

INFLATION

in

HIGHER EDUCATION

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If one reads about the plight of our mental hospitals, our prisons, our inadequate welfare, and our other generally-starved public services, one sees that, by contrast, higher education has been the secular cathedral of our time. However, all such institutions are "service industries," and one characteristic of service industries is that with more resources, production does not necessarily rise; it may even fall. Indeed, in general, as academic salaries have risen, teaching loads have dropped (which of course does not necessarily mean that less work is being done). While the boom market for Ph.D.'s may be levelling off in the United States (if not in Canada), academic institutions have had to offer increasing amenities to Ph.D.'s in shortage fields in order to recruit and retain them. This is especially true if they want distinguished people who will attract others.

Faculty fringe benefits are said to rise even faster than salaries. Handsome fellowships for married graduate students with children start them up an inclined slope with a beginning income higher than in most other parts of the world. The financial gap between an Assistant Professor and a full Professor in America is much less than the comparable spread between, say, a Lecturer and a Professor in a British university, where the difference is of the order of 4-1, as against the American 2-1.

This general pattern of costs in North America exists at a time when students and communities are demanding more and more from academic institutions. The affluent students who often lead protests are persuaded that the society is full, abundant and that nothing really costs anything. The different views of scarcity and abundance are elements in the generation gap. I question the conclusion of the Cox Committee Report on the Columbia disorders that Columbia College students were angered when they came from wealthy homes to live in old-fashioned, slummy dormitories. Probably just such students would not like to live in any obviously luxurious way. They may register the standard complaints against institutional housing as they do against institutional food, but even so, I do not believe the condition of the dormitories had much to do with the demonstrations. The fact is that we have a standard of amenity, whether at Bloomington, Madison, or Urbana, which is pretty handsome and which sets a model by which public institutions do quite well in comparison with private ones. We have a sense of what is the right amount of space for the young to occupy physically. At the same time, what might be called the moral space is also enlarged. And more and more is demanded in the way of psychiatric and counselling services, resident R.A.'s, and the rest.

The Brink of Bankruptcy

In my opinion, the universities have overpersuaded many people about the contribution that academicians can make to the problems of contemporary society. Having responded to so many demands in the past, and having often made claims to justify themselves to Philistine critics, universities now may be driven to bankruptcy by the demand for urban studies, black studies, courses that will help students prepare for the Peace Corps — all the new relevancies — while neither outside constituencies nor the faculty are prepared to cut down on the older ones. Area studies programs and history may in time suffer because of the competition of programs in ethnic studies, but the rules of tenure make it difficult to eliminate unfashionable programs — in any case, one may hesitate to do so, if one regards present trends as wrong or evanescent. Similarly, after a point one cannot visibly do *less* for, let us say Italians, because one is doing *more* for blacks, for Spanish-Americans, and for other deprived groups.

William Trombley, the admirable former education reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, in a series on black students and studies which he wrote last fall, quoted Jack Peltason, Chancellor of the University of Illinois at Urbana, as follows:

I am convinced that the program for black students is solid and the [black] students are making progress. The time and effort we are spending is also making people sensitive to improving instruction in the whole university. Faculty members used to say, "I am a good teacher, but the students are too dumb." You can't say that about these black kids, or anyway, they [faculty members] don't. They know they have got to find ways to teach them.

That costs money — it means more concern for helping the faculty members become less awkward teachers, and this, I think, often involves cutting down teaching loads so more imaginative teaching can be done. The demand for more imaginative teaching for some of the new groups coming into higher education tends to focus on small classes or even individual tutorials. But similar pressures in the general society tend to drive both students and faculty to demand small groups because of what I have come to think of as the contemporary cult of intimacy.

Faculty members don't want large captive audiences. It was recently proposed at the University of New Hampshire that every senior faculty member give a freshman seminar with fifteen or fewer students. That's fine, but where is the money coming from? Is there any educational reform which does not cost money and/or take its toll of faculty time? This is true of so-called independent study (which is cannibalistic of faculty time), of seminars, thesis work, and experimental courses. Even the efforts explicitly designed to save money, such as courses taught on closed-circuit television or programmed learning, seem to be fantastically expensive.

