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NASPA-5M, 3/14/90, SPC/lsm

CAMPUS LIFE: IN SEARCH OF COMMUNITY

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March 14, 1990

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, in an informal "bull session," a handful of campus presidents--after solving such "global" problems as acid rain and Third World debt--focused on what one president called "the campus-life crisis" at his college.

There's more "alcohol abuse," he said, "and more crime, and I worry about race relations, too." Another president said: "The Hispanic, black, and Asian students on my campus live in totally separate worlds."

Later, I had lunch with the president of a large public university who poignantly confessed: "I've been around a long time, and I'm more troubled now than in the sixties. Back then," he said, "you could meet campus critics--head on--but today there seems to be a lot of tension just below the surface that could explode anytime."

All of this was rattling around in my head when I got a call from Bob Atwell asking if Carnegie would join with ACE in a study of campus life. The answer of course was "yes." And we're now about to complete our year-long investigation, which I'd like to highlight for you this evening.

During our study, we visited campuses from coast-to-coast. We surveyed 500 presidents and talked with hundreds of administrators, faculty, and students. Our overall impression--which won't surprise this group--was that American higher education is basically in good health. Campuses are well managed, and we've built, in the United States, a system of higher learning that's the envy of the world.

But we also found that student apathy, alcohol abuse, racial tensions, and acts of incivility are causes for great concern. I recognize that campuses are facing the impact of pathologies in society at large. And it's also true that student personnel professionals are responding superbly to the crises that keep crashing in.

The problem is, however, that on far too many campuses student personnel officers are being asked to carry the responsibility all alone. And while in-loco-parentis has been abolished, no theory of campus governance has been discovered to replace it. Colleges are to keep the lid on, but ground rules are ambiguous at best.

To add to the problem, parents and the media are increasingly criticizing the conditions of student life. And on this very day, Congress is holding hearings on campus violence.

No one wants to return to the days when do's and don'ts were arbitrarily imposed. Still, we need a higher standard, and we conclude in the Carnegie Report that what's needed today is not a new set of rules, but a larger vision. In response to this challenge, we've organized our report on campus life around six principles that capture, we believe, the essence of higher education, and provide a new framework within which a community of learning might be built.

I. A PURPOSEFUL COMMUNITY

First, we say in the Carnegie Report that a college or university is a purposeful community, a place where the intellectual life is central, and where faculty and students "work together" to strengthen teaching and learning on the campus.

When we began our study, some argued that we should look only at the so-called extracurricular activities and ignore the academic. But I'm convinced that the academic and nonacademic cannot be divided, and if students do not become intellectually engaged--if they do not take seriously the educational mission of the institution--then all talk about community will be simply a diversion.

The problem is that on far too many campuses, there is a great gap between the intellectual and the social. Faculty are often far removed from student life, and on far too many campuses, it's much better for professors to deliver a paper at the Hyatt in Chicago, than to meet undergraduates back home.

I'm suggesting that if we hope to improve the quality of campus life, learning must become the central focus, and faculty and student personnel professionals both must be viewed as teachers, in the classrooms, and in the dining commons, too.

Frankly, I consider it a disgrace that we recruit millions of students every year, charge them high tuition, and then suggest that undergraduates are a low priority on the campus, when, in the end, almost all of us are where we are today because of the inspiration of a great teacher who, not only taught his subject, but also taught himself.

Several years ago--I couldn't sleep--and instead of counting sheep, I counted all the teachers I had had. I remembered rather vividly 15 or more. First, I thought about Miss Rice, my first grade teacher, who, on the first day of school, said to 28 frightened, awestruck children, "Good morning class, today we learn to read." It was Miss Rice who taught me language and learning are inextricably interlocked.

I then recalled Mr. Wittlinger, a high school history teacher, who one day said quietly as I passed the desk, "Ernest, you're doing well in history--you keep this up and you just might be a student." That's the first time a teacher had said that to me directly. Suddenly I thought, "Doing very well," I just might be a student.

I suspect everyone in the room has been inspired by a teacher, and if you had a few minutes on the platform, which teacher would you honor?

