



Contributed by
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Piety and Virtue

Character development was a primary goal of education in 18th and early 19th century schools and colleges. Education was intended to shape students' attitudes and values as much as to stretch their intellect and expand their knowledge of the world. Nichols Academy was founded by a religious denomination (Unitarian) to, in part, preserve an important facet of character: its religious heritage, beliefs, and values. The original 1819 Act incorporating the Academy proclaimed: "That an Academy is hereby established...for the promotion of piety and virtue [emphasis added], and for the instruction of youth in such languages, and in such liberal arts and sciences as the trustees hereinafter provided shall order and direct."

While the Academy was proud of its non-sectarian curriculum, religion (Protestant Christianity) was not absent from students' daily lives. Bible readings (later termed devotional exercises) were a normal part of students' daily morning schedule and students were required to attend public worship on the Sabbath unless excused at the request of a parent or guardian.

If piety was important, so was virtue (i.e., good behavior encompassing such things as integrity, fairness, trust, respect, and empathy), even as education shifted focus from a theological foundation to a practical and secular moralism. Together, piety and virtue were the foundations for good character and the formation of good character was a part of the Academy's mission throughout the 18th and early 19th centuries.

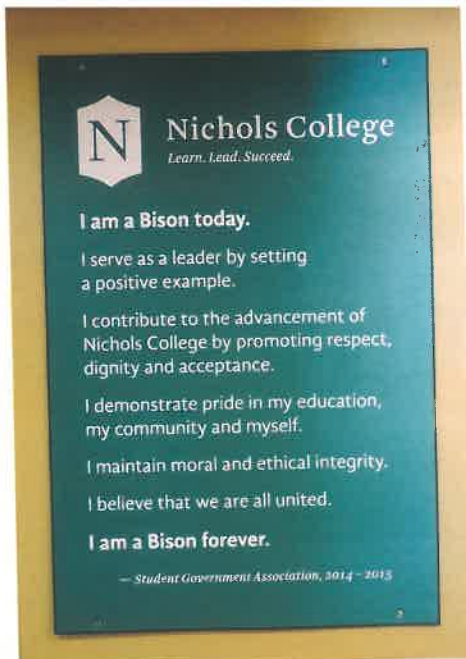
Character development would continue to be important for the Academy's successors on the Hill. "Satisfactory evidence of a high standard of character as indicated through character references and high

school reports" would remain an admissions requirement from the early thirties to 1978, when it became strongly recommended instead.

A description of the "Education Plan" in the 1938-39 Nichols Junior College of Business Administration and Executive Training catalog commented on the importance of character: "...Education is a process of growth and development of the entire individual, and its influence is used to inculcate and foster principles of gentlemanliness and culture...we are accepting young men of character; we consider it our obligation to send them out, if not better men than when they came to us, at least as good."

Faculty rated each student on Cooperation, Responsibility, Courtesy, and Industry. If a student's rating was below the standard set by the faculty, a written warning was issued. A continued low standard would result in a faculty request that the parents withdraw the student.

When Nichols became a four-year college in 1958, students were still required to fulfill "Satisfactory character as determined by the faculty," as well as academic requirements. Traditionally, a list of senior candidates was forwarded to the Faculty Senate prior to graduation. If there were no objections, the secretary would cast a single vote of approval for the list. The process worked fine until 1989 when, for the first time, there was a question concerning a student. Ultimately, the student received his degree but it highlighted faculty unease over the process and the requirement itself. The college consulted an attorney who recommended that formal criteria for "unsatisfactory character" be established, as well as a student notification and appeal procedure. Unacceptable conduct



was drawn up to include felony conviction; extreme physical or psychological intimidation or abuse; academic or other dishonesty; and flagrant disregard for the health, welfare, safety, or reputation of the college and its community.

Faculty questions about the character requirement surfaced again in 1996 over concerns about another student. An ad hoc committee established to investigate concluded that a number of issues and questions remained, including the precise definition of the term "satisfactory character." The college ultimately removed the character requirement for graduation. The Class of 1996 were the last to hear "...and who have been voted by the faculty as worthy in character and conduct" in the presentation of degrees at commencement.

Although the college no longer has a formal character requirement, today's students are guided by a Code of Conduct, which outlines the institution's core values, pertinent policies and procedures, and sanctions for violations. The comprehensive document ensures that all members of the Nichols community understand the shared responsibility of maintaining an environment of mutual respect and integrity. As further assurance, a student creed developed by the Student Government Association has been posted in campus buildings (pictured), reminding us all what it means to be a Bison and recognizing that whether or not it is a requirement for graduation, character is still an important part of a good life and an important part of Nichols College.