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The Modern University: Concerns for the Future

University administrators must do more than cope with exigencies; they must divine the future and plan.

Samuel B. Gould

The American university, it has been said, represents one of society's great potential instruments for change. The actuality has rarely been true in the past, however, and few signs are emerging to cause much more hope for the future. Change, unprecedented change, is inevitable, but to attribute it to the initiative of the university is to read into the institution strengths and forces that may be more apparent than real.

It is perhaps more accurate to say that these days our universities are too busy being successful to give too much thought to the distant future. The university is now, after all, the recipient of all that the most affluent society on earth can bestow upon it. Success may not have spoiled the institution, but neither do these golden days encourage the necessary soul-searching. Success need not produce mindlessness; indeed, our constant preoccupation with the enormous tasks of providing quality education for the millions can and should prompt deep and serious thought about what lies ahead.

There is little question that national destiny is shaping today's universities, rather than the other way around. But, once we have successfully solved the problems of academic quality in mass education, we shall still face other hurdles to which we have barely addressed ourselves; these will rapidly become central to the modern university's future ability to accommodate to change, and even to become also an effective initiator of change.

Our present methods of responding to the changing needs of the world are more closely characterized as a patchwork approach, rather than one of bold and inventive planning. With all the ingredients present to tell us what the world has in store, we are still adapting old methods and making minor revisions and emergency moves; we are still desperately trying to pour new wine into old bottles instead of recognizing that the new vintages may require quite different sorts of receptacles. In the face of the thousands upon thousands of students pouring onto the campuses of the universities, those of us who are responsible for the educational advancement of these thousands are still clinging to everything traditional—to our curricula, to our internal organizations, even to our prejudices. We patch here and there, but we still procrastinate about meeting the issues squarely. Only now, years later than it should have happened, do we see a general stirring, a growing sense of urgency among educational leaders regarding the need for clearly establishing the philosophy of their institutions and systematically planning their long-range futures. Only now is there an increasing awareness that, given the rapidly changing world we live in, we can no longer expect anything to remain the same, even educational anythings.

The process of planning starts with some effort to predict the nature of our society and of the world 50 years from now, the needs that will emerge from mankind who must live in that world, and the kind of institution that can best prepare for it. The longer one explores these elements of the process, the more clearly one sees the inadequacies of what we are now doing and the dangers inherent in our continuing to do it. Under such circumstances, one would think it unnecessary to plead for a continuing and visionary process of planning, but the fact is that only now are some of our colleges and universities giving attention to it.

The failure to plan exposes another characteristic of our universities generally: this is the tendency to follow rather than lead. Too much of the initiative for new programs, innovative efforts, or experimental approaches comes from outside the universities today—from foundations, from government agencies, sometimes even from individuals. Since this initiative is usually accompanied by large amounts of money, temptingly available, universities find it hard to resist. Without really meaning to, they can suddenly find themselves fully embarked on a course of action or extraordinarily involved in study areas that were not previously an important part of their mission as an institution. Or, to put it another way, a new and happily coincidental flexibility develops in the mission that puts within the university's purview almost anything an outside agency is willing to support. Carried to a high point of development, this tendency can soon lead to the situation in which the university no longer shapes society

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but rather is shaped by it; no longer can reserve for itself the role of critic but must always make of itself society's willing partner whether for good or ill.

Similar lack of leadership is also seen in other ways. Universities on the whole have failed to meet with intelligent initiative the changing temper of student expectations. Universities and students can share the blame for the current restiveness of students that is so apparent on many campuses, even after one sets aside the issues of campus size and impersonality, or the importance of teaching as a countervailing force against the dominance of research. These are major issues, but they are not the whole story. Nor can one explain away today's phenomenon of unrest simply by talking about "alienation." *Every* generation of youth has felt alienated from the world around it, and always for different reasons related to the contemporary scene. Demonstrations to end wars are not the exclusive creation of this generation, although the techniques of demonstrating have changed. My own generation of youth was upset and "alienated" not only because of wars but also because of a crushing economic depression, the reasons for which we could not understand, but the results of which kept us jobless and hungry. Today's adults seem to have very short memories, and today's youth have not looked into history very carefully.

The tragedy is that we seem to learn little from experience. The idealistic energies of young men and women are being frittered away in large part, and our educational institutions are lapsing into a state of numbness, timidity, or outright fear.

Students will always be critical of the *status quo*, and should be. These are their years for searching and questioning; otherwise, university life has no meaning. But ways must be found to help them formulate answers when there *are* answers and to make clear the reason why sometimes there are *no* answers.

