

Every institution of higher learning needs understanding and support from the society which it exists to serve.

The Constituencies of Higher Education

by W. M. Perel

In recent years the question of the purpose of institutions of higher learning has risen again and again. What are universities and colleges for? Whom do they serve? These questions are more basic and must be answered before such questions as "Who should control or govern colleges and universities?" The faculty have traditionally felt that the university existed for and was to be controlled by its members. Administrators have accepted this view and have attempted to justify their control by referring to themselves as faculty. If one thinks of a university as an institution which preserves, transmits, and adds to knowledge, then clearly the major role of the faculty as scholars, teachers, and researchers is clear.

This traditional view was openly challenged by student militants during the '60s. Students voiced the cry for "relevance" which was soon taken by some faculty members and some administrators, even though no generally accepted definition of the term was ever enunciated.

An effect of student activism was an erosion of the powers of both the faculty and the administration. Students ceased to think of themselves solely as consumers of the academic product, or customers, if you will, and began to demand a more active role not only in more or less generally accepted student affairs questions, but in academic matters as well. Committees of all sorts now have student members. On some campuses students have the power to hire and fire coaches and sit on search committees which hire both administrators and faculty. Student began to think of colleges and universities as institutions which existed for them, which meant that they emphasized the university's role as a transmitter of knowledge and deemphasized research and scholarship, not seeing any connection between the two.

Actually, there are four constituent groups which compose a University Community. These are the students, the faculty, the administration, and what for lack of a better name will be called the "larger society." While these four groups have composed the university community in all times and all places, their relative importance and power has varied from time to time and place to place. The role of students and faculty are best known so that the discussion

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here will concentrate on the latter two groups, but there is no intention to downgrade the importance or necessity of both students and faculty.

Historically, the role of the faculty has been paramount. A community of scholars gathered together to study and to learn. In time, students attached themselves to the community of scholars as apprentices. There was little or no administration, as such. All of the myriad questions of physical plant and equipment are relatively recent and will be ignored here, because the focus is on groups of people. As mentioned above, students particularly within the last 10 or 20 years have sought and gained a larger role within the university community. Perhaps student militant rhetoric should not be taken too seriously, but sometimes students seemed to totally ignore all of the other constituents which compose the institution they were seeking to control. Naturally, they failed.

First, let us define terms. By students I mean persons who pay tuition or who enroll as students presumably to learn under the direction of faculty. Students differ from faculty, even though faculty members also continue to learn, principally because the faculty member is paid a salary for his services to students, and the student typically pays a fee for the privilege of his association with the faculty. Some faculty members are fond of saying, "I have learned as much from my students as they have learned from me," but such remarks are not to be taken too seriously. As a wise man once said, "In order to teach a dog tricks, you must first know more than the dog." A faculty member is presumably an expert within the discipline or area in which he was hired. If the faculty member does not know more than the students about his own discipline, he is clearly incompetent and should be removed from the faculty. Faculty members are persons employed by the university because of their knowledge, training, skill, or credentials within some discipline, for the purpose of transmitting such knowledge to other persons called students.

Perhaps unfairly, but primarily to avoid too many divisions, the administrators are defined to be all employees of the college or university who do not qualify as faculty members by the definition given above. Thus the administration includes secretaries, librarians, electricians, gardeners, and the like as well as presidents, vice presidents, deans, and associate deans, budget officers, fund raisers, museum curators, and others too numerous to mention. Having given the above definition, it is now proposed to concentrate only upon those administrators who exercise control over faculty members in some direct chain of command manner. However, the stake which the other university employees have in a healthy University atmosphere and sound university fiscal policies should not be ignored.

One problem is that deans, academic vice presidents, and even presidents like to refer to themselves as faculty members when addressing faculty meeting and no doubt some of them even feel that they are faculty members. They often hold academic rank within one of the departments of the university and may be highly qualified within a particular discipline. But they do not qualify as faculty members by the definition given above. They were not hired by the university to preserve, increase, or transmit knowledge, but were hired as administrators because of administrative experience or skills they possessed or were thought to possess. Certainly, at the level of president, one finds many persons who are utterly unqualified academically to hold an assistant professorship in any department, but who acquired their administrative skills and experience in industry or in the military. Some such presidents are highly success-

ful and have served their universities well. But they were and are not faculty members, and they neither speak nor think as faculty members do.

Academic administration has become much more complicated within the past decade. It is no longer clear that a professor can be made into a dean overnight and learn his administrative duties on the job. There are now special training programs in academic administration and some institutions employ deans and other administrators who have been through such programs. Such administrators are not professors and have never been professors. Even though they hold a doctorate in some discipline represented in the university's curriculum and even though they occasionally teach a course, they were not hired because of their discipline training and they were not hired to teach. They are rewarded in terms of promotion to a higher level of administration or in terms of salary increases for their performance as administrators, as they should be. Indeed, they can lose their positions by inadequate administrative performance, no matter how great their teaching or research, as they should.

