The idea that the college is a collection of students and faculty interested in the same goal of undergraduate education seems lost in the departmentalized atmosphere of the college. The editors of the Purple Patcher sponsored a symposium of faculty members which revolved around the question of the importance of a philosophy of education in this atmosphere. Dr. William Andruchow of the Chemistry Department, Dr. S.E. Flynn of Modern Language, Dr. Kenneth Happe of Classics, Dr. Robert Johann of Philosophy, Dr. Jerome Judge of Economics, and Dr. Thomas Lawler of English participated in a candid, unrehearsed discussion which opened with this question — "Is a teacher more than a professor of a certain discipline?"

Flynn: Well, personally, I'm a professor of languages. But I prefer the word "teacher" to the word professor. Professor has a certain pompousness to it. I hate to be called professor.

Happe: I would object to one word here, and that is "discipline." I think that I would disagree with Dr. Flynn. I don't think that I just teach the Greek language; I teach a way of life, which is K, Happe's way of life. And you would get exposed, hopefully, to forty different men's way of life at this college.

Flynn: But don't you have to teach them the past participle before you can teach them your way of life?

Happe: That's in addition.

Flynn: What is a "way of life"?

Happe: It is the zeal which I have included in the subject; you are as enthusiastic about Spanish as I am enthusiastic about Greek literature.

Flynn: That's not your way of living.

Happe: Oh sure it is, enthusiasm is a way of life.

Judge: We have over-emphasized this question of discipline. It seems to me that what we are saying is that all those disciplines are supposed to come together in the student. I'm not sure that we know what the student is. I don't think that our system is conducive to inducing, "educere", from the student. So I would think that, at the moment, the student is the central thing at the college. And to me, Holy Cross is an institution of which I am always suspicious for it is necessary for me to work with other people in the institution. When the institution becomes greater than myself, I tend to buck it. It's only here to support me in this endeavor — to present my resources to the student.

Lawler: I agree with that. I think that a teacher's primary obligation should always be to the student.

Happe: Not to the discipline?

Lawler: I would almost go so far as to say that. The body of literature that you are reading really has no significance unless you are reading it with somebody. I more and more look upon my philosophy of teaching as reading books with people and giving them my ideas as they are giving me their ideas.

Flynn: You're not serious? But are you interpreting or misinterpreting? What are you doing?

Lawler: I am very often misinterpreting and if it is good teaching, they are discovering my misinterpretations. Then they are really learning something. I think an inexperienced teacher is sometimes the very best kind of teacher you can have.

Flynn: How can you dissociate yourself from your discipline?

Judge: Well, there is no dissociation. I think the integrity of this approach lies through the medium of the discipline. There are other things than the discipline itself; the life of the student here, in it's total ramifications. It's something which I can touch upon — by my experience, education, and maturity — through the discipline.

Flynn: I think we're confusing the idea of discipline. I would feel it is my duty as a Spanish teacher to see if I can cultivate in my Spanish students the love and admiration that I have for the Spanish language. I realize that in many of their lives, the Spanish language is a very minor thing. If I can give them a year or two of pleasant Spanish instruction, in which they will carry away an idea that there is really something here, then I think that I have done a great deal for them. I think that's also involved in my personal discipline, of my Spanish material. I think it is sort of presumptuous to say that I'm going to give this group of young men my philosophy of living. My philosophy of living may be a very objectionable one.

Happe: Well, I think they should be exposed to all sorts of, you know, objectional philosophies, so they can object; I don't know. Johann, you're a philosopher.

Johann: I'm trying to see where we are going here. Maybe you want to say something of your conception of the need for interdisciplinary approaches to some things. Part of what was said here is the idea that the college is, or could be, a kind of resource, a context of resources for the students and for their development, to open up their possibilities. I think part of the complaint is that the disciplines are, and the professors of the various disciplines are, kept out of touch with one another. In other words, the student presumably has a complex of problems and a number of interests which could be forwarded and developed, and which call upon the various departments, which should be there, it seems to me, as tools. Too often, I think, we isolate ourselves from one another;
and there really isn’t an advance in the students. And this idea of making the student the center of this thing, as suggested before, I’m in favor of it. It would have to be a kind of community of inquiry, in which all are learners to some extent. My impression of the students this year is there isn’t any great interest in the academic. I don’t find a tremendous interest here, on the student’s part; partly because of our effort, and perhaps because the structure is inappropriate.

Judge: Take for instance the class thing, which I think is passe. I think of wider education experiences and participation. If the student wants to do a course here in conjunction with three different disciplines, why not?

Happe: What about biology and chemistry? Do they have interdisciplinary courses. Is that possible?

