

~~HIGHER EDUCATION: ACCESS AND EXCELLENCE~~

~~Remarks of  
Ernest L. Boyer  
U. S. Commissioner of Education  
before  
The Council on Higher Education for Israel  
Jerusalem, Israel  
January 11, 1979~~

~~Introduction~~

~~Daniel J. Boorstin, in Democracy and Its Discontents,  
entitled the final chapter of his book "Getting There Is All  
the Fun."~~

~~That statement, a bit tongue in cheek perhaps, seems to  
capture today's higher education mood - in the United States  
at least.~~

- o During the past 20 years we've moved from a relatively selective higher education system to what can only be described as a sprawling enterprise.
- o It hasn't been all fun, of course, but at least we were kept very, very busy.

\*\*\*

Now, after two decades of breathless growth, a kind of morning after mood has settled in.

- o Enrollments have begun to level off.  
Building new facilities has declined.
- o And we're not quite sure what has happened to something we vaguely have identified as "academic standards".

EDITION 870403 070108Z FEB 79  
NOISIAO 870403 070108Z

79 FEB 16 A10 53

NOISIAO 870403 070108Z

OHIO UNIVERSITY  
President, Prof. & the organized  
guests Jim Belknap to  
participate in the 15th birthday  
celebration of this outstanding  
institution.  
Ohio University is a  
unique blend of  
academy & service  
Jim convinced  
it will continue  
& offer unique  
services to the  
region & the  
world in the  
years ahead.

The nation's best  
universities differ  
sharply from  
one another.

Early Elitist Tendencies

*We quite selective*

The truth is that higher learning in America --- ~~while egalitarian in its inclination for many years~~ --- ~~served primarily the privileged.~~

- o Students in colleges were nearly all children of wealth --- sons of merchants, shipbuilders, magistrates, lawyers, gentleman farmers, and, above all, ministers.
- o Only about 10% came from the homes of poor farmers, servants, or seamen.

Once again, compared to European models, academic life was not directly linked to social status.

Even so, the underprivileged have

- historically been less well represented in higher learning institutions.

o o o

There were exceptions to be sure.

The Church sponsored college frequently used spiritual piety rather than intellectual prowess to measure student progress.

And the land grant college dramatically linked the university to the social and economic expansion of the nation.

Even so, while these two uniquely American institutions trained, they did not break the connections between social privilege and formal higher education.

For more than two hundred years -  
the percentage of high school graduate going on to higher  
education crept up very slowly.

By 1900 it reached 36%  
- and then plateaued for over 40 years.  
But this 36% represented about 10% of the age cohort.  
Clearly higher education is the exception and not the rule in America.

#### Federal Policy Intervention: From Elite to Mass Higher Education

Today, of course, all this has changed.

In America, we have moved from ~~elite to mass~~ to universal higher  
education -- to borrow Martin Trow's descriptive terms.

After World War II - sparked largely by the Federal funded  
G.I. Bill - enrollments took a quantum leap ahead.

- o Some 2,230,000 veterans -- many of them first generation college students --- came to campus
- o And from 1940 to 1960 American higher education enrollment doubled, from 1.5 to 3.2 million.

This dramatic growth -- in turn -- triggered aspirations among historically bypassed students, those who heretofore had never dreamed of college

- o So long as higher education was restricted to the privileged few, blacks, Chicanos, and the economically deprived accepted their exclusion.
- o But when middle income students marched off to college, the poor perceived themselves as tightly and prejudicially locked out of social progress.

Langston Hughes in his poem "Dream Deferred" asks rhetorically -

What happens to a dream deferred?  
Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore...  
Or does it explode?

Once again let me underscore a central point. Compared to many institutions in America social clubs, business and the community power structure higher reasoning was a somewhat open institution but it was still judged insufficient.

As more and more people went to college, more and more people wanted to go and American higher education, quite literally, confronted an explosion of rising expectations.

Colleges and universities from coast to coast -- often torn between turmoil, tradition, and social conscience -- aggressively recruited minority and low income students

The Cogn -- <sup>-- in time -- response</sup> responded to this social revolution.  
In 1972 a Basic Grant program was ~~opened~~ opened, which gave ~~scholarships~~ <sup>scholarships</sup> to needy students ~~federal~~ <sup>federal</sup> ~~grant~~ <sup>grant</sup> p5

And during the 1960s higher education enrolment took another leap ahead.

