

CHALLENGE OF QUALITY

When I was asked to talk about the "Challenge of Quality" to a group of busy academics, my first inclination was to decline. I have been close enough to the agonies of administration--budget cuts, collective bargaining, competing interests on the campus, the pressure of state legislatures--to know that the day-to-day push to keep some sense of equilibrium on campus is a tough and demanding task. I also know that when one goes to a conference and listens to a session on "quality" there is a touch of irrelevance to it all. We're all inclined to say, "But he doesn't understand what is going on back home. We don't have time for these "Education 101" lectures on the ends of education." I understand that and I won't feel offended if you bring to this session a healthy skepticism.

I do hope, however, you will give me a few moments to explore, what in the long pull, may be the central issue of the 1980s. As I see it, our survival will not relate to money, as essential a life-line as that is, or to governance, as politically crucial as that may be. It won't have to do with federal policy, as anxious as we might be about the direction government is taking. I believe that in the end the health and integrity of the enterprise we direct relates to our clarity of purpose and to our capacity to pursue excellence. I also believe that given the great diversity of higher education, the agenda of quality has to begin at home and be uniquely tailored to each institution. I commend the planners of this conference for

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bringing together not only college administrators but members of the faculty who are crucial in helping the college confront the issue of excellence in the 1980s.

I.

This afternoon I have prepared what might be called an "Inventory for Excellence in the '80s." I would like to give you a pop quiz with four discussion questions. You may listen to each question and write down your answer now or later in your room. Speaking of examinations, I'm reminded of Robert Benchley, who as an undergraduate at Harvard College was quite inattentive to his academic pursuits. When he confronted a final examination in a political science course, there was just one examination question and it went like this: "Please discuss the conflict over off-shore fishing rights between the United States and Great Britain, first from the United States point of view, and then from the point of view of Great Britain." Benchley sat there for a few moments and twisted his pencil but no flashes of genius came to mind. Then he had an inspiration and wrote as follows: "I know nothing about the conflict over off-shore fishing rights from the view of the United States; I know even less about it from the point of view of Great Britain; therefore, I should like to discuss the problem from the view point of the fish." I think the faculty will understand if I speak to the presidents to say "For this afternoon we are going to discuss the quality question from the view point of the fish."

Back to the exam. Are you ready? The first question will be judged unfair because we did not cover it in the lecture nor will you find any references to it in the text. However, here it is. If I were coming to your campus and examine the issue of quality in the future, my first question would be: "Does your college work closely with the public schools?"

The truth is that we face in this country an education crisis of enormous dimensions. About 20 percent of all students who enter high school drop out before they graduate. It is my own estimate that of those who do graduate at least one third are so marginally prepared they are inadequately equipped for further education. When one looks at minorities, the failure and drop out rate is still more staggering. Among blacks, over one third of all young people who enter the public schools do not graduate by age 19, and among Hispanics it is over 40 percent. Those figures have to be understood in the context of the demography of this country. In the next 20 years while the majority white population continues to decline, the black and Hispanic population continues to grow and minorities increasingly will populate the public schools.

Let me give you just three statistics. In the United States in 1979, 27 percent of all white Americans were 18 and under. Among blacks about one-third are 18 years of age and under. Almost one out of two Hispanics is 18 years and under. This fall one out of every two kindergarten students enrolled in the Los Angeles County schools is Hispanic, and more than 50 percent of all the students in the Texas public school system, is

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Hispanic. Here's the point. The face of young America is changing. If you look at the increased population of blacks and Hispanics and then you overlay that with the failure rates, we take seriously education in the public schools.

In 1962, I spent three years directing a school-college collaboration program in the University of California. Twenty years later, I see a revival of interest in school-college collaboration, a movement that may be more dramatic than the flurry of activities after Sputnik. There is a seriousness in our midst about saving education, and most especially saving public education, where 45,000,000 children are enrolled each day.

Quite frankly, I believe a dramatic obligation rests heavily upon the nation's universities and colleges. Higher education has a scandalous detachment from the public schools. We have pretended that we could float above it all in some divine, almost mystical fashion, the right students would find their way to our privileged door. That to me is a myth that must be put to rest. Sure, there is a practical side to this. If we continue to see 20 percent of our students drop out, and that figure increasing to 30 if the current minority population is not better served, we are going to see perhaps one out of every three of the students that we would prefer to serve unavailable for postsecondary education.

The military, also, increasingly lays claim on high school graduates. Because of the above demographic pattern, if the selective service keeps its population pool at the same level that

it is today, 1990 the armed forces would have to have one out of every three high school graduates among the pool from which they are selecting to keep military personnel at the present level. Clearly, colleges and universities have a self interest in getting in precollegiate education.

