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THE CONTEMPORARY COLLEGE MISSION:

COMMUNITY SERVICE

by

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Early History

What is the role of an institution of higher learning in today's world? It would seem that all aspects of knowledge have their institutional reflections in three missions for a college or university: to acquire knowledge through research; to transmit knowledge through teaching; and to apply knowledge through public service. There is neither the need or the space to trace the emergence and development of these three missions over the past five hundred years. Suffice to say, we are today at the third mission. The question is why did we get here, and what does this third role for the institution of higher learning involve?

It seems to me that the earliest beginnings of this mission go back to World War II and the period immediately following. There were connections between strong schools of science and engineering on the one hand and vigorous regional development on the other. And though nobody has yet defined just what those connections are, or measured their economic significance, the circumstantial evidence is sufficient enough to cause many regions to strive for the same kind of excellence that seems to be causing the prosperity around those strong schools. Other communities, recognizing that a gap existed between

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their technical schools and private industry, encouraged the development of institutes of applied research. It was felt that new industry would be attracted to a community where existed a bridge between the technical university's reservoir of knowledge and the industrial community. Such was the conclusion in the "hard sciences."

But few of the new institutes were very successful. Industrial or governmental organizations which need the kind of aid provided by an established institute will go to that institute to get it, though the institute may be a thousand miles away. It was also found that today most research-oriented industrial organizations have research and developmental capabilities of their own, hindering the growth of the applied-research institute as well as the regional economic growth that such an institute might simulate.

It was during the period following the unsuccessful experience with research parks and research institutes, that there began to appear a new answer: the Ph. D. The reasoning behind the answer was that certain regions - great "producers" of the Ph. D. - were growing faster than other regions.

As was found with the "research park" and "research institute", the Ph. D. did not do justice to the problem. One cannot explain the growth of the Boston region simply by saying "Ph. D." Nor can one explain the growth of Florida, which is a poor Ph. D. producer. And so it was found that there is more to the answer than simply: "Produce Ph. D. 's"

Resolute metropolitan leaders began to scale downward their goals: comprehensive program of graduate and small schools of undergraduate engineering

and science. Given ten years in which to develop these new capabilities, and given other necessities, such as venturesome financial communities and that nebulous quality called "cultural environment", an ambiguous community's chances of success would be quite good. As with the earlier mistakes in following too closely in the footsteps of the "brain centers" of the nation, the leaders soon were faced with an escalation of requirements. What is that "cultural environment"?

Recruiters for communities were told the new technical people wanted galleries, opera, theater, museums, libraries, nice places to live, good schools for their children, good facilities for themselves, a symphony orchestra, a couple of good chamber music groups, a good French Restaurant, opportunity to associate with first-rate scientists and engineers, ready access to beaches in summer and ski slopes in winter, and a work environment that would enable the fullest development of their intellectual resources. What could the institutions of higher education do by way of fulfilling these demands?

At the same time the knowledgeable leaders turned to the "hard sciences" and made appeals for more "art". The institutions in the big technological complexes such as MIT, Stanford, and Harvard began to reach out for new problems--not military problems, but problems of a changing society. There was a conviction among the professoriat that in these institutions they should contribute to the rebuilding of our great cities, to the proper use and development of our water resources, to the solution of our transportation crisis, and so on. And whether one accepts or not that these are problems that lend themselves to

academic scrutiny, the point is that many institutions began to step forward, eager for involvement, ready to accept the challenge.

And so the "soft sciences" (social sciences) of a college or university became involved following the footsteps of the "hard sciences" -- community involvement. To recast the function of a college or university is to apply the knowledge within its halls through public service.

New Role of Public Service

Assuming then, that public service is a modern mission of institutions of higher learning, can the research and teaching resources of a college or university be tapped to better understand and control our urban environment'? Can any small college provide "urban agents" to deal with the complex problems of a whole region? How can the small college or large university extend itself out into the community? Specifically, what are the roles that an institution of higher learning can assign to itself, or have assigned to it? Is it presently structured to assume urban commitments? Are there limits to engagement in community conflict? Can the universities and colleges that undertake these extension operations use the same system of academic rewards for staff as they use in so-called line departments?

It should be stated at the outset that an institution's new function or responsibility in the community must be so adapted to its traditional functions of teaching and research that those same functions will be strengthened.