I'm suggesting that the quality of campus life must be measured by the quality of teaching and of learning and that the challenge of building community rests, not just with student personnel professionals, but also with faculty who not only love their subjects, but have a love for students, too.

II. A JUST COMMUNITY

This brings me to the second principle of campus life. In the Carnegie Report we say that a college or university is a just community, a place where the dignity of every individual is affirmed, and where equality of opportunity is vigorously pursued.

Frankly, I know of no issue that's more urgent than affirming justice in this country. The harsh truth is that America is becoming a deeply divided nation with a terrible gap between the privileged and the poor.

Many of us recall the 1960s when Martin Luther King led a great crusade. And we recall when colleges and universities from coast-to-coast, supported vigorously this call for human rights.

But the harsh truth is that this historic push for "simple justice" has been losing ground. The enrollment of the least advantaged black and Hispanic students has been going down. Especially disturbing is the fact that minority students, once they come to college, often feel isolated and alone. Racial conflict on campus seems to be increasing especially at large universities where 68 percent of the presidents we surveyed identified "race relations" as a problem.

It's true, of course, that racism is rooted in society at large. But it's my conviction that in the decade of the 90s, equality of opportunity, for all Americans must become an urgent national crusade. Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans must be socially and economically empowered, and the nation's colleges and universities should take the lead.

We need urgently to recruit minority students while they're still in junior high; we need special orientation sessions between minority and nonminority students during the summer months before they come to college. Colleges should survey carefully black and Hispanic students to get their views of campus life, and all college seminars and courses are needed to promote interracial understanding.

Injustice, of course, takes many forms. And during our study we also found that women still encounter prejudice on campus--ranging from tenure problems to harassment. The editor of the student newspaper at one university described T-shirts that read, "Ten reasons why beer is better than women." We also found that 62 percent of presidents at research and doctoral institutions consider sexual harassment a campus problem. At the other four-year institutions, about 30 percent of the presidents said it's a problem.

Here, then, is our conclusion. If the nation's colleges and universities are to be just communities, prejudice in all its

forms--racial, ethnic, sexual--must be challenged. In the decade of the 90s if we do not find ways to overcome the tragic divisions on the campus and in society, at large, I'm convinced the future of the nation is imperiled.

III. AN OPEN COMMUNITY

This brings me to principle number three. In the Carnegie Report we conclude that a college or university is an open, honest community, a place where freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected, and where civility is powerfully affirmed.

When I was a small boy in Dayton, Ohio, we used to say "sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." What nonsense. I'd usually say this with tears running down my cheeks, thinking all the time, "hit me with a stick, but for goodness sake, stop those words that penetrate so deeply and hurt so long."

The simple truth is that our sophisticated use of symbols sets human beings apart from all other forms of life--the porpoise and the bumble bee, notwithstanding, and it's through the miracle of language that we are mystically connected to each other.

Consider the miracle of this very moment. I stand here vibrating my vocal chords. Molecules go "skittering" in your direction. They touch your tympanic membrane. Signals go scurrying up your 8th cranial nerve, and there is a response deep in your cerebrum that approximates, I trust, the images of mine. What an audacious act--which we simply take for granted!

I'm suggesting that language is the key to everything we do. It's the way we reach out to one another. It's through words that our social relationships are either strengthened or destroyed. And if we hope to build a community of trust in higher education, students must learn to communicate, not just with accuracy, but with civility as well.

The sad truth is that today's students have grown up in a culture in which language is shockingly abused. They live in a world where slogans have become substitutes for reason. In America today, politicians use 60 minute "sound bites" to destroy the integrity of their opponents. And--very early--students learn to use words--to "hurt"--rather than to "heal."

During our study we found that more than 60 percent of the presidents at doctorate institutions reported that "sexual harassment" is a problem, and about half listed "racial harassment" as a problem on their campuses.

And when we asked presidents--in an open-ended question--what they would do to improve the quality of campus life, over 80 percent said greater "civility" on campus, and more respect for the dignity and rights of others.

I'm suggesting that we urgently need to help students overcome the stereotypes that have been imposed on them by a prejudicial culture. We need to help them listen more carefully to each

other, one-on-one, not as black people or white people or Asian people, but as human beings.