Let me give you two or three examples of school-college collaboration that encourage me about the future. Next Monday in Washington there will be a colloquium on the future of higher education in the United States. Donald Kennedy, president at Stanford, will announce that Stanford University is going to give top priority to the strengthening of its School of Education. He will argue that faculty members should be rewarded as they support the preparation of teachers.

We are now beginning to realize that this nation can no longer live with the scandal of having the weakest students choosing the profession that matters most, and I believe that the colleges bear heavy responsibility for this decline in prestige and status. Isn't it true that the gifted students on your campus are encouraged to go into science and math, they are tantalized by medicine and law; and it's implicitly if not explicitly stated that if nothing else is available, "why don't you try teaching?" Now I know that the professions I have mentioned are more appealing financially and otherwise. I think teaching has become a very tough, almost grim encounter, but I also believe that if we really believe in the future of this country and the future of quality education and the future of our own institutions, we are going to have to start giving more

priority and dignity and value to preparing educationally the next generation of Americans.

The Bay Area Project in Berkeley illustrates another successful collaboration. Faculty at Berkeley have joined with high school teachers to work on the improvement of writing in the junior and senior high schools. The Bay Area Project, thanks to a federal grant, has now been replicated in some thirty centers across the country.

Also, I am enormously impressed by the work some colleges are doing to serve gifted high school students even before they graduate. Syracuse University has what is called Project Advance, in which high school teachers are designated as adjunct faculty teaching student in the high school. Syracuse gives credit for the instruction in the schools. I firmly believe that we should have networks of collegiate instruction that allow the senior year to be something more than a nine month exercise in tedium and boredom and the truth is that many of our best high school students spend the last year in high school marking time, going to football games, just drifting along. Any college that cares deeply about its future and about students and can't find ways to get some of its instructors to the students and start tapping the gifted young people is not worthy of continued strength and growth. There has been a failure in will and imagination and a smugness and arrogance that we can no longer countenance.

Finally, I would like to see more of our colleges and universities reach out in their own communities and acknowledge

the great teachers in our schools. The more I am in high schools, and I am in them frequently, because the Carnegie Foundation is doing a report on the American High School, the more I believe that teaching high school is one of the toughest jobs. When I hear people sit back and smugly criticize over cocktails, I can only say I don't think most of them would last two weeks in the classroom. It is a tough, demanding job and I think we must work for ways to give more recognition to good teachers. (There are, of course, bad one too!)

Several months ago, I was having dinner with Father Tim Healy of Georgetown University and we got on this subject of teacher recognition. Tim said that about two years ago he called 15 students from the Bronx High School of Science into his office and asked who was their best high school teacher. They gave him the name of the person right off. He called the principal to make sure the students weren't giving him a fictitious name, and sure enough, there was such a teacher who had been there for many years. Yes, the principal said, he was outstanding. That spring at commencement time Father Healy said, "I would like to introduce a candidate for an honorary degree. He teaches school at Bronx High School of Science. He is the one who made Georgetown possible."

That was a powerful statement to the student who were there, to parents, to the faculty. We have found an educator who's making the difference. I wish that every college in this country would plan some way to honor teachers. I don't care if it is an honorary degree, that's only illustrative of a broader point.

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Why can't colleges take the initiative to bring teachers occasionally to the campus. It has to come from the colleges. We are the ones who have leverage in the community, and the quality of our own institutions is directly linked to the quality of the schools. In the next decade, unless we move teaching up the priority list and get away from smugness, I think the future of higher education is dark indeed.

II.

In testing quality, I would ask a second question, "Is this college's general education program coherent and well planned?" As some of you may know, The Carnegie Foundation completed a study about a year ago on general education. We surveyed hundreds of catalogues and visited many campuses. We found that general education is in a shambles. Colleges have hidden under the label of "diversity" and we have used the elective system that has degenerated into a kind of hodge podge. I believe we can no longer afford such carelessness about something so essential because in a very central way, the way a college defines its general education is the way it defines its mission.

I am convinced that our curriculum should help students understand the interdependent nature of the world and we cannot allow them simply to see education as a grab bag of electives. Let me drift back to the schools again. We are enormously critical of the way schools have allowed the curriculum to unravel. My memory is that in the state of Illinois there are

over 200 separate high school courses listed. We have high school catalogs in this country that are thicker than some college catalogs. High school students are walking around wondering what is meant by education. And yet high schools have lost their way because they have confusing and contradicting signals from higher education. Their understanding of priorities of education mirror what they hear higher education people describing as priorities and purpose. We cannot be critical of the incoherence on the college campus.

