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COLLEGE: MAKING THE CONNECTIONS

Remarks by

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President Jim Freedman
Ed Jennings (Ohio State)

Returning to this campus to honor Dr. Spriestersbach is--for me--a very special honor.

Almost 30 years ago in a careless act of indiscretion Sprie invited me to come to Iowa City as a young academic.

I enthusiastically agreed and Kay and I bought a house in Manville Heights. But then--just before I could move my family here from California, I received an offer to enter the strange world we call administration.

I was absolutely torn. Sprie and I sat up all hours of the night to talk about my dilemma-- and on that occasion Sprie gave one of the best pieces of advice I've ever had.

He said:

Ernie, the classroom is the only authentic location on the campus. That's where all the action is and Administration will always be disappointing and a dead end.

He was of course absolutely right.

Still, Sprie, since we had that intimate encounter, I have followed your own career with awe and fascination.

And before the day is over I'd like to talk with you again about a few other life choices I confront.

I do thank you, Sprie and Bets, for your friendship and for the inspiration you have been.

During the past 2 years we at the Carnegie Foundation have been looking at colleges and universities in the United States.

We conclude that America's higher learning institutions are the envy of the world.

We have over 3,200 colleges and universities in the United States-- even with its own unique mission and tradition over 12 million students are enrolled.

These schools are held in very high regard and have incredible support.

The nation's mood about this enterprise of higher learning was captured by a student who said to our researchers:

I want a better life for myself that means college.

At the same time, while we found great achievements we also found the pressures of transition.

And this afternoon--at this Spriestersbach symposium, I should like to focus on five priorities that I believe will shape the colleges and universities of this nation as we move toward the year 2000 and beyond.

I'd like to move beyond Iowa City.

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First, I'm convinced that one of the most urgent obligations we confront will be to close the gap between the haves and have nots in education.

I find it shocking that at the very moment when the percentage of minority Americans is increasing, when poverty among young Americans is growing and when the number of minorities, enrolling in higher education is going down:

The Secretary of Education ridicules federally funded grants and loans and characterizes the students as "cheats" and "ripoff artists" forgetting that the GI Bill and other student aid has changed forever the hopes of individuals and the quality of the nation's life.

And I find it shocking that the administration proposes drastic cuts in student aid at the time when many students and their parents urgently need help.

During the preparation of our report on College we surveyed 1000 high school students and we discovered that nearly half of those planning to go on to college come from homes where the average annual income is below 30,000, and 21 percent come from homes with an average income of less than \$15,000.

- o About 10 percent of the high school students surveyed said that because of cost they could not go on to college.

- o 60 percent said they would need grants and loans.
- o And only 30 percent said they could make it on their own.

And yet our national leaders suggest that to help students go to college is not a national priority when in fact it is a dramatic investment in the future of the nation.

What's doubly disturbing is that the demography of America is changing and the need for student aid surely will increase today and while

- o White America is growing older
- o Black and Brown America is growing young

By 1990, 30 percent of all children in the public schools will be from minority families--many of which are poor--and these are precisely the students with whom the schools are least successful.

At this conference on the changing expectations of the university--we should recall that the nation's colleges and universities can be no stronger than the nation's schools.

We should _____ that the students who enter 1st grade this fall will, with success graduate from high school in the year 2000. And what happens in these

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intervening years will determine the quality of higher learning in the nation.

In the city of Chicago in 1984, over half the students failed to graduate and among those who did, only one-third were reading at the 12th grade level.

In Philadelphia the dropout rate is 38 percent, in Boston its 43 percent.

Last year in the Cleveland public schools there was not a single semifinalist in the National Merit Scholarship Competition.

And looking at one minority population as a group

almost half the Hispanic students who enroll in public schools "drop out" before they're awarded a diploma.

Here then is my conclusion.

As we move toward the year 2000 I'm concerned that the quality of the university may be threatened not by a lack of standards on the campus but by failing schools and by the gray gap between the have and have nots in education.

It is a national disgrace that 48 percent of all those classified as poor in the richest nation of the world are children.

Colleges can be no stronger than the schools.

We must strengthen the curriculum and give more status to the teachers--a point I will return to later on.

Indeed one of the most urgent obligations higher education will confront is to work more closely with suffering schools--not just to protect the academy itself but (above all) to help disadvantaged students.

James Agee said on one occasion that

With every child who is born under no matter what circumstance the potentiality of the human race is born again.

And I'm suggesting that with the changing demographic pattern equality of opportunity must remain the central affirmation of this nation.

And the university will increasingly feel the urgency of this essential mandate.

This leads to priority number two.

As I look toward the year 2000--it seems clear that universities increasingly will be engaged in lifelong education.

Throughout most of recorded history, human life was "chopped up" into slices like a great salami.

There were:

- o 4 or 5 years of happy play
- o 12 to 20 years of formal education
- o 40 years of full time work
- o A little nubbin at the end called "Dignified Decline".

