

Carnegie Commission Stresses Equal Opportunity

The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education last week made its debut with a special report on the financing of higher education in the immediate future, which not surprisingly calls for increased federal responsibility. The commission, however, parts company with many proponents of a bigger federal financial role on the question of what form increased federal aid should take.

The Carnegie commission, headed by former University of California president Clark Kerr, has placed prime emphasis on equality of educational opportunity and has stressed direct aid to students, particularly students from low-income groups, who are now underrepresented on American campuses. Until now, with the exception of the GI bills, most federal aid to higher education has been channeled through programs which aided construction of facilities, supported research, or helped achieve public service objectives. In recent years a campaign has been building to establish federal programs to provide "general support" to universities which could be used with some flexibility by the institutions. The Carnegie commission's championing of aid to individuals provides an alternative which many university administrators greet with scant enthusiasm.

In the past, Congress has been unwilling to establish new federal aid programs in higher education without agreement on terms among the major groupings of higher education institutions, the big and small, public and private, rich and poor, elite and plebeian. A consensus was being fashioned in favor of general support, which could be upset by the Carnegie commission's entry of another horse in the race.

The commission can hardly be accused of either naiveté or disruptive intentions. Its members are eminent representatives from the university-foundation complex which has dominated the formulation of federal policy for higher education. (Included among the commission's 14 members are the presidents of the universities of Illinois, North Carolina, Notre Dame, Cornell, and Harvard and the president of Bryn Mawr.) The Carnegie Corporation, which sponsors the commission's work, has supported research which has provided many solid educational innovations and has also furnished a recent Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare—John W. Gardner. The present report is only the first intimation of what is designed to be a comprehensive 3- or 4-year study of higher education, ranging across curriculum, structure, and function and including the economics of higher education. Because of the ambitiousness of the project and the prestige of the commission, its work could command attention similar to that earned by the Conant study of American public education, another Carnegie-supported effort.

In discussing the financing of higher education in its first report, while militant students are disrupting the universities, the commission may be accused of talking about city planning while Rome burns. But the quiet crisis over finances could build frustrations in the future which could make the universities ungovernable. And the commission's priorities indicate an awareness of one of the dissidents' main grievances.

The commission, which is prescribing for the 10-year

period ending in 1976-77, is asking for a lot. It calls for an increase in expenditures by institutions of higher education to \$41 billion in 1976-77, more than double the present figure (spending rose from \$5.2 billion in 1957-58 to \$17.2 billion in 1967-68). The federal share would rise from 21 to 32 percent. Local and state effort should, the report states, decline from 27 to 17 percent, because federal income tax is the only source of funds capable of supporting an increased proportion of costs. Half the bill would continue to be paid with private funds.

The report contemplates an expansion of enrollment from the present 6 million to 9 million over the 10-year period, with a million of the new students added by virtue of new aid programs.

The commission asks creation of a "national reservoir" of student aid programs which would absorb most existing forms of federal aid. Educational opportunity grants would be available to undergraduates, first-level graduate students, and medical students, on the basis of financial need. To bolster this basic aid program, the commission recommends such things as a system of supplementary federal matching grants for students who win grants from nonfederal sources. There would also be "talent search" and development programs.

Also recommended is that present loan programs be expanded for all who need them and that doctoral fellowships be provided during the period of intensive work on the thesis. The commission does recommend that institutions enrolling students who are on federal grants get cost-of-education payments similar to those that now accompany some federal fellowships, but the sums involved are hardly princely.

The commission recognizes both the value and the rising cost of research and recommends that the level of funding be increased over the next few years, "but with the annual rate of increase declining from 15 percent in 1970-71 to 10 percent in 1976-77."

At this juncture the report's details are perhaps less important than the directions in which they point. The members of the commission have shown some readiness to develop their own position on university financing at risk of unpopularity with their peers. The commission concedes that "no major ways are likely to be found which will make it possible to educate more students at the same level of expenditure without lowering academic quality." Realistic as this no doubt is, the commission is asking that a greater share of the gross national product be devoted to higher education without a proportional increase in productivity. This will not go unnoticed by the middle class, who would presumably bear much of the burden of additional federal income tax revenues required without enjoying as great a share of the benefits as they are accustomed to receiving from higher education legislation.

Still ahead of the commission is examination of the structure and function of a higher education system which many critics find self-indulgently organized and inefficiently administered. It will be interesting to see how the commission, having recommended the carrot, would administer the stick.—JOHN WALSH