methodologies as well as across traditions. [Mac Dixon-Fyle]

Wabash College: the College's core course, "Cultures and Traditions" or "C&T," required of all sophomores, incorporates readings from Eastern texts as parts of several topical units, as
well as a module devoted to the texts of classical China:
http://www.wabash.edu/depart/CandT/ [Raymond Williams]

*Boston University:* Great Books courses in the Core curriculum that include Eastern texts (not all BU students take this core curriculum): http://www.bu.edu/core/ [See especially CC101 and CC102] This was just about the only place available for this kind of integration at BU. Students do read complete texts. [David Eckel]

*University of North Carolina at Asheville:* the general education sequence includes a course devoted to Eastern material: http://www.unca.edu/humanities/ [See especially Humanities 124 and Humanities 414] [Bill Spellman]

*University of Notre Dame:* Program of Liberal Studies: This is a distinct program within the university, it constitutes a distinct major, with its own faculty. Students' curriculum is largely set, with very few electives. In addition to "great books" courses, there are also tutorials in the seven *artes liberales*. Professors continue to conduct research in their own areas of specialization, which are largely disciplinary. http://www.nd.edu/~pls/Readinglist.html [See especially Seminar V] [Gretchen Reydams-Schils]

*St John's College, New Mexico:* offers a master's degree program in Eastern Classics: http://www.sjcsf.edu/academic/grads2.htm The decision was made not to try to bring Eastern philosophic traditions "piecemeal" into the undergraduate curriculum, but to set up a program with its own integrity—a four-semester graduate program, with a language component. [John Agresto]

**Pedagogical issues related to integration**
In the course of discussing these different examples of integrating Eastern and Western materials, a number of related pedagogical issues were touched upon.

*On teaching oral traditions:* Dixon-Fyle noted that one of the benefits and challenges of teaching oral traditions is that it introduces students to the challenges of ensuring corroboration. Students must work with epic material, material from Griots, but must use these oral traditions' materials alongside documentary materials.

*On faculty incentives to teach outside their specializations:* Eckel asked of the Wabash "Cultures and Traditions" course whether there are any faculty incentives to teach in it? Williams explained that junior faculty are expected to teach such "all-college" courses before their fourth year review, but he added that these courses often get our best faculty, department chairs, etc. Eckel noted that similar requirements existed for the analogous courses at Columbia.

*On criteria for inclusion of works:* John Churchill asked Agresto and Eckel about the reading lists at BU and St. John's: what was the principle of selection for inclusion of Eastern materials? Was it "greatness"? Or did you look for texts that stood in traditions of origin with a standing comparable to Western texts, in other words, texts that function as "cultural literacy texts," that raise question of meaning and value, "canonical texts"? Eckel explained that, so far as he knows (as a newcomer to the core courses), the criteria are a combination of the three: texts should be
"great," of historical or cultural significance, and should raise important questions because they can enter into dialogue with each other and with Western texts. He added a fourth criterion: we try to explore different genres. For example, in the second year, students read & listen to Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. Agresto added that at St. John's, liberal arts education is not thought of as disciplinary. It is not even to "look at different views and collect opinions." Rather, the task is to spend four years looking at important perennial questions that should be grappled with through the best texts. The foundational texts of a new way of thinking are often the most persuasive, because they had to make the strongest arguments. As a result, we couldn't imagine doing without Plato.

*On canonicity:* This remark prompted a question from Niall Slater: What degree of self-consciousness is there about canonicity? Agresto replied that the last thing we see ourselves doing at St. John's is "teaching a canon." To a question from Lee Yearley, Agresto explained that a commentary tradition does not constitute a canon, because a canon implies a rule and a development and a telos. Rather, we see constant bickering in the traditions. He added that time has probably killed more great books than it has preserved. Slater added that multiple canon processes have given us the books we've got. He finds it quite valuable to discuss with students why we have the Greek tragedies we have. Agresto agreed, noting that at St. John's, the last faculty meeting is about what to teach next year. Some questions are pedagogical, for example, one can't do both *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. (He added that seminars at St. John's are bizarre, compared to the rest of the world. Each class has two tutors, one of whom asks an opening question.) Slater offered an example of the problems that canons pose: he tends to teach some of Euripides tragedies that don't meet the standard mode. It's an accident of survival; there must have been many other different tragedies. Reydams-Schils agreed that Slater's point about canon formation is a good one. We talk about it, but only among the faculty. We have non-Western texts in the Liberal Studies curriculum, and they face certain problems. We haven't, for example, come to a conclusion about Islamic texts (in part because to put something in means to take something out.)

