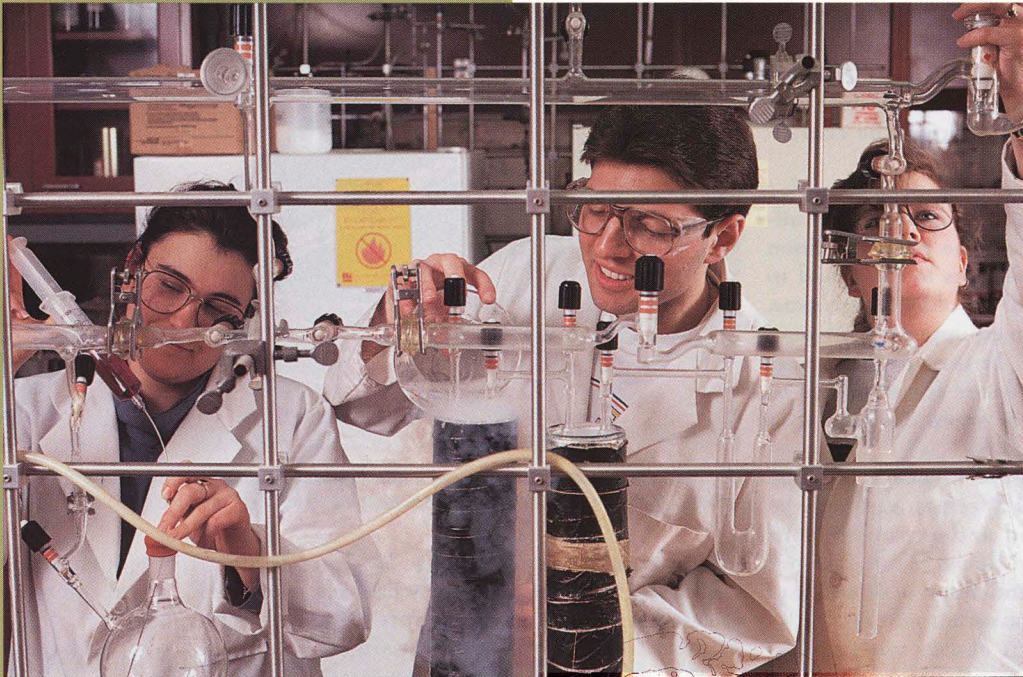


125 YEARS

Many colleges and universities emphasize a liberal arts education. Others accent professional training. Syracuse University has always striven to provide students with the best of both academic worlds.

GOOD CHEMISTRY

PHOTOS BY PETER FINGER



By Andrea C. Marsh

Bob McClure can talk for hours about the importance of receiving a liberal education. Or he can simply recite “The Bear Went Over the Mountain.”

“The song says the bear went over the mountain to see what he could see, but when he got on the other side of the mountain, all he could see was the other side of the mountain,” says McClure. “That’s part of what happens to students with narrow professional ambitions. They come wanting to go over the mountain. They think a wonderful world will open up to them if they can only get that professional

training. But those students are just like the bear who sees the other side of the mountain. At that point, the broader world becomes more appreciated.”

The best education, says McClure, associate dean of the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, is one that combines both professional and liberal arts training. Such an education spawns well-rounded graduates who not only excel in their chosen fields, but also put their work into the cultural and historical contexts needed to function in an evolving and complex society. “The notion here at SU is that just providing liberal education or just providing professional training is not where society needs education to be,” says Gershon Vincow, SU’s vice chancellor for academic affairs. “Society needs the two to be working together.”

Such an approach isn’t novel at Syracuse University. It has been a part of the institution’s fabric for 125 years. When the University was founded in 1870, it offered a classical curriculum



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consisting of chemistry, physics, algebra, geometry, Latin, Greek, history, physiology, elocution, and rhetoric. Like most liberal arts institutions, SU designed its education to develop general intellectual capacities, such as rea-

