

SWARTHMORE COLLEGE

SWARTHMORE, PENNSYLVANIA 19081

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

December 2, 1968

Courtney Smith  
College Mail

Dear Courtney:

In this letter I would like to try to say a few things about summer programs at Swarthmore which might be of use to the Council on Educational Policy as they reflect on the many alternatives available to us.

I think I should begin with my conviction that Swarthmore College is too great a resource to disappear for three months every year. Our beautiful library with its great potential for research and teaching was almost deserted last summer, used by only a few lucky faculty members like myself and by students in the Upward Bound Program. Why should Swarthmore College go to sleep in the summer? The reasons I have heard seem to arise out of the somewhat traditionalistic attitude regarding the necessity for maintenance, but maintenance schedules can easily be developed around activities which could be carried on during the summer. It is out of this kind of conviction that the following remarks emerge. I don't think I know the answer to the question as to how the College might be used in the summer, but I think that an assessment by the Council on Educational Policy is exactly what we need at this time. There are multiple uses of the College during this period which are not inconsistent with one another. I believe that the College should try to develop a set of priorities, and the following remarks are intended as a contribution to that discussion.

One of the questions which has always interested me has been the relationship of the College to its alumni--not merely at Swarthmore, but also at other institutions. I think that colleges across the country are groping for new ways of trying to retain meaningful links with their alumni because the traditional ways of maintaining this relationship seem to be only partially suited to the character of students who are passing through the institution at the present time. At a college like Swarthmore, where intellectual experience and scholarship are so important, perhaps we should try to think of ways in which we can encourage alumni to relate to the institution in terms of its primary mission, rather than in terms of activities which might be defined as peripheral, such as attendance at athletic events. I am an enthusiastic athlete and a firm believer in the importance of physical education, but at the same time, I think some of the rituals associated with alumni return need to be augmented for the more recent generations of graduates. It seems to me that something close to 10% of the Swarthmore College faculty does teaching of some kind during the summer. I could be wrong about this figure, but I think it is approximately correct. A large number of Swarthmore faculty remain in the Swarthmore area during the summer, working on their research and/or teaching. Using a model such as that of the Salzburg Seminar in American Studies (which I attended in 1956), could we not have brief, intensive, residential seminars for alumni which would take place

## 2.

over a period of two or three weeks at the most, on a particular topic, which would be taught by faculty who have been invited to do so by the College? Even if a faculty member was working hard on his research during the summer, two or three weeks, which would be remunerated generously, would not ruin the summer from the standpoint of a very desirable change of mental set from the academic year. Furthermore, on the basis of my experience in teaching in the University Extension at Harvard, it seems to me that teaching adults is intrinsically interesting and different from teaching adolescent college students, and that this might be attractive as a change of pace for some of our faculty. Of course, I think this would be extremely attractive and rewarding for alumni, who would be encouraged to bring their wives (though I'm not sure what kinds of arrangements could be made for children), and I think that this kind of experience should be costly and that the College should benefit from it in the same way, for example, in which Harvard Summer School benefits the University by producing a profit. I should add that even though this program did not produce a profit, it would be a worthwhile one, since it would strengthen and reaffirm the relationship of the alumnus to his college, though of course the contention that such a program would have a beneficial effect on alumni giving is purely hypothetical, though not inconceivable. I think the details of such programs could be worked out very easily, and that there could be a succession of seminars which took place during the summer, so that there were a couple going on all the time during the three months, but they were staggered so that faculty participation would also be staggered. It will be more convenient for some people to participate at the beginning of the summer or at the middle than at the end, and vice-versa. It is my impression that other institutions have experimented with this kind of program, though I can provide no documentation at this time and on such short notice. I have the impression that Stanford and Yale have both created such programs for alumni. I know that Amherst has a special program for alumni during commencement week, but this program seems to me to be too limited in its scope. Of course, if the Council on Educational Policy would like me to try to obtain details regarding the existence of such programs, I would be happy to do so.

A second type of program for adults which would reach another college constituency is one which is described in the enclosed pamphlet entitled Methuselah 1. Basically, Methuselah 1 is a residential program for adult members of the local community which is carried out at the University of California at Santa Cruz. It was created by a former Harvard colleague of mine, Byron Stookey, who was until recently Director of Academic Planning at Santa Cruz. As you can see from the fly sheet, Methuselah is a six-week seminar program which is residential and encourages participation without restriction according to any formal prerequisites other than "intelligence and eagerness for inquiry". Methuselah was not cheap, and a fee of \$500.00 was charged for full-time students. Husbands and wives could attend for \$800.00. Housing and meals came to \$280.00, so that the total fee for the six weeks, including a college membership fee, was about \$800.00. Enrollment was limited to 50 full-time and 20 part-time participants. Each of these participants took two core seminars and a general seminar. The work of the program was focused on four areas: Philosophy and Religion, History and Politics, Aesthetics and Art, Psychology and Psychoanalysis.



## 3.

The seminars were led by Santa Cruz faculty, augmented by a number of distinguished visitors. Some of the better known visitors included Leslie Fiedler, Angus Wilson, Howard Nemerov, Walker Evans, and Christopher Morris. I think the Methuselah project is interesting, but in terms of the overall mission of the College as I understand it, such a program probably has a low priority. On the other hand, it is probably true that the College would do very well to try to improve its relationships with interested citizens in the surrounding area. I suspect, however, that the image of the College held by ordinary lower-middle-class citizens in Delaware County would not be changed substantially by the existence of such a program, because ordinary middle-class citizens of Delaware County would not enroll in the seminars.

I have said nothing in this letter about the Upward Bound Program or the A.B.C. Program, though I would be happy to share my views with members of the Council. Gil Stott has written what seems to me to be an exceptional letter on the Upward Bound Program. My own approach to this aspect of potential summer use of the College can be summarized in the following question: how can the summer use of the College help us to find qualified applicants for admission to Swarthmore who are also members of minority groups in American society--Negroes, American Indians, Spanish Americans, and others--whose presence would enrich the experience of the entire college community and keep us from becoming a de facto segregated institution? In other words, what can the College do to enable members of minority groups in American society to achieve the level of academic excellence which is required and should continue to be required for admission? I trust that the Council on Educational Policy will be discussing a wide range of alternatives in this regard.

Cordial best wishes,



Leon Bramson  
Associate Professor of Sociology  
and Chairman

LB:pbf