*On Islam:* Ramseyer remarked that, from her medievalist perspective, it seems strange to consider Islam non-Western. Len Clark asked her if she must do much work to correct mistaken images of Islam? She replied that most students have had no encounters with Islamic history. Islamic philosophy is fairly rational; but the lives of saints are much harder for students to comprehend without attributing it to superstition. (She added a lament for the poor middle ages—nobody seems to think that there are any great books in the middle ages.) Eckel took up her concern that Islam and Islamic texts seem not quite to fit in the Eastern-Western dichotomy, asking for suggestions of how to teach Islam, and how its status may have changed in recent years. Dixon-Fyle noted that at DePauw, they have an Islamicist who works with primary Arabic sources. Dixon-Fyle himself primarily does an introduction of the history of Islam from the 7th century, via trade, and relations established between ancient kingdoms—he relies on secondary sources. Eckel added another anecdote from an introductory course on religions of Asia. A Sikh student complained that Sikhism and Islam weren't mentioned in the course—I realized that we can't teach about religions of Asia w/o teaching about Islam; it's too significant. Ramseyer added that the Qur'an is a bad choice for a great books course. Students tend to read it like the Bible, but it cannot be read that way. Muslims don't read it as Christians read Bible. A better first text would be the *Life of Mohammed*. It's a narrative—from there you can include
portions of the Qur'an. (It is not that one shouldn't include the Qur'an, but rather that if only one text is to be included, it is not the best.) Yearley noted that specialists are beginning to address the question of how to facilitate the inclusion of the Qur'an in general education, great books or core courses. Eckel suggested that a pragmatic choice could be another great Islamic text, the Conference of the Birds. Ramseyer also mentioned Al-Ghazali as a possibility.

Reydams-Schils asked what the place of Spain in Islamic history should be. Spellman added that this is why UNC-Asheville includes the Song of Roland. Kelber noted that he was recently asked to give a talk on the impact of 9/11 on the humanities. He is uncomfortable with the notion that as a result of 9/11, we should rush to make appointments in Islam. We were interested in it prior to 9/11 (and continue to be) for its intrinsic value as a major culture and faith, and for its interactions with Western and Eastern cultures. It ought to be part of curriculum. Dixon-Fyle pointed to the Sufi tradition of mysticism (including Conference of the Birds and Al-Ghazali). Students are struck by difference of traditions between older Muslim tradition and contemporary African Islamic traditions.

Yearley proposed a hypothesis, two reasons why it has been hard to bring Islam into our curricula: First, Islam is so large, and complicated, and women are excluded. Second, Islam challenges all kinds of ways of thinking about what one means by a tradition—it makes one ask new questions about Christianity and Buddhism. Reydams-Schils added that there are certain ways in which the Islamic tradition connects well with the Judeo-Christian traditions. Yearley added that certain Western epistemologies, such as Plantinga's, allow Islamic fundamentalists to do exactly what they want to do.

On training faculty, the role of specialists, and the use of translations: Bill Placher raised the question of expertise—linguistic or otherwise. In small institutions, or in doing a staff-taught course, we end up having materials taught by people who can only read it in translation, and who don't have much or any background with the material. Yearly recalled a number of models that were identified in the morning session. There could be quite a bit done with the web, and this might be a project for the Center of Inquiry to work on: how to choose good translations. Other possibilities include short courses for faculty during the summer, to help integrate one or more texts. This can be talked about in terms of texts, or in terms of a course, and can become a seed for the rest of the faculty. Spellman noted that there are certain advantages for an interested layperson (non-specialist) being a co-learner teaching a topic. Reydams-Schils pointed out a potential problem with a dialectical-learner model: people will rebel against the expert, and won't talk about their interpretation with the "expert." Agresto offered an example: reading the Odyssey. What, he asked, are the important issues that only a classicist has access to? He added that he doesn't think there are any. Slater suggested that the role of oral literature is one that a classicist would be best prepared to handle. Reydams-Schils added another example: Aristotle's city-state is just as utopian as other ideas—without recognizing this from other contextual background, we can fall into a kind of literalism that hides the text from us. Yearly pointed out two more examples, Confucius' Analects and the Tao Te Ching—there are questions about what those texts are. The elusiveness of the texts means that a translator has to give you a strong interpretation. (In fact, in some cases, later-century commentaries are mistaken for the original texts.) This may sound like a picky philological point, but it is critical that one not use terms like "being" and "nonbeing" in translating Lao Tzu. If you do, you make it a pale version of what you already know.
Churchill observed that yesterday, we had a caricature of the problem of texts in translation: either one knows the original language and recognizes the surrounding literature (and can thus hear all of their resonances in a given text), or one reads a text in translation, hitting a brick wall. But it seems that the faculty at St. John's learned enough Sanskrit to know frailty of translation. The term "arête" is another example: You don't have to read Homer in the original Greek to know that this word shows up there, with different resonances than in Aristotle. Reydams-Schils agreed that there are two excesses to be avoided here— we must not restrict education to experts, nor can we allow our students and ourselves to go anywhere in interpreting texts—we must know when to ask for help. Yearley added that "strangeness" has to be dealt with. We haven't dealt with the subject of stereotypes that students bring to texts (and may match the stereotypes that faculty bring). Or the translator, added Eckel. Closing the session, Agresto summarized this thread by noting that we want the best translations that we can get, even if they are always limited. At St. John's, for example, we did our own translations of Aristotle's *Politics* and *Ethics*. 
Session 6 (Saturday, 7:15-8:30 PM)
Suggestions for Future Projects

