A COLLEGE OF QUALITY

Remarks by
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INTRODUCTION

Thirty years ago this month John Hannah, then president of Michigan State University, delivered the keynote address at the annual meeting of the Association of American Colleges. The Soviets had just hurled a silver ball called Sputnik into space and President Hannah spoke in almost apocalyptic terms. No event in recent centuries, he said, seems even remotely comparable to Sputnik, "save perhaps the discovery of America."

Hannah concluded that higher education's proper response to Sputnik was not only technological; it was humanistic, too. "College graduates," Hannah said, "can face the world of tomorrow only by planting one foot firmly on the solid rock of vocational competence and the other on the rock of moral conviction." So standing, Hannah concluded, tomorrow's graduate is not likely to be swept away by "the torrent of change" sure to come.

This leads me to the central theme of my remarks tonight. I'm convinced that undergraduate education in America does, as President Hannah declared, have two essential missions. The first is to prepare students to live independent, self-sufficient lives, giving them the skills they need to become "vocationally competent," to use John Hannah's formulation. And on this point, higher education, historically, has been doing very well, indeed.

Some years ago, when I was on sabbatical in England, I read C.P. Snow's, The Masters. In the epilogue of that fascinating book, which deals with the politics of higher education, Snow gives a brief history of Cambridge University in which he tells

how, in the twelfth century, young men came to study with a colony of clerics who had assembled along a little river called the Cam. The students lived in poverty; slept on straw, went without food; it was a dreary life. Snow then asked why did these young men live under such dire conditions to struggle for an education? They did it, he said, for one essential reason: They wanted jobs. They wanted jobs in the royal administration, jobs in the courts, jobs in the church, jobs in the schools. The purpose of education in those days was vocational, Snow concluded.

The point is that education has always been considered useful--and, as we all know, that priority persists today. In 1984, when we asked undergraduates to define the essential outcomes of a college education, "training for an occupation" was at the top. And Alexander Astin's most recent data shows that "making money" is a key reason 71 percent of today's students say they go to college. That is the highest ranking that purpose has received in twenty years. I'm suggesting that all students, regardless of their major, are preparing for productive work--be it engineering, business, history or English. The assumption of all education is that learning will be directed toward constructive ends and I'm convinced that colleges should support students in their determination to be useful, self-sufficient and productive.

But what about the moral conviction of which John Hannah spoke? Students want job security and, like the rest of us, they are concerned about careers. But undergraduate education, at its

best, also is a time when students search for identity and meaning. And in an era when careerism dominates the campus, is it too much to expect students to go beyond their private interests, learn about the world around them, develop a sense of civic and social responsibility, and discover how they can contribute to the common good? But in our hard-edged, fragmented world, how is this to be accomplished?

I.

I am convinced that the search for a larger more integrative view of education means first that colleges should develop a curriculum with coherence.

The debate about what constitutes legitimate content for undergraduate education is not new. As far back as 1829, Professor A.S. Packard at Bowdoin College called for a course of study that was, as he put it, comprehensive. (Incidentally, it was Packard who first introduced the term "general education" into the curriculum debate a century and a half ago.)

In 1869, Charles Eliot opened the curriculum to electives. In his inaugural address, Eliot summarized what he called "the full range of academic subjects" and told the Harvard faculty: "We will have them all."

Forty years later, when Lawrence Lowell became president of Harvard, he introduced the so-called "distribution requirements" as a compromise between the rigidity of the core and the randomness of electives.

During the tumultuous twentieth century, we have had two great general education revivals--one following World War I and the other after World War II, which was sparked by the powerfully influential Harvard report General Education in a Free Society.

In the 1960s, curriculum debates were often too angry and too shrill, but occasionally there was integrity in the encounters. In the 1970s, as concerned academics sought to make

the undergraduate experience both intellectually rigorous and personally authentic, many colleges and universities refurbished their general education sequence, but the reforms of that decade frequently reflected a move by faculty to reclaim academic turf rather than define a more intellectually compelling way to educate the students.

Today, general education is, once again, a topic for debate. And this time the discussion seems to be more vibrant than any I have heard in thirty years. The search for a core of common learning now occurring on many campuses today is being pushed, I believe, by the school reform movement and it's also being prodded by the cultural literacy debate occurring in society at large.