All this is happening in a society where it becomes increasingly easier to attend college than not to attend. As the realtors would say, many neighborhoods have been "tipped" in the direction of college. Alan Wilson did a study ten years ago of middle-class and working-class high schools in Berkeley, California. He found that, holding income and aptitude constant, a working-class youngster in the middle-class high school was more apt to plan on college than

had he gone to high school in his own neighborhood, just as a middle-class youngster in a working-class high school was less apt to plan to attend college. The peer pressure to go to college becomes greater and greater; more and more people turn up in the 13th grade who have been able to get through the 12th.

As studies have shown, black parents particularly believe that one needs college to get ahead, and this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; not having gone, thus becomes a sign of being odd. The draft, of course, furthers this impression. There is some discrimination against girls in American higher education, especially at the graduate and professional level, yet for many girls, college is a way out of an impossible home situation, as the Army and "running off" have been for boys.

In the 13th grade, the teaching load is apt to be half or less for faculty than it was in the 12th, the salary somewhat higher, and as one goes on to the postgraduate level, the span of control (teacher/student ratio) of faculty becomes less and less. The result is that, if the costs of higher education are projected even conservatively, as the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education has done, it looks as if they are going up about twice as fast as wages and maybe three times the rate of inflation. Meanwhile, as the taxpayers strike, the adult backlash makes it more difficult to finance even the essential state and local provision for education.

In addition to these escalating problems, an extraordinary tacit alliance between the right and left extremes is also exerting pressure on the universities — from both sides. Paranoia is a convenient state of mind because one is never disappointed. If one is on the left and can "prove" that "the man" or the "power structure" or "the Establishment" is invariably racist and Fascist, then one will never be surprised. And if the rightwing paranoids can "prove" that the lapse in authoritarian controls or getting rid of rules leads to excess and patently turbulent behavior, they need not distinguish between Mark Rudd and Clark Kerr.

The world, in fact, is perplexing and disorienting; hardly any of us understands it. Are we to interpret the war in Vietnam, the intervention in the Dominican Republic, or the hegemony over the budget that the military and their civilian allies, including the labor unions, possess as representing the true reactionary nature

of our society which can only be corrected by revolution? Or are we to see these as evils that can perhaps be moderated through the existing democratic and institutional channels?

Many young radicals are not certain of the answer to this, nor of their own courage and beliefs. By acting dramatically and decisively, they seek to persuade themselves of their solidarity with each other and of their mutual understanding; by getting a reaction from adults, they sometimes feel confirmed in what they are only tentatively seeking to become. The adults whom they confront in the universities are even more unsure of themselves; we often lack a feeling of legitimacy. In our defensiveness, we sometimes become overly gullible about the young and sometimes overreact to their defiance of us. While in all societies rapid change tends, as Margaret Mead has put it, to make adults immigrants in their own countries, the exceptional speed of recent changes has forced those of us who are now adults to see many idols overturned, many once far-fetched ideas confirmed: Picasso turns out to be a great painter, Bartok a great musician — and we are intimidated if we reject the art or politics proclaimed as *avant garde* even when it appears to be a “put-on” or an act of nihilism.

Overcommitment and Underfinancing

A consequence of these combined developments, in which higher education becomes more and more omnivorous of resources while it becomes less and less able to elicit enthusiastic community support, is the situation I have termed the collision course.* The most obvious casualties now appear to be those occurring in the great State universities where overcommitment and underfinancing go hand in hand, as bond issues are defeated and as State legislatures respond in often punitive ways to white and black student protests and to the alleged softness of faculty and administration in seeking to control these.

However, the private colleges are already facing at least equally severe financial pressures. Those that depend on tuition and have miniscule endowments are likely to be in the position of Sarah Lawrence College where students sat in to enforce their demand

* Watch for additional papers on higher education's collision course in the next issue of this Journal — Ed.

for lower tuition, the recruitment of more impoverished black and white girls, and the maintenance of small class size!

