

Mailbox

Reflections on Pacific Alumni Weekend

Thoughts on the Legacy of Callison College

Callison College was the third and last of the cluster colleges, established in 1967 by President Robert Burns. That first fall, Callison students were reminded of the bold claims made in its recruiting brochure: *“The Callison College program is in response to a growing awareness that our survival depends upon educating a generation for global responsibility... The college’s curriculum will attempt to meet this need by integrating non-Western studies into a program which retains the proven values of a liberal arts education, will devote a significant portion of the curriculum to the social sciences and area studies, and will require all students to spend a year in residence studying in a non-Western country.”* Those first students spent their year abroad in India.

Was the program a success? Many would judge that it was not. The college closed in a little more than 10 years. Supporters of the program worried that some of the students were more interested in the counterculture than in Western or non-Western culture. Indian educators at Bangalore University, expecting students dressed in blazers and ties or skirts and blouses, were often greeted by barefoot students in shorts or saris. But these externals were not what mattered. In India, Callison students reexamined their values; they studied Indian politics and religion; they observed great poverty; they came to understand the struggles of a poor and overpopulated country attempting to move into the modern world; and they developed a new understanding of the strengths of their own country.

This past June at Pacific Alumni Weekend, over 150 Callison alumni and former faculty members reunited in Callison Lodge. A rich tapestry unfolded as I interacted with these former students and learned about their dreams, values and vocations. They included lawyers, business entrepreneurs, therapists, a doctor and a dentist, government officials, city planners, international development workers, numerous teachers, the head of an international school in Latin America, writers, authors, composers for film and TV, a theatre technician and a naturalist.

As a teacher who believes in the capacity of a liberal arts education to prepare citizens for a free society with concern for both the haves and the have-nots, I was moved by the values and dreams they expressed. The alumni of Callison College truly demonstrate its resounding success and have more than fulfilled its bold claims.

— *Larry Jackson, founding provost of Callison College and former dean of Morris Chapel*

Below are excerpts from biographical statements sent to Dr. Jackson from Callison alumni after the reunion.

“I think that for me the most important ethic I gained from Callison is ‘what we do should make a difference.’”

— *Mike Fleming ’75*

“The Callison program launched me on a multicultural and multilingual career in education.”

— *Jack Delman ’72*

“Callison provided me with invaluable life lessons and certainly broadened my worldview. It prevented me from making assumptions about the world and reality which I might otherwise have made.”

— *Jane (Stuart) Baron Rechtman ’72*

“Going to India at such a young age somehow made me realize I could take chances and survive, leading me to a richer life.”

— *Nancy (Ligon) de Ita ’73*

“My time at Callison helped to ground and inspire me in my spiritual seeking as well as in my motivation to be of service.”

— *Jo Valens ’71*

“I didn’t find a career path at Callison: I found a way of living, of looking at the world. I found the ability to question, to step outside frames and see anew. I found a way to think beyond the usual. I learned to honor the freedoms in our own political system, working from within for change.”

— *Laurie McBride ’71*

Though the cluster colleges experiment seems short measured against this institution’s long history, their impact is tremendous, and their spirit and vision permeates the whole University through its focus on social-emotional intelligence, global citizenship, social entrepreneurship, experiential and service learning, and the close faculty-student relationships. Thank you, Dr. Jackson, for sharing.

— *Ed.*

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