

1000 0002 2421

celbratv-4, 2/1/90, GMA/dee,dmo,lb, SP

#### CHAPTER 7: A CELEBRATIVE COMMUNITY

Sixth, a college or university, is a celebrative community, one in which the heritage of the institution is remembered and where rituals and traditions are widely shared.

In the award-winning Broadway play Fiddler on the Roof, the peasant dairyman--who raised 5 daughters with considerable help from scriptural quotations, many of which he himself invented, says that the things that make life tolerable to the hard working Jewish family are the old laws, the old customs, and the feasts that are handed down from one generation to another. Without these--the dairyman declares--life would be as shaky as a Fiddler on the Roof.

So it is with college. While much of what professors and students do is solitary, their lives are enhanced by ceremonies, rituals and traditions that stir feelings they hold in common and establish a sense of place for all of them.

Without such shared remembrances, the vitality of an institution may be sapped and the sense of mission lost.

Higher learning is rich with traditions just waiting to be tapped. The university is one of society's oldest and most hallowed institutions. The community of learning is enlarged and strengthened to the extent that ceremonies and rituals draw members of the university closer to each other and nearer to the institution. What we seek is a climate in which common loyalties prosper.

All too often colleges and universities are places where no one takes time to celebrate the past or to honor the rituals that once united the community. A historic spot on campus loses its meaning. A ceremony is dropped from the calendar. A long-entrenched practice is replaced without regard to the significance that it had for so many for so long.

It is not easy for a campus community to keep alive its sense of celebrating the past. One-quarter of the undergraduate enrollment changes every year and an entire student generation passes in roughly four years. Also, students are far more likely than in former years to transfer one institution to another.

Even many professors move on, understandably, when they think they can better themselves. A larger portion of the faculty than ever is made up of part-timers and adjuncts who dare not let themselves feel too much a part of the institution lest they will multiply their suffering when they are told they must find another job.

An institution's collective memory can readily be jeopardized. In the years after the campus upheavals of the mid-sixties it seemed that many students and some professors found triumph in seeing traditions die. There were campuses on which proms that had been held annually for as long as anyone could remember were ended. Commencements were stripped of their trappings. Rituals were sneered at. Ceremonies were boycotted.

Higher education has undergone enormous changes during the last 25 years and on many campuses the reemergence of the

celebration of tradition is built on a shaky foundation. Some of what now is accorded the status of tradition is actually fairly new and has barely taken root.

We visited one liberal arts college that in accepting women and ending its historic all-male mission deliberately severed itself from many traditions that the administration felt were slanted too heavily toward men. It is struggling to build new traditions.

But one can hardly decree a tradition. Very often rites and traditions spring from spontaneous acts that few realized would give rise to anything more than the ephemeral.

There are also some acts that assume the standing of tradition that despite their connection with history in no way ennoble the institution. We have in mind the "Smoke Out" held each year in a common room at one university, where the consumption of marijuana to the beating of drums is the essence of the event. Another university has its "Golf Night," when students tour the campus, consuming a different alcoholic beverage at each of designated stops. And at yet another university students mark St. Patrick's Day each year with wanton drunkenness, inviting visitors from campuses near and far.

In spite of such negative versions of tradition and in spite of the difficulty of recapturing what has been lost, we are sanguine about the sense of celebration that we see at many colleges and universities. Rites and ceremonies unite campus communities and help give many students a sense of belonging to something worthwhile and lasting.

The value of the celebratory dimension was pinpointed in a report on faculty morale done for the Council of Independent Colleges (Change, March/April 1988). Most of the 10 liberal arts colleges examined in depth because of the high morale and high satisfaction of their faculty members were distinguished by the importance of rites and traditions on their campuses.

Institutional history and the prominence accorded it went far to shape the organizational culture at these colleges. Most of the colleges drew nourishment through their religious roots even when denominational influence had waned. Similarly, such a college as Smith honored in many ways its origins and continued existence as an institution for women.

Ceremony is a powerful influence at such places. For example, one of the 10, Greenville College has a series of ceremonial events throughout the academic year, beginning with a fall fellowship that includes faculty, staff, and spouses and lasts for three days at an off-campus site. The cycle ends after commencement at the end of the academic year, when graduates assemble in a large circle, linked by strands of ivy--as Greenville's graduating seniors have done since the turn of the century.