It seems to me that one of the great contributions of the urban studies center movement is the benefit which will accrue to the university itself from

bringing together research, education, and extension. There may be a tendency on the part of traditionalists in universities to look down their noses at extension as the "vulgarizing" of knowledge by taking it out to people who are not matriculated for degrees. But getting out into the community can be very invigorating for scholarship. It might even change the research agenda, to some extent, in the college halls. It may have an influence on what people feel is worthwhile to teach to undergraduates or graduate students in the classroom. Perhaps the "Mickey Mouse" research formerly conducted in academic halls needs some updating. Certainly the academician ought to do more than pontificate to his students about life, death, and immortality. There is a great deal to be learned from testing theories and tools in the world of action. Resistance to action only puts blinders on those who dwell in the academic halls. Education in a dynamic society must keep pace with social changes and new obligations. In many instances, the intellectual structure has grown obsolete. College professors must recognize the simple fact that their undergraduates must receive an intensified and broadened learning which will accurately reflect the realities of their generation.

Millard E. Gladfelter, Temple University's former President, recently stated that the urban university will be this half-century's distinctive creature of American higher education. He added that it will be so because this is the half-century during which our major attention is directed to the information, organization, and reconstruction of cities. The liberal education of today cannot

be defined in terms of the needs met by the colonial college, the early land grant colleges, or even the small church-related colleges that dot America.

This is not the place to debate whether or not the university should have a conscience to society and the absolute necessity of having to solve problems in order to establish good public relations in its community. Community growth is often accelerated by the presence of a college or university, which in itself employs a large number of people. A college creates a beehive of activity in the cultural arts and recreational activities, which result in attendant problems. Student cars cause traffic and parking problems. Rooming houses adjacent to campuses may not always meet regulations. The police have their problems with the pranks of a college student body. Universities erode the tax base of a city to the point where the city fathers live on borrowed money. The demands which universities make upon their immediate environment may become disintegrating forces in the very areas in which the institutions may be located. Witness Chicago, Philadelphia, New York or any other large city with a city institution.

College administrations today have, therefore, come to recognize that their institution must make a strong contribution to the community. The old traditional point of view to disregard what was happening beyond the University property is being replaced by a broader recognition of the interrelationship of the "gown with the town".

The challenges of today are particularly pointed to a college that has a mandate to serve the community. If "community," once predominantly rural,

has changed in location, ethnic composition, economic activity, and needs for services, a college must accommodate accordingly if it wishes to remain a relevant and progressive force in that community. Although every college exists primarily to provide education and to sponsor research, it is also a community institution bearing all the responsibilities this fact implies. Community affairs have an impact on any college even as the development of a college affects the community.

What's more, the 20th century university or college in a metropolitan area cannot perform its contemporary function in the old-fashioned or traditional sense of sitting and waiting for the community to come to it for instruction or for light. It must, to use the common expression, "extend" itself and its capacities out into the community. It must find ways of sending out the special knowledge, information, capacities, and expertise that are assembled at the university into the marketplaces within the community in which they can be used and transformed into action and policy by the agents who are really in the community itself.

In reply to a question on the role the university should play in the development of urban areas put by Senator Robert Kennedy before a United States subcommittee in August, 1966, Daniel P. Moynihan, Director, Joint Center for Urban Studies, Harvard and MIT, gave the following reply:

"The land-grant universities in this country have made a big difference and a very clear marked and measurable difference in the productivity of American agriculture, in the farm arrangements generally in the country, and in the social arrangements of the American countryside.

"Now it is certainly possible that universities can concern and associate themselves with the same kind of problems in the urban areas where increasingly universities are located. I think while this service function is important, really the main thing that universities should do in this country is to call things as they see them. I think the function of universities is to seek knowledge, to identify failures -- to solve them wherever they are encountered, and however it may offend the persons involved. But the main point about universities is that they make independent judgments on the effects and the efficacies of public policies, and they ought to remain independent, even at the cost - if it comes to that - of not involving themselves in the formation of public policies as much as some of us may like to think they ought to."

The pace of social change is forcing a reexamination of the definition of a university. A university must be functional to its society and an activist institution in today's world. If there is conflict and tension within the society as certain near-term and long-range objectives collide, then such conflict and tension also belong in the university halls. Academic tradition cannot be utilized as a defense against change. The modern university or college is in serious trouble if it thinks that it can survive an isolated life as an island of excellence. Uncommitted to public service it is bound to generative destructive tensions throughout our society. Because the university is a pivotal social institution, the need to engage in problem solving activities is now.