After again announcing that participants should plan to submit an essay related to the current colloquy to LiberalArtsOnline, Bill Placher opened the floor for suggestions on how to follow up the weekend’s conversations. He also solicited other recommendations for the Center of Inquiry. The responses are listed below, with their advocates indicated in brackets.

1. [Werner Kelber] The Center of Inquiry should continue its efforts to be in touch with Wabash faculty and with what departments at Wabash are doing.
2. [Werner Kelber] The Center of Inquiry should consider being involved in the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCHI).
3. [Werner Kelber] Colloquies such as the one this weekend would be particularly beneficial for deans of schools in the liberal arts whose time is often filled by administrative duties rather than conversations like we have had here. Mixing the number of deans with the number of faculty might be a good idea, to ensure exposure of the deans to the discussions.
4. [Len Clark] One practical outcome of the colloquy could be for the Center of Inquiry to encourage people with models of integrated Western/non-Western curricula (such as a subset of this weekend’s discussants) to participate in one of the American Association of Deans’ sessions at AAC&U’s annual meeting.
5. [David Eckel] Including admissions officers from liberal arts schools in conversations about the goals of liberal arts education would be useful, to allow them to be better informed when recruiting students.
6. [Gretchen Reydams-Schils] Notre Dame University’s survey information from alumni describing the benefits of their liberal arts educations may be of use to the Center. [She will share these data with the Center.]
7. [Len Clark] This weekend’s conversations have generated multiple elements of a book that might be entitled, “What every Stanford trustee and donor ought to know about the case for the liberal arts as essential to training citizens and citizen leaders.” The Center of Inquiry could be instrumental in facilitating the writing of such a book. The purpose of the book would be to put forth a case for liberal arts education that is accessible to those outside the world of academia (or outside of liberal arts colleges). An alternative title [suggested by Gretchen Reydams-Schils] could be “What everyone always wanted to know about the liberal arts and never dared to ask.”
8. [Mac Dixon-Fyle] It is imperative to move this weekend’s conversation beyond this small group. A place to start is for us to go back to our home campuses and re-initiate the conversation there.
9. [Len Clark] If it hasn’t been done recently, it might be useful for the Center to hire someone to repeat the study from a few years ago that purported to show that engineering graduates tended to have more prestigious positions in companies, but that later the liberal arts graduates ended up leading the companies. Another thought is to support the writing of a “popularized” book whose content is similar to that of Martha Nussbaum’s Cultivating Humanity but which is aimed at less of an academic audience.
10. [John Agresto] In the late 1980’s, NEH did a number of studies surveying CEO’s secretaries and asking them where their bosses went to college and what they majored in. At
that time, well over half were from liberal arts colleges or had a liberal arts degree. It might be useful for the Center to repeat a similar survey to determine if this trend is still true today.

11. [John Agresto] Two other even more radical topics could be interesting for the Center to investigate. 1. Talk with the principles of high schools to determine the status of the liberal arts in their schools (since many students’ “liberal arts education” will proceed no further than high school). 2. Investigate what graduate schools are doing to prepare faculty to teach in liberal arts colleges. [Other participants noted that similar efforts for the second suggestion have been made in English and by the psychological association.]

12. [Gretchen Reydams-Schils] Given that the European Science Foundation has already had to fight the battle of developing precise arguments for studying the humanities, it might be mutually beneficial for the Center to compare the status of liberal arts education in the U.S. and in Europe.

13. [Werner Kelber] A great deal may also be learned from liberal arts faculty in other countries such as Russia and Africa; the Rice Center for the Study of Cultures already has contacts with colleagues in these areas, if the Center is interested. Such collaborations would be a two-way street of learning.