- o From 1960 to 1977 enrolment increased from 3.2 to 11.4 million.
- o and even more significantly, the percentage of minority students in higher education increased from 7% to 17.5% in just 15 years.

min. f.  
P.Y.

o o o

#### Education As A Right

And here's where all of this has led.

Higher education in America has -- in fact -- become not just a privilege but a "right".

- o A \$6 billion student assistance program has been approved by Congress.
- o And public policy now declares - de facto if not de jure - that no eligible student should be denied access to higher education because of social or economic barriers.

Since World War II the university has -- in short -- become a prime distributor of rewards and the university is a principle means by which upward mobility is achieved.

The university has of course always conveyed rewards.

- o It's just that as more and more people are involved, participating in the reward becomes more and more essential.

- 6 -

- o Riesman and his associates observed, \*  
that middle and lower middle class neighborhoods  
have in recent years been tipped in the  
direction of college "making it harder  
for the majority of young people not  
to go to college than to go".

There is - I am convinced - such a "trip over" point in every culture -

A point at which higher education is so identified with social status - and gain such momentum that for each succeeding generation not going to college becomes less and less an option.

Given these it is my conviction that to resist - rather than respond - to this reality - is perilous as public policy.

Winning the Access Battle *This brings me to my central point.*

~~I suspect~~ I believe the ~~access to higher education battle in America has~~ *The access battle has* largely been won.

Almost all qualified students who want to go to college can find a place -- somewhere in the system.

And a very generous federal assistance program has largely overcome the cost barriers as well.

In the future focus, I suspect, the focus will be -- not on gaining access to the ~~system~~ -- but on gaining admission to particular programs -- to medicine or law or engineering,

---

\* Riesman al et, Academic Values and Mass Education. Double day and Co., 1970

professions where the rewards are high, competition keen and where minorities and women have been under-represented in the past.

0 0 0

*Also one important pattern is beginning to emerge.*

In spite of social pressure - we are beginning to discuss that an open admissions policy does in fact have limits. Universal higher education is not quite universal.

- o Consider for example that for the past five years the proportion of high school graduates going on to college has held steady levelling off at about 60%.
- o In the city of New York where *open admission* was most aggressively pursued by the City University the percentage of high school graduates going on to college peaked in 1973 at 80% and dropped back to 75% in 1977.

There is in short strong evidence to suggest that even when almost all barriers are removed, a significant percentage of high school graduates will not go onto traditional higher learning institutions. For the foreseeable future at least, I believe the outer limits have been reached. The enrollment pattern among 18 to 21 year olds has now stabilized.

On the other hand, adult enrollments will continue to expand.

America is growing older. By the year 2000 the number of adults over 21 years of age will increase from 64 to 73 %.

- o In response, the Academy is shifting both its content and its calendar to pull the older students back to campus.
- o In 1975, 17 million persons participated in adult education and 4 million more than in 1969.
- o And I'm convinced this pattern will persist.

I suspect non-traditional institutions will also continue to expand - to serve many of the young people who do not go on to formal education.

- o Today, American business and industry are spending between 40 and 50 billion dollars a year on "in-company" training.

And during the next 10 years, many high school graduates will in fact take special non collegiate courses or enroll in a short term trainig programs -- either on or off the job.

Last night I heard that in the Greater Boston area there are over 120 post secondary institutions and as the youth population continues to decline the "non collegiate" schools may, in fact, compete with more traditional higher learning institutions.

To put it bluntly -during the 1960's- we were forced to reexamine our definition of the college student- and we were asked to put our own performance rather than our own crude estimates of the students' talent on the line. This challenge introduced -I am convinced- a healthy tension and in the process the fiber of the academic enterprise was strengthened.

IV

Second, mass higher education forced us to reshape the structure of the university.

As new kinds of students came to higher education, it became absolutely clear that the traditional liberal arts college or research university could not exclusively do the job. We needed a diversity of institutions to serve a diversity of students.

\* From 1960 to 1970 some 550 new institutions were established.

\* Most of this growth occurred at the two-year college level.

During the decade of the 60's a new community college was built in America every 12 days.

