If this perception of optimal presentation is correct...the best approach to general education in the future seems to be less disciplinary and more problem-oriented. The problem (or big issue) addressed...could be of the following kind: the nature and consequences of human nature, the basis of moral reasoning, the crisis of global fresh water supply and its solution. Such an approach would require some breadth on the part of the instructor, or team-teaching by a group of complementary experts.

Professor of Greek and Latin Richard F. Thomas, chair of the classics department, focused on the disappearance of historical perspective.

Our country has become remarkably and alarmingly presentist. Popular culture and self-absorption tend in the direction of allowing us to live purely in the present, oblivious of the past and unheeding of the needs of the future....[G]iven the political season and our own recent history I cannot resist giving one anecdote. In 1947 General George C. Marshall delivered a speech at Princeton University, including the following words:

I doubt seriously whether a man can think with full wisdom and with deep convictions regarding certain of the basic international issues of today who has not at least reviewed in his mind the period of the Peloponnesian War and the fall of Athens.

Why do these words now sound so quaint? Thucydides (without whom we know next to nothing about the Peloponnesian War) is as useful a guide now as he was 60 years ago....

In Athens 2400 years ago the free adult male population voted for the war, while our Senate did the same two years ago. That the motives for each group’s doing so were in some cases shared is something worth knowing and reflecting on. But if Colin Powell were to say what Marshall then said, the response from some 90 percent of a contemporary commencement audience...would presumably be puzzlement. Why? Has some other text replaced Thucydides...as a guide for our citizens in