Of course, there are still many deans and other administrators who have come from the ranks of the faculty. They have been assistant professors, then associate professors, then professors, and perhaps department chairmen before moving on into the higher levels of administration. Are not such persons still faculty members when they become deans? The answer is clearly NO. The chief difference between the two types is that the latter is more secure in that he generally has "retreat rights" to the department of which he was formerly a member, whereas the other types of dean may have no place to go within the university which employs him if he should decide or if his superiors should decide that he should no longer be dean. But in their dealings with faculty, students, and others within the university community there is little difference between the two. When a professor becomes a dean, he becomes further and further removed from his discipline as the years pass. More important, he stands on a different platform than does even a department chairman and it is natural that the university and the world look different to him. His concerns are with budgets, enrollment, administrative and other problems which a typical faculty member ordinarily ignores. The better administrator he is the more remote from faculty concerns he becomes. There are no doubt examples of great professors who become great deans and continued to be professors, but typically the better the academician, the less likely he is to become a dean or want to become a dean.

Now that many institutions have adopted collective bargaining, the line between administrators and faculty members is more clearly drawn. Administrators are not members of the unit and faculty members are. By this definition department heads or chairpersons are sometimes faculty members and sometimes administrators, but never both. Without collective bargaining the determination of group membership for department heads is less clear, but usually these persons are faculty members because they still maintain contact with the discipline and they were often hired for the same reasons and with the same qualifications as other faculty members.

Administrators are concerned with maintaining themselves in office. This consideration is much more important to an administrator than to a faculty member because the faculty member can normally expect to acquire tenure in his position, whereas tenure is not usually available in an administrative post. Administrators support research because good faculty research enhances the reputation of the insti-

tution which in turn reflects favorably on the administration. Administrators also support good teaching, since poor teaching not only reflects unfavorably on the institution, but also because it may affect enrollment adversely and often causes student unrest. However, these matters of faculty concern are important to the administration primarily as they affect the real administrative goals which are typically growth . . . growth in enrollment, in physical plant, and in reputation. The emphasis on growth may cause the administration to support programs of doubtful academic merit, in the view of many faculty members, but which will nevertheless attract additional students.

In any case it seems clear that administrators and faculty members are different groups of persons. For a stronger statement of difference, see "Impolite Speculations on Higher Education" by Edward L. Galligan, **Bulletin, American Association of University Professors**, April 1977.

But the really neglected constituent group is that which was referred to above as the "larger society." For a state university, the larger society is the population of the state, represented by a governor and legislature, which, in turn, often selects a governing board which, in turn, hires and sometimes fires the institution's chief administrative officer. For a regional state university, the population of the region may have somewhat more say, even though the support comes from the state as a whole. The larger society for a private institution may be the alumni, or the leaders of a particular religious denomination which supports the institution. In either case, it is the larger society which pays both to establish and to operate the university, as student tuition and fees in neither case pay more than a fraction of the total cost. There is an ancient saying: "He who pays the piper calls the tune." Faculty members and students may not like either the quotation nor its implications for higher education, but it still expresses the opinion of many members of the larger society.

Some state legislatures have by statute decreed that all students enrolled in the state universities shall enroll in such courses as state history or government, or perhaps American history, as requirement for graduation. Other states require that state university students be taught "anti-communism" or that they not be taught evolution. The consideration here is not whether such requirements are academically sound, but rather that they were not imposed by academicians for academic reasons but that they are imposed by politicians for political reasons. Some states have even defined faculty teaching load by statute. Private institutions often have required courses in religion, chapel attendance, dress codes, and a whole host of other requirements imposed by the governing board in response to demand from the larger society which the board represents. In the February 1977 issue of the **Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors** appears an article titled, "Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities." Within this article appears: "When such external requirements influence course content and manner of instruction or research, they impair the educational effectiveness of the institution." Even though the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges had a hand in the preparation of this statement, it seems clear that boards and legislatures will continue to exercise the control, examples of which are cited above.

The whole problem of ultimate control is further complicated by the intrusion of the federal government into the affairs of both private and state-supported institutions. Particularly since World War II, many institutions have come to rely upon massive infusions of federal funding. The current

demands for affirmative action programs are only the most recent manifestation of the power of the piper payer to call the tune. The availability of research funds in one area as opposed to another has influenced the direction of faculty research. During the "Sputnik" era, the funds made available by the National Science Foundation made engineering, the sciences, and mathematics much better able to attract both undergraduates and graduate students. In short, society determined a need for more scientists and engineers and the pump was primed to produce them. Now that society is more concerned about energy and the environment, other pumps are being primed.