City College of the City University of New York is trying to give students a taste of ceremony with the New Student Convocation that it has instituted. It is designed to provide freshmen and transfers with a sense of the college's academic spirit by building the ceremony around the recognition of a handful of honored professors. Faculty members proceed into the

auditorium in caps and gowns and sit in tiered rows on the stage, facing the students. The ceremony, which includes a speech by the president to acquaint the freshmen with City College's noble academic heritage--eight Nobel Laureates among its alumni, culminates in awards for a handful of senior professors who have been exemplary teachers.

"What most of you and I have in common," said a distinguished biologist, one of the honorees, "is that we were the first in our families to go to college. My parents didn't even finish grade school. They weren't even sure that I should go to college because they thought that perhaps I should make my living unloading trucks, next to my father."

Thus, the white professor and the mostly minority audience of freshmen seemed to share a bond. Such a ceremony as this gives promise of imbuing students with a sense of celebration about their institution and what higher education can represent in their lives.

Even physical settings and architecture can contribute to the celebratory. Reverence for the beauty and tranquillity of the Indiana University campus at Bloomington helps unite those who are part of that learning community.

Even today, almost 30 years after Herman B. Wells surrendered the leadership of Indiana, stories circulate of his occasional reaction upon seeing blueprints for new campus buildings. Those who relate such tales tell of how Wells would send the architects back to the drawing boards, deeming this or that plan unacceptable because it would require that an ancient

tree be removed or a stand of woods lost. The architects were ordered to alter construction projects so as to preserve nature.

Such stories and the relish with which they are related point to the extent to which the physical setting has underpinned the sense of community at Indiana. Its rolling, grassy campus of 1,860 acres, transversed by a stream that is spanned by a series of wooden footbridges, is a spot where sylvan landscapes blend with gray limestone buildings to lend a quiet sense of peace and dignity.

On many campuses, freshman orientation surely provides a splendid opportunity for the initiation of college students into the customs and values of the institution. Beyond the introduction to social life, students should hear about the history of the institution, putting a human face on it. They should learn about the goals of liberal learning and be encouraged to think reflectively about the experience of being a college student.

An effort to reestablish tradition has led to the creation of a convocation each fall at the University of California at Berkeley to welcome back students, faculty, and staff. The ceremony replaces two events that were abandoned, Charter Day and the Opening of Classes Convocation. An academic procession by faculty members and some alumni, complete with caps and gowns, wends its way into the Greek Theater. This event is still struggling to win the attendance that Berkeley hopes will eventually give it the success that another ritual, the Fall Reception for new students, has enjoyed.

Dating back to the dark Depression days of the mid-1930s, the Fall Reception is replete with refreshments and music. Each new student is greeted by a member of the university's faculty or staff and accompanied through a formal receiving line at the Student Union, where the faculty or staff member introduces the student to Berkeley's chancellor. Then the new student is introduced to a senior who becomes his or her host.

All-college forums can build community, as well. One campus we visited suspends classes so that the entire community may discuss a topic of campus-wide concern. A large midwest university has an assembly series every Wednesday morning, featuring poets, artists, political leaders, and others who draw large audiences. Weber State in Utah sets aside time each week for a campus-wide convocation. A few years ago, the University of Rochester instituted a University Day and began the Rochester Conference, an annual affair for gown and town that focuses on a large issue such as "power," "creation," and "time."

Commencements and alumni weekends can have a powerful influence, if properly directed, as can concerts on the campus.

Occasionally, a college community can be brought together to support a worthy cause. Several years ago the State University of New York at Brockport hosted the National Special Olympics. The whole campus came together in a project that stirred inspiration and lifted the vision of both faculty and students.

An unusual tradition associated with commencement, for example, is found at Montgomery County Community College in Pennsylvania, where students know each spring that their degrees

will be granted in a ceremony in a tent. The practice began when the college was still in its infancy, in the early 1970s, not because the institution was trying to be eccentric, but because of expediency--there was no building on campus large enough to allow more than 400 people to gather at once. So, now there is the tradition of commencement in a tent behind College Hall, on a lawn that stretches down toward a creek and distant woodlands.