\*\*\*\*\*

The State University of New York, with which I am most familiar, illustrates how universities sought to clarify in rather formal fashion just how the new academic functions were to be assigned.

The statewide system in New York has 64 separate institutions.

- \* There are 30 open-access community colleges.
- \* Six are two-year technical institutes. All of these are committed to the popular functions of the university.
- \* The 14 arts and science colleges, four medical centers, four universities and specialized research centers are to some degree committed to the traditional scholastic functions.
- \* The upper level institutions are more or less selective.
- \* Also launched a college for adults -a non-campus independent study institution to serve adults.

Let me put the issue as pointedly as I can. Different kinds of colleges are needed with different levels to serve different students. And any move to expand access without building a diversified higher education system

- \* will not serve the student
- \* nor will excellence be maintained.
- \* AG and TECH
- \* Purchase

There is a danger here of course -something one can only describe as an "UPWARD DRIFT" within the system.

A hierarchy may be quickly fixed and every institution begins to initiate the most elitist institution.

There is also -I suspect- the danger of a "DOWNWARD DRIFT", as well more traditional colleges and universities that try to take the mission of the two year college as the competition for students grow more keen.

I happen to believe this drift is not inevitable -I believe a higher educational system can be shaped and stabilized

\* provided a clear cut-socially significant mission is set forth for each type of institution

\* and provided also there is mobility within the system

If for example those who enter a two year college institution get no academic recognition and can go no further even if they academically succeed.

The system has lacked some faculty "second class" arbitrarily frozen out some able students from further progress-

-AND IT IS BOUND TO FAIL-

\* If, on the other hand, students who enter a two-year program know that if they succeed they can in fact move on, then the inclination to rank order in colleges on a "status" rather than a "mission" yardstick will be diminished. And the prospect of excellence at all levels will be unusually enhanced.

So much for where I think we've come. What has happened to us in the process? What are we to say about this higher education system that's erupted in our midst -- one that serves two-thirds of all high school graduates.

- o It's very big, of course.
- o It's quite untidy.
- o It struggles with competing values -- just like the society it serves.
- o It offers remedial education to students who would not have been admitted in the past.
- o And to be quite candid, it is a system where - according to some critics - quality has declined.

But its more than this, of course.

The open university reflects the fact that knowledge has expanded, work has become more complicated and more education for more people is absolutely crucial.

- o Just as secondary education with 12 years of schooling was pushed 100 years ago, so it is that 14 or more years of formal education seems not unreasonable for those about to enter century 21.
- o The expanded university also reflects the fact that education has become a status symbol and to be excluded is viewed as a discriminatory act.
- o It also recognizes that there is no God-given cut-off line where the gifted and the non-gifted are arbitrarily slit apart and that our selection practices are still more art than science.

- o The expanded university also accepts the rather brash assumption that openness and excellence in higher education are, in fact, not contradictions.

o o o

In the spirit of this conference, I should like to pick up that final note - openness & excellence - and in the remaining moments ~~explore the rather novel notion that increased access has, in fact, led to increased quality in academic life.~~  
*focus on priorities for the 1980's.*

To prop up that rather wobbly proposition, four specific assumptions will be explored.

As I said before our higher learning system is still most untidy--  
but to the extent that mass higher education has forced to reshape the  
system--quality has, in fact, improved.

v

*First, I believe that with all our diversity higher ed*  
*Third, mass higher education has not only reshaped our facilities,*  
*we'll face a something called the common core*  
*it has reshaped our education curriculum as well.*

In the early days American higher education was more or less cohesive.

- \* The production of a learned ministry, the creation of a professional class, the passing on of eternal verities--these were -for years- the goals of Harvard College and of hundreds of imitative institutions.

\*\*\*\*\*

The elective system came along but this did not remove our nation of a common academic core.

During the 20th century American higher education, like America itself, was shaken by war, the crash, the alienation of modern life, the erosion of faith and religion and even rationality.

- \* But, with it all, colleges still accepted some notion of coherence, albeit a pale after glow of the vivid puritan commitment.

This common heritage notion was, however, sharply challenged in the 1960's. As we admitted students from all social and economic groups the notion of coherence was sharply challenged. On campus after campus

- \* Diversity -not conformity- was the new ideology to be worshipped.
- \* Many students, often joined by faculty, viewed as "cultural imperialism" any attempt intellectually to unite Chicanos, native Americans, blacks, New York Jews, San Francisco WASPs, oriental immigrants, ghetto kids, and fundamentalists.
- \* Traditional requirements often were attacked and toppled while new values were aggressively affirmed.

