Reaffirming a Great Tradition in American Education
Reaffirming a Great Tradition

Albert Gallatin, adviser to and cabinet member under Thomas Jefferson, started a revolution in American higher education. He rejected the limited Greek and Latin curriculum in vogue at American universities during the early part of the nineteenth century, and, when he cofounded New York University in 1831, it was with a new kind of university in mind. An American university, he believed, should be located “in the heart of a throbbing metropolis,” and its curriculum should be wide in range and relevant to the concerns of its urban citizens. For 150 years, New York University has adhered to the principles of its cofounder. All the schools and divisions of the University have made excellent use of the unique and unlimited resources of New York City both in curriculum planning and in extracurricular activities.

The creation of the Gallatin Division in 1972 officially reaffirmed the University’s commitment to these principles by designating a division where innovation in education and flexibility in curriculum are the hallmarks.

The creation of the Gallatin Division recognizes in certain students the quality of resourcefulness that Albert Gallatin most admired in others and for which he is best remembered. For these students, who are mature and self-directed, the Gallatin Division offers the opportunity to plan an individualized program of study that can result in the achievement of distinctive educational and career goals.

The 150-year-old tradition of bold innovation is nowhere better exemplified at New York University today than in the Gallatin Division’s approach to education. The Division acts as a facilitator in providing its more than 500 students with access to the resources of the entire University. Classes given by most other schools and colleges of the University are open to the Gallatin student, as well as the options of developing projects for independent study and arranging fieldwork or internship experiences.

The Gallatin approach to education recognizes that for a self-directed person, a quality learning experience can take place in many varied situations outside the classroom. Students work closely with a Gallatin faculty adviser to design a program that can combine both professional goals and personal schedules.

At the same time that the Division provides its students with access to resources and flexibility in program design, the Division maintains extremely high admissions standards to ensure that quality keeps pace with innovation. Although there are no major or minor areas of concentration required, Gallatin students are expected to be conversant with a formidable list of great books as a graduation requirement.
The Gallatin Approach to Education

The philosophy behind Gallatin's innovative and nontraditional approach to academic programs is reflected in a response Dean Herbert London often gives when asked how the Division helps its students plan and prepare to meet their goals: "At Gallatin, the future is right now. The students are already involved in their futures by acquiring a first-rate higher education and firsthand practical experience at the same time."

Gallatin offers three academic programs. Two undergraduate programs lead to the Bachelor of Arts in individualized study; the third, a graduate program, leads to the Master of Arts in individualized study.

University Without Walls Program. The success of this highly innovative program, established in 1972, inspired the creation of the Gallatin Division. The program offers students the opportunity to design a program specially tailored to their career goals and academic growth, emphasizing independent study and internship experiences that contribute directly to the student's professional skills.

Cooperative Education Program. This program permits career-minded students to combine employment with academic study. The Division places students with firms and organizations in paid, entry-level or higher positions related to their specific career goals. At the same time, students attend work seminars designed to develop skills specifically related to their jobs. These positions often lead to full-time employment with the same firms after graduation.

The Master's Degree Program. This program grew naturally out of the undergraduate University Without Walls Program. This rigorous, selective master's program enables students to pursue in-depth research, practical expertise, and creative mastery in their areas of interest. They may choose to present and defend a research thesis in the traditional manner or to demonstrate mastery through an original performance or artistic creation.

All of the programs are offered on a full-time or part-time basis in order to accommodate the busy work schedules or commitments to family and community of the majority of the Gallatin students.
In attempting to present a profile of the typical Gallatin student, one conclusion that can be drawn rapidly and with certainty is that there is no single profile that accurately encompasses the diversity of the student population.

The mix of students from varied backgrounds and different ages makes the Gallatin Division a stimulating, vital place to learn, share experiences, and expand intellectual horizons.

Many are older students who may be accomplished professionals in a wide variety of areas and want either to earn academic credentials or to pursue a new career direction. Others are young students recently out of high school intent on starting to develop a career. A proportion of the younger students are well-known performing artists who gravitate to Gallatin’s flexible academic programs to acquire a higher education after achieving prominence in their specialty. There are a number of women whose education has been interrupted to bring up a family and who have become active as community leaders through their volunteer efforts. These women are returning to school after a long absence from formal education. And finally there are those students who simply want flexibility and interdisciplinary study in an academic program.