The ultimate purpose of the Institute of Regional Affairs in what was once a depressed area is to contribute to improving the quality of regional life. It

can be said the Institute has effectively established and maintained communications and working relationships between Wilkes College and organizations and individuals serving the immediate community and the region. In the last thirty years, Northeastern Pennsylvania communities experienced a state of economic decline with corresponding high unemployment. Only in very recent years has this region made any progress in economic development. These same communities which have gone through an economic transformation face drastic readjustment to the stern realities and the demands of an urbanizing society, not as acute as in larger metropolitan centers, but nevertheless, just as painful. The on-rushing transition from a relatively simple agrarian set of conditions to the highly technical and bafflingly complex conditions of urban life call for vigorous and alert response from local institutions, be they governmental, educational, economic, or social. Since its establishment in 1947, Wilkes College has participated in every community effort towards economic and social development because its faculty leaders believed that the College's expansion and development are inextricably linked to the fortunes of the community and the region.

Although the College does have immediate financial responsibilities and long-range educational commitments to its academic programs, it has become increasingly aware of the fact that community affairs have an impact on the College as the development of the College affects the community.

The mutual desire of town and gown to work with one another for the advantage of both is not only a demonstration of teamwork between higher education and the region, it is an educational venture into the field of adult extension

education, wherein the College is acting in the role of "urban agent." The Institute of Regional Affairs in attempting to create the "tomorrows" from the "todays," for the region acts as an umbrella for the social sciences and represents the College as "urban agent."

Commitment

There appears to be a growing realization that responsiveness to the urban environment calls for total across-the-board commitment. An isolated college department devoted to urban affairs appears to have limited impact upon the college as a whole.

A multi-purpose college organization which views regional and urban problems as belonging to no simple academic disciplines, but rather as a contemporary phenomenon spilling into many disciplines soon becomes a necessity. Its resources must include not only the College faculty in the social sciences -- economics, education, psychology, government, sociology -- but also those experts in the region who can lend their talents to teaching, information, research, and consultation. Such an organization must be a cross section of the social sciences and College administrative officials. Its creation must be the natural integration of all the activities in the social sciences. Steps must be taken to bring an increasing number of the faculty in the social sciences into the ever-increasing activities of such an integrated organization.

There is a possibility that many community organizations will want all types of action and research projects undertaken. It must be the aim of an "urban studies" center to serve as a vehicle to help make research

and action programs on urban problems a process of continuing data collection and analysis rather than relying, as was the case so many times in the past, on issuance of sporadic and singleshot reports by individual faculty members. Only in this way can the "extension" approach be fully realized.

Any organization that affects the total commitment of a college should be administratively independent of any of the academic departments. Its Director should report directly to the President of the institution. Such a structure must be deliberately designed to emphasize the organization's extension or extramural orientation, and also to prevent its staff from being captured by pressures for teaching man hours and traditional academic interests. Herein will lie the secret of its success. It should be responsible directly to the President because of its specific mission. Projects by members of the faculty may be undertaken for part-time or summer research. Research and action programs can then serve to encourage originality with only general requirements that the work deal with problems or urbanization.

The commitment of Wilkes College in regional affairs has a long and satisfying history.

The Institute of Municipal Government formed in 1951 had as its fundamental purpose to guarantee the semi-autonomous structure of American local government. Many innovations in local government in the northeastern area had their beginnings in workshops and conferences sponsored by the Institute. A part of the plan for greater industrial har-

mony in Greater Wilkes-Barre includes a Labor-Management-Citizen's Committee initiated through the Economics Department of Wilkes College. To establish a climate for industrial progress, and recognizing a special need of the industrial community, the College has pioneered a management training program under which special classes were organized for personnel in industry, commerce, and banking.

In 1960, an Area Research Center was established on the campus to coordinate the many economic studies that had been done prior to its establishment. In 1965, the Area Research Center was phased out and replaced by the Economic Development Council of Northeastern Pennsylvania, a broad-based citizen organization for all of Northeast Pennsylvania. Quite a number of Wilkes College faculty and administration members are active officials of many social welfare organizations--too numerous to mention. The commitment by the College in community affairs was duly recognized in 1960 when the Ford Foundation funded several of these College activities. This financial support generated even more interest on the part of the Wilkes College faculty members to seek community involvement.

