

Contemporary society can ill-afford education institutions that fail to nurture attitudes favorable to lifelong learning.

The Role of Higher Education in Lifelong Learning

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This article begins from a clearly stated premise: higher education has a role in lifelong learning. No longer can the premise be debated. It is one of those self-evident truths that has escaped recognition by only the most myopic and tradition-bound administrators and scholars of higher education. The *nature* of the role and the way that role is to be carried out by different institutions and by levels of institutions may need to be debated and examined, but the existence of a role is difficult to deny (Cross, 1985).

It is likely different higher education institutions will fashion roles that are specific to particular institutions, but there are two general kinds of roles that will apply to most post-secondary education institutions. The two general roles perceived to be common to the community college and the university are (a) the creation and sustenance of attitudes favorable to lifelong learning and (b) the provision of education service to adults beyond the traditional college age range that is limited to young adults. Both of these roles are important, but so are related concerns that need to be addressed. Therefore, after arguing the above two points the following additional topics are addressed: (a) some explanations for role disagreement, (b) social and economic imperatives fostering lifelong learning and (c) some problematic areas of concern.

Roles

As noted above, it is believed two common roles of higher education concerning lifelong learning apply to higher education institutions regardless of level or specific circumstance. Each of the general roles is discussed here.

Enhancement of Attitudes

Some have suggested that schooling is bad in that it diminishes the human spirit in some way while creating negative attitudes toward learning if not to schooling. Without doubt most of us can recall some unpleasant experience in our education career that might support such a cari-

ature of school. If the argument is true then all of education, writ schooling, needs dramatic if not radical reform.

It is not my purpose here to become an apologist for education institutions and educators wherever their degrees originate. Rather, the point is clear and obvious, contemporary society can ill-afford education institutions, at any level, that fail to nurture attitudes favorable to lifelong learning. We in higher education really have two different kinds of challenges: (a) one to recognize that a major educational objective is to foster a spirit of lifelong inquiry (learning); and (b) to become acutely aware that lifelong learning is the product of the interaction of numerous social agencies such as places of work, places of worship, and places of play as well as places of study, to cite a few. Both of the challenges have implications for the second general role of providing educational services.

Educational Services

It is patently illogical to suggest a major objective of higher education is to foster a spirit of learning that knows no age limits and for higher education to subsequently reject services designed for adults. It is also unfortunate that we in higher education have been reluctant to search for ways that we can supplement and enhance the learning that goes on through the auspices of other social agencies. Cropley (1977) conceptualized lifelong education as existing on two dimensions: horizontal and vertical. The horizontal axis includes the range of community and social agencies available for lifelong learning. Such a concept facilitates our thoughts of lifelong learning as a process that extends from birth to death and, equally important, one that permeates, and is penetrated by, a wide range of institutions.

It is proper and desirable that higher education institutions from community colleges to universities provide a range of education services for adults. The range may differ among institutions, but it should be observed the range of services should not be restricted to only pre-employment education and professional continuing education. At least both of the above kinds of education services are appropriate for many, if not most, higher education institutions. Very small schools with few faculty and students may not be equipped to offer quality programs in more than one or two areas, but the larger institutions (some of the very ones that may be reluctant to fully embrace the role) certainly have the resources to provide a range of services.

Patricia Cross (1985) has approached the problem of the changing role of higher education from a similar yet different position. She has posited six propositions that relate to the changing roles of higher education in the learning society. They are (a) "... institutions of higher education no longer enjoy a monopoly on the provision of educational services"; (b) "... the roles of educational providers ... are increasingly blurred"; (c) "... higher education no longer has the full-time commitment of students—or for that matter of faculty"; (d) "... learning has become a lifelong necessity for almost everyone"; (e) "... young people must be educated for their futures as lifelong learners"; (f) "... education will play new roles in the society of the future" (Cross, 1985, pp. 101-106). Elsewhere (Long, 1987), I have addressed

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similar points from yet another perspective.

