

TO THE UNIVERSITY WITH LOVE

The American university is an anachronism. It no longer meets the needs of today's students as they struggle for self-identity amidst the confusion and complexity of our world. It has failed to meet the demands and the challenges of a society struggling to deal with the realities of the twentieth century--war, racism, illiteracy, nuclear power, and population growth. In order that we might better understand the failure of the university, let us examine the goals, methods, and consequences of the present university style of education.

We would distinguish two goals of the educational process. The first is socialization--the preparing and shaping of the student for a productive and stable life in society as it presently exists. Achieving this goal of education requires that the student learn to accept and support all the presuppositions--social, economic, and political--upon which the society is based. It gives the student attitudes which are appropriate of the past but not for the future. The second goal of education is a revolutionary one--the preparation of students for participation in the never-ending task of reshaping the society. The student must develop the capacity to criticize the postulates and value presuppositions of the culture in which he lives. This is a very difficult task, for the particular patterning of knowledge and perception brought about by socialization obscures those very postulates which must be examined. Nevertheless, if a society is to survive, its members must be able to identify areas of obsolescence as they arise within the society. Students, therefore, must learn to analyze changes in conditions in order to determine whether changes in the society's patterns of thinking and in its structures are necessary.

It is our belief that every educational institution should be striving for both goals. But we at Illinois and other students throughout the nation have found that America's universities are directed only toward the goal of socialization because the instrumental or authoritarian approach to education used at the universities precludes the realization of education's more revolutionary goal. This approach assumes that man is essentially lazy and must be coerced to discipline himself in order to learn. It assumes that knowledge is value-free or objective, that reason can be separated from passion. It assumes that it is possible to predict accurately the activities in which an individual will be engaged during his life; thus, the university need only teach the student those facts which he will need in order to work effectively in the predicted areas of activity. In the context of this illusion that it is possible to predict the problems and the needs of the future, it is not surprising that faculty members assume that only they have the knowledge and the wisdom to forecast the future accurately and that they, therefore, must be the sole determinants of curricula and course content. Finally, the instrumental approach assumes that the capacity of an individual can be fully determined by objective testing. A student's work is judged entirely by its impact on a professional scholar; that the work may have disrupted the student's views about himself or his universe is irrelevant. Emotional starvation is the norm. Clearly such a process does not prepare a student to criticize the value assumptions of his culture, for it regards as insignificant the subjective base or context in which every line of analysis is set. According to this instrumental philosophy of education one need only manipulate information to achieve his ends.. (We would point out here that this is our interpretation of the educational process as we have experienced it; we do not

claim that these are the actual assumptions made by particular administrators or faculty members.)

We believe that the present state of our society provides the most convincing evidence supporting our thesis that the existing pattern of higher education in America--socialization achieved through instrumental means--is entirely inadequate and obsolete. Today our nation stands stagnant in the very midst of crisis; blessed with virtually unlimited resources and talent, we are unable to mobilize them for constructive action because our people are not willing to make the changes required of them if we are to survive in this new age--they are rooted to old styles of living, old values, old prejudices, and old concepts. In short, America's people are living in the past; they do not know how to cope with the present and the future.

Surely this stagnation reflects in part the myopia characteristic of America's universities. Our universities trained the scientists, the political leaders, the businessmen, and the technicians who brought America to heights and power never before known. But those universities failed to teach America's people how to control and use their wealth and power for the liberation of all men. So today the powerful are frightened by their own power, and the wealthy are unable to cope with the problems of an affluent society.

And even now as the nation stands faced with disaster her universities continue to plod on at the same pace, evidently unaware that they are out of step with the twentieth century. Although problems have become more diverse and complex and the society more pluralistic, the universities' pattern of education has remained stereotyped and inflexible. Today's curricula reflect their nineteenth century origins much more than they reflect the contemporary student's search for a personal and social identity. Increasingly, today's students are

concerned with personal relations, philosophy, contemporary national and international issues, and the creative arts--just those areas where the curricula are weakest. The comprehensive study of social problems is further hindered by a paucity of interdisciplinary courses and of opportunities for independent study.

