

Staff of Common Course
Bard College
30 April 1954

REPORT ON COMMON COURSE

In his address to the Symposium held in February 1952, in the time of the Great Apathy, President Case proposed a five point program of academic innovations. During that term the faculty discussed the program and adopted four of the points, including the Common Course. The President's proposal to inaugurate a common course for freshmen was based in part on the report of the "Newman Committee" which found that the community lacked common intellectual interests. It was hoped that a course could be designed which would supply this common ground, stimulate intellectual curiosity and help the student to begin a serious effort to educate himself earlier in his college career.

Two different courses were proposed to the faculty and vigorously debated. Agreement on a definite plan for a course seemed unlikely. It was finally resolved, by a small majority, to appoint a director who would be charged with assembling a staff drawn from all Divisions, and working out with them a course concentrating on values and using student interests and problems. The course was to be given in 1952-53 and reviewed by Policy Committee toward the end of the year.

Mr. Bluecher was appointed director and came to the college in September, 1952. He spent two months becoming acquainted with the faculty and choosing a staff of eight comprising a biologist, a mathematician, a painter, two philosophers, two poets and a sociologist. They met frequently during the rest of the term, but time was limited since they could not be relieved of their regular loads. It seemed most practical for the director to present to them a selection of materials and the line of thought which informed it. This was done and the course was given in the spring semester to nine seminars of some 8 students each. It was based on nine great figures regarded as original thinkers, each of whom, by his life and work, demonstrated a fundamental human creative capacity. The cultivation of these capacities was suggested as a basis of an education and a road to human freedom. The staff felt that it could not become sufficiently familiar with these ideas, in the limited time available, to present them to their seminars. It was therefore decided that Mr. Bluecher should present these ideas in lectures. All seminars used these lectures and a small body of common materials as a basis of discussion. Each developed in detail as the interests and problems of the group suggested and used such additional materials as were most valuable for these interests in the opinion of its leader. Mr Bluecher visited each seminar frequently. Weekly staff meetings were held to exchange information on successes and failures, lines of discussion and special materials.