The disquieting element in today's student activism is not that it is taking place; it is rather that in too many instances activism appears to have lapsed into protest for the sake of protest and without regard for constructive results. Colleges and universities must search for ways to move students beyond the two preliminary stages of first identifying a problem and then protesting its existence. And, if they are to do this, the institutions themselves must be more flexible in assisting students toward such movement. Problems are solved by not merely emotional motivation, but by intellectual power as well; one without the other turns out to be ineffectual exercise.

Our responsibility as educators seems clear: we must look squarely and honestly at the nature of the education we are offering our youth and ask ourselves how directly it meets the requirements for development of logical, articulate, informed, and thinking students. We have always paid lip service to such requirements even while our curricula have remained comparatively unchanged. Because of these unchanged curricula, too many students coming to college—even long after arrival—have no background in philosophy, interpret history in its narrowest factual patterns, are completely ignorant of the techniques of logic, do not even know that there is such a subject as argumentation, and are insufficiently grounded in the rudiments of written and spoken English. Is it any wonder that they flounder when even with the utmost sincerity they attempt to establish points of view on major issues and to express themselves upon them?

The trend toward activism by students must be met with a corresponding trend toward their preparation for the most intelligent and constructive kind of activism. Student involvement and independent assertiveness will increase during the decade ahead. I hope we shall have the good sense and the flexibility with which to turn such a trend into a positive and worthwhile facet of education. The tradition that the student should be a docile, comparatively silent recipient of what we choose to offer him is dead or dying; it must be replaced by one far more dynamic, far more meaningful, far more suited to the times. We cannot and should not stand in the way of the student's urge toward maturity; since it evidences itself more strongly than ever, we should welcome it and do all we can to assist its flowering into wisdom.

The activist movement among students, as well as faculty, also carries dangers: for one thing, it accentuates the growing rift between faculty and administration. Faculties are asking for more of a voice in the administration of an institution, not only in academic matters but in everything else as well. As is the case with students, these demands are frequently surrounded with a general fuzziness as to where responsibility and accountability lie. Decision-making powers are being pressed for, but no one seems to care to specify who will be responsible if the decisions are wrong. The accountability of committees or of active masses has never been worked out either on university campuses or elsewhere. Furthermore, there is the danger that campuses may become so preoccupied with nonintellectual matters that they may forget their primary purposes.

If the university's leadership rests with the academic administrator, all manner of hurdles conspire to make his tasks difficult, if not occasionally impossible. The typical educational administrator today is caught up in such a frenetic set of circumstances that he is mercilessly and effectively alienated from the world of thought. This state is not usually voluntary on his part: he struggles manfully to organize his life, with time for reading, for contemplation, for cultural refreshment. Yet, as time passes and every day seems full of urgencies, he becomes captive to the calendar of appointments that ebb and flow every 30 minutes like accelerated tides; to the round of committee meetings on budget, buildings, book purchases, benefactors, and bottlenecks; to the academic and social rituals; to the annual conferences and conventions—all variations on the same old refrain; to the official breakfasts and luncheons and dinners—gastronomically deadly and oratorically bland.

It may be, as Paul Goodman suggests, that university administrators are becoming fit to do no more than sweep the establishment and then stand aside, genuflecting respectfully, while the faculty and students file past us into the halls of academe. It may be that we are now no more than the bookkeepers, the educational entrepreneurs, the money changers of our profession—tainted with the disease of public relations, afflicted with a mania for consensus and compromise, destined to become the eunuchs of the intellectual world. If this were to happen, administrators have only themselves to blame.

The gradual abandonment by university administrators of the function of leadership in education is a dangerous trend and could have profound effect on the future of higher education. The administrative function, as it applies to academic leadership in analysis and planning, is more and more vital to the development of quality education at all levels. When it is performed with appropriate regard for

the broad aspects of leadership that it encompasses, it cannot help but be linked to intellect and to educational values. The president must see himself as the force that educates trustees to all the new emergencies of our day; that orients civic and political leaders and the general public to new understandings of the vital roles that education must play in guaranteeing a future of consequence for the State and the Nation; that galvanizes faculties into concern and action in regard to these emergencies and these roles. It is not important that he have all or even a few of the ideas required for the solutions, although it would strengthen his position if he participated in their development; it *is* imperative that he be a catalyst and be possessed of enough vision and persuasiveness to convince his institution that our current educational situation is a dynamic one that will become more crucial if action is deferred.