Another major obstacle to serious study and thought is the myth that one can only learn through hard work and suffering. Therefore, students are expected to master five courses at one time, a feat which, if possible at all, can only be accomplished by sacrificing so much sleep and leisure time that one comes far too close to sacrificing his sanity. This is no joke: note the rate of suicide attempts on this campus, or drop into Kam's any Friday night. John R. Platt described this situation well when he wrote that the university "is an affluent society parody of medieval monasticism...the student is treated like a monk with a vow of poverty, austerity, and overwork--a vow which is not even his own but has been taken for him." We are not seeking a simple or easier curriculum; rather, we seek a more sophisticated one.

Much of the blame for the failure to develop a modern curriculum belongs with the faculty, for, in the old pattern of thinking, curriculum reform was their responsibility. In most universities the faculty has, however, resisted attempts to change the traditional curriculum. This resistance supports our belief that the faculty's epistemology has been limited and its foresight myopic. Further, today's curricula reflect a subtle faculty elitism: behind the facade of academic discipline faculty members have developed curricula intended simply to produce more faculty members like themselves.

The time for change has come. No longer can the university serve as a supplier of replaceable human parts for America's oligopolies; the production of university-inspected and approved human machines must cease. In this

new age the university cannot be a tool of the Establishment; we, the students refuse to be prostituted any longer to the demands of a sick society. We insist that the university assume responsibility for the humanization of the structures of society: it must become the prophet of the new age, the leader and innovator of the struggle for freedom. The university cannot assume this new leadership role in the society unless a new style of education is implemented, a style centered upon dialog. Both faculty and students must begin now to bring about this change.

This dialogical approach to education is based on the image that it is in man's nature to grow and actively seek out his own understanding of self. This approach assumes that knowledge is never wholly objective, that any pattern of analysis contains at least one unprovable assumption; therefore, if a person is to make sense out of his situation he must be able to consciously examine the value assumptions upon which his decisions are being made. This approach assumes that it is not possible to forecast accurately the directions in which a person should grow; that a student must be prepared to act effectively in any of a wide variety of situations whose occurrence neither he nor his professors can foresee. Another assumption is that enthusiasm provides the potential for levels of motivation and creativity not attainable through the instrumental approach of negative reinforcement.

Finally, this approach assumes the equality of all the participants in education; we are all learners and teachers. Although a professor may know more facts, his experiences and contributions are no more relevant and valid than those of his younger colleagues. This view holds that a student's curiosity and interests should be at least as much a determinant of curriculum and course content as any professor's particular biases about his field.

This freedom from authoritarian relationships leads to freedom for the development of genuine interpersonal understanding and finally to the total involvement of all participants in the learning experience. We would emphasize that the total learning experience necessarily involves both the reasoning abilities and the emotions of all participants and that such an authentic learning experience is not possible in today's emotionally sterile classrooms.

This concept of the university--flexible, everchanging, based on true partnership and dialogue between students and faculty--represents the ideal toward which we would direct the reformulation of the university. We would emphasize that the situation is urgent; the authoritarian mode of education has failed, and we must begin now to implement a new mode of education. We shall now present some specific examples of the kinds of change which we believe must be made. These proposals are not inclusive; they represent the kinds of changes which we believe must be instituted at the moment. A spirit of flexibility, innovation, and experimentation must accompany these efforts. We would urge the faculty and the administration to unite with us now in the struggle to develop a new university and a new style of education--one centered upon dialogue.

SPECIFIC PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE

We see these necessary changes as arising in three areas which directly influence student life: the academic situation, the decision making process, and the University life experiences.

In the academic realm, the more flexible University of the future which we envision will have no required courses and no specified curricula. There will be no grades, for we see the pressure created by the emphasis on grades as a major reason for the authoritarian atmosphere in the classroom. Students are subtly intimidated by this pressure from voicing dissenting views or diverging in any way from the expected patterns of the classroom situation. A vast extension of the pass-fail system must be instituted to relieve this pressure, and to create an atmosphere which will free the student to direct his own learning adventure. Inherent in these basic changes is the realization that students can and must define their own educational process.

In order to facilitate this style of individually-directed learning, spontaneous courses and seminars must be allowed as people envision the need for them. It must be possible for curricular changes to be brought about in a matter of weeks instead of years. If a group of students wish to study a particular topic and can present a coherent plan of study, they should be able to do so and gain credit for their study, whether or not a teacher can be found to teach or to give advice. Similarly, teachers should be able to initiate courses on short notice. One way to accommodate this type of flexibility would be to establish course numbers without specific course in each department to allow for such contingencies.