Today all this has begun to change. For the first time in human history most adults have time for leisure which is the fastest growing industry in this nation.

And older people can now mix work and lifelong education.

Today 40 percent of all college students are older and part time and the average age of undergraduates is 26.

And it's been estimated that by the year 2000 over half the students in higher education will be older and be enrolled part time.

Incidentally, I should report that I welcome this trend of older people on the campus.

After one study I concluded that too many campuses are youth ghettos where teenagers talk only to themselves. And I became convinced that we need more intergenerational connections.

The GI Bill made it very clear that older students make the university more socially and pedagogically authentic.

And the age spread among students should be welcomed--not resisted.

Further, our survey of undergraduates revealed that older students are--in fact:

- o More committed to general education
- o and less concerned about careers.

So as I look down the road, the challenge colleges and universities confront is

not to push adults into corporate education but to bring together the younger and the older students in ways that will enrich both groups and build an authentic community of learning on the campus.

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This leads to issue number three. After completing our study of the American College I became convinced that in the days ahead colleges and universities must somehow close the gap between careerism and the Liberal Arts.

Fifteen years ago, over 80 percent of the undergraduates surveyed said their goals were to shape their personal values and develop an appropriate philosophy of life. Career concerns were half way down the list.

Today--(as everyone must know) that pattern is reversed and last year one out of every four baccalaureate degrees awarded was in the field of Business.

What's disturbing about all of this is the fact that while career interests have gone up, concern for general education has gone down.

Again, in our survey we asked college students if they would support more general education in selected fields. And the only subject that received support was Computer Science. On the other hand, history was rated at the bottom.

I'm convinced that in the days ahead the university must reestablish in the curriculum critical thinking and

- o The centrality of language
- o The perspective of history
- o The priority of science

But above all we must integrate careerism with the core subjects and the Liberal Arts.

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In the Carnegie Report we conclude that the crisis in undergraduate education is not the focus on careers.

After all, education has always been considered useful.

The crisis in undergraduate education is that in too many fields, the skills have become the ends unguarded by historical or ethical concerns.

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In the Carnegie Report, we conclude that general education and specialized education should be blended during college just as inevitably they must be blended during life.

And to achieve this end, we say that general education, at least in part, can be achieved in the upper division and through an enriched major as students put their specialty in historical and social and ethical perspective.

Eric Ashby wrote that the path to creativity should be "through a man's specialization--not by bypassing it."

A student who can weave has technology into the fabric of society, can claim to have a liberal education.

A student who cannot weave has technology into the fabric of society, cannot claim even to be a good technologist.

In the end, every student should not only be economically empowered, but students also must understand the social and moral imperatives of their work.

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This brings me to priority number four.

As I look toward the year 2000, it seems quite clear that universities will need to maintain a better balance between teaching and research.

During our study of the American college, we found that on almost every campus

to read a paper at a national convention is far more important than to teach students effectively at home.

And we found that when it comes to tenure and promotion, publications matter most

And where do students fit in all of this?

We also found that

- o About 45% of the students at public institutions say they are treated like numbers in a book.
- o About 40% say professors are not interested in their academic program.
- o And only about 1/3 feel they can discuss personal matters with professors.

I'm convinced that this nation urgently needs a network of independent high quality research universities.

And the University of Iowa--thanks to Sprie--has positioned itself splendidly in research.

We urgently need Centers of Academic Scholarship with laboratories that are not simply an extension of the Corporate World or the Department of Defense.

And if the United States does not continue to invest in "pure" research; if we do not cherish the creative work of the independent scholar I'm convinced our prospects for survival as a nation will be enormously diminished.

At the same time, its also clear that we need to give more status and more recognition to the teacher since--in the end--excellence in education means excellence in teaching at both the school and college level.

Several years ago I couldn't sleep and instead of counting sheep I counted all the teachers I had had.

There were a few nightmares in the bunch, but on balance I was rather pleased.

Then I decided to recall the great teachers who had shaped my life.

I remembered Miss Rice who, the first day of school, said

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Good morning class, today we learn to read.

I ran home that night ten-feet tall and whipped a crumpled piece of paper from my pocket. I said to my mother, "Today I learned to read." Miss Rice taught me that language is the centerpiece of learning and I find it quite miraculous that fifty years later when I was trying to write a book on high schools, I had a chapter called "The Centrality of Language." But it was Miss Rice, an unknown teacher at Fairview Avenue Elementary School, Dayton Ohio, who was imposing her convictions on that book. Great teachers live on forever.

I remembered Mr. Whitlinger, a high school history teacher who one day in class said, "Ernest, will you stop by after class today." My heart went into cardiac arrest and I had sweaty palms. Teachers don't ask you to stop after class unless something awesome is to be encountered.

On this day it was both fleeting and enduring. In just fifteen seconds he said, "Ernest, you are doing pretty well in history. You keep this up and you just might be a student."

