In 1962, Raymond College arose as the first cluster college of University of the Pacific. It fulfilled the vision of President Robert Burns — to reinvigorate the liberal arts and grow the University while maintaining a student-centered focus.

It also brought national attention to Pacific.

"Pacific may become one of the nation’s most interesting campuses," observed Time magazine in an October 1963 article.

Ten years later, when universities across the country were struggling financially and cutting programs, Pacific’s cluster colleges were still being talked about, in the San Francisco Chronicle, the L.A. Times, the Wall Street Journal and others. And schools such as UC Santa Cruz, UC San Diego, Michigan State University and Western Washington University were beginning to follow Pacific’s lead.

Innovative

It wasn’t just the cluster concept that brought attention to Raymond; its program was unique on virtually every front. Raymond offered a three-year bachelor’s degree program in liberal arts. That’s it. There were no departments, no majors — and no grades.

In the early years, the program included 27 courses, of which 22 were required. Students had the freedom to explore other topics through independent study and research. Though in some ways the prescribed curriculum seemed constraining, it also added to the cohesiveness of the community.

"The strength of the program was that students had the same common background," said Raymond physics professor Neil Lark.

Community

In Raymond College, community was key. Students and faculty studied and ate together on a regular, almost daily basis. Classes were small — no more than 15 students — and focused on seminars and independent study.

“Small seminar-type classes require total participation in discussion,” Ralph Holcomb ’73 reflected on his experience at the time. “I became involved with my classes as never before.”

Interdisciplinary

The curriculum incorporated the classical divisions of the liberal arts: humanities, social sciences and natural sciences, with a focus on integrating the learning experience. It also encompassed a global perspective, including non-Western
Where are they now?

What can you do with a degree in liberal arts? Anything. Raymond graduates have made their marks in virtually every field. Here are just a few examples:

L. Adrienne (Sherrill) Cupples ’65
Professor of Biostatics and Epidemiology, Boston University School of Public Health

Beverly Moon ’65
Methodist Graduate School of Theology, Taipei, Taiwan, retired author, The Role of Revelation in the World’s Religions (McFarland, 2010)

Ursula (Swentt) Shepherd ’66, ’73
Professor of Honors and Biology, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque; CASE and Carnegie Foundation 2011 U.S. Professor of the Year

Peter Morales ’67
First Latino President, Unitarian Universalist Association

Edna (Turner) DeVore ’67
Deputy CEO and Director of Education and Public Outreach, SETI Institute

Gregory Graves ’69
Surgeon, Sutter Cancer Center

Carter Brown ’70, ’73
Senior Advisor and former CEO of Major, Lindsey & Africa LLC

Roger Berry ’72
Nationally recognized sculptor

Hon. Douglas V. Mewhinney ’73
Calaveras County Superior Court Judge, retired

Frederick E. Harris ’76
Assistant Vice Chancellor, College Finance and Facilities Planning, California Community Colleges

Gary M. Katz ’76
Nationally recognized finish carpentry specialist, author and presenter

The Weekly High Table dinner embodied Raymond’s living/learning community, with a shared meal and an engaging presentation, followed by stimulating discussion.

Individual

“Raymond College from the very beginning shunned letter grades as a way of evaluating a student’s work,” said George Blum, a former Raymond College sociology professor.

Students received term letters, which included an evaluation of their achievements, strengths and weaknesses.

“Overall, Raymond remained true to its philosophy of treating students as individuals who deserved an evaluation that went beyond a mere grade symbol, even though some concessions had to be made in communicating our evaluations to the wider public,” said Blum.

The first graduating class set the bar high, with 14 of 39 graduates earning prestigious fellowships, including three Fulbright awards and two Rockefeller grants. Graduates parlayed their liberal arts degrees into a wide variety of career paths, with more than 70 percent going on to graduate and professional schools.

As the 1970s drew to a close, financial and other challenges resulted in the eventual dissolution of the cluster colleges. But though the physical institution no longer exists, Raymond’s essence is still very much a part of Pacific today.

Small classes, close faculty-student interaction, an integrated foundation for liberal learning and respect for diversity are pillars of Pacific’s mission. Innovation and interdisciplinary research and programs are common and encouraged across the entire University. Beyond the classroom, producing graduates who can think critically and who care about creating and sustaining a good society are primary Pacific values.

As Raymond alumni gather together this summer for a celebratory High Table, they can take pride that their legacy is still very much alive at Pacific today.

For more about the Raymond College 50th Anniversary, visit PacificAlumni.org/Raymond.