

Toward a new concept of the University

When the Centennial College concept was first discussed, it seemed like a fine way to commemorate the University's first century.

Now, with the Centennial Educational Program becoming a reality, it appears to be more a way of commemorating the next hundred years.

The philosophy and ideas in the Centennial Committee's report below are more a fantastic blueprint for the future than a celebration of the past.

The Nebraskan editorial page staff thanks Dr. Robert Knoll, Dr. Phil Scribner and Acting Chaceclor Merk Hobson (committee members) for permission for the use of this document.

Centennial Education Report

Within the past generation a new kind of student, a new kind of faculty, and a new kind of university have developed. To meet the challenges which these changes present and to provide for an educational and national future whose nature is unforeseeable, many persons have concluded that experiments in university curriculum and organization are called for.

The purpose of such endeavors should be a graduate sharply aware of himself, his society, and his world, and a student able and desirous of continuing his liberal and professional education on his own.

The New Students

Students who come to the University of Nebraska now are different from those who came twenty years ago. A larger number of high school graduates choose to enroll than before; and of those who come, a larger number stay to graduate.

Though the numbers are greater, their quality is not inferior. Television and other instruments of mass communication have provided them with astonishing funds of miscellaneous information, some of it inaccurate, much of it irrelevant, part of it useful, and many have travelled widely. The new students come to us with new formal preparation. High school science programs have been set up by distinguished scientists, the "new math" has become widespread — and public school English has undergone elaborate revision. In the future advanced placement programs promise to change drastically the relation of entering students to the University.

PERHAPS MORE important, the temper of the undergraduates seems to be changing. The students have learned to react quickly to situations far from home ground, and echoes of Vietnam and Berkeley can be heard promptly in Lincoln. In some universities the students have not hesitated to bite the hand that presumes to feed them, and

generally students are becoming increasingly critical of their courses, professors, and colleges.

They complain that universities have made them numbers on IBM cards, anonymous to teachers and advisers, a gray mass to their administrators; and they resent a lack of individual attention. For the past two years — at least — responsible students through their official channels (e.g. ASUN) have undertaken to scrutinize the university programs. It is significant that the disgruntled students are not the weakest; quite the contrary. The most critical are often the brightest, the most committed socially, and the most responsible morally.

The best seem the most critical.

The New University

The new faculty is also different. The new professor is likely to be a specialist rather than a generalist, to see himself a member of a profession before he is a member of the intelligentsia. Because his loyalties are bound to his discipline more than to his university, the new staff member is highly mobile. He puts down roots slowly and pulls them up quickly.

BECAUSE departments, colleges, and universities have become so large, many feel anonymous on campus. Some are dissatisfied with the kinds of courses they feel bound to teach and the cut-and-dried nature of the curriculum generally. Significant numbers are bored by the whole enterprise and yet feel inadequate individually to effect a change.

If the students feel estranged from the faculty, many professors feel estranged from one another. Departments, colleges and perhaps the university itself have outgrown easy human comprehension and its organization as a human institution falters. A good many of the faculty like a good many of the students are restive.

The New Faculty

Part of this restiveness is surely in reaction to the new university. Until this generation educational institutions of 20,000 students have never existed, but now departments have grown into colleges, and colleges into empires. A campus which was once a place of community now has traffic problems, and the right hand hardly knows what the left hand does. One might say that the university has become as impersonal as the city and its occupants subject to similar kinds of alienation.

Indeed the problems of the urban community and those of the academic community are strikingly similar: bigness, impersonality, individual irresponsibility.

THE UNIVERSITY in this generation has changed its nature. Where formerly a university was to a large extent a shelter for reflection and a channel for the dissemination of received wisdom — the ideal was a Hall of Ivy — in our time it has become a Research Center. (The relation of the College of Agriculture to the state has always been *sui generis*.)

In our time we have increasingly seen a shift from being to doing, from knowing to producing, and universities often justify their existence by prominently listing their explicit research contributions to business and society.

The market place and the campus have been joined. Institutional rewards have increasingly gone to researchers rather than to teachers, to analysts rather than synthesizers, and "service" is often thought of less as an aspect of teaching and more as an aspect of institutional or personal advancement.

Ironically as the market and the campus have been linked at the most advanced levels of research, the undergraduate courses of study have been increasingly fragmented by administrative divisions; i.e., departments.

PRESSURES ON the student for specialization have come earlier and earlier and interrelationship of study has become unusual. The relation of humane values to the development of technology, for example, has remained outside the standard curriculum in both engineering and arts colleges.

Thanks to the present course structure, the student is invited to see the disparity rather than the unity of things, and often complains that what he studies is "unreal" and irrelevant to the world outside the classroom. The new university in gaining new patronage has sometimes neglected its old responsibilities.