Why is a particular institution of higher learning founded? Many students believe that a state establishes a medical school because some of its young people wish to become physicians, and that state education or normal colleges were founded because some of the young people of the state wished to become teachers. However, the truth is that, for the most part, society acted from a sense of need for the product of such institutions rather than from a desire to supply opportunity to its young citizens.

In other words states establish medical schools, dental schools, law schools, etc., in order to fill society's need for doctors, dentists, and lawyers. It may be argued that law and medicine represent ancient academic components of universities. But, surely, no one would make such a contention for agriculture, yet states founded colleges of agriculture to serve the needs of the largely agricultural society which existed when most of them were founded in this society. Many denominational colleges were founded in order to supply the denomination with ministers. When private liberal arts colleges were no longer able or willing to supply society's need for public school teachers, states founded normal schools and teachers' colleges. It is true that many graduates of denominational colleges do not become ministers just as many graduates of state teachers' colleges never teach, but the founding of such institutions did increase the supply of both preachers and teachers.

In the view of a typical member of the larger society, then, an institution of higher learning does not exist solely to fill the expressed needs of the student body. Nor does it exist to provide an opportunity for faculty to engage in research which he may regard as useless or worse, inimical to his interests. Certainly, he often objects vigorously if a faculty member uses his academic platform, either within the classroom or without, to express views which he finds abhorrent. Even after many years of experience with the traditions of academic freedom, the lay public often fails to understand or appreciate the concept.

Most faculty members and the official position of the American Association of University Professors are in agreement with the principal that both the board of control and the institutional administration must define academic freedom as one of their chief duties and responsibilities. In the book **University Goals and Academic Power** by Gorss and Grambsch, published by the American Council on Education in 1968, it is reported that university presidents indicated in a survey that the protection of the academic freedom of the faculty was their most important responsibility. There are some faculty who do not take this self analysis of university presidents too seriously. The board which exercises the power to hire and fire the president is the representative of the larger society from which complaints about faculty statements, teaching, and/or publications are likely to issue. The members of the board are likely to find it much easier to identify with the complainers than with the faculty. Faced with a board trying to represent the constituency

which selected its members, perhaps the president can be forgiven for giving some attention to keeping his job.

Let us consider an example. At a state university, a group of students forms an organization known as the Erotic Arts Society, complete with faculty advisor and approval of the Student Senate. Under the sponsorship of the Society, a film is shown which courts have held to be obscene. Although the showing of the film is not associated in any way with the curriculum and is not a class exercise, university facilities provided for the use of student activities are used. Local authorities invade the campus, confiscate the film, and arrest the president of the Society. It cannot be doubted that both local and statewide sentiment is against the showing of such films. Letters to the editor of the local paper, to members of the Legislature, and to the board of control run heavily in favor of the actions of local authorities. Even the faculty is divided on the question of whether or not academic freedom is involved. What should be the response of the president to the charge that he has allowed the facilities of a tax-supported institution to be used to undermine the morality of the student body? A wise president must be capable of an adroit middle-of-the-road approach, which while causing him to receive flak from both sides, enables him to survive. Certainly, he cannot totally ignore the wishes of the public which not only pays its taxes but also supports the university with private gifts and in hundreds of other ways.

Less trivial examples exist, examples which involve the academic functions of the institution more directly. Shall a predominantly white public support a state university which seeks to establish an academic program in Black Studies to satisfy the demands of a small minority of black students? Shall a predominantly religious public support a state university in which it is alleged that professors of diverse disciplines are teaching atheism? What if the public demands that the state university teach Christianity or that faculty meetings and certainly football games must begin with a prayer? Public sentiment may strongly favor those disciplines which train or propose to train young people for a specific occupation and oppose those such as philosophy which can make no such claim.

The answer to these and other such perplexing questions lies not in giving in to every pressure from a largely uniformed public. However, many students and faculty members are either unaware that such problems exist or choose to ignore them. Every institution of higher learning, indeed, every institution, needs understanding and support from the society which it exists to serve. No doubt many faculty members feel that their institution exists to serve faculty needs and interests, but such a view ignores reality. Faculty members are aware of the needs and wishes of students and administrators and in many cases are able to prevent the wishes of students and administrators from prevailing. Faculties must also be aware of the needs, wishes, and views of the larger society. Awareness does not mean abject surrender, but hopefully will inculcate within the mind of the faculty a greater awareness of the problems of the administration which must mediate disagreement among all of the constituencies which form a college or university. It is unrealistic to expect the administration to support faculty views at all times and in all places, and it is absurd to have any such expectation from the members of the board of control. An important function of the administration, particularly of the president, is to serve as mediator. It is surprising how many university presidents play the role of mediator so well, without, in many cases, even recognizing its importance.