Perhaps the best demonstration of the success of Gallatin’s unique approach to education is the outstanding record of academic achievement of the students. Gallatin undergraduates have won several University awards, such as the Whit Whitman Prize in poetry, the Maas Essay Prize, and the political science prize. In 1979, a Gallatin student won the only full scholarship awarded annually by the Graduate School of Public Administration. And in 1980, a Gallatin student placed first in a citywide German language competition.

Three-quarters of all Gallatin’s graduates of the University Without Walls and Cooperative Education Programs go on to pursue and earn graduate degrees. And every Gallatin graduate who has sought admission to a graduate school has gained entry.

Gallatin graduates in general have achieved an unusually high level of success and visibility in almost every area of New York City life. Many prominent figures in theatre, films, publishing, journalism, advertising, business, finance, law, medicine, and the social agencies are graduates of the Gallatin Division.
The Gallatin Division provides a forum for the discussion of the leading ideas and issues of the day in its three series, held throughout the academic year, on public policy, writers at work, and artists at work. One mission of the Division realized by these series is its role as a liaison to the business and public sectors and to the larger urban community served by New York University.

The Public Policy Series. This series provides a forum for the discussion of contemporary matters of national significance. Leading members of the public and private sectors present opposing views on a particular theme.

In 1979, the theme was "Energy and International Affairs" with participants such as Irving Kristol, editor of Public Interest; Herman Kahn, director of the Hudson Institute; Irwin Stelzer, president of NERA (National Economic Research Associates); Peter Bradford of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission; John Dingell, chairman of the House Subcommittee on Energy; Edward Luttwak, senior associate of the Georgetown University Center for Strategic Affairs; Robert Fri, president of Energy Transition Corporation; Joseph Greene, president of Seven Springs; Walter Marshall, deputy minister, United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority; Zygmunt Nagorski, vice president, Lehman Institute; and Robert Stobaugh, editor of Energy Futures.

In 1980, the series focuses on the theme "Agenda for the Nation: An Examination of the Four Critical Questions Facing America in the '80s — Inflation, National Security, Energy, and the Limits of Growth."


The Writers at Work Series. Writers at Work brings noted writers, critics, and editors to the University to discuss topics related to the theme of being a writer. Several informal lectures are given each year by major literary figures for the publishing and writing community.

Past participants in the series have included Nobel Prize laureate I. B. Singer; Harvey Shapiro, editor of The New York Times Book Review; Toni Morrison; Robert Gottlieb, president of Alfred A. Knopf; Norman Mailer; Hortense Calisher; Kitty Carlisle Hart; Irving Howe; Gay Talese; Erica Jong; and Tillie Olsen.

Writers participating in the fall 1980 series include Reynolds Price, Maxine Hong Kingston, and Norman Mailer.

The Artists at Work Series. This series, now in 1980, serves as a forum for artists to discuss various aspects of being an artist. The first forum in the series in November 1980 features a conversation between Barbara Lee Diamondstein and Louise Nevelson.

The Interdisciplinary Arts Seminar

The seminar permits students to explore the social, political, economic, and legal issues that have an impact on artists and their work. Frequent guest lecturers from the New York City art scene participate in seminars, and students may undertake related independent study projects.

Internship or apprenticeship placements are available to qualified students. The apprenticeships are a cooperative venture between the Gallatin Division and the Arts Apprentice Program of the Department of Cultural Affairs of the City of New York.
Contributions and Support

In the past few years, the Gallatin Division has received many contributions from organizations and individuals that have been used for the sponsorship of new programs and scholarship aid.

Major contributors that deserve special mention are:
- Mobil Oil Foundation
- Rockefeller Foundation
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A Personal Note

If this report has stimulated your interest in any of our programs and you would like to talk about the ways in which you or your organization can get involved in our activities, please write or call me for further information or to set up an appointment.

Herbert I. London, Dean
Gallatin Division
New York University
Rufus D. Smith Hall
Washington Square
New York, N.Y. 10003
(212) 598-7077, 7078

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