14. [Niall Slater] There is a German foundation that identifies high-ability students and fosters their studies from before they enter university, creating a network and a certain kind of interest among the students. Could the Center generate or support programs intended to create a similar pro-liberal arts ethos and excitement among U.S. students?

The session ended with Bill Placher thanking the participants for their insight and energy, and suggesting that everyone continue to think about the next steps for the colloquium and email ideas to the Center in a few weeks when there has been time to reflect on the weekend’s conversations.

[Emails may be sent to Bill Placher at placherw@wabash.edu, Richard Lynch at lynchr@wabash.edu, or Anne Bost at bosta@wabash.edu]
SACRED SCRIPTURES IN MONOTHEISTIC FAITHS

RELI 350
MWF 1:00-1:50

Instructors: Werner Kelber: HUM 219, office hours Wed. 2-4, kelber@rice.edu. Office number (713) 348-2995.
David Cook: HUM 211, office hours Tues. 3-4, dbcook@rice.edu. Office number (713) 348-2440.
Gregory Kaplan: HUM 209, office hours Mon. 2-4, gkaplan@rice.edu. Office number (713) 348-2778

Prerequisites: None.
Requirements: Attendance (any student missing more than three lessons without a medical reason will drop a full letter grade), participation, a midterm and a final examination and a written assignment (paper).

Note: Any student with a disability requiring accommodations in this course is encouraged to contact me after class or during office hours. Additionally, students will need to contact Disability Support Services in the Ley Student Center.

1. INTRODUCTION
Avot 1:1.

2. AUTHORITY
Genesis 1-12; Exodus 19-24; Leviticus 16; Deuteronomy 17-24.
MT Mamrim 1:2 [in Stephen Wald, “Authority”].
Menahot 29b; Bava Metsiah 59.
Rashi, ad. loc. Genesis 1:1.

3. AUTHORITY
Romans, chaps. 1-3.
Mark Edwards, Jr., Printing, Propaganda, and Martin Luther, pp. 109-130.

4. AUTHORITY
Qur’an 7:10-54, 33, 9.
Bernard Lewis, *The Muslim Discovery of Europe*, chapter 3.

5. PROPHECY
Isaiah 6, 10-11; Amos 5; Ezekiel 37; Daniel 7.
*Letterson Ariesetos*; *BT Megillah* 9a-b; Philo [in *Texts and Traditions*, pp. 211-230].

6. PROPHECY

7. PROPHECY
Qur’an 73-74, 93, 12.

8. ORAL AND WRITTEN TRADITION
Ezra, Psalms 1, 19, 100, 150.
*BT Bava Kama* 83b [Lex Talionis; see Seltzer, pp. 276-278, 281-282].
Josephus; Philo; Mark 7; *Megillat Ta’anit*; *PT Megillah* 4:1; *BT Temurah* 14b; *Sifre Deuteronomy* 351; *BT Eruvin* 54b; *Mishnah Avot* 1-5 [in *Texts and Traditions*, pp. 517-526].
Franz Rosenzweig, “Scripture and Luther.”

9. ORAL AND WRITTEN TRADITION

10. ORAL AND WRITTEN TRADITION
Qur’an 17-18
11. COMMENTARY
Isaiah (selections): “An Eye for an Eye.”
Genesis Rabbah Parashah LXX [See Neusner, Signposts, pp. 29-43].
Zohar: “The Old Man and the Beautiful Maiden” [Matt, Zohar, pp. 121-26].
Martin Buber, “People Today and the Hebrew Bible” [in Scripture and Translation].
Ibn Ezra (selections).

12. COMMENTARY

13. COMMENTARY
Qur’an 5, 24:35
J. Cooper (trans), The Commentary on the Qur’an by Abu Ja`far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari, pp. 5-37
(al-Tabari’s introduction to his commentary).
Mahmoud Ayoub, “The Speaking Qur’an and the Silent Qur’an: A Study of the Principles and
Development of Imami Shi’i tafsir,” in Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’an,
chapter 9, pp. 177-98.

14. SYNTHESIS
George Steiner, “Our Homeland, the Text” [in No Passion Spent]
Gerald L. Bruns, “Secrecy and Understanding,” Inventions: Writing, Textuality, and Under-
Standing in Literary History, pp. 17-43.
Syed Hossein Nasr, “The Qur’an as the Foundation of Islamic Spirituality,” in Islamic Spirituality I,
chapter 1; Allahbakhsh Brohi, “The Spiritual Significance of the Qur’an,” in Islamic Spirituality I,
chapter 2.