Lynton and Elman (1987) have cogently identified new priorities for the university that are associated with the social changes that Cross (1985) and I (1987) have addressed. They argue that the university's emphasis on the quest for new ideas and knowledge is too narrow. They call for higher education institutions to focus on another need: new ways to accumulate, interpret and apply knowledge in the real world.

If it is apparent that higher education's role in lifelong learning includes the above tasks, why are the administrators and faculties of some higher education institutions reluctant to accept the roles identified? There are four general explanations: role disagreements emerge from (a) different views concerning the nature and role of higher education, especially the university, (b) differences concerning the purpose of education, (c) different views on both the nature of education for adults and (d) different perceptions of adults as students. Let us look at some of these reasons for disagreement about higher education's role in lifelong learning.

The title of this paper implies the modern university, or the university of the third era, according to Houle (1974), has a role in educating adults. That is, there are university activities that rightfully are involved in the education of adults. At least two different discussions could emerge from this proposition. The first part of this article discusses the first point as it is an attempt to identify and prescribe two general university obligations or activities that are appropriate to the education of adults. The second discussion is an attempt to clarify and to explain some of the reasons why the idea of the role of the modern university in educating adults is often confused and even opposed. Furthermore, some of the problematic features that should be considered in devising ways to fulfill the university's role obligations in educating adults are addressed. Therefore, this section addresses three topics: first, the problem of why the premise that the university has an adult education role causes some difficulty for some, or why the adult education role attributed to the university is often impoverished.

Secondly, this section identifies some of the significant economic and social developments that encourage a more serious and considered examination of the issue. Thirdly, some of the problematic features and consequences of the above for the university's role in educating adults are noted.

Before developing the three points it is useful to observe higher education changes with other social changes (Cross, 1985, Long, 1987. Houle (1974) suggests higher education is in its third era. The third era, according to Houle, is characterized by changes that are often referred to as non-traditional. Thus, later reference is to second and third era universities.

Role Disagreement

Disputes over the topic of "the modern university's role in educating adults" seems to be based on two basic but different points of view: disagreement over (a) the nature and role of the university, (b) the nature of the purpose of education, (c) the nature of education for adults, and (d) perceptions of adults as students. Let us briefly examine these elements.

Nature and Role of the University

Conflicting ideas about the nature and role of the university have implications for the university's adult education role. First, there is the traditional view of the university

that limits the university to a classical concept that emphasizes the instruction of youth and young adults. This view has been expanded slightly to include similar instruction, at the graduate level, for older adults who have the required foundation, usually baccalaureate or master's degrees.

Once we depart from this concept of the nature and mission, of the university, it becomes increasingly difficult to deny that the modern university has a role in educating adults.

Nature of Education

Ideas about the nature and purposes of education, especially education of adults also contributes to disagreements about the university's role. Clarity is not imposed on the situation by the proposition that education falls into one of three categories: basic, repair, and continuation. If we define education as only one of these three types it is easy to develop a stunted and incomplete view of the university's role in educating adults.

Let us look at these three types more carefully. The first type is basic education. This kind of education is perceived to be preparatory. In other words, the educational goals of a university are constrained by the belief that the purposes of a college degree are only to impart and develop basic knowledge that students will use for the rest of their lives, i.e., their education is complete. Of course, we know that could not be the case or we couldn't justify advanced degrees. So we modify the position slightly to suggest that the first four years of college provide a foundation for graduate programs. This is the approach that has dominated academic thinking for this century.

Repair or remediation is a second type of education. As a rule, faculties of higher education institutions have suggested this is not a mission of the university. Of course a few exceptions exist in highly visible programs adopted by many major universities in the last decade to improve selected academic skills of some traditional aged students. Naturally it is apparent that we could not develop a very comprehensive university based on that type of education alone.