In all these situations in which our universities find themselves, the balancing act has to be performed by the administration; yet it seems to me that one of the consequences of what is going on is a loss of administrative flexibility. The faculty go on regardless: they assume the payroll will somehow be met and, in another remarkable example of self-fulfilling prophecy, faculty members have been right so far in thinking that (whatever hazards are faced in the legislature or with the alumni) their courses will not be cut down and the inclined plane on which they have been living will continue to rise. The libraries will continue to get journals, although I suspect that delayed purchasing and deferred maintenance may hit libraries as vulnerable targets, especially the great and costly research libraries.

It is difficult for universities either to economize or to demonstrate to various publics that they are seeking to economize. Consortia to do research and teaching in the more esoteric subjects might help a bit, but on the whole, every respectable college feels that it must present the full line of departments, and each department feels it must have the full line of specialties.

Top administrators would like to experiment with cost-cutting devices, but experience has taught many of them that what they may gain in dollar savings, they often more than lose in faculty and student morale. Indeed, departmental power, and now student power, tend to rob administrators of whatever residual room for maneuver they have to resist outside pressures and cope with budgetary stringencies. Whatever else may be involved in the democratization of higher education, one outcome is the proliferation of committees. (I have tried in vain to convince students that they are in college only four years, they should get an education and save committee work for the rest of the sixty years they will live.) Democracy does take more time and leaves the administrator with decreasing leeway to shift resources to meet the new and fashionable and the old and still important demands on higher education. To be sure, some extremely talented administrators can make use of their very lack of flexibility to put pressure on partisan regents or State officials to support traditional academic freedoms just because it is clear that the administrator lacks authority to interfere

with these. And of course I am not assuming that all administrators are talented or benign.

An extraordinary thing about higher education, and this always astonishes businessmen, is that there is no career line for the top jobs. A group of students at the Harvard Business School once asked me how to get into administrative work in higher education, and I said that you can't do it by training for it — you have to do it by training to be something else and then be *unlucky*. Student and faculty critics attack academic bureaucracy, but everywhere I look I see undernourished and understaffed administration. In a recent book, *Mirror of Brass*, Mark Ingraham points out that administrators do not have the fringe benefits of faculty: few vacations, no sabbaticals, and no graceful means of exiting short of retirement.

Educational Opportunity Bank

Are there ways out of the collision course? I am not sanguine about this. I think we are in for extremely difficult times in higher education — that's hardly news. But I would like to suggest one very partial and tentative prospect that might reduce some of the inflationary pressures, as well as make some sense in its own right. A number of economists and some panels of experts have proposed a plan for a Federal Educational Opportunity Bank from which students could take loans to finance their educational costs — loans which would not be mortgages but would be obligations to be repaid over a long period of years by adding an increment to their federal income tax. Thus, if someone took a loan to become a physicist or physician and struck it rich, he could pay off the money in inflated dollars without hardship, thus helping to subsidize the loans made to students who become school teachers or counsellors and whose tax burden would be much less. Such a plan would allow many young people to become independent of their parents and to make their decisions about where to be educated in a freer academic marketplace. For example, I have had students at Harvard College from Sacramento who could not afford to go to Sacramento State College or the University of California at Davis because, although tuition fees there are low, public institutions seldom pay subsistence costs. A student confident in himself or willing to gamble on the Federal Government's confidence could take a loan, go anywhere he wants, and feel that he is on his own, not dependent on his parents or on

local beneficence. Thus, he might be slightly less the resentful captive of a place he can afford and perhaps a bit more likely to be a happier customer of the place he presently has the freedom to choose. It should be noted that these loans are secured not by the possessions of the student but by the prospects of his future income, and any plan such as this has to be a Federal arrangement, because only the Federal Government is capable of spreading the risks and benefits widely enough so that the administrative costs and the subsidy to interest rates and start-up costs can be met. Yet it is difficult to persuade students from very low income families, and perhaps especially black students, that such loans would not in fact be mortgages or liens such as those their friends and families have suffered from when their cars or household furnishings have been repossessed. Such students would almost certainly need scholarships to get them into college initially, while at a later point they might be willing to enter the Educational Opportunity Bank program to help support them in graduate or professional study.