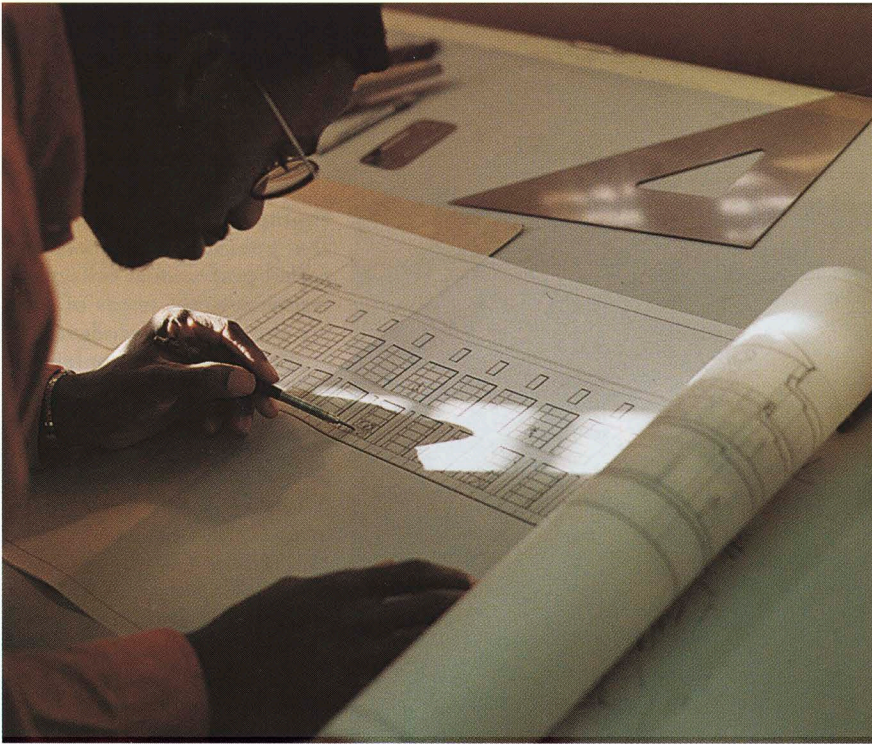
soning and judgment. Over the years, the University added professional colleges in response to the needs of society and desires of students.

Although many contemporary students are attracted to SU by its popular professional schools, such as Newhouse and Architecture, and by Maxwell’s graduate programs, the backbone of the University has always been the College of Arts and Sciences. It enrolls far more students than any of SU’s other colleges. Plus, all students not enrolled in the college—or in the College of Visual and Performing Arts—

must take at least half their coursework within Arts and Sciences. Further, Newhouse requires its students to complete 75 percent of their coursework outside the school, principally in Arts and Sciences.

“I strongly believe that you can’t be a successful journalist, advertiser, public relations practitioner, filmmaker, or photographer if you go to a trade school,” says Newhouse Dean David Rubin. “You have to understand the world you’re getting into. You have to understand its history, its politics, its art, its languages.”

December graduate José Mendez-Monge took Rubin’s advice one step further—he enrolled in both Newhouse and the College of Arts and Sciences, earning a dual bachelor’s degree in newspaper journalism and international relations. “I chose to do a dual major so that I could specialize in more than one area,” he says. “This way I can write about foreign affairs or work internationally. If I hadn’t done the dual major, my education



The College of Arts and Sciences teaches students to think critically, express themselves eloquently, and write well. The college also allows students, through dual majors and minors, to take advantage of many of SU's professional colleges.

wouldn't have been as strong and as broad. I would have been closed to other areas if I had been only a Newhouse major."

When the original bylaws of the University were written, the College of Arts and Sciences was more than simply the heart of the University, it *was* the University. But as years passed and the prestige of newer colleges grew, the stature of Arts and Sciences diminished. That's something Robert Jensen plans to reverse. Jensen, an SU professor of geography since 1964 and former dean of the Graduate School, became dean of the college last July. His vision includes increasing the college's visibility and better publicizing its academic merit. Jensen is also attempting to create a stronger identity for the college, to make it a single unit, not just a collection of departments and programs grouped under the same academic umbrella.

"We want to show that this is a unified liberal arts college," says Jensen. "We're trying to communicate this message through all of our departments and programs."

To help that process, Thomas Anthony was hired in February 1994 as associate dean for college relations. He wants the college to establish a more conspicuous base of operations. "We're trying to create a sense that the Hall of Languages is our headquarters, so that anyone entering the building will immediately know they're in the College of Arts and Sciences."