The third type of education noted above is continuation education. It may be degree credit work or it may be non-degree or non-credit, but acceptance of this educational purpose recognizes that information and knowledge change. It also gives consideration to the possibility that people change and as a result, the university can contribute to their continuing education. Once again, it is obvious that we cannot build a comprehensive university solely on continuation education. It is more likely that we can develop a comprehensive modern university by recognizing that the university may have a role that includes all three of these types of education and that adults constitute an important user group for all of these types.

For the past 75 years or so we have given tacit and often grudging support to programs and activities serving the adult through extension and service programs. While it is important that these kinds of programs continue; they are no longer sufficient in the program and mission of the comprehensive university. Universities that continue to schedule classes and adopt inflexible policies that eliminate all but the most fortunate or the most dedicated individuals will be penalized in their competition for public support and students. They will also reduce the likelihood of being identified correctly as a comprehensive university. Perhaps one can justify the continued existence of a range of special purpose universities such as small liberal arts institutions, that focus on undergraduate instruction with some gradu-

ate provisions, but such limited missions cannot be adopted by the large state university without a fatal constriction.

Nature of Education for Adults

From the previous comments, it should not be difficult to assume that my position in the university has a role in educating adults. I would agree that the mission or role has not been clear, neither has it been accepted uniformly. Lack of agreement concerning the nature of the education of adults has contributed to this state of affairs. Some hold to the view that adult education is primarily designed to address a deficiency in one's childhood education. As a consequence adult students are perceived as being children who never adequately learned their numbers, or failed to learn to read or to write, or failed to master some vocational skill that can be taught through vocational and occupational courses.

A second, and related view, is that adult students are ill prepared for the rigors of a college or university education. If they had been good prospects for college admission at age 18 they certainly would have entered college then, according to this view.

A third view, also related to the first two, subscribes to the belief that any educational program that attracts adults must be superficial or lacking in substance in some way. This position is buttressed by the argument that part-time study is inferior to full-time study. It is easy to understand how someone whose views are a combination of the above would be opposed to the university's involvement in educating adults; at best, according to proponents of this view, adult education must be identical in format, techniques, and so forth with youth-oriented education.

Perceptions of Adults as Students

We, the current faculty of this and other universities, did not create the confusion concerning the nature or types of education; neither did we create the negative images of adult education without some help from older colleagues and some adult students. But, neither can we claim originality in the creation of such concepts as lifelong education or lifelong learning. Plato and other philosophers and dreamers of utopias throughout the centuries contributed to the idea of education as a lifelong process. But somewhere along the way the ideal of adults as scholars was submerged. Grattan (1955) poses a paradox for us. He proposes that while industrialism required an educated adult population, it also contributed to the creation of systems with clearly defined entry and exit points. In education these entry and exit points became quite clearly defined at about age 6 and 16-18 for terminating high school. College age was to become accepted as being 18-22. For a long period, academics, politicians and others accepted these ages as a kind of biological law rather than a social convenience. A reference to historical sources reveals that Harvard and Yale were not constrained by these age classes in the 18th century (Anania, 1969). Before 1750 both institutions had admitted students as young as 11 years of age. The oldest student admitted to Harvard was 30 and the oldest student admitted to Yale between 1702 and 1750 was 28½ years of age. Neither do the current upwardly creeping ages of undergraduates around the nation provide support for a biologically based termination age for education. Thus, if the current entry and exit ages for education were socially inspired between 1850 and 1940, why do we have such difficulty in accepting a new premise that the idea of any terminal age for education is inappropriate? If we agree with this premise we

must agree that some education institution has a role in educating adults. In reality, there are several education institutions whose role and mission could justifiably include adults.

Unless I'm completely out of touch with reality, competition among the various levels of education institutions—public school, two-year colleges, vocational-technical institutes and four-year colleges and universities—will sharpen their competition for a larger share of the potential adult student population. In addition to the competition among higher education institutions, the administrators and families will be faced with increasing challenges from other business and social organizations (Cross 1985, Long 1987). Thus, university faculties and administrators have little to gain by continuing to ignore the emergence of calls the third era of American higher education.

