

## **Outward Bound: *AQ* Explores the Oort Belt and Comet Fish**

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When the editors of *AQ* began to plan this issue, we thought we would focus it on the institutions that surround the university, in some cases claiming to “represent” higher education to the outside world, and in other cases imposing themselves on the academy. We had in mind accreditors, government agencies, and higher education associations.

My own view is that scholars often underestimate the importance of those great grey entities, which often seem like a cyclonic swirl of initialisms: AACTE, AACRAO, AACC, AASCU, AAUP, ACPA, ACT, ACE, APPA, AAC&U, AALA, AAMC, AAU, ACCU, ACCY, AGB—and on through the alphabet to UCEA. Some of these have name recognition, such as the American Council on Education (ACE), the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), but most are interest groups known only to the interested—and to the landlords of Dupont Circle in Washington, D.C., where the majority have their offices.

While a faculty member may have direct contact with only a few of these organizations, they collectively wield considerable influence over higher education. For example, in 2003 the College Board (technically, the College Entrance Examination Board—CEEB) bowed to a threat from Richard Atkinson, the retiring president of the University of California (UC), and eliminated the verbal analogies section of the SAT as of 2005. Atkinson had bruited the idea of eliminating the SAT entirely as a UC requirement unless

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the College Board removed the verbal analogies. Atkinson wasn't entirely forthcoming with why he so disliked this portion of the test. He told the *Los Angeles Times*, "I always just hated the verbal analogies. There was just a trickiness to them."<sup>1</sup>

But as with many other outwardly opaque developments in higher education, the de-analogizing of the SAT was driven by racial politics. What Atkinson knew and wasn't going to say is that African American students in California scored particularly low on this section of the SAT. By eliminating it, he hoped to lessen the gap between blacks and other students, and thus to some degree offset the effects of Proposition 209, the 1996 ballot initiative that had outlawed racial preferences.

The effect of eliminating the verbal analogies section, however, was to remove from the SAT the component that perhaps more than any other measured an intellectual skill crucially important to liberal learning. Recognizing, understanding, and constructing analogies is what we do when we read beyond the superficial level of a novel, a play, a work of philosophy, or a scientific experiment. The study of law and medicine are essentially advanced courses in thinking analogically. Which case is the best precedent for this set of discreet facts? Which diagnosis best matches this set of symptoms? Colleges and universities are tireless these days in promoting their attachment to "critical thinking," but critical thinking without verbal analogy is like spelunking without a flashlight.

The College Board's decision to cave in to Atkinson's demand will do nothing to decrease the importance of analogical thinking in higher education, but it does mean that colleges and universities will find it harder to determine which applicants are truly ready for the college classroom. And that in turn means we end up in our classrooms with more students who are ill-suited to the demands of the task.

This is but one instance of how the actions that originate in that cyclonic cloud of initialed organizations eventually impinge on the work of professors. But just the telling of this one small tale illustrates that we editors had dreamed of a topic far too large for a single issue of *AQ*. What we have instead is a theme that we will pursue among other matters over the next few years.

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Pringle, "College Board Scores with Critics of SAT Analogies," *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 2003, A-1, <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/jul/27/local/me-sat27>.

Our first steps to explore the institutional wilderness beyond the ivy gates are represented here in the articles by Patricia Hausman and Anne Neal, and in Richard Fonté's review essay. Hausman examines *Beyond Bias and Barriers: Fulfilling the Potential of Women in Academic Science and Engineering*, a report by the National Academy of Sciences that has given oomph to efforts to apply Title IX to the teaching of science in American colleges and universities. The NAS (not to be confused with the NAS) has lent its good reputation to a pretty doubtful document. If Title IX really does come crashing down on American science, it will be another instance of far-reaching academic change orchestrated by ideologues whose agenda has nothing to do with advancing science or academic inquiry.

Neal gives us a survey of higher education accreditation, a system created in principle to ensure the quality of academic programs that has turned into a device for shielding colleges and universities from substantive review.

Fonté examines a book that grew out of a project by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching that oddly urges a kind of retreat from teaching—or at least teaching as it has been traditionally understood. The book Fonté reviews, *Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility*, has four authors and a complicated pedigree. One of the authors, Tom Ehrlich, helped to draft the Talloires Declaration on the Civic Roles and Social Responsibilities of Higher Education. The book itself has been taken up by the American Democracy Project, “a collaboration of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and the *New York Times*.” In short, we are deep in that wilderness where powerful entities outside the university meditate on ways in which the basic enterprise of higher education should be modified—to suit them. (A version of Fonté's review amplified with informative footnotes is available on [www.nas.org](http://www.nas.org).)

The other three articles in this issue were not originally intended as part of this examination of the institutions at the edges of academe. There is, nonetheless, a certain fit. Russell Nieli revisits the idea launched thirty years ago by Justice Powell in his opinion in *Bakke* that the mere proximity of students of different racial backgrounds in a college classroom will confer educational benefits to all. Nieli calls this the “discredited contact hypothesis” and he surveys recent evidence of what the diversity doctrine has actually brought about. The idealistic hope that “diversity” in and of itself would lead to stronger and more positive intergroup relations and enhanced learning seems sadly out of sync with reality.

Stephen Balch's essay is a summons to college and university trustees to step more deeply into their responsibilities as the civilian overseers of higher education. It seemed appropriate here, in an issue rather thick with doubts about the wisdom of external interference with higher education, to give a voice that affirms at least one kind of external oversight. I also expect the essay to be provocative in another way. The campus Left is tireless in raising the concern that ignorant trustees, their minds clouded by simplistic business models, will misuse their power by limiting academic freedom. Trustees themselves as represented by the Association of Governing Boards, have heard these warnings from the left and are usually pretty diffident when it comes to deciding matters that reach to the intellectual substance of the programs that fall under their purview. Balch offers a striking dissent from the model that treats trustees as best employed at writing checks and waving flags at football games.

No one has been more acrid in his disdain for trustees than the literary critic and professor of everything, Stanley Fish. We devote nearly a quarter of this issue to David Rothman's essay on the career of Fish—not because we mistake him for one of those impinging external institutions. To the contrary, Fish is in and of the university, and it is hard to imagine him anywhere else. We commissioned this essay as one of several we hope to publish on highly influential figures in higher education. Rothman's analysis focuses on the intellectual themes that run through the considerable body of Fish's scholarship. He is skeptical about the merit of much of that work, but Rothman is engaged in a thoughtful reading, not an ad hominem attack. We think Rothman's account is an important contribution towards a broader assessment of the man who may well be American higher education's leading celebrity.