The formation of the IRA in 1966 is intended as that multipurpose college organization that can act as an "urban" umbrella over the social sciences. It is proof positive of the full across-the-board commitment on the part of the College. Its creation was nothing more than the natural integration of prior activities in which members of the College staff and administration have engaged for over 20 years.

Just as some of the faculty have sought to work among community groups, so the community has sought out the many services that the College could offer. It is no wonder then that the community at large in Northeastern Pennsylvania has shared in the Institute's growth and has encouraged its development. The work of the Institute of Regional Affairs can be viewed as an investment that has yielded ideas, techniques, and insights that a small liberal arts college may profitably examine as it ventures more deeply into complex community and area problems.

Roles

In emphasizing the modern mission of urban agents, there are a number of identifiable roles in which an institution of higher learning can appropriately relate its skills to the community.

FIRST. The function of special education would be the primary role. This is the more or less traditional type of extension activity, giving special courses or institutes for particular groups in the community. The university must, to some extent, talk not just to very small key groups, but to the large community. It may mean conducting policy seminars, workshops, and conferences. In such an instance, the college may seem like a mere convener of groups. But it may be that merely by welcoming a group of people--sometimes at their own request, sometimes with a slight hint from university personnel--to a college campus, many surprising innovative ideas can be imparted to rival and conflicting interest groups.

SECOND. The college can act as a clearing house. This means bringing university and academic resources to the community through newsletters, pamphlets, or bulletins on a regular periodic basis. Library materials on urban research must not only be made available but must be brought to community leaders.

THIRD. The attention of the function of consultant on specific problems will become important if related to the first and second roles discussed above.

FOURTH. There may be demonstration experimental projects or research projects on a small or very large dimension that university people can perform. Obviously, the research must be of an applied nature and tied to the need of finding a specific solution to a specific problem.

In all of the activity that has been summarized, an overriding consideration is the fact that any college or university must be first and foremost a service organization providing a program of training, consulting services, information, and research all intertwined and prompting specifically intelligent and capable public spirited leaders in facing the changing needs of today's complex society.

Involvement

In the "soft" social sciences, to what degree are there serious hazards in getting involved when political figures, elected representatives, or professionals in public or quasi-public agencies asked faculty members to take responsibility by the process of their getting involved? How deeply can the urban university or metropolitan college get involved in the decision-making process in

society? Another way of putting it is: On whose back will the monkey rest when something goes sour from a decision which has involved the participation of the institution itself or that of its members on the faculty? It should be recognized at the outset that the nature of a given urban area, the structure of the college, the disciplines of its staff, the philosophy of its president -- all color the involvement and that outcome of the involvement in community affairs.

The element of danger arises from the involvement because in urban activities and conflicts one rarely knows what is going to be the basis of community disagreement until after the decision to get involved has been made. One thing for faculty members to remember is that the university is not the policy-making area of society, the mere providing of information involves risks. There isn't any use pretending that it doesn't. And just how far a university-based person or agency can afford to go will depend to some extent upon the individual's or the agency's own capacity to play the role of politician.

The emancipation of our generation from immature dependence on past religious and intellectual authority has forced people to think for themselves. We live in a time of disestablishmentarianism in all fields, and particularly in the social science area. It is an unfounded naive piety and certainly misdirected effort to establish a new church in the name of a company of scholars who are to deal with political, social, and economic problems of a community. Certainly today's colleges and universities seem unlikely candidates for any new sacred mantle. In the field of social problems, an urban studies center cannot be a "court of last resort" established in self-perpetuating ivy towers.

It seems to me that an urban university can meet several distinguishable situations easily and without too much difficulty. The first is when people are genuinely fundamentally in disagreement over goals. This is definitely the political arena. Unless the faculty member can stand the "hear," he had better not get into it. The second is when people agree on goals but disagree on instruments or methods to attain the goals. This area is also a political thicket. The word is beware. The third situation is when community groups are in agreement on goals and methods, but they simply do not have all the desired information for decision making. The operations of an urban center can safely be predicated on the third situation wherein the task is the simple one of providing information. The difficulty arises because college people do not have a crystal ball and therefore cannot anticipate which of the three situations will predominate until commitment to action has already been made.

The most creative function of a university is to nurture the environment out of or in which solutions to problems can develop. There are agents in our urban society who are in the policy making arena. The task of the urban college is to find them and relate to them. The risk taking will be minimal if the environment is properly nurtured and if identification with existing agents is made. If, on the other hand, risk taking professionals must continually operate at the intersection of public and private actions to vacillate the nurturing process, then a re-evaluation of the college's educational role becomes critically important.