We cannot define, of course, what the dimensions of common learning should be for every college. I can only say that if a college still has an intentional vision of itself it will, through its faculty and administrators, seriously confront priorities and seek to define its own unique educational vision. If the college has no such vision, then it should declare itself an academic supermarket--a place where each student can come in and shop around, check out after four years with no questions asked.

I am impressed that we are confident about the length of education but unsure about its substance. We know that a bachelor's degree takes four years. The truth is that when John Harvard graduated from Emmanuel College in Cambridge, England, it was a four-year program. He wanted to replicate in the New World what he had experienced in the Old. It took four years to get a degree at Cambridge, so it took four years in the New World. The irony to that is that soon after John Harvard left Emmanuel College it went to a three-year program. I would wager that if Harvard had graduated somewhat later, three years would be the

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pattern in the new world and today we would be absolutely convinced that you couldn't become an educated person in less time.

Be that as it may, I don't want to suggest that we change the time of education. I do say that I believe we should help educate our students broadly, encountering issues that go beyond their own individual interests. When I was Commissioner, Joan Cooney of Childrens Television Workshop, asked if we would help fund a program on science for junior high school students. I thought it was a good idea. In doing the research for this program, junior high school students in New York were asked simple questions about the world in which they lived. One question was "Where does water come from?" My memory is that 15 to 20 percent of the students said "the faucet." Asked, where does light come from?" They said "the switch." "Where does garbage go?" They said "Down the chute."

I was amused, and then sobered by the circumstance where students see only as far as they can feel or touch. It is precisely that kind of ignorance that leads us to kick the gas pumps when there's a shortage, instead of understanding that somehow it is related to the Middle East. I think we must help students understand the common human agenda, which to me represents the essence of general education, and explore those issues that engage us all. The truth is that while we are all alone we are also are together. Unless we understand our connectedness as well as our independence we are not educated for the future. Therein lies the challenge of common learning for

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the future. I would ask, then, if your college is interested in quality, does it offer a general education that is coherent and well-planned.

III.

Third, I would ask "Does the college integrate career and liberal education?" To me this is the issue of the future. Recently, during campus visits, I have asked how many of the recent graduates are in career-based fields and how many are in the traditional liberal arts fields. It is held up with consistency on almost every campus that about two thirds of all the baccalaureates today are in career fields, with business usually number one, health-related areas number two and communications third. About one third or less of all graduates are in what might be called the traditional liberal arts, e.g., history or literature, those fields that we have thought of historically as the essence of the baccalaureate. In the last 10 to 15 years there has been a revolution in this country. Baccalaureate programs are now dramatically career-based in their focus, or if not that, heavily committed to professional training for the future.

I would add a second caveat just to put this in bold relief. The fastest growing component of education in America today is in business and industry. Between 35 and 50 billion dollars every year is being spent by the corporate world to educate their personnel. Beautiful campuses are being built. I

speculate that in the next twenty years, the biggest threat will not be declining enrollments; it may not even be declining standards in the schools. The biggest threat may be the entrepreneurial competitors who offer students education directly related to the job. And if the monopoly we now have, namely, certification, accreditation, and credentialing begins to crumble, we may lose the battle.

The nation's colleges and universities must decide how they will respond to the career interests of students while at the same time suggesting that there is something more to education than careers. The goal is to blend the legitimate interest in vocation with the broader interest in living a valued life. For us not to engage in a serious debate about "ends" would be a great mistake. And if the students see us only competing in job-related education, I believe higher education will be outdone by those who do it better. Our claim for credibility is to offer careers plus the values to make that career a meaningful experience. This is where business cannot and will not compete. Finding this balance to me is a challenge for the arts and science college that is as momentous as any in the last fifty years. The arts and science faculty who do not understand the obligation to relate themselves to the students' interest in careers will have made a short term judgement that will have long term negative consequences for us all. Perhaps even working directly with business and industry will be essential, indicating to them what we can add that goes beyond careers.

I would add as a footnote that we have done a great

disservice to our students by not honoring their interest in vocation. The word "vocation" is one of the most honored words and most essential issues we confront. After all, what is work except the taking of our intelligence and our commitments and our conscience and focusing it on some worthy end. Who we are and what we will become is measured by our choice of work and how we engage our time. Work is something we should honor and our discussion with student should deal with it carefully, indeed reverently.

