



(Draft: Not for distribution)

Presidio Founding Educational Philosophy, Its Relevance Today and Its Contribution to the Western Liberal Arts and Science Education Tradition.

Reflections by Ron Nahser, PhD. Provost Emeritus, (Founding Provost), August, 2020

In developing and launching Presidio Graduate School (then Presidio World College), we followed Jim Collins, of Stanford GSB fame, and his three pillars of success for developing what he has called a BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal):

- What can you be best in the world at?
- What is your passion?
- What is the economic/financial model?

Our simple statement as we launched the first MBA in Sustainable Management in the US (many tell us the first on the planet) was:

If we develop and launch a future/systems-oriented, values-driven integrative educational practice, Presidio World College (now Presidio Graduate School) would be making a unique contribution in the long, rich historical tradition of Western University "Liberal Arts and Science" education of citizens.

We first unveiled this [founding educational philosophy](#) - developed from 2002-2004, building on earlier educational vision, models, and methods of the founders - to the academic world at University of Oxford Department of Education Studies, "8th Conference for the Study of Values in Education and Business" in 2006.

I have since stated this bold vision often – waiting for the raised-eyebrows reaction: "Presidio...nice location, but best in the world? What about Harvard Business School, Stanford GSB, your alma mater Kellogg, etc."

People inside and outside academia have given me that look, but are then intrigued to see what we actually launched...and are still doing.

A recent Presidio document from the current president, Liz Maw, outlining an initiative for renewal of the flagship MBA, stated:

"The institution was built based on three pillars of our founding educational philosophy: 1) learner's engaged participation through Project Oriented

Learning and Pragmatic Inquiry as the process of disciplined reflection and action based on experience; 2) systems thinking and practice to design creative solutions that take into account the interrelationships among human, organizational and ecological systems, and 3) integration and communication of knowledge culminating in an integrative capstone course where students demonstrate their mastery of the program's core competencies and have the opportunity to uncover, define, articulate and test their calling – the work they sense they are called to do.”

Importance of Curriculum

One of the major breakthroughs in Western education was introducing the Sciences - “Experimental Natural Philosophy” - into Liberal Arts curricula. This pivotal step of revolutionizing Western college curricula, based on the inspirational insights of the Scottish Enlightenment, also had great impact on American colleges and universities in the 18th century. (Sloan, D. *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal.*)

Among of the leaders of the movement in Scotland were the Masters of Marischal College in Aberdeen. The revisions were announced in a slim 35 page booklet entitled: “*The Plan of Education In the Marischal College and University of Aberdeen, with the reasons of it.*” (1755).

The major advance was the inclusion of a branch of Natural Philosophy in the 3rd year, referred to as *Experimental* Philosophy (science: “Mechanics, Hydrostatics, Pneumatics, Optics, Astronomy, Magnetism, Electricity, and any others which farther discoveries may add to the parts already cultivated.”). They completely revamped the dominant Scholastic way of teaching Natural and Moral Philosophy and moved that from earlier in the curricula to the 4th year (from the “Plan” booklet):

1. Pneumatology or the Natural Philosophy of Spirits, including the doctrine of the nature, faculties, and states of the human mind, and Natural Theology.
2. Moral Philosophy, containing Ethics, Jurisprudence and Politics, the study of these being accompanied with the perusal of some of the best of the ancient Moralists.
3. Logic, or the laws and rules of inventing, proving, retaining, and communicating knowledge
4. along with Metaphysics.

They concluded their defense with:

[The Masters] have already begun to experience the public approbation, by the increase of the number of their students. They have now published the

reasons which determined them to it, and leave mankind to judge of their solidity and strength.

The world didn't have long to wait for the seeds to be planted and bear fruit. One of the graduates from this new Marischal curricula was Dr. William Small who came to the US in 1758 to William and Mary College to teach Natural Philosophy but soon, because of failing faculty, increased his load. Two years later, from 1760-1762 when Small was 26 and Thomas Jefferson was 16, Small taught Jefferson everything from mathematics, science, ethics, rhetoric, to Belle Lettres. Jefferson, reflecting later in life, said:

"It was my great good fortune, and what probably *fixed the destinies of my life* that Dr. William Small of Scotland, was then Prof. of mathematics.... from his conversation *I got my first views of the expansion of science and of the systems of things in which we are placed.* (My note: describes "calling.")

"He was to me as a father. To his enlightened and affectionate guidance of my studies while at college, I am indebted for everything. He first introduced into both schools [of philosophy and mathematics] rational and elevated courses of study, and, *from an extraordinary conjunction of eloquence and logic, was able to communicate them to the students with great effect.*" (My emphasis. Jefferson's *Autobiography* in Wills, G. *Inventing America.*)

14 years later, Jefferson helped introduce the case for modern democracy and, in effect, invented America. And "from an extraordinary conjunction of eloquence and logic, was able to communicate them to the [world] with great effect": "When in the course of human events..." And the ineffable: "We hold these truth to be self-evident...inalienable rights...life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

It is within this historical context we are attempting to see if we have evidence that [Presidio](#) has any claim to making a "unique contribution in the long, rich historical tradition of Western 'Liberal Arts and Science' education of citizens" by adding as a foundation Experiential Learning and Pragmatic Philosophy to the usual MBA curriculum. The evidence is: How our students are "changing the world." We believe that our emphasis on "calling" is bringing back the long diminished/dismissed field of Pneumatology – values driven strategies and careers - to Sustainable Management Education. From the president's memo:

"...the opportunity to uncover, define, articulate and test their calling – the work they sense they are called to do. (My note: We believe this practice operationalizes and gives meaning to "...*the pursuit of happiness.*")

"Our mission: to educate change makers to build a flourishing future for all."