We should also keep a watchful eye on the now rapidly changing economy of higher education; this is bound to carry significant implications for the future. The lines between private and public institutions are steadily becoming more blurred, with private colleges and universities turning more and more to public funds of one sort or another for their support. I shall use New York State as an illustration: a study of operating budgets of the state's private institutions shows that in 1963 they averaged 25 percent in direct support from federal or state funds; the Congress's recent acts relating to education will lift this percentage considerably. Institutions carrying out major research contracts for agencies of the federal government lean even more heavily upon other than private funds, and I do not consider the various forms of indirect support and assistance that are not reflected in operating budgets. Loan and scholarship funds, as well as grants for assistance with construction, are of great help also. The Regents Scholarship plan in New York State was specifically and intentionally designed to benefit private colleges and universities when no way could then be found to give the money directly to the institutions.

The private colleges seem not a bit disturbed by this phenomenon of blurring; they yearn mightily after whatever federal or state funds are available to them, sometimes with more avidity than their public counterparts. Indeed, in the area of professional education, which is so extraordinarily expensive, they are already receiving much federal aid and, here in New York and in Pennsylvania (to name but two states), are requesting or already receiving state assistance as well—through contracts or by other means. It will not be long before the same kind of assistance is sought for undergraduate education, and soon the distinguishing lines may be completely erased. Such seeking is understandable, with costs of education rising steadily and swallowing the steadily increasing private support that private institutions have been attracting. This is a far-reaching change in higher education, deserving of careful study as to its effects on such elements as philosophy, mission, and diversity of institutions.

Another factor in change is the increasing pressure on universities to emphasize more and more the service aspects of their mission. Modern universities do not stand aloof from society as did their medieval predecessors; they are regularly implicated in many kinds of public service, running the gamut from the training of professionals and technicians in many fields to the assistance of government and industry in many forms of research and education, extension work, consultation, help with underdeveloped countries, urban planning, data gathering, and the like; they are steadily becoming the focal points for cultural growth of communities. The major universities today are congeries of such a multitude of activities in behalf of government and the public generally that they bear little resemblance to the traditional images they have been to us in the past.

There are inherent dangers in the degree of emphasis which, in the extreme, may make it impossible to stick to the university's intellectual last, its *raison d'être*. The steady parade of requests for service, including those that cannot be ignored under any circumstances, can lead to a proliferation of activities that throw the university's total mission seriously out of balance. Research that is not truly designed to advance knowledge, but rather to solve an industry's immediate problems, can make inroads upon the university's avowed purposes for research. The academic life can become academic in name only, if service programs, worthy in and of themselves, begin to outweigh the more fundamental parts of the curricula. There is a careful line to be drawn between what is appropriately the concern of a university and what should be undertaken by business or industry or by government—itself, or through some other agency. Similarly, cultural programs and activities of a university should be designed primarily for its students and only secondarily for the community; to forget this point is to bring about fairly radical alterations in such programs and activities.

There is no question that the trend of the future will place even more of a burden upon universities to perform service functions. Nor is this in any way an unfortunate trend except when, in following it, the universities fail to measure carefully the services they perform against their major objectives, and unless they fail to find means to mesh these services soundly with their objectives.

To say that the impact of science and technology upon our universities represents a change is to offer nothing new by way of information. Yet science and technology are only now opening avenues of exploration to us that will mean sweeping changes in at least one aspect of university life that hitherto has remained comparatively untouched —the techniques of instruction and the whole process of learning.

It may be distasteful to some educators to consider these new monster-like electronic creatures that our technologists have created. Yet they are with us to stay: they threaten our old concepts of human labor, but they also have their own unmistakable promise, their own particular kind of magic. And it is a magic from which we must strip the mystery. From now on, the student coming to college will need knowledge of the fundamentals of computer technology if he is to perform adequately; it would be best if this fundamental need were filled *before* his arrival in college, not *after*. But in any case he must have this kind of background. His college and university career will be more and more closely concerned with this technological device, whether in the way he uses the library of the future (which is bound to be highly computerized) or whether he is a research scholar with mountains of data to be gathered and classified. With man's knowledge now doubling itself every 10 years, the computer comes at an opportune moment for use as a storehouse of such knowledge and as a retrieval system.

The argument is frequently advanced that the advent of computers further

dehumanizes the university, which is already beset by problems of size. I cannot accept this point of view since I feel it represents a distortion of the purposes for which computers are used. They are in fact the means by which hours and hours of laborious effort in data gathering or in mathematical computation can be bypassed and the scholar and his assistants freed for the more creative and productive aspects of their research. Like other forms of automation, the computer gives man a new dimension of freedom from drudgery and removes him more and more from unskilled labor. I do not minimize the problems that such a change in occupational need creates, but they are problems pointing toward the raising of man's potential, not the lowering, and should therefore be welcomed. When the devices we invent have the result of releasing us from drudgery or of increasing our opportunities for leisure, we cannot blame anyone but ourselves if we are unable to use all the additional time more meaningfully or to prepare ourselves for more satisfying occupational possibilities.