But is there, in fact, a knowledge appropriate for all students? And if so, how should it be defined? In the Carnegie report, College, we say that all students should above all become proficient in the written and spoken word. Beyond these essential skills, we also suggest a course of study that would introduce all students to our Western heritage, our social institutions, to science, literature, mathematics, and the arts in order to achieve cultural literacy, to use E.D. Hirsch's helpful formulation. We also say that, to be truly educated, students must go beyond isolated facts and gain a more coherent view of knowledge and a more integrated view of life.

Albert Einstein once wrote that all religions, art, and science are branches of the same tree. Frank Press, the president of the National Academy of Sciences, captured this same

spirit when he recently suggested that scientists are, in some respects, artists, too. Press observed that the magnificent double helix, which broke the genetic code, was not only rational, but it was beautiful as well.

Barbara McClintock, the Nobel Prize-winning geneticist, said to me recently that "everything is one." There is, she said, no way to draw a line between things. (I wonder if Dr. McClintock has looked at a college catalogue in recent years.) And when the physicist, Victor Weisskopf, was asked, "What gives you hope in troubled times?" he replied, "Mozart and quantum mechanics."

Today, in almost every academic field, researchers are asking questions that do not fit into the traditional academic boxes. Indeed, the most exciting scholarship is in "the hyphenated disciplines"--in bio-physics, in psycho-linguistics, and the like. The groundbreaking work is occurring in what Michael Polanyi has called "the overlapping academic neighborhoods."

But where in the college experience do students encounter connections such as these? Where in the grab bag of distribution courses do undergraduates go beyond the separate disciplines, gain perspective, and discover integration?

As I look toward the year 2000, it seems quite clear to me that debates in the larger cultural context will inevitably shape conversations on the campuses. We live in a world that is economically, politically, and environmentally at risk. The protective ozone layer is endangered, our shorelines are polluted, and tropical rain forests are being depleted at the

rate of about 100,000 square kilometers per year. And I'm convinced that increasingly scholars will be searching for a more integrated view of knowledge and a more integrated, more authentic view of life. But I worry that at the very moment the human agenda is more global, education in this country is becoming more parochial.

And I am especially disturbed by our neglect of non-Western cultures. During our study of the American high school, we discovered that only two states required a course in non-Western studies. In December, Secretary of Education William Bennett proposed a model curriculum for high school, and non-Western cultures were barely acknowledged. And in 1984, when we surveyed 5,000 undergraduates, 30 percent said they had <u>nothing</u> in common with people in underdeveloped countries. Not one thing in common? What <u>are</u> we teaching in our colleges and schools?

Several years ago, my wife Kay and I left JFK airport in New York and soon found ourselves in the jungles of Belize. We were there to visit our son Craig and his new Mayan wife. We had, within a few short hours, traveled a thousand miles and a thousand years. At first, I was convinced that the cultures could never be connected; the distances were too great. The urban jungle and the Mayan jungle could not meet.

But as we sat around the open fire, the embers dying, I discovered that so-called "diverse people" do, in fact, have many things in common. At the most fundamental level, we share the universal experiences of birth and growth and death. (Incidentally, two years later, Kay, who is a certified nurse-midwife, delivered our first Mayan granddaughter in that jungle.)

That evening, I also discovered that, whether we are from Belize or Princeton,

- We all communicate; we depend on the symbol system we call language.

- We all recall the past and anticipate the future, and so far as we know, we humans are the only creatures on the planet with the capacity to place ourselves in time and space.

- Further, we are all, regardless of our culture, members of groups and institutions--the Mayans have, in fact, a very well-ordered sense of community and control.

- We all have a love of the aesthetic; the Mayans had art a thousand years before white men "discovered" this continent.

- We all produce and consume. My son's father-in-law spends his day planting and harvesting. After some difficulty, I explained that I spend my time carrying paper and catching airplanes. He looked at me with some bewilderment and asked, "You call that work?"

- And, finally, I discovered that we are all guided by values and beliefs.

What I am suggesting is that these experiences are found among all people and that, despite our diversity, there is, in fact, a shared agenda. And, I'm convinced that it is a central obligation of our colleges and schools to help create within the minds of our young students an understanding of the human commonalities and the interdependency of our world.

But how should this reality be converted into a curriculum for students? There are many ways, of course; let me suggest just one. Two years ago, I read a front-page story in the Christian Science Monitor on the International Council on Monuments and Sites. The report listed 165 special places on earth that the council had identified as of universal value to humankind. These sites and monuments included the pyramids of Egypt, the palace of Versailles, Cuzco in Peru, Persepolis in Iran, the Katmandu Valley in Nepal, and the old walls of Jerusalem, to name just a few.