Course numbers should also be established for interdisciplinary courses.

With a world becoming increasingly unified and integrated, the concept that knowledge can be segmented into departments is becoming obsolete. A new emphasis should be placed on a unified, interdisciplinary approach to education.

A further essential component of the flexible university we envision is the creation of unlimited opportunity for independent study. If a student can present a coherent study program for independent research--on or off-campus--for up to a full semester credit, not just for three or hours, he should be allowed to do so. The concept that education can take place only within the formal, classroom-curricular structure must be abandoned. Students who find educational experiences working in the slums of Northeast Champaign, so long and blissfully ignored by this University, should be able to gain credit for such work if they can communicate their experience and make it part of the larger body of knowledge.

This individually-defined educational process leads to specific changes in the teaching process. First, teaching must not be limited at all by places or facilities available. Rather, classes should be moved outdoors, into apartments or other informal settings to help establish an atmosphere in which students and teachers feel they can participate on a basis in which the only measure of one's contribution is quality, not status. Secondly, teaching must not be limited to the current one man, one class pattern. Team teaching is important, with teams of more than two faculty members or a faculty member and a student or several students. It should also be possible to differentiate responsibilities among the faculty members so that they may choose an area of concentration rather than serve in often conflicting roles as teachers and researchers.

Finally, as a replacement for the current authoritarian teaching relationships, we would suggest greater availability of outstanding faculty members, and other resource people, both local and national. The exciting cultural events available in this centennial year should be a regular part of the academic environment. The regular presence of such excellence encourages the communication, fosters the exchanges and evaluation of ideas which is essential to the continuing spirit of academic experimentation and flexibility which we have indicated as essential to the university atmosphere.

However, it is not enough to alter the academic atmosphere of the University. Students must also have a meaningful role in the decision-making aspects of the University. The present University power structure effectively emasculates the student and prevents him from taking any effective role in determining educational policy. Students are presently granted on or two non-voting seats on faculty senate committees and seats on "advisory" panels to administrative officials who ultimately can and often ignore what the students say. Furthermore, the student is required to take a crushing load of course that effectively prevent him from participation in significant decisions. If the University is to become a true community of students and teachers rather than an authoritarian hierarchy headed by faculty and administrators, students must be given a real voice in governance. This means greatly increased student representation on all policy-making committees--departments, college and University. Students should be given a voice in all matters which concern them--including curricula, admission policies, teacher hiring and criteria, and election of administrators. However, this type of increased student voice will not work unless students are physically enable to take a meaningful role in such

in such committees. This means giving students credit for such participation. Students should also be given credit for participation in activities of the student sector of University government. In this manner recognition will be given to the process by which an individual learns by making decisions and taking action--shaping his environment, instead of merely being shaped by it.)

Finally, the concept of the University as a true academic community based on flexibility and dialogue must pervade all aspects of the University. At present, students personal lives are almost wholly separated from the intellectual atmosphere of the classroom. Education is something students "go to" and "come from." A first way to change this--to make education a more-involving and life-changing process--is to make living units a place where educational experiences are encouraged. Professors should be located in the dorms, perhaps on a rotating basis to provide a tie between classroom and living unit. Dorm libraries should be greatly expanded. Ultimately the dorms should become living and working areas for both faculty and students who would meet together formally and informally, joining one another for dinner as well as classes.

Another important part of the educational experience is the library. The University of Illinois is justly proud of the institution, but access to it is arbitrarily limited to certain students at certain hours. The undergraduate library and the stacks should remain open around the clock instead of closing at 10:00 p.m. and midnight as presently. Other departmental libraries also should extend hours as the need arises. The stacks, now essentially open only to graduates, should be open to any student who can present a valid reason for wanting to use them.

Lastly, students should have greater opportunities for initiating

their ideas. A student book co-operative, free copying services, current article libraries, a student house on the south end of campus to serve the same functions the Union does on the north, course evaluations, a student tax--good ideas for making changes in the University are numerous. They should be encouraged, and the best way to encourage them is to make it possible for students to implement them more easily than is now possible.

We would emphasize that these changes constitute our vision, and that we realize that their implementation would result in a radically different university. However, even these changes are not final, for the university of the future will never be static. It will and must be constantly changing if it is to survive as a meaningful part of an ever changing world.