That might sound to you like a put-down but to me it was a compliment of high order. Suddenly my brain was shaken. "You mean I might be a student?"

That fleeting affirmation lived on and I redefined who I was and what I might become.

Often it's the influence of the early teachers that matter most. I read a story in the Kansas City Times that tells--a bit

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whimsically perhaps--just how important the first years of formal learning really are:

Most of what I really need to know about how to live, and what do do, and how to be, I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate school mountain, but there in the sandbox at nursery school.

These are the things I learned: Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours. Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody. Wash your hands before you eat. Flush. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you. Live a balanced life. Learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some.

Take a nap every afternoon. When you go out into the world, watch for traffic, hold hands, and stick together. Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the plastic cup. The roots go down and plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.

Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the plastic cup--they all die. So do we.

And then remember the book about Dick and Jane and the first word you learned, the biggest word of all: LOOK.

Think of what a better world it would be if all of us--the whole world--had cookies and milk about 3 o'clock every afternoon and then lay down with our blankets for a nap. Or if we had a basic policy in our nation and other nations to always put things back where we found them and cleaned up our own messes.

And it is still true, no matter how old you are, when you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together.

In the days ahead

we urgently need centers of quality research where scholars can pursue their work without pressure or concern.

But I'm also convinced that in the days ahead we must give more status to the teachers.

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I stress teaching because we urgently need creativity, not conformity in the classroom.

What we need are leaders. We we need is not imitation but imagination.

And the classroom is the place where these talents must be trained.

What's bewildering is that on most campuses--even at the upper level--passivity penetrates the campus.

Trinity--get a degree without saying a word. 75 percent

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This brings me to one final observation.

As I look toward the century ahead, I'm convinced that in our complex, interdependent world, the university increasingly will be expected to focus on International Education.

Here again--Dr. Spriestersbach's leadership on this campus has been crucial.

In the days ahead there will be enormous pressure for the university to help the nation remain economically competitive.

That's absolutely crucial!

But I'm equally concerned that students understand the importance of cooperation too.

And I worry that education in this country is becoming increasingly parochial at the very moment the human agenda is more global.

During the past five years we at the Carnegie Foundation have been studying colleges and schools, and I must tell you that the signs of isolation are enormously disturbing.

About three years ago, 40 percent of the community college students surveyed in California could not locate either Iran or El Salvador on the map.

During our study of the American high school, we discovered that only two states require students to complete a course in non-western studies.

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And two years ago in a survey of 5,000 college undergraduates we learned that over 30 percent said they had "nothing in common" with people in underdeveloped countries.

Nothing in common with other human beings just because they are impoverished!

Henry Steele Commager in a recent address spoke discouragingly of the current mood and concluded that

in some respects the 18th Century was an era more enlightened than our own.

The 18th Century was, he said, an age when the United States and France could decree immunity for Captain Cook _____ because

"They were" common friends of all mankind.

It was a time when _____ could pay tribute to those minds who embraced all mankind within the scope of their benevolence.

And the 18th Century was a time when Tom Paine could declare himself a citizen of the world.

A term today that sounds almost subversive.

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The late University of Notre Dame campus minister, William Toohy, wrote on one occasion that the trouble with many campuses is that they indulge in the "nesting instinct" of building protected little communities inside their great and learned walls.

I'm convinced that in the days ahead, the university must be viewed as a staging ground, not a monastic retreat from the realities of the world. And we will need a curriculum to reflect this perspective.

Several years ago in The Christian Science Monitor, I read about an organization called The International Council on Monuments.

This group had selected 165 places all around the planet earth that they said were of very special value to mankind.

- They included such landmarks as the pyramids of Egypt
- the palace of Versailles
- the city of Cuzco in Peru
- Persepolis in Iran
- the Katmandu valley in India
- the old walls of Jerusalem, just to name a few.

It occurred to me as I read that fascinating story that these priceless treasures might provide a marvelous curriculum for our colleges, our schools.

I asked myself: Would it be possible for all students during their 12 years of formal education to learn about these 165 special places on the planet earth?

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Would it be possible for students not just to study those monuments but also to learn about the people and the history and the traditions that produced them?

Would it be possible for every student to understand that we have a sacred obligation not to desecrate these monuments and sites that mark so exquisitely the human passage on the planet earth?

Lewis Thomas, chancellor of the Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York, said:

If this century does not slip forever through our fingers, it will be because learning will have directed us away from our splintered dumbness and will have helped us focus on our common goals both nationally and globally as well.

America's colleges and universities are the envy of the world and their priorities must be vigorously protected.

At the same time--as I look down the road--I'm convinced renewed priority must be given

- o to both excellence and equity in education
- o to the connection between colleges and schools
- o to the _____ of adults
- o connections--younger and the older
- o to the connection between careerism and the liberal arts

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- o to an affirming of both teaching and research
- o and to a connection between the campus and the larger world.