As I read this fascinating list, I thought: Wouldn't these priceless treasures provide a marvelous framework for an international curriculum for our colleges and schools? After all, we teach our students about the wars the world has waged. Could we also introduce them to the exquisite monuments and sites that celebrate the human spirit and mark our passage on this planet? Would it be possible, I asked myself, for all students, during their twelve or sixteen years of formal schooling, to look

not just at the monuments, but also to learn about the people and traditions that produced them? And would it be possible for every student to understand that this generation has a sacred obligation not to desecrate these monuments that so exquisitely mark the human passage on earth?

I am suggesting that quality in undergraduate education means giving students a perspective that is global. And that in the end, the future of the human family will be made secure not by putting weapon systems into space, but by building better human understanding here on earth.

Before leaving the curriculum, I would like to say a word about the major. At most colleges today, there is sharp division between general and specialized education--a two-plus-two arrangement in which students work to get their general education requirements "out of the way" so they can begin their major. Indeed, we observed during our study of the undergraduate experience that students are eager to become competent in specialized fields but what they are <u>not</u> asked to consider is: "Competence to what end?"

In the Carnegie report, we suggest that general and specialized education should be blended during college just as, inevitably, they must be blended during life. And to accomplish this objective, we propose <u>the enriched major</u>. Under such an arrangement, general education courses would run vertically, from the freshman to the senior year. Departments would teach general education as an extension of the major, and, in a capstone seminar, all students would be asked to put their specialty in historical, social, and ethical perspective.

As the academic major intersects with the themes of common learning, students can return, time and time again, to considerations of language, heritage, social institutions, and the rest. And when the major is so enriched, students move from depth to breadth and focus not on mere training, but on liberal learning at its best.

Sir Eric Ashby, the noted British educator, wrote: "The path to culture should be through a man's specialism, not by by-passing it. . . .A student who can weave his technology into the fabric of society can claim to have a liberal education; a student who cannot weave his technology into the fabric of society cannot claim even to be a good technologist."

II.

This leads me to priority number two. Courses alone do not bring coherence. Integrating the liberal and the useful arts depends every bit as much on people as on programs. Faculty must provide the enlightening and integrative foundation so successful to the undergraduate experience. They also should not only be devoted to their disciplines but also to the embodiment in the classroom of the spirit of a liberal education.

Higher education in the United States draws its inspiration from two great traditions. First, there is the tradition of the colonial college, with its focus on the student, on general education, and on loyalty to the campus. But higher education in this country has also been profoundly shaped by the European university, with its focus not only on the student, but on the professoriate; not on general education, but on specialized knowledge; not on loyalty to the campus, but to the professor.

In our survey of 5,000 faculty, we found that 70 percent said their loyalty was to their discipline; 20 percent said their loyalty was to the campus. One professor spoke for many when he said, "My community is the WATS line, not my colleagues down the hall."

But we also found during our research that 60 percent of the faculty surveyed (in a sample drawn from all sectors of higher education) said they prefer teaching to research (in liberal-arts colleges, it was 80 percent), and 60 percent of the faculty agreed that: "Teaching effectiveness, not publication, should be the primary criterion for promotion."

I'm suggesting that there is an enormous ambivalence within American higher education about the division between teaching and research. Somehow, we need to look behind the "teaching vs. research" cliche and ask the more provocative question: "What does it mean to be a scholar?"

We should recognize, of course, that scholarship means the discovery of new knowledge, through research. But we also should recognize that scholarship means integrating knowledge, through curriculum development. Let us also recognize the scholarship of applying knowledge, of finding ways to relate information to contemporary problems. And, above all, let us recognize the scholarship of presenting knowledge, through advising and counseling and teaching.

What we urgently need in the academy, then, are scholar-citizens--people who are committed to building an intellectual community, not just in the classroom but in the coffee shop and committee room as well. And until scholarship in American higher education means not only publishing, but also designing integrated courses, serving on committees, and spending time with students, I am convinced that our efforts to renew the undergraduate experience will simply be time spent tinkering on the edges.

III.

This leads me to the third priority in higher education, the building of community and the strengthening of campus life. I do not wish to romanticize the notion of community in higher education. And yet, a college, regardless of its size, must be held together by something more than a common grievance over parking.

In the award-winning Broadway play Fiddler on the Roof, the peasant dairyman who raised five daughters says that the things that make life tolerable to the hard-working Jewish family are the old laws and customs. Without these, the dairyman declares, life would be as shaky as a fiddler on the roof.