The Educational Opportunity Bank idea has met objection both in technical detail and in principle. As with the GI Bill of Rights after the Second World War, there is always the possibility that entrepreneurially-minded academic institutions will exploit potential customers. For many of the latter, opportunity for access to consumer research on higher education is often meager, dependent on poorly informed and overworked counsellors in colleges and secondary schools, and on the not always cogent advertising of academic institutions. Several of us in discussing the plan have used the term "negative dowry" to indicate our misgivings concerning the willingness of young women to take loans which might become a charge against their joint family incomes. However, because many parents will do less for the education of a girl than for that of a boy, I believe that such loans may add to women's opportunities in an area where they still suffer from subtle as well as visible discrimination. Perhaps most salient have been the objections in principle of some spokesmen for State universities who believe in tuition-free institutions as a democratic ideal and who fear that the availability of loan-bearing students will force tuition to be raised. However, as Christopher Jencks and I argue in *The Academic Revolution*, public low tuition institutions generally subsidize the

moderately well-off at the expense of the poor (whose children don't attend) and the very rich; hopefully, somewhat higher tuitions would be accompanied by greater resources for scholarship aid. More important in the short-run is the pragmatic argument that neither State nor Federal grants are likely to support the major State universities in the future as they have supported them in the recent past. It seems possible that, by shifting some of the costs of higher education to the young and away from resentful adult taxpayers, a plan like that of the Educational Opportunity Bank may, to some small degree, attenuate the tendency of the latter to want to repress students and institutions. While there is no guarantee that the Federal Government would not attach restrictive conditions to such loans, it has continued even up to the present to behave in a more enlightened way *vis-a-vis* higher education than many States have. Further, one could envisage a scheme managed by some kind of independent agency or authority, buffered against impulsive congressional vindictiveness, which would have a financial as well as a principled interest in bringing the largest possible number of students into the scheme so that it could quickly become self-liquidating.

A New Breed of Academic "Brokers"

I have already implied that the casualties of the collision course may be most serious among those private and public universities which are now also in the forefront of seeking to respond to the newer commitments which are sure to lead to many disappointments and to much community antagonism.*

In his much abused but penetrating book, *The Uses of the University*, Clark Kerr described a new breed of academic administrators who were in effect brokers among the various commitments and constituencies of higher education. He saw these men just as I see them, as having minimal power and limited leverage over their departments, their students, their alumni, and their sources of financial and other public support. If we are to get through the years ahead and to preserve some of the autonomous functions of the university where the commitment to action is oblique rather than direct, I think we will need to find a still newer breed of administrators capable of resisting some constituencies

in order to accept others. They will have to inspire students and faculty and others in the universities to accept their leadership in making choices — be it a persuasive rather than an arbitrary leadership. They will have to help institutions make a better division of academic labor: for example, to decide that a particular university will continue its mission to foreign students and to black students in medicine and health sciences, even if it is at the cost of the demanding and visible pressures to admit more black undergraduates. Still another administrator may say that he will defend concentrating on black undergraduates and their idiosyncratic problems as well as those they share with other students, and that he will resist pressure to do something for Chicanos for the time being; and so on around the map of possible commitments to education and to other ventures.

In general (and with many exceptions), the burden of maintaining our most distinguished institutions and helping make the hard decisions regarding which of the new claims to honour, while not destroying the old, fall on administrators. As a result, they are going to be even more unpopular than those who now wish they could step gracefully out of office. Yet, if we do not find the right administrators, we will see higher education spread increasingly thin over the landscape, seldom committed to reflection, often committed to impulse, often ending in the bankruptcy both of treasuries and of hopes. But I do not know by what faith such potential leaders will live.

*For fuller discussion, cf. a recently published paper by Martin Trow, "Reflections on the Transition from Mass to Universal Higher Education," *Daedalus*, Vol. 99 (Winter, 1970), pp. 1-42.