

# Comments to the Commission on Post Secondary Education

in

## New Brunswick

The purpose of education and especially post-secondary education is to produce capable and productive citizens - autonomous individuals with the ability to fully realize their talents in a creative and demanding society.

The community colleges and Universities have separate but overlapping missions which are likely to be compromised by consolidation. Universities educate in the Humanities, Sciences and Professions. The community colleges provide training in skills required in the workplace plus an introduction to the core of both the humanities and sciences to individuals not conventionally directed to a university program. These courses should be taught at the highest level attainable\* and at completion their graduates should receive, in addition to their technical certification, transferable credit(s) equivalent to two years at an admitting university.

Three programs can effectively improve the "human capital" in the province and Atlantic region.

Introduce students to University and University trained individuals early. Most importantly this is to be achieved by creating a "New Brunswick University" composed of scholars supported by a provincial endowment fund. Initially, five high calibre scholars in the Sciences and five in the Performing and Plastic Arts are proposed to the NBU, an independent body, by individual competing universities as new resident faculty members. Supported NBU fellows will be funded for a maximum of three, five year, renewable on review, periods with the expectation of tenure at the sponsoring institution after that. These scholars will have a dual mandate, both as faculty and NBU fellows, to engage the community, external to the university, in high level collaborative research and inform communities with the best in the performing arts. The high schools are the most likely, but not exclusive, effective venue for these efforts. These scholars might productively bring students and their teachers to campus based "short courses" and performance "Master Class" work shops.

Establish a regional Open University, on the British model, to provide university level courses to individuals in work or otherwise unable to attend conventional universities.

Establish a non-profit corporation to manage a common research campus on the "Research Triangle" model to provide critical mass and local expertise in technology transfer and deployment of venture capital. The regional universities should, cooperatively, be the initial primary stake-holders.

\*Robert Maynard Hutchins: "The best education for the best is the best education for all."

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## **Resources**

### **Research Triangle Park**

[http://www.rtp.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page&filename=about\\_us\\_history.html](http://www.rtp.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=page&filename=about_us_history.html)

<http://www.rti.org/page.cfm?nav=156&objectid=9080A887-156F-4352-8E94838384BAEEC6>

<http://www.rti.org/>

### **Open University**

<http://www.open.ac.uk/>

<http://www3.open.ac.uk/about/>

<http://www.tru.ca/distance.html>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open\\_University](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_University)

<http://www.athabascau.ca/>

### **Humanities**

Clemente College: a rigorous, university-level course in the humanities

<http://www.mfh.org/newsandevents/newsletter/MassHumanities/Spring2000/shorris.html>

Riches For The Poor

Earl Shorris

WW Norton, 2000

through the Humanities:  
An Interview with Earl Shorris

Earl Shorris Earl Shorris is founder and chairman of the advisory board of the Clemente Course in the Humanities, a college-level course in the humanities for people living in poverty. Educated at the University of Chicago in the classics-based curriculum designed by Robert Maynard Hutchins, Shorris has had a distinguished career as a journalist, social critic, lecturer, and novelist. His articles and reviews have appeared in Harper's Magazine, where he has been a contributing editor since 1972, as well as in The Atlantic Monthly, The Nation, and many other publications. Among his nonfiction books are *The Death of the Great Spirit*, *Latinos: A Biography of a People*, *New American Blues: A Journey Through Poverty to Democracy*, and the forthcoming *Riches for the Poor: The Clemente Course in the Humanities*. While doing research for *New American Blues*, Shorris had the conversation that inspired the Clemente Course. He described the first year of the course in the October 1997 issue of Harper's. Now administered by Bard College and in its fifth year, the Clemente Course is currently being taught at 17 sites in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and France, including The Care Center in Holyoke, where it is co-sponsored by the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities. Kristin O'Connell interviewed E. Shorris .

Kristin O'Connell: The basic concept of the Clemente Course is a radical one. Given the overwhelming problems faced by the poor, most programs designed for them have focused on practical goals, like developing employment skills. What is the rationale for offering a course in Plato and Shakespeare for people living in poverty?

Earl Shorris: I've argued that the humanities provide the most practical education. If we can stipulate that knowing is better than not knowing, then the comparison is between education, as in studying the humanities, and training, as in learning to operate a computer or mop floors or pull a tooth or make out a will. We can start from the simplest kind of training, that is, training to repeat the least complex task, which might be mopping floors or repetitively entering numbers into a computer. Such work is poorly paid, with little or no chance for advancement. Historically, the poor have been trained to do such tasks as a way of maintaining a low cost labor force. During the industrial revolution, an ethic (Weber's Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism is the best description of it) developed that kept the poor "happily" at their labors.

Training for complex tasks, such as dentistry or engineering, is more demanding, but nevertheless training, in that it teaches the student to do something that has been done before: pull a tooth, build a bridge, and so on. Compare even that kind of training to education in the humanities—philosophy, art, history, literature, and logic, in Petrarch's formulation. The distinction is between doing and thinking, between following and beginning. Nicolaus Copernicus, a Polish student of the humanities, with no formal training in astronomy, quite literally turned the universe inside out. Few ideas in modern history have had more influence on scientific thinking than the Copernican Revolution. Similarly, Descartes, whose method is at the base of technological activity, was not himself a technologist or even a scientist; he was a philosopher. If America is to remain a leading nation, it will do so because of the humanities, not because of training, even of the most sophisticated kind.

Let's apply that practicality to a person living in the second or third generation of poverty. If one has been "trained" in the ways of poverty, left no opportunity to do other than react to his or her environment, what is needed is a beginning, not repetition. The humanities teach us to think reflectively, to begin, to deal with the new as it occurs to us, to dare. If the multi-generational poor are to make the leap out of poverty, it will require a new kind of thinking—reflection. And that is a beginning.

ES: The philosophy of the Clemente Course grows out of an idea put forth by Robert Maynard Hutchins: "The best education for the best is the best education for all." The application of that thesis to the alleviation of poverty was not entirely of my own making, however. It came to me while I was in a maximum security prison in Bedford Hills, New York—just visiting, of course. I asked a prisoner, Viniece Walker, why she thought people were poor. Niece, who has since become a good friend, said that it was because "they don't have the moral life of downtown," by which she meant Manhattan south of Harlem, where she grew up. Thinking she had probably undergone a religious conversion while in prison, which is not unusual, I asked rather casually what she meant by "the moral life." What a surprise when she said, "Plays, museums, concerts, lectures, you know." I said, "You mean the humanities." And she looked at me as if I were some kind of cretin: "Yes, Earl, the humanities." On my way back to the city I made the connection between Niece's idea and my own education. It was the beginning of the Clemente Course.