\*\*\*\*\*

An anecdote from Stanford University is instructive. After having dropped almost all requirements in the 60's a faculty committee proposed -in 1976- a required course in western culture.

The student newspaper in a biting attack on the proposition said the new report

proposes to remove from students the right to choose for themselves a course... This is not to deny that courses in western culture are valuable and that most persons could benefit from them. To require them to take them, however,

carries a strong illiberal connotation... It imposes a uniform standard on nonuniform people.

Conventional wisdom had it that all intellectual and cultural connections among students had been snapped.

\*\*\*\*\*

Today, I believe the curriculum pendulum is swinging back again-- and out of our confusion I happen to believe a new more authentic cohesion will emerge.

- \* There is of course a danger. Students must be free to follow their own interests, to develop their own aptitudes, and to pursue their own goals.
- \* On this liberty no one must trespass; this is why colleges have academic majors and electives.
- \* And yet- we are beginning to reaffirm that truly educated persons must move beyond themselves in relation to other peoples and times, understand how their origins and wants and needs are tied to the origins and wants and needs of others.

\*\*\*\*\*

We are beginning to recognize that to suggest that students have nothing in common is just as flawed as to suggest that all students are alike.

John R. Davis, in writing about our current quest, said that behind our

search for standards is a more fundamental search for purpose.

The confusion about standards and the emerging pluralism in higher education are symptoms of a quest for new formulations of purpose. What may emerge, he says along with the emerging pluralism, is a new concept of liberal education. Unlike traditional liberal education, rooted as it was in concepts of mental discipline and transfer of training, liberal education for the decade ahead will increasingly use... contemporary problems of society as the medium of education.

In my own book Educating for Survival, Marty Kaplan and I have also discussed themes of "commoness" which focus on our common heritage, on contemporary institutions and on prospects for the future which we believe justify of consideration.

In any event, I suggest that the general education pattern in America which had reduced itself to something called "distribution requirements" had for all practical purposes lost its intellectual soul. It was all but bankrupt- and the students knew it.

The irreverent confrontations of the 60's shook the skeletons, broke some bones but I suggest that out of that assault a new more authentic notion of liberal education may emerge.

Second, higher ed must bind c with bridge 2  
The world of learn + the world of work.  
Third, higher ed must "serve a dignified role of student"

Finally, mass higher education in a curious and indirect way  
~~also may have strengthened research and scholarship.~~ The sine qua non  
of academic excellence.

Trow, in his brilliant essay on "The Transition from Mass to Universal Higher Education," comments on what he calls the autonomous and the popular functions of the university. The autonomous functions, ~~he says,~~ are those which are

intrinsic to the conception of the historic university.

They include:

- \*the transmission of high culture, the creation of new knowledge, and the formation, selection,
- \* and certification of elite groups, the learned professions, the civil servants.

The popular or mass functions on the other hand flow more directly from the university as a redistributor of privilege and the provision of "useful knowledge" to many social groups and institutions.

Trow suggests that the big state universities in America -many are our most distinguished institutions -have increasingly been performing both autonomous and popular functions, trying to keep the functions insulated from each through graduate and undergraduate schools and academic departments. He insists that we must protect

the highly vulnerable autonomous functions of liberal education and basic research and scholarship from the direct impact of the larger society.

Trow also observes that the autonomous functions of the university are being threatened.

Constituencies, he argues, have become much wider, more heterogeneous, and less familiar.

- \* Governing bodies must now negotiate conflicting values,
- \* and they are inclined to respond to the fear and anger of the many publics. The fit between an expanding university and the tradition of scholarship is very awkward.

\*\*\*\*\*

Trow's analysis is as usual absolutely valid. The tensions within these institutions that try to be both traditional and popular are very real ~~and this is precisely the reason institutional diversity to accomodate student diversity is so crucial.~~

There is, however, another side to all of this. Jencks and Riesman in The Academic Revolution argue that the vastly expanded undergraduate enrollments of the 1960's actually increased faculty power and has helped make that country the world leader in research and universities patrons of high culture. Graduate schools have been expanded, which in turn has made it possible to increase the proportion of students attending undergraduate colleges.

