6 July 1984, Volume 225, Number 4657 **SCIENCE**

Is Taking Sides a Good Idea for Universities?

Universities are being exhorted by a wide variety of interest groups to take official positions on issues such as military research, the U.S. corporate presence in South Africa, and restrictions on information flow. Often the groups making such demands are perplexed by the resistance they meet, since they believe their particular perspective to be in the long-term interest of the human community and, therefore, of the university community as well.

It is essential to understand, however, that over the past century American colleges and universities have been transformed from quiet centers of traditional moral, political, and social values into educational and research centers at which inquiry is more important than dogma. It is only in recent times that the faculties and students of colleges and universities have acquired both the freedom and the obligation to consider subjects and pursue lines of investigation that may contradict prevailing beliefs in science or threaten the vested interests of powerful social and political groups. It is only in this century that the notion of academic freedom as a defining characteristic of universities has become pervasive.

This is a fundamental change. But the distinction between universities as institutions and faculty and students as individuals is often not recognized by the various publics who support universities and who look to the university as an institution for an affirmation or reaffirmation of particular points of view.

The work of the academic community is undeniably related to and supported by a particular set of values. These include the value of knowledge, the benefit of fair and open inquiry, respect for other points of view, and the possibility of human progress. In addition, most universities are now on record as taking a stand on some moral issues such as affirmative action and research on human subjects. We must, however, be very cautious about adding to this list. Without developing a means of distinguishing ideas from ideologies we risk the possibility of undermining the environment that supports our principal commitments and responsibilities. Returning to an earlier model of moral, political, and scientific orthodoxy would, however, undercut academic freedom and open discourse, transforming the character of contemporary higher education and undermining the university's capacity to make positive contributions to society.

Although academic freedom is not the only value that should inform our actions, we should consider no erosion of academic freedom without carefully scrutinizing the reasons for it. Perhaps we could ask ourselves questions such as the following as we prepare for the discussions.

1) What is the source of the university's right to free inquiry and what is its relation to the society that grants that right? In particular, what obligations accrue from this right?

2) If the university as an institution takes a moral or political stand, what implication does this have for members of the community with other points of view?

3) How do we identify those moral and political issues on which a university should adopt a particular point of view? For example, is the range of admissible inquiry a matter for administrative decision? If so, under what circumstances do we allow restrictions on teaching and research programs that offend an individual's moral or political values?

Experience indicates that transforming moral sentiments into policy statements requires carefully articulated ideas of the mission of a university and the impact of teaching and research on that mission. In this context, I believe that a university remains a creative part of society only as long as it remains an intellectually open community and not the ally of a particular point of view.—HAROLD T. SHAPIRO, *President, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor 48109*