Summary

Like all institutions the university must be constantly renewed; where it cannot change society, it must modify itself. But departments and disciplines which may have been established as administrative conveniences have hardened into vested interests, and what started as pedagogical experiment has been apotheosized.

As a consequence the present fragmentation of intellectual life is frequently assumed to be the natural state of affairs, above revision. It need only be added that the reward system in contemporary universities often discourages intellectual and professional experimentation.

The state of contemporary universities is pretty clear: restive students who think themselves lost in a mass, studying subjects they feel to be irrelevant in an institution so large it inspires neither affection nor intellectual curiosity.

Experiments Elsewhere

Within the last decade a number of universities have undertaken educational experiments which they hope will close the widening psychological gap between students and faculty and the intellectual split among the academic disciplines.

Some large universities have experimented with residential arrangements in order to exploit dormitories for educational purposes. At Florida State and at Michigan State, students are grouped in residential units of manageable size, and classes are held in these dormitories among residential associates.

By breaking up the total university into smaller college-type units, these institutions hope

to counteract the sense of overwhelming mass. By grouping all students in college-size dormitories, without further curricular adjustments, such places as the University of Kansas hope to bring the impersonal university down to human dimension.

A NUMBER of institutions have combined residential and elaborate curricular experimentation. At Justin Morrill College, Michigan State University, not only do the students share coeducational dormitories, but they share a unique program of studies. This special program has an international emphasis calling for independent study both on and off the campus. Many of its courses are "problem centered" as opposed to "subject matter centered" and are interdisciplinary.

The experimentation at Montiel College, Wayne State University, is almost exclusively curricular. It seeks to regroup knowledge into three synthetic academic disciplines: Science of Society, Natural Science, and Humanistic Studies. About half the students' three undergraduate years are spent in such integrative studies. The remaining time is spent in the traditional departments.

Similar kinds of integrative, synthetic studies are under consideration at Hampshire College, the new institution being sponsored by Smith, Mt. Holyoke, Amherst, and the University of Massachusetts.

ON THE West Coast both the University of the Pacific and the University of California at Santa Cruz are attempting to break up the great university into small independent colleges clustered together. Each college at each university has its own curriculum, faculty, and dormitory, rather than the model of Oxford and Cambridge. They strive to encourage interdisciplinary cooperation and minimize early specialization.

In these experiments efforts are made to combine living and curricular experience, to encourage interdepartmental synthesis, and to involve the faculty and students actively with one another.

The Problems and Goals

If one judges from the experiences of other institutions, a variety of alternatives are open to any university which, responding to the current scene, wants to experiment in education.

The difficult questions seem to be: How can an undergraduate's education be made personal and synthetic, while at the same time professional and specialized? How can curricular and extra-curricular experiences be united? How can the various disciplines be integrated without destroying intellectual rigor? How can faculty specialists be made generalists and their enthusiasm for teaching captured?

A Proposed College

To deal with these questions we propose that a general, experimental College for undergraduates be established as soon as faculty can be assembled and curriculum determined. We assume that anything that can be learned in this experimental College about living arrangements, curriculum, teacher-student relationships, and even examinations ought to be made available to the larger university.

This should be a residential college for about two hundred students in each yearly class. The students should live in coeducational dormitories where commons rooms, class and study rooms are also provided; to minimize isolation from the general university, they should eat in a general dining room with students not in the experimental College. Commuting students should be provided carrels where they can leave coats and books, and receive mail; the carrels will be their homes away from home.

By using dormitories in this fashion, we hope that peer groups will educate one another and that their curricular and extra-curricular life will be joined.

SEVERAL FACULTY men and women should be invited to live in the College; and we plan

that non-resident faculty will lunch with the students regularly and keep extended office hours.

The student body should be a representative, a largely random sample of university students — this is not an honors college — and the individual should be admitted upon University invitation. No student would be enrolled against his will but applications would be only selectively entertained. Students anticipating careers in agriculture, engineering, history or education would be equally welcome.

We hope that the changes in attitudes during the years in the College might be evaluated so that we can gauge our success and failures rationally. These results should be made generally available.

INDEED we would hope that the College would be but one of a number of contemporary experiments which could be judged comparatively.

One such experiment would be the academic liaison between the College and the students in the reorganized honors program in the College of Arts and Sciences. The latter students would be invited to attend special College lectures and colloquiums and perhaps participate in some College classes. The close association between the two groups of students, we hope, would foster an *esprit de corps* beneficial to both.

The curriculum of the College should remain extremely flexible, responding at every point to the changing needs and interests of students and faculty as well as to current intellectual climate.

One would hope to produce a graduate who was not so much stuffed with information as aware of possibilities, one able to imagine and decide between rational alternatives. He should be an educated man in that he had acquired certain habits of mind, certain abilities to ask and answer questions. He should not be merely the possessor of an established body of doctrine or even information.



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