Economic and Social Developments

The second major element in the discussion of the modern university's role in educating adults concerns the relationship of the university to the larger society.

Changing demographic characteristics accompanied by social and technological innovations combine to present contemporary higher education with a momentous challenge that can be compared with any of the previous historical watersheds in the past 200 years. American higher education has shown considerable resiliency and malleability in curriculum and mission on previous occasion. The opportunity presented by contemporary events and demographic conditions may be compared with conditions that led to the shift from the classical curriculum to a more practical one in the 19th century, or the emergence of the manual education movement and the land-grant college concept, the evolution of the research university, or the adoption of the Carnegie unit for managing a student's course of study.

Only a few Rip Van Winkles are unaware of the deepening change in the age range of college students. By tradition, experienced faculty and administrators accepted the premise that the clientele of the university was the young adult of 18-22. But a more realistic and current view, based on facts, indicates the 18 to 22-year-old students will continue to account, in the foreseeable future, for a smaller proportion of the student population. Supporting evidence for this observation is provided by data reported by the National Center for Educational Statistics. From 1970 to 1982, the share of enrollment that students under 25 years old comprised decreased by more than 11 percentage points, from 72 percent in 1970 to 61 percent in 1982 (NCES, 1984). By 1992, only five years from now, students under 25 years old are projected to comprise just 51 percent of the total enrollment; a decline of more than 20 percent in just over 20 years. Furthermore, full-time enrollment is expected to decrease to 52 percent; a 16 percent decline in the period.

The university of the third era must address changes that are broader and deeper than admitting older students. The admission of older students to the university is only one of several important consequences of a changing economic and sociopolitical role of the modern university.

Economic and Technological

The invasion of the university campus by adults between 25-40 years of age did not occur in a social vacuum (Cross, 1985). Stated differently, other changes that have implications for the concept and mission of the university parallel the demographic changes. Time and space do not permit a detailed explication to identify rapidly changing technology, expanding information, requirement of new

skills and similar phenomena as significant (Long, 1985). These and related changes, place a premium on the modern university's role in addressing the educational needs of adults.

Problematic Features

If we accept the previously noted premise that higher education has a role in educating adults, and if we accept the argument that economic and social changes have implications for the university's mission, it is appropriate for us to look at some of the potential consequences.

First, there is a tendency among a large segment of the adult student body to be motivated by occupational goals. As a consequence, these students are not always easily convinced that they should enroll in a course that will not have direct application to earning a livelihood. As many adults are foregoing some part of their income, or a major part of the leisure time or both, they often are in the tangible benefits of an education. They want to know *why* they should know something as well as how it will help them in the world of work. This mind set is extremely challenging to the professor whose commitment to a discipline engenders a different view.

Second, their adult social role will not articulate well with the traditional student role that requires some approximation of full-time study. These students seek to balance wage-earner and parent roles with the student role. University administrators and faculty are stimulated to search for ways to better articulate the different role obligations.

Third, adult students are more sophisticated and have less patience with doctrinaire instructional techniques that are often based on positional authority of the professor. As a result, adults seek a relation between what they are studying and what they are experiencing.

Fourth, adults are experienced. They recognize the fallibility of generalizations. Furthermore, they are often more competent in some areas of life than their professors. Such a situation can have untold effects on the ego of insecure faculty.

Fifth, they are not awed by the authority of faculty or administrators. Authority must arise from competence and/or from the discipline rather than from the position of a faculty member.

These characteristics challenge the rigid traditionalism of the university. As soon as professors and administrators recognize and adjust to some of the above characteristics they begin to fashion a new relationship with adult students that must eventually lead to a revision in the university's role concerning adults.

Another important source of pressure for modifying the modern university's role is provided by the educational/information needs of non-students in society. The university faculty member's audience is no longer limited to those individuals who are registered students. Our audience spends much of their time in laboratories, offices, shops and other places of work. Some of these have information needs that cannot await a class or a conference.

