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Agenda for the Colleges and Universities

Higher Education in the Innovative Society

By JOHN W. GARDNER

THE colleges and universities of the nation are facing what I believe will prove to be the most exciting and trying period in their history. They are enjoying extraordinary success today. What David Riesman calls the "Academic Victory" is virtually complete. But it will be possible for the colleges and universities to be busy and populous and yet fail in their essential jobs—which is to say that they could be busy and populous frauds. In short, the stakes are high.

There is no doubt that the colleges and universities would like to do what the times demand of them. But what do the times demand of them? I propose to list what I consider to be the major problems and challenges facing the colleges and universities, not in the order of importance but beginning with teaching, which is certainly central to any discussion of higher education today.

First, we must restore the status of teaching. Our institutions of higher education have three great traditional functions: research, teaching, and service to the community. The particular function emphasized depends on the institution. The two-year college and the four-year liberal-arts college are concerned chiefly with teaching; the graduate school is more heavily concerned with research; the land-grant university

JOHN W. GARDNER, *Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare*, was president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York when he delivered the address from which this article is adapted at the Fourth Annual California Conference on Higher Education held last May.

has traditionally placed great emphasis on service to the community. None of these functions should be slighted. One of them *is* being slighted today; namely, the teaching function, particularly the teaching of undergraduates.

The reinstatement of teaching as an important function of the undergraduate college may be hastened by the current wave of student discontent. But the decisions that move us in that direction must be faculty decisions. The faculty should give serious attention to students' views, but the balance between teaching and scholarship, the qualifications for tenure, and similar issues must not be settled under pressure or adjudicated in an atmosphere of controversy.

Second, the colleges and universities are going to have to undertake a thoroughgoing reform of the undergraduate curriculum. We have now had a decade of lively reform in the high-school curriculum. A comparable movement for reform at the college level is already under way, and we shall be hearing a great deal more about it in the years ahead. It is certain to transform instruction in all major fields of knowledge. It will require searching reappraisal of the aims of education in each field. It will require thorough exploration of the possibilities of new teaching aids and methods. It will involve a more widespread and ingenious use of independent study. And it must involve a continuing effort to do justice to interdisciplinary approaches. Curriculum reform will be incomplete if its only consequence is that each specific subject is better taught; it must also reintroduce into the undergraduate program the breadth so essential for young people who will reach the peak of their careers in the twenty-first century.

Third, we must greatly improve our procedures for institutional planning. Up to this point we have been discussing changes that must be brought about by the faculty. Now we are discussing something that must be accomplished by administrators. I have noticed in the recent campus troubles that "administrator" has become something of a dirty word—the only one not spelled with four letters. And the only dirty word that no one has risen to defend.

In the interest of common justice, let me say a word in behalf of administrators. Many of the students engaging in demonstrations today would not have had a college to go to if a lot of hard-pressed administrators of the late 1950's had not seen them coming along and planned the expansion of our colleges and universities.

The problem of numbers has struck us full force, and we feel that we are swamped—but we haven't seen anything yet. We do not need to speculate about the college students of the 1970's: they are riding around on their bikes and skateboards today—and there are a lot of them. To make adequate preparation for them is going to require better planning within institutions, far better planning on a state-wide level, and an attentiveness to the economics of education greater than any we have

exhibited in the past. We are going to have to learn some hard lessons about planned diversity among institutions and about co-operation among institutions.

Fourth, every institution that has not already done so will have to re-examine the college calendar and the traditional four-year pattern for the A.B. degree. Virtually every institution is going to have to go into year-round operation through adoption of the quarter system, the trimester system, or some comparable arrangement. Less than 20 per cent of our colleges and universities have faced up to that reform. Furthermore, every institution must introduce the flexibility into its four-year program that will permit the various kinds of acceleration bright students now demand. The advanced-placement program has been immensely successful. A number of universities now offer a four-year A.B.-M.A. program. Some leading universities offer the A.B. and Ph.D. in a total of six years.