Andruchow: This gets back to this idea, well, to use the word, discipline, subject matter for example. Let’s use that word instead of discipline. My primary responsibility is twofold, and it would be difficult to cut them apart. It’s one to my subject matter and to my students. In the classroom my prime responsibility is to chemistry. I don’t talk about the social problems of the world; I don’t talk about the economic problems of the world; I don’t talk about any of the philosophical problems confronting us. Yet on the other hand, if a legitimate opportunity presents itself, and it can present itself, where a group of students as a body request me to present my views on a matter, I will do it.

Happe: But the guy that is hired at Holy Cross, I presume, would be someone, I hope, who would be different from a teacher at the University of Chicago graduate school.

Andruchow: I would hope I would be able to help the student outside of class with any number of problems he may bring up to me, and not necessarily in chemistry.

Johann: This may be a bit unfair, but what would you say is the role of chemistry as a discipline in education?

Andruchow: Well let’s make it even a little broader. Let’s say what the role of science is in education. And I think it’s an important question nowadays as everyone seems to put the blame on science for our problems. And really, when you look at science itself, it’s neutral, like any other discipline. In science we pursue truth, as any other person does. It’s the people handling the products of science which make it so terrible, and I think it has to be an integral part of education. If you go in and sit and talk about how bad the world is, you have to realize why it’s so bad. What it really comes down to is simply the mishandling of scientific, or maybe I should say the technological, developments of man over the past fifty years. And you can get tremendous amount of technical
ability, and ways and means by which we can solve the materialistic problems, yet we have not advanced one iota spiritually in this time. If a philosopher or a sociologist or even a person in language or classics is going to talk about how bad science is, he has to understand what science is all about. And once he understands this, maybe he won’t throw stones so rapidly.

Judge: It’s not the technology — it’s not the question of the scientist; I am a scientist too. But we have no control in the social-ethical aspect. Our economic system has no device by which we can say that what we are doing here — maximizing our effort in this way or that way — is good for society.

Happe: I just wondered, do you expect the college to make an evaluation on society. Well, just this moral thing came up Monday at the faculty meeting concerning an open campus.

Flynn: Well, I was surprised to hear that word “moral”; weren’t you? I haven’t heard that word in about five years.

Happe: It’s coming back. I had a question on one of my first quizzes after reading Plato’s Republic and Aristotle’s On Education. I said “What do you think is the target, the goal, of a college education?” I would say of seventy of them, 40%, expect a moral training when they come here in October of their first year. I think I’m even underestimating. I’d say even more. You’d be a good one to answer this question, “Is the Holy Cross student changing?” I mean you’ve been here God knows how much longer than all of us put together.

Flynn: I think the student body is changing; I think, at the moment, we have the poorest student body I have ever seen at this school. I think there is the greatest lack. They are the most difficult students to stimulate. You can entertain them and they love it. But to actually stimulate them you have to put your head through the blackboard. But I don’t think they are to blame; I think they are being trained by young teachers, perhaps in prep schools and high schools, who themselves are a result of this flabby training. That’s why I don’t shudder at the word discipline; I think what we need is more discipline, particularly for freshmen.

Johann: I’m not really sure it’s that simple. But I really feel that the great effort being expended here, so far at least, and I’ve only had a few months here, but the same thing holds true at Fordham where I’ve been before, is really by and large going down the drain. It’s a kind of wasted effort. I don’t see any real growth going on here in terms of our interaction with them. And how do you come to grips with this problem? You think about it, you go along with the system pretty much. And they’ll talk about it. I have a large class, I’d say in philosophy they’re a little bit too large. So their big thing was, let’s break it down — there’s not enough contact. So I broke it down into discussion groups. They don’t want to say anything, they have nothing to say. They don’t know how to come to grips with the problem.

Judge: For two years now, almost two years, I’ve decided to blow the gaff. And I have a senior section where you’re free for one year. And what I’m finding out is, the students say, “Well, no one has ever asked me what I want.” But what I am interested in here is the habit aspect, the period of discovery of the human thing. Now when he touches me on something contingent to my area, I move into that area. If I don’t have the information, I’ll get it someplace, you see. This is the tactic I’m trying to explore.

Flynn: But how do you do this with sixty students?

Judge: I had sixty-seven last year, you see. When you get a student working, you don’t have to worry today, tomorrow, or Thursday morning. He begins to boil, and, I think this is greatly possible.

Flynn: Suppose he’s going completely down the wrong way?

Judge: So what, this is experience.

Flynn: You don’t mind if he winds up ignorant.

Judge: I don’t. Let him chance his life.

Flynn: Well, I think that’s a very dangerous philosophy.

Judge: It is. That’s why I love it.