The college's greatest challenge, however, is helping students overcome the notion that a liberal arts education won't make them job-worthy. "There's a great tendency for students to focus on an education that has a perceivable end, a substantial job," says Anthony. "It's our job to impress upon students that the value of a liberal education is rooted in ideas."

"When parents visit Syracuse, one of

their main concerns about their children's education is the ability to survive and thrive in a changing environment," says Ronald Cavanagh, vice president for undergraduate studies.

"We're looking at an education that students understand to be fundamentally lifelong. What the College of Arts and Sciences has done is create a way for students to think critically, express themselves eloquently, and write well. In addition, students in Arts and Sciences have the opportunity to dip into and wrap around minors and dual majors with our professional schools."

Few students have taken better advantage of SU's liberal arts curriculum than senior Rebekka Meissner. She's majoring in international relations, economics, and French, which are all within the College of Arts and Sciences.

A finalist for a Rhodes scholarship—and one of the nation's top 20 students, according to *USA Today*—Meissner has had several impressive internships, including one last summer at the White House as an assistant to David Gergen, then-counselor to President Bill Clinton. Two years ago, Meissner worked as an intern for the directorate of the European Council for Culture, Education, and Sport, and taught American politics and culture to French children in both public and private schools in Strasbourg, France.

"The liberal nature of the education I've received in the College of Arts and Sciences has played an important role in the development of my academic perspective," says Meissner. "Minds are meant to cross over disciplinary lines, to bridge cultures, ideas, and languages. The study of one academic field is enriched when you have a vision of all the other dimensions of human experience. The strength of Arts and Sciences is that you get a tremendous breadth of knowledge. It's the interconnectedness that I value the most after four years at Syracuse."

Meissner is also part of the University's Honors Program, which grew

out of the College of Arts and Sciences. The Honors Program invites top-flight students to expand upon their coursework through additional—and rigorous—academic endeavors. Freshman and sophomore honors students participate in seminars that expose them to different ways of thinking and to cultural and civic life in the wider community. Topics include global social problems, the impact of science on medicine, and the environment and the media. Honors seminars for juniors and seniors serve as forums for developing and presenting honors theses and projects.

“There’s so much change in society that a student cannot simply learn enough in four years for a career that will last a lifetime,” says Judy Hamilton, associate director of SU’s Honors Program. “That makes a broad-based education extremely important. People need basic perceptions of knowledge to be able to analyze information and think critically.” ■



In addition to meeting the demands of their chosen major, students must fulfill the new core curriculum. Its requirements include 12 credits in each of three subject areas—the natural sciences and mathematics; humanities; and social sciences.

A NEW CORE OF KNOWLEDGE

The College of Arts and Sciences creates and administers the University’s core curriculum, which ensures that all students receive a balanced liberal education of humanities, social and natural sciences, writing, math, and foreign languages.

The core grew out of a rebellion against the sixties “supermarket,” which allowed students to take virtually anything they wanted. Although there were some requirements, the core curriculum was more or less structureless.

In the seventies, a committee was established to lend order and coherence to the core curriculum. Clusters were created in the social and natural sciences and humanities so that students could take a series of related courses. Requirements were also set in basic skills, which include writing, math, and

foreign languages. The idea, says Peter Marsh, a professor of history and international relations, was to “relate the courses to each other so that it wouldn’t just be a grab bag.”

Over time, however, an overwhelming majority of students began opting for the Basic Components cluster, which included introductory survey courses in all the major disciplines. By the early nineties, it had become clear that the core wasn’t fulfilling its desired purpose, and in 1992 a committee was formed to revise the core curriculum. Stewart Thau, a professor of philosophy and interim associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences for curriculum and instruction, has coordinated the changes, which will be implemented next semester.

The new core curriculum requires that students take at least 12 credits in each of three subject areas—the natural sciences and mathematics; humanities; and social sciences. Improving the quality of undergraduate writing skills is particularly important, says Thau. For that reason, students must complete a minimum of three writing courses. In addition, students must take either three language classes or two quantitative skills classes. The latter includes both math and statistics courses.

There will also be a new “critical reflections” requirement in which students must take at least two courses that explore social and ethical issues such as religion, the environment, violence, and poverty and inequality.

“The new curriculum will be more flexible and it will improve the basic skills requirements,” says Thau. “Our goal is to develop a unique and unifying experience for all students.” —ACM