But the aim of flexibility is not solely to speed things up. It must also serve, where necessary, to slow things down. We are ready to dispense with the tradition of a four-year, uninterrupted college education. We now know that many students benefit greatly by a break in the four years—for a year abroad, or a year at work, or a year traveling, or just a year to figure out what it is they want to be or do.

Fifth, we are going to have to find a way to bring the small independent liberal-arts college back into the main stream of higher education. There are hundreds of these colleges that can no longer compete with the universities in attracting able and highly motivated faculty members or students. The reason they cannot compete is that they are too small to offer the richness and variety of resources and opportunities that so many of today's faculty and students expect. Because of this, the tide is going against them; and if it does not change, they will become a weak and deteriorated part of our higher educational system. That would be a regrettable end for a great American institution.

The best chance of salvaging the small liberal-arts college lies in devising new means of co-operation among institutions. In some parts of the country these small colleges have banded together to co-operate among themselves. In other places they co-operate with near-by universities. In some places they do both. In all cases, the need is for the small college to relate itself to some larger system in such a way that it can retain its autonomy but still enjoy access to the richness and diversity of resource that professors and students demand.

Sixth, colleges and universities must give more thought to continuing education and off-campus instruction. We have abandoned the idea that education is something which takes place in a block of time between six and eighteen (or twenty-two) years of age. It is lifelong. We have abandoned the idea that education is something that can occur only in a classroom. A system of education suited to modern needs and aspira-

tions could not come into being until these two notions were finally done away with.

The continuing-education movement does not need any special encouragement. It will develop at a rapid pace regardless of what the colleges and universities do. But I believe that the colleges and universities should provide intellectual leadership with respect to such education, and that depends on their own creative activity in this field. If they ignore it, the movement will pass them by and leadership will go out of their hands. If that happens, I think they will have reason to regret it.

Seventh, American colleges and universities pride themselves on their service to the larger community, and this service is posing some immensely significant challenges. I shall not discuss the relationship of universities to the government or the vitally important role that the universities have in every phase of international affairs. But I want to say a word about the relationship of the colleges and universities to another part of the larger community—the city. The city is the heart and brain of an industrial society. But our cities today are plagued with every conceivable ill: apathy, crime, poverty, racial conflict, slum housing, air and water pollution, inadequate schools and hospitals, and a breakdown in transportation. Coping with those problems is going to be very near the top of the national agenda for the next decade. There are no institutions better equipped to serve as a base for that struggle than the colleges and universities, but they have played a negligible role thus far. The strategic role played by the land-grant universities in developing American agriculture and the rural areas has no parallel in the cities.

And that brings me to my final point. We are going to have to give some thought to the internal health of our colleges and universities as functioning communities. One problem is that of size, and institutions here and throughout the nation are experimenting with ways of solving it. The cluster concept is the most widely advertised solution, but there are many other approaches.

The large institution has been much maligned of late. I have been surprised by the censorious tone with which some critics now refer to large institutions, almost as though in growing to their present size these institutions had deliberately chosen to do an evil thing. This is ridiculous. The critics may, if they wish, attack the American people for being so numerous and so fertile. They may, if they wish, attack the society generally for holding such a liberal view concerning who should go to college. But they should not attack institutions that are simply trying to accomplish a well-nigh impossible task the society has handed them. The institutions being scolded for largeness today are the ones that have been most responsive to the American eagerness to broaden educational opportunities. We should have the grace to live with the consequences of our choices.

IF WE address ourselves to the problem of the college or university as a functioning community, we face at once the matter of student unrest. The student demonstration is a very imprecise instrument that turns up false issues as readily as real issues, but the question remains why this generation of students provides especially fertile soil for such demonstrations.

This generation of students has its exhibitionists and fools, just as our generation did. But over the nation as a whole, today's students are more aware of what is going on in the world, more serious about their own relationship to it, than any generation we have known. Out of this awareness and seriousness has come a whole array of constructive activities, such as tutoring disadvantaged youngsters, working for civil rights, and staffing the Peace Corps.