\*\*\*\*\*

My own observation in New York also would sustain this point.

It was through increased enrollments that new facilities were built--  
laboratories and research facilities unheard of 20 years ago.

Mass education expanded undergraduate enrollments in science and  
gave researchers more teaching fellows. I happen to believe that traditional  
research functions have in fact flourished during the days of great  
expansion, in spite of social tension.

One other point. Because of the Federal support the research  
function has been independently sustained.

\* Professor Joseph Ben-David, in his excellent book on  
American Higher Education, carefully traces the emergence  
of mission oriented research noting that the Federal role  
is absolutely crucial.

\* Since 1940 the Federal support of university research and  
development has increased from \$8 million to an estimated  
\$5.4 billion in 1977.

\* Federal R&D support has had its ups and downs but I believe  
it will hold its own and even rise since the urgent social  
problems which depend on research will persist and grow  
increasingly complex.

I believe the Federal Government has a vital role to  
see to it that the scholarly functions are sustained.  
*Leave space to discuss Research Library funds*

Dr. Lewis Thomas -author of Lives of a Cell, and a trustee of  
the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center- said recently at a meeting

of the American Association for the Advancement of Science that these are not the best times for the human mind.

"All sorts of things seem to be turning out wrong," he said...

and the century seems to be slipping through our fingers here at the end, with almost all promises unfilled. I cannot begin to guess at all the causes of our cultural sadness, not even the most important ones, but I can think of one thing that is wrong with us and eats away at us: We do not know enough about ourselves.

We are ignorant about how we work, about where we fit in, and most of all about the enormous, imponderable system of life in which we are embedded as working parts.... it is a new experience for all of us. It's unfamiliar ground.

As the agenda of interdependence grows more urgent, whether on matters of fuel or environment or population or food or health, I believe the university will be called upon to search for plausible answers to our problems and hopefully sustain free inquiry whereevr it may lead.

#### Conclusion

What are we to conclude from all this?

Well, as I look ahead higher education in America faces stress and the pressures of the 1980's will be even more intense.

3

Enrollments will decline, budget will be hit and the university will compete with other social needs.

At the sametime, we've gone through a traumatic period were survived, and several lessons might be learned.

First -- Increasing access to higher education is I suspect inevitable. Education and social progress inextricably tied together and any policy that seeks arbitrarily to limit education beyond high school will not be sustained.

Second -- Universal higher education does in fact have limits. A significant percentage of students for a variety of reasons will not go on to traditional higher education institutions.

Third -- As higher education become more open than selective, the focus will be on the performance of the institution as well as the capacity of the student.

Fourth -- A diversified system of higher education is required to serve a diversified group of students. The separate missions of the university must be clearly indicated and mobility within the system assured.

- 23 -

Fifth -- Even among diverse student groups some commonality can remain, and a new kind of liberal education can be intellectually pursued.

Sixth -- The research mission of the university can be preserved, and enhanced, by the growth and richness of the larger academic community. Further, as the Earth's problems grow more intense, the university will be looked to sustain both basic and applied research.

\*\*\*\*\*

Finally, I suggest -- for the consideration of this most distinguished body that expanding enrollments can strengthen, not diminish, the quality of higher education.

Our challenge is to find appropriate ways to link social justice and the intellectual quest, not as an act of weak surrender but of deep conviction. That human potential--wherever it is found - is a most important resource.

## III

~~First, mass higher education forced the university to rethink the definition of the college student.~~

~~For far too long, many colleges and universities fell back on a self fulfilling prophecy~~

- o Admissions officers were expected to recruit the gifted student who in turn would become the gifted graduate.
- o The aim was to keep the institutional risks very low.
- o The strategy was to find students who would look good at the institution rather than finding those who could profit from a college education.

\* There is of course, but the difference is consequential.

~~So long as colleges depend on the selector's process to screen out all but the academic winners -~~

~~colleges can function as Astin suggests - much as handicappers do:~~

~~they're more interested in predicting performance than in improving it.~~

This doesn't mean that we abolish all admissions standards.

- o Education does mean evaluation
- o And standards are essential.

\* It's just that very often our definition of the "alle student" too limited.