The full impact of our technological age also presents universities with two urgent needs: first, a process of winnowing, discarding, selecting, and regrouping knowledge so that the obsolete is cast aside and the pertinent is evaluated; and, second, a reexamination of what the role of education must become in the face of the continuing multiplication of knowledge.

For example, the sheer volume of material and the rapidity of its changes throw new emphasis upon the importance of periodicals of the physical and social sciences in our studies. By present methods of book publishing, the process of putting material into print is too long and the result often too expensive; nor is the appropriate material available to the student quickly enough. Books in the sciences are needed and will always be needed to expound principles and to provide historical background, but they must be supported and augmented more and more by the timely periodicals that keep us all up to date. A candid and unsentimental look at our library shelves today would soon reveal how many volumes we might eliminate because what is in them is either irrelevant or downright wrong. This is true not only in the sciences, but in other disciplines as well.

Education in the future must either radically adjust its curricula and its major goals of teaching or founder hopelessly in an engulfing morass of knowledge. In most instances, a course of study can no longer be more than a judicious sampling, with a great proportion of the time spent on learning how to search for knowledge, organize it properly for assimilation, and evaluate its worth. This course requires a new kind of teacher, less anchored in the past and less parochial in interests; it produces a new kind of student, more independently oriented and more prone to make judgments based on a wider spectrum of knowledge.

Against this broad canvas of sweeping change, one should note that the universities on the whole have been unable to adapt their faculties to the times. We have a tradition of tolerating and even protecting the obsolescent teacher—the teacher who simply does not know what he is talking about because he has never bothered to keep up in his field. He has earned his ticket of admission to the classroom, and so far as he is concerned the rules, procedures, and contents of the game never change. It is not necessary to visit his classes in order to uncover him, and thus be accused of violating the principle of academic freedom; the word seeps out anyway with a wonderfully mysterious inevitability. Students are far wiser in this than we give them credit for being; they have their own effective, even if sometimes embarrassing, means of communication.

Even the finest teacher must constantly be sensitive to contemporary change; this attribute is in fact a major contributing element to his excellence. But *all* teachers require regular opportunities for exposure to what is happening around them, and it is our responsibility as educational leaders to make sure that such opportunities are provided. Continuing in-service training and education are essentials at all educational levels today. Investments in visiting lecturers and faculty who bring with them the message of what is changing in our world and therefore in many academic fields, in sabbatical opportunities, in expansion of departments so that workloads make allowances for study, in visits to other institutions for the interchange of ideas—these investments are vital if we are to fight the battle of obsolescence.

Most universities allocate precious little from their operational budgets to such in-service development today. Few have a systematic plan for the intellectual, cultural, and professional enrichment of the faculty. The time has passed when we could mask our shortcomings in the learning process; we are being supported as never before, and we must justify this support with quality results—results that are relevant to our age.

Unquestionably, we have the ability to create educational systems that match our times, not only by assimilating their scientific and technological discoveries but equally by strengthening the philosophical and ethical foundations upon which all new discoveries should properly be placed. The tradition of human values as a part of education can stand the test of centuries of challenge; the shallower traditions, in which many of us have found refuge, out of either obstinancy or apathy, deserve to be cast aside and replaced. This will not happen, however, unless academic leaders personally see to it, for the essence of their function is to be visionary.

The greatest components of educational leadership are those related to analysis of how effectively one's institution is doing its academic task, and to long-range planning based upon predictable changes in the world. These components are based upon the premise of dynamism, of willingness to change not for the sake of change itself but because world events and trends make such change essential.

There are merits in the essential conservatism of education when it is a proper balance wheel. But there are also many frustrations when it becomes a deadweight. The frustrations take on additional importance in a period when the world, with our own country in the lead, is moving with such speed scientifically, technologically, and politically. It is good to have traditions about subject matter and techniques, but this is not an age in which one can cling to them out of mere sentiment. It may well be that we have already outlived the time when we can allow such traditions to continue to flourish. Education's present success is not simply the fruit of its traditions, but grows out of present national exigencies.

It is doubtful that the 21st century will prove as tolerant of our outmoded uses of higher education as is the 20th. The more self-critical we allow ourselves to be today, and the more we act accordingly, the more capable our universities will be of leading, rather than of being led, into the next century.