

Questions and Answers with Grant Swinger

(News and Comment presents another interview with Grant Swinger, director of the Breakthrough Institute (Science, 1 January 1965) and chairman of the Board of the newly organized Center for the Absorption of Federal Funds.)

Q. Dr. Swinger, what is the Center for the Absorption of Federal Funds?

A. It is an organization, created by a consortium of several institutions, for the purpose of surveying preliminary steps toward a fresh look at some of the more vexing problems of research, education, and society.

Q. What are some examples of its work?

A. I'll be happy to tell you, but first I think it should be understood that the Center does not take any problem to the closure mode.

Q. The closure mode?

A. Yes, that is, we don't finalize any problems. We confine ourselves to pioneering in developing new approaches. We tend to be technique oriented.

Q. Specifically, what are some examples of the Center's work?

A. Well, the Center staff members have resolved the conflict between teaching and research.

Q. How?

A. By doing neither.

Q. I see. Then what do they do?

A. They confer, they comment on each other's past papers, they travel a good deal. There is no shortage of activity. In fact the pace is cruel. It is just that our people don't want to get into the classic dilemma of having to choose between the classroom and the laboratory or library.

Q. What else does the Center do?

A. Well, it is doing some preliminary work toward the development of new programs, procedures, and goals for our member institutions.

Q. Such as?

A. We are investigating the establishment of a new undergraduate program, to be known as Junior Year on Campus.

Q. I see.

A. In addition, we are looking into the possibility of new sources of support. For example, there is the Pan-American Chair.

Q. In Latin-American studies?

A. Oh, no, this is actually a chair on a Pan-American airplane. It would be set aside for traveling members of the Center and the associated institutions.

Q. Yes.

A. And we are also looking into the establishment of the first \$1-million chair at any university.

Q. A million-dollar endowment?

A. No, a million-dollar salary, and that would be for 9 months. The resulting publicity and prestige for an institution with such a chair would be simply fantastic.

Q. The salary would cover only 9 months?

A. Yes, to provide opportunities for consulting and travel in the summer months. Furthermore, our preliminary investigations suggest that, to maximize the prestige, the recipient should have neither teaching nor research duties, and in fact should rarely, possibly never, be on campus.

Q. What are some of the other services performed by the Center?

A. Because many universities are experiencing difficulty in filling administrative positions, we have established a Rent-a-Dean service.

Q. Rent-a-Dean?

A. Yes, we will provide a dean for a flat daily charge, plus so much for each decision he renders. The advantage to the university, of course, is that it does not have to make a permanent

commitment and may return the dean at any time, which, in effect, is what now goes on anyway with many major appointments.

Q. I see.

A. We also have an assortment of related services, such as Rent-a-Fellow, if an institution is unable to fill the fellowships that it has available.

Q. Are there other activities of the Center?

A. Yes, for example, we are devising new types of tests and examinations. The most promising development so far is one in which the student is furnished with, let's say, 25 footnotes, and is required to write a paper incorporating them in the given order.

Q. Are there other activities of the Center?

A. Yes, we are looking into the creation of a new academic title to reflect some of the realities of modern-day education and research. We have tentatively decided upon the title post-doctoral emeritus. Finally, we do a great deal of international consulting. For example, I will be leaving for Africa in the morning for a conference on Space, the Atom, Particle Physics, and the Emerging Tribe.

Q. How long will you stay?

A. Oh, it's just for the afternoon. I have to be in L.A. the next day for an international conference that will be attended by about 200 persons.

Q. On what subject?

A. As far as I know, a topic has not yet been selected.

Q. Dr. Swinger, this may be a delicate matter, but how can these activities be justified to the public authorities?

A. Oh, I think that an examination of the historical record shows that we are well over that hump. But the advice of our Committee on Research and Publications is that, if questions arise, they usually can be settled with a few brief references to hybrid corn, penicillin, atomic energy, and serendipity. Really not a problem.

Q. What future do you see for the Center?

A. Quite obviously it can only grow bigger. We have adopted the motto, "As Long As You're Up Get Me a Grant." I think we can only grow.

Q. Thank you, Dr. Swinger.

—D. S. GREENBERG