One day, when I was Chancellor of the State University of New York, I was about to speak to faculty from across the state when several hundred students moved in with placards, chanting slogans, demanding that I help free a group of students who had been arrested on another campus the night before. The microphone was grabbed and, for almost an hour, we went back and forth.

Finally, in desperation, I concluded the meeting was in shambles and that we weren't listening to each other. Even worse, it was apparent that I was talking not to students, but to a "faceless mob." But you can't talk to "mobs," you can only talk to people. And more out of desperation than inspiration, I left the platform and began talking to a single student. I asked her name; I asked about her family. Soon others joined us and for the first time, we began to listen to each other.

Wayne Booth of the University of Chicago captured the essence of civility when he wrote that all too often our efforts to speak and listen to each other seem to be a "vicious cycle" spiraling downward. "But," Booth went on to say that, "we've all experienced moments when the spiral "moved upward," when one party's efforts to speak and listen--just a little bit better--produced a "similar response," making it possible to move on up the spiral to a "moments of genuine understanding."

In an open community, freedom of expression must be uncompromisingly defended, and offensive language must be vigorously denounced. But--above all--good communication means viewing language as a sacred trust, and listening to messages that come, not just from the head, but from the heart.

IV. A DISCIPLINED COMMUNITY

This leads me to principle number four. We say in the Carnegie Report that a college or university is a disciplined community, a place where individuals accept their obligations to the group, and where well-defined governance procedures guide behavior for the common good.

We all remember the days when women's dorms were locked up together than a drum, when there were rigid study hours, and when lights were out at eleven o'clock sharp, except on weekends. We also can remember the 1960s when in-loco-parentis was abolished, almost overnight. And if I can be a bit confessional, this was the time when my hair turned from black to white.

In the late sixties, we had--in the entire State University of New York system--93,000 dormitory beds and I recall the heated debates over whether freshman should be allowed to live off-campus, whether "visiting hours" should be abolished, and whether residence halls should go "coed."

In the end, of course, the answer was affirmative to all three! Looking back, I'm convinced that creating a more open campus, was absolutely right. Students are adults, not children. Most know how to balance freedom and responsibility in their daily lives. And no one imagines returning to the days when young women were locked in. And when deans of students were viewed as "parents on the prowl."

Still, there's a feeling on many campuses that something is not right. Today's undergraduates increasingly are isolated from adults. And many come to college with pathologies, born of confusion and neglect. During our study we found that two-thirds of all college presidents rate alcohol abuse and drugs a serious problem. Date rape is increasing. And two-thirds of the presidents at large research universities say theft and vandalism is a growing problem--which often is alcohol related.

The harsh truth is that young people growing up in America today are fed a steady diet of ethical ambiguity, at best, and decadence at worst. And no community can thrive in a climate where values are ambiguous and where conduct is chaotic. Campus regulations are essential. Further, there is evidence that students themselves would welcome a climate where standards are established.

Several years ago, we surveyed 5,000 undergraduates. About half said they support a code of conduct on the campus. And a slightly higher percentage said that known drug offenders should be suspended. That's a dramatic turnaround since our last survey in 1976.

Therefore, we conclude that all colleges should have a clear code of conduct, developed by the community at large, to guide both academic and nonacademic matters, and we also urge that campus regulations be widely disseminated and consistently enforced.

I know that this is precisely what many of you already have been doing. Not only are regulations being tightened, but 90 percent of the nation's colleges and universities have alcohol education and prevention programs; more than 70 percent have special task forces on substance abuse. Almost everywhere we found seminars on crime prevention. And student personnel professionals are bringing not only physical and social services to the campus, but moral leadership as well.

If higher education expects to exercise a moral force in society, it must take place in a moral context. In the days ahead-- instead of asking what courses we want our students to complete, we should be asking what values we want them to embrace

V. A CARING COMMUNITY

This brings me to principle number five. We say in the new Carnegie Report that a college or university is a caring community, a place where the well-being of every member is sensitively supported, and where service to others is encouraged.

Colleges and universities should be purposeful, and just, and disciplined, and open. But the key to community--the glue that holds it all together, is the way people relate to one another. Does someone really care?