Yet, isn't it true that on many campuses we convey to students the suggestion that if they have an interest in careers, or if they try to figure out what they will become or how they will use their few moments on earth for productive good, that this is somehow an inappropriate topic at an arts and science college. To me it borders on the immoral not to help student to make choices that deal with the very essence of their lives. Indeed, while telling students of our disinterest in their future work, we fight endlessly to make sure we are ourselves given tenure and security on campus.

One of the most exciting issues for the undergraduate college is to look for ways to combine careers with values so that students understand that life is whole? After all, after graduation we don't say one day I am "a careerist," and the next day I am a "liberally educated theorist." We mix it up. To me the mixing up should occur before graduation as well as after and the college of the future that finds a way to combine careers with traditional values of liberal learning which give

perspective and value to careers will be the college of integrity that can attract students, and, match the competition.

IV.

I have a fourth question before the bell rings and class adjourns. In probing the quality of an institution, I would ask "Does the college take seriously the education of adults?" I talk about this with hesitation because in the audience today is the nation's authority on adult learners, Dr. Patricia Cross. The adult learner is the sleeping giant in our midst. While we have an enormous educational challenge among minorities who are young, we have an equally enormous challenge among the majority who are growing older. We are now in a situation where the majority of postsecondary students are over 21. We have had a revolution that will continue, so that by the year 2000, higher education will in many respects be an education for adults.

The truth is we have broken out of the rigid cycle which said that for four or five years we played, for fifteen or twenty years we go to school, for forty years we work and then for five or ten years we encounter dignified decline. The lockstep has been broken. Today, work and education and recreation are for a life time. How does the formal learning institution deal with the obligations of continued growth that none of us can avoid? Here again let me introduce a second competitor, while I am identifying the broken out of the rigid cycle which said that for four or five years we played, for fifteen or twenty years we go

to school, for forty years we work and then for five or ten years we encounter dignified decline. The lockstep has been broken. Today, work and education and recreation are for a life time. How does the formal learning institution deal with the obligations of continued growth that none of us can avoid? Here again let me introduce a second competitor while I am identifying the competition. I believe we are on a technology threshold. Perhaps in the next decade with computers in the home and videocassettes that can offer almost any course of study, the campus will become increasingly obsolete. The question is, where does formal education come in, caught between the corporate classroom and the videocassette? Can we somehow intervene in a way that offers more than career and more than entertainment and can we provide interpretation as well as information?

I believe we are going to have to be less trivial about the education of adults. I find it embarrassing to look at most adult education catalogs. We worry enormously about those under 21. We think we have an obligation to think about majors and minors, but for those over 21, we offer a grab bag of electives. I saw a catalog the other day with an adult education program for a legitimate college. They were offering "Dancing by Moonlight," "How to Fix Your Motorcycle," "Relaxing over 50," and "Gourmet Cooking on the Mediterranean." It was a mixture of the YMCA, the Methodist Church and the Rotary Club, but it did not strike me as a college.

How does a college get serious about the education of adults? I don't have a complete answer, of course, but I will

give you one example to illustrate my point. I believe America faces an enormous challenge with the gap of public understanding of public issues in our education. We are becoming less and less informed about issues that will be more crucial to our future, as a recent Carnegie report suggests. We are, in short, becoming civically illiterate. We depend more and more on technologists to tell us what to believe in matters of life and death. This is unacceptable in a democracy. Is it possible to educate adults for citizenship? Could we dust off that old term "civics," and give it new life helping adults understand responsible participation in government at the local and national level?

Do we really believe that baset weaving is all that people over 21 care about? Pat Cross' survey shows that adults do pick up courses that interest them. It also shows that adults are interested in liberal learning and civic issues but frequently we don't offer them. I would suggest, then, that the college of quality is one that takes more seriously the education of adults.

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I'll close on that point by giving you a quote from Woodrow Wilson, a professor of jurisprudence, said in 1896 that the spirit f service will provide a college "a place in the public annals of the nation." He said that if colleges are to offer the right service, "the air of affairs should be admitted to all of its classrooms. There is laid upon us the compulsion of national life, and we dare not keep aloof and closet ourselves while a

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nation comes to its maturity. The days of glad expansion are gone. Our life grows tense and difficult. Our resource for the future lies in careful thought, in providence and in a wise economy. The school must be of the nation."

No institution, no matter how erudite, how Ivy League, may detach itself from the affairs of the nation that are the affairs of the people. Our colleges must build a bridge between the intellectual life and the issues that will direct our world in the days to come. I think that challenge is especially present as we increasingly serve adults.