Johann: Well, maybe there’s another way of putting it, that wouldn’t sound so dangerous. But there’s a kind of native curiosity on their part, the difficulty is the way they get a lot of the material is not actually relevant to what their main concerns are. I think that’s one of the main concerns here at Holy Cross, part of what was manifested in our discussion at the faculty meeting the other day; this idea that there is a concern with the quality of our society, the quality of life. There is some idea that the college itself is not facing up to. I went to a student dinner and it’s like a record, you can get any place at any time by pressing a button and all the evils about the institution all come out. Now these are concerns in some sense which are extracurricular concerns. These are the things they talk about; these are the things that occupy them. And then they’ve got all the class material, and by and large, it’s irrelevant to what they spend their time thinking about. Now it seems to me that education at any particular time, if it’s really to function as an education, has to begin with the kinds of problems facing society at that particular stage of its development. These boys have it by osmosis; it’s in their bones. These are their concerns, worries, and perplexities. If they come here and all of what they have prescinds from this, then naturally they’re going to feel that this is all irrelevant. It’s one of the great
words, it's a cliche' now, but it is irrelevant to what they're going to be, to the shaping of their lives in the future. They're getting a certain amount of truth, but they can get by using all the tricks of the trade. You can get passing grades here very easily with a minimum amount of work. But there's no real creative process going on here. Now is it simply their fault? I don't think so. I don't believe it's simply ours. We ourselves are victims of the system. But the thing is, unless we can face the kinds of concern that are actually theirs, the kinds of things they are really curious about, and bring all the disciplines to bear upon this, then I don't think we're really doing anything.

Flynn: I think we're sitting around in these classrooms talking and talking and talking, but yet, we're not teaching. This school is awash with talk, and coffee and there's very little teaching going on.

Happe: To talk with you is an education, in one hour, you're so full of crap . . .

Flynn: I think that we have developed a very unhealthy philosophy on this campus. For the past five or six years the question has always been — "What's wrong with Holy Cross?".

Lawler: It's not a question of what's wrong with Holy Cross. It's a question of what's wrong with American colleges. He isn't going to find anything better any other place.

Flynn: That's the point — plunge into American education, and drown. A flow of words and there's nothing in them. That's what they're getting in the classroom. That's the type of term papers they're writing. No content. And, I think, content comes first.

Johann: You get the sense of separation between their educational process and the things that they're dealing with themselves all the time. It just can't be the content, divorced from the context. I think we've lost the sense of context in our education. And what we're more and more aware of is that the organization as synthesis is on the active level; it's not on the theoretical level. And therefore, it's in response to concrete problems. It's in response to the concrete shape of our lives, and therefore, we bring our different disciplines to bear on these problems to which they're relevant.

Flynn: Don't you think the problem is the learning problem?

Johann: We have been engaged very much in giving answers to questions they're not asking. In other words, you can't supply something for which there is no need. Now, if you're going to have learning, you're going to have to start where the problems are, and as they are felt in experience. We don't do that; for example, setting up the whole curriculum completely independent of what the student's actual interests and problems are. This is what we've always done. We're still doing it. We're revising our curriculum, and in terms of what we are revising it? There is a sense — but not just a sense — that something is wrong with our society. We all share in that. But have we begun to think, how can you come to grips with it? And where, if any place, but at the university should that thinking be going on? What universities are really doing that?

A Student: One thing I can say from people I know is that there's a lot of kids who go to class, come out of class and who'll say, "big deal, what's it mean to anything I'm going to do when I get out of here."

Lawler: This really upsets me. I really feel there are too many students here who just are not interested. And I don't think, although I've been knocking the system, it's entirely the system's fault. I don't think it's entirely my fault as a teacher. I think there are just too many who won't accept the fact that, damnit, you ought to be interested in African history just to be interested in it.

Happe: I think they do it from a feeling of guilt. They feel we have corrupted them into career orientation since junior year in high school, and they write their goddamn Holy Cross application that says, "what's your major going to be?" Who knows? A pimply-faced sixteen-year-old kid knows what he's going to be when he's thirty-two? This crap should have gone out of the system long ago.

Flynn: Thank you, Putney Swope!

Johann: Is it not true that an educational institution should, I believe one aspect of it certainly, be in the context of communication and a common inquiry. You try to maximize a context which they don't have elsewhere, otherwise there's no reason for having schools.

Happe: Maybe we should all close down.

Johann: I'm not trying to suggest that I, in any way, have the answer. I am aware of a problem here, and it does seem to me that it calls for a radical reconstructing of our educational procedures. But how you go about it, I'm not sure.

Lawler: Wasn't it the superintendent of the Springfield schools who said last week, and it's an astounding statement from an American public school system; he said we can keep the old methods if we want, but if we're going to keep the old methods, we're going to have to have policemen in the corridors. Either we get new methods or keep the old methods with police, because we're not going to be able to teach in the old way unless you have policemen.