So it is with college. While professors teach and conduct research, and while students study on their own, life for most of us is made tolerable by shared rituals and traditions and by our capacity to create community by speaking and listening carefully to each other.

Yet, in the rigid departmental structure through which most campuses are governed, we are often so busy pursuing our special categories of knowledge that community is diminished.

Some years ago, our children were playing a record at a decibel level that was calculated to destroy my tympanic membrane. "If you can't turn the volume down," I said, "at least explain to me what I should be enjoying." My daughter brought me the record jacket, and I discovered the Beatles were singing about Eleanor Rigby, a woman who wore a mask she "kept in a jar

by the door." And I thought that we in education also wear our masks, often concealing more than we reveal.

Wayne Booth of the University of Chicago once said that, all too often, our inadequate efforts to speak and listen to each other form a vicious cycle, spiraling downward. But Booth went on to say that "we all experience moments when a person's capacity to speak and listen more carefully creates a like response in others." In the end, he said, the spiral can move upward, "leading to rare moments of genuine understanding."

During the 1960s, while Chancellor of the State University of New York, I was preparing to speak to faculty from across the state. It was an especially important moment because the university trustees were there, too. But just as I was to speak, several hundred students moved in with placards, chanting slogans, demanding that I free a group of students in Buffalo who had been arrested the night before. The microphone was grabbed, we argued back and forth.

Finally, after an hour, I concluded that we were not listening to each other. I realized I was talking to a faceless mob. The meeting was in shambles. At that point, I left the platform and walked into the crowd; I began talking to a single student. I asked her name, I asked about her family. Soon, several others joined us. To make the story short, the session ended, a compromise was reached, and, in the process, I came to know some most attractive students.

We hear a lot of talk these days about teaching values in higher education. Frankly, I am not sure this can be

accomplished through a separate course in morality or ethics. I am convinced, however, that values are sustained on campus by the honesty of our words, and by the confidence we have in the words of others.

Some years ago, Quakers would risk imprisonment because, in a court of law, they would refuse to swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. In essence, they would say to the judge, "Your honor, I speak truth, and, if I swear it only on a Bible, does that suggest that, outside the courtroom, truth might be an option?"

I am suggesting that in morality there is no place for plausible deniability. If the Iran hearings taught us anything, they taught us that good communication means not just cleverness, not just clarity; it means integrity as well. This, in my judgment, is the key to building community on campus.

IV.

Finally, if we are to help students achieve the "moral conviction" of which John Hannah spoke, students must see a connection between what they learn and how they live.

During our study of the American high school, I became convinced that we have not just a school problem but a youth problem in this country. I become troubled that it is possible for teen-agers in society today to finish high school and never be asked to participate responsibly in life, never spend time with older people who are lonely, never help a child who has not learned to read. One student we talked with in Ohio told us that he had a job last summer at McDonald's. "It wasn't very exciting," he said, "but at least I was feeling useful." I think there is something wrong with a society where teen-agers define being useful as pushing Big Macs.

Also, there is today an intergenerational separation in our culture. We have created a horizontal layering in which sixteen-year-olds talk only to other young people, and, in retirement villages, eighty-year-olds talk only among themselves. We keep young people out of sight, warehoused in schools. Indeed, when we see teen-agers on the streets, in groups of more than three or four, we wonder what they are up to.

My parents live in a community of adults and retirees, but they have a day-care center there. Every day, fifty four- and five-year-olds come to the center, where the children have adopted grandparents. When I see my father, who is eighty-six,

he shows me the drawings of "his little friend" and recounts their conversations. There is something authentic about a community in which a five-year-old can spend time with someone who is aging and something equally authentic about a community in which a retired person can see the vitality of youth.

In our report High School, we proposed a new "Carnegie unit." We suggest that all high school students be asked to volunteer to work in hospitals, in museums, in nursing homes, or to tutor other kids at school. A term of voluntary service, whether at the school or college level, could uniquely bind the nation's youth and help them see connections between the classroom and the needs of people.

Martin Luther King once said that, "Everybody can be great because everybody can serve." I am convinced that this nation's young people are genuinely ready to be inspired by a larger vision. All too often, if the headlines are to be believed, the vision we have given them is greed. Could we also suggest that to be truly human one must serve?

Here then is my conclusion. Education must prepare students to be independent, self-reliant human beings. But education, at its best, also must help students go beyond their private interests, gain a more integrative view of knowledge, and relate their learning to the realities of life. This is the meaning of collegiate education.