If one reviews the various incidents involving students on campuses around the country and attempts to sift the real issues from the extraordinary clutter of emotion and recrimination, it becomes clear that nation-wide the students have hit upon at least one or two issues that go to the heart of the problem of the modern university. The question of whether undergraduate teaching is being neglected is a real one, and I am bound to say that in many colleges and universities the students have a real grievance. The question of anonymity and impersonality of student life is a real issue in many institutions—a problem worthy of all our wisdom and inventiveness.

We need new patterns for the organization of student life. There must be orderly channels for the expression of student grievances. There must be opportunities for students to work off their idealistic urges in constructive projects—preferably projects of their own devising and under their own management. There must be opportunities for them to exercise emerging capacities for leadership and decision.

The problem of the student's place on the campus might be simpler if the college or university community were a coherent whole. But on many, perhaps most, campuses there is a breakdown of communication among various elements of the university community: trustees, administration, faculty, and students. The resulting cleavages trouble me, because I believe that most academic institutions are going to have some difficulty in surviving as coherent and significant communities. The difficulty will be magnified if they are expending their best energies in civil war.

The traditional academic institution *was* a community. Those who spent time there knew they were members of a community. It had a "personality" that could be described and loved—or laughed at. Undergraduates were often marked for life by its style and spirit. And the community was to a very considerable degree what its members wanted it to be. In short, it was autonomous.

Such institutions still exist. But on every college or university campus in the nation, the sense of community is diminishing. Why?

First of all, because of the spectacular rise of the academic professions. This is the era of the professional, and faculty men are like all other professionals in having a strong guild loyalty. The community of the physicist or the economist is his professional brethren scattered over the nation or the world. His ties to any local community are correspondingly weak. Second, the cohesiveness of the local community is diminished by the very strong ties that its constituent parts have with elements external to the academic world, particularly with government. And perhaps one should add as a third point that it is in the nature of a highly organized modern society to be destructive of local communities.

Let us be clear concerning what is at stake. Even if the campus loses every trace of community, it can still be an orderly, busy, productive, important place, in the sense that a city block in the heart of one of our great metropolises is an orderly, busy, productive, important place. A group of activities do not necessarily diminish in significance because they are not welded into a community.

But it is hard to view that prospect with enthusiasm. The young people who pass through colleges and universities can profit immensely from membership in a local community that has its proud traditions and standards and *esprit*. Later they may shift their loyalty to nation-wide or world-wide professional communities; but for the education of youth, the face-to-face community has incomparable advantages.

Equally important, the community that enjoys internal coherence and morale is in a position to defend and preserve its own autonomy and to shape its own future. The non-community will be shaped to a much greater degree by outside forces—by the federal government and other sources of funds, by political pressures, and by popular demands.

IT IS possible that in the years ahead, the college or university will become a less and less identifiable landmark on the national scene, as more and more institutions in the society encroach on its traditional activities. Research has long since ceased to be a university monopoly. As for instruction beyond the high school, everyone is in the act—industry, the military services, civil government, TV stations, publishing companies, and public-school districts.

If the college or university is to preserve its character as a community, and forge for itself a distinctive identity and role in the vast clutter of scholarly, scientific, and instructional activities that will characterize our evolving technological society, it will have to have a considerable measure of internal coherence and morale. And that means that trustees, administration, faculty, and students are going to have to admit that they are all part of one community—distasteful as that may be to some of them—and they are going to have to ask what they can do individually or collaboratively to preserve the integrity and coherence of that community and to regain command of its future. I do not mean

that they must subject themselves to some kind of unanimity or consensus. Every vital community has internal conflicts and tensions. But I do mean that there will have to be healthy forms of interaction and dialogue among them.

So much for the problems facing the colleges and universities. It is an overwhelming list. The objection may be made that I have proposed one or two unnecessary new tasks for institutions already dangerously overburdened. But I do not believe that the colleges and universities will go under because they are carrying heavy burdens. If they deteriorate, it will be because they lacked the morale, the internal coherence, and the adaptiveness to meet the requirements of the future; it will be because in the moment of their greatest success they could not pull themselves together to face new challenges.