Another unusual tradition, this one on the Saturday afternoon before commencement, is found at Princeton University, where alumni return to march in a parade with the seniors who are about to get their degrees. Known as the P-rade, the procession is led by members of the 25th-year reunion class, followed by the "Old Guard," the 50th year reunion class and all of those graduated earlier, which at this point means some from the days of the First World War. Strung out behind the "Old Guard" are classes of more recent vintage with the seniors who are about to graduate at the end of the line.

Carrying class banners and dressed in colorful costumes and special blazers to distinguish each class, the alumni and their families and the seniors--some 10,000 strong--march through the venerable campus--the site of skirmishes during the Revolutionary War. After some two and a half hours the immense procession reaches Clarke Field, next to Palmer Stadium, where they pass a reviewing stand and assemble for a meeting of the Alumni Association, the beginning of a lifelong act that binds the youngest graduates of Princeton to all of those who preceded them.



Colleges and universities can also celebrate spaces and places on the campus. Most colleges have an "old main" or other locations with a long and honorable history. The tale of these buildings is frequently impressive, often with humorous anecdotes, and always worth sharing with freshmen and new faculty. Also, the name of each building on campus has special meaning. These names celebrate individuals who are important in the history and development of the institution. Their stories should be told. All these, along with special landmarks or points of physical beauty of the campus, are a part of the distinctiveness of the institution. Knowing and understanding them increase the sense of belonging--of being part of a community.

We suggest an orientation program for all students, an intensive seminar that would introduce undergraduates not just to social life on campus, but also to the goals of liberal education, to the academic traditions of college, and provide mentoring as well.

Though Franklin and Marshall College in Pennsylvania is so old that it can trace its beginnings back to Benjamin Franklin, the institution has few long-standing traditions. But some newer ones are developing.

There is, for example, Spring Arts, a five-day program held mostly outdoors, starting with wrestling matches in a huge vat of lime gelatin. Contestants paid for the privilege of wallowing in the mess and the \$1,000 that was raised was donated to a shelter for the homeless. There was nowhere to go but up from there and

before it was completed Spring Arts offered a lecture by a member of the art department, the performance of a play by Arthur Schnitzler, a jazz concert, an exhibit of student art, a student talent show, a picnic, and more concerts.

Franklin and Marshall also held for the first time a convocation to mark the opening of the spring academic term, an occasion that the recently-appointed president used to comment on the role of celebration in an academic community. He said: "Convocations and acts of community--a coming together of people with interests and work in common. . . . They are reserved for celebrations that ought to occur more often. . . . We gather at this convocation to celebrate another beginning, to give ritual expression to the re-creation of our academic community."

We also propose more "all-campus" seminars on campus, more informal "mini-concerts," and more discussions and debates in the student union. The sort of intellectual vitality and "aesthetic" pleasure that's found in the great cities of the world.

Carl Schorske, in a brilliant study of creative communities, describes Basel, Switzerland, in the nineteenth century as a place where civic and university activities were interlocked. Professor Schorske said, "The primary function of the university was to foster a civic culture . . . and the city state accordingly assumed, as one of its primary political obligations, the advancement of learning" (note).

If a city can stir an intellectual climate, if merchant families can foster civic culture, what about the intentional community we call a college? While leaving space for privacy and

individual interests, a university at its best encourages the group to share rituals and traditions, that improve and give deep meaning to the institution and foster its own civic culture.

The way the six principles we have just formulated are introduced surely will vary from one campus to another. At some colleges they might be formally adopted by Boards of Trustees; at others, university senates could offer them to guide the formulations of governance procedures, program development, or new services and activities. Administratively, they could become the basis for codes of student conduct or disciplinary processes or used as criteria to judge the worthiness of new social organizations.

For some institutions the creation of a committee devoted to implementing the six principles may be the best way to define and preserve community in a pluralistic setting. And on every campus, with or without a formal committee dedicated to this task, the principles could be a subject of discussion and form the basis for seminars during student orientation, and guide community behavior.

In the end, what we imagine is a campus in which students and faculty come together as scholars-citizens. We propose for colleges and universities a climate in which all members of the community are not only intellectually engaged, but also inspired by an institution that is a source of constant psychic renewal to them.