Others arrive on campus or at some other location for meetings and conferences, while we strive to seek ways of delivering the university via electronic means that include computers, telephone, and television.

Need for changes in methods of relating the university to the student did not happen because of the 18 to 22-year-old age group. They were brought about because of the educational and informational needs of adults. It is likely that whoever described the 19th century as the century of the child and the 20th century as the century of the adult may

have been partially correct.

Little is to be gained by debating whether any university will enter this third era. Rather, the emphasis in the debate should focus on the nature of the role adopted by any one institution. The focus of this debate may be sharpened by referring to a choice available to university faculties. Universities can choose from different positions in carrying out their adult-educating role: (a) a position that segregates the role whereby the adult services are isolated from the main stream of university activity; (b) an integrated role where the adult-education mission is integral to most other activities; or (c) some combination of a and b. To be effective, however, each of the chosen positions should reflect an awareness of four conditions: (a) a recognition that adult-focused programs and activities are equal to other programs and activities; (b) a recognition that almost one-half of the student body is likely to be 25 years of age or older; (c) an awareness that is sensitive to the diverse purposes of adult education as illustrated by Grattan (1955) as being informational, liberal, recreational and liberal; and (d) an awareness of the distinguishing psychological and sociological characteristics of adult students.

The segregated role has been the dominant choice in the past 75 years. Accordingly, adult students were identified as the "problem" for university extension units or divisions. These organizations were frequently accorded second-class status, hidden away in condemned buildings and staffed by rejects from other university units. For a time it was commonplace to perceive directors of extension as university administrators who were out of favor with their presidents or chancellors and who were given transfers to extension to remain out of harm's way until retirement. As a result, extension was often perceived as a kind of necessary evil that posed no threat to the turf of other deans and directors. Extension was accorded a degree of autonomy to complement its isolation.

Despite these negative conditions, some university extension operations became successful. Unfortunately, the price paid for successful programming and budget surpluses often was cannibalization. Other deans and directors often moved in and pirated the way the units most closely aligned with their disciplines and created competing units. Simultaneously, extension administrators experienced increasing demands to operate their units in the black if not to produce a surplus income.

The current challenge to be debated by administrators and faculties is how to modify the university culture and society so that educating adults becomes a mission that is equal to the concern for educating youth and young adults. This is not to be easily accomplished for a number of reasons. First, some of the kinds of things that go into educating adults are vastly different from the approaches used in educating the traditional age student. For example, when we use the term education it can be often translated into schooling. Schooling means courses, class meetings, papers, tests, credit units and grades. These elements are important to the culture of the university of the second era, but require modifications in the university of the third era.

Conclusion

It is beyond this paper's purpose to prescribe detailed role activities for specific higher education institutions in educating adults. Rather, the emphasis is on a discussion of (a) two general roles perceived for higher education in educating adults; (b) sources of role disagreement; (c) economic and social developments that encourage a more direct assessment and development of the modern

university's adult education role; and (d) problematic features that should be considered in devising ways to fulfill higher education's role obligations in educating adults.

Higher education definitely has a role. That role may be conceptually and structurally one of three kinds: a segregated one, an integrated one or some combination of the two. Segregation of most of the adult services is not necessarily bad. But when segregation equals isolation and autonomy, problems are likely to emerge. Integration of all adult services is not necessarily good, particularly when adults are treated as if they were adolescents. Integration of adult services into the mainstream of university activities can have exciting consequences for the tradition-oriented units and personnel. A short-term danger of integration is there will become no one to communicate the needs of adult students and to represent them in an institution that is historically conservative. However, by the year 2000 this concern may be moot.

In the meantime, every major university that desires to be described as modern should undertake a rigorous self-study to determine its current role in educating adults and to develop plans and structures that represent the new reality of the university's relationship with adults.

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