At first blush, the term "caring" seems soft, almost sentimental. And yet, as human beings we have an absolute need for social bonding, from the first to the last moments of our lives. Professor Mary Clark--at San Diego State University--puts the matter this way: "Social embeddedness," she says, "is the essence of our nature." We need each other.

Today's students cherish their independence. They're pleased that in-loco-parentis has finally been abolished. But undergraduates like the rest of us, they still want guidance. They want to belong to something larger than themselves. One student captured this "ambivalence" when she said, we don't want the university to be involved in our lives, but we would like someone to be concerned occasionally about our lives, and at least make freshmen feel that they belong.

Yet during our study of undergraduates several years ago, we found that about 50 percent said they "feel like a number in a book." About 40 percent did not feel a sense of community on campus, and about two-thirds of today's students say they have no professor who is interested in their personal lives.

I'm suggesting that a community of learning is a caring place, and this spirit must be reflected not just in brochures, but in every office, and in every classroom.

Indeed, one of the surprises of our study was "the spirit of community" we found among students at two-year institutions. Many of these older people were on campus just a few hours every week. But they told us that the classroom was a kind of oasis in their lives; they made friends with other older students; they felt accepted, and college "office hours" were arranged to meet their needs--not to serve "the system."

To put it simply, building community in higher education relates, not to the length of time students spend on campus, but to the quality of the relationships they experience while they're there.

Finally, a caring community is a place where students engage in service so they can see a connection between what they learn and how they live. Frankly, I'm worried that this

nation is becoming separated across the generations. Babies are in nurseries. Three-year olds are in day care centers. Children are in school. Adults are in the workplace. Retirees are in villages all alone.

I'd like to see all college students serve in day care centers, help older people, and tutor disadvantaged kids in schools to relate their learning to the realities of life, so that students could make connections not only interculturally, but intergenerationally as well.

Rheinhold Niebuhr once wrote: "Man cannot behold except he be committed. He cannot find himself without finding a center beyond himself."

I'm convinced that young people of this country are ready to be inspired by a larger vision. In the end, the goal of education must be, not just competence, but caring.

VI. A CELEBRATIVE COMMUNITY

Finally, we conclude by saying that a college or university--at its best--is a celebrative community, one in which the heritage of the institution is remembered, and where rituals affirming both tradition and change are widely shared.

In the award-winning Broadway play, *Fiddler on the Roof*, the peasant dairyman--who raised five 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 scholars conduct research, and while students study on their own, a community of learning must be held together by something more than a common grievance over parking.

Let's have freshman convocations in which students are introduced to the heritage of the college in a richer, fuller sense. Let's celebrate the buildings and special landmarks on the campus. Let's recall the founders and the funny anecdotes. Let's celebrate the school's academic reputation, and honor the

achievements of faculty and students. And, of course, there are commencements, which should be something more than boilerplate speeches on a sultry afternoon.

But a celebrative community not only recalls the past, it anticipates the future. Colleges should highlight the racial and ethnic groups on campus. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, for example, should be honored, and days also should be set aside to feature Hispanic, Asian, and Native American cultures. And foreign students should be celebrated, too.

I'm suggesting that while colleges affirm the sacredness of the individual, they also--through ritual and tradition--should celebrate community as well.

Lewis Thomas wrote that if this century does not ship through our fingers with almost all promises unfulfilled, it will be because learning will have disconnected us from our "splintered dumbness" and helped us focus on our common goals.

This is what a celebrative community is all about.

CONCLUSION

Here, then, is my conclusion.

To strengthen the quality of student life we don't need a new set of regulations. Rather, what we need is a larger vision by which to guide the nation.

We say that a college or university at its best is:

- a purposeful community,
- an honest community,
- a disciplined community,
- a just community,
- a caring community,
- and a celebrative community,

We suggest that these six principles be adopted as a "campus compact" and be used to measure all actions on the campus--from fraternities to trustees.

And it is our hope that by strengthening community on campus, colleges and universities might become an inspiration to the nation and to a world that is desperately searching for ways to put the pieces back together.

Again, I applaud those of you assembled in this room who have--
throughout the years sustained this spirit of community and
served the nation's students, not only intellectually, but
socially, and spiritually as well.