Beyond the considerations above, the role of the intellectual in community life might be limited for a still more practical reason. Removed from his own discipline, no one is more vain than the intellectual. Sniffing at the hems of power has its momentary thrills and enchantment for the academic mind. But it is a known fact that every elite (intellectual or otherwise) inspires a counter criticism. "Experiments" by intellectuals may be rejected; and if accepted, may end in failure. Because the academic person is able to handle ideas with ease, it is all too easily turned when he is rejected. The virtue of politics in a free country lies simply in the exercise of the vote of the people, and not in the rightness or wrongness of any act. In the crunches of current affairs, a college person tends to see "his" right and "their" wrong. When this happens, and his theoretical ventures are not acceptable, the intellectual sulks and retreats to his academic barricades, leaving the field of the "rough and tumble" to others. Academicians fail to see themselves as merely another "opinion" in the Community, but rather see themselves as professors with a "mission" to society. They fail to see themselves as just another interest-- sometimes contra business, sometimes contra church, etc. -- seeking to influence public policy. Anyone active in community affairs (and therefore also active in politics) without admitting that fact, must be terribly naive. Not many professors may possess the insensitivity to criticism necessary to operate urban affairs. Not many college people can take a bruised academic ego. Not many intellectuals can move from the world of academic freedom to the arena of publicity by insult and distortion.

If the foregoing is the state of things, better that the urban college limit itself drastically.

The setting of limits to engagement in community conflict has never been a critical issue to Wilkes College faculty members. Programs have never been abandoned because of fear of involvement, even though at times action programs may have been postponed until a time was more propitious. The College has always been looked upon as a neutral forum where ideas could be exchanged and programs instituted outside a partisan political framework. In trouble-plagued communities, such as has been the case in Northeastern Pennsylvania, programs have been conceived not as ends in themselves but as means to the larger end of community development. Rather, the College (through the Institute of Regional Affairs and other activities) has been drawn into a continuing role of helping to develop and to implement urban programs. The traditional barrier of the "town and gown" type never really existed. The Institute is in the community. It is, however, relatively free of restrictions because it is not of the community. The very fact that the Institute of Regional Affairs has been both in the community but not of the community has given it the latitude for venturesomeness.

Epilogue

Measuring the benefit which an urban center or an institute such as the Institute of Regional Affairs has in an area is difficult because workable criteria for evaluation are lacking. The concept of an "urban agent," which really defines such an organization, seems to be a viable one even though it is difficult to

evaluate the results. Policies adopted, attitudes changed, educational meetings attended, or number of activities completed may be inadequate measurements. Projects have influenced action; but ultimate achievement depends upon the extent to which social scientists and educators possess the knowledge and means of communication which is appropriate to improve the quality of life.

Changing needs in today's complex society pose special problems for community leaders at all levels. Civic officials are faced with knotty problems of planning, community renewal, health, welfare, education, organization and management, and a host of other challenging areas. These often require special skill, research, and broad knowledge of best practice. All too frequently they demand more time than can be spared from regular duties. In addition, governmental and non-governmental agencies are becoming increasingly aware of the wisdom of long-range planning and program studies, as well as the need for efficient administrative structure and procedure.

In the past thirty years, Northeastern Pennsylvania communities experienced a state of economic decline with corresponding high unemployment. Only in recent years has this region made any progress in economic development.

Having met this challenge successfully by building a stable and progressive economic foundation, it is essential that the region turn its attention to a broader, more comprehensive, and more balanced approach to development which will tap a wide range of resources in such a way as to provide the essential amenities of community life for people of the region. In making the sophis-

ticated evolution from a posture of stressing economic rebirth to one of consciously providing a balance of amenities for community living, it is essential to maintain a broad problem-solving orientation, rather than a narrow or fragmented program orientation. This approach combines the physical, economic, social, and human elements of planning and development in a comprehensive and balanced approach to communities as organic units.

Although the college does have immediate financial responsibilities and long range educational commitments to its academic programs, it has become increasingly aware that it must assure the coordination of the varied efforts in redevelopment of the regions and help to better understand and resolve complex and contemporary problems. The mission of the college and the Institute of Regional Affairs, of any College for that matter, is to provide meaningful assistance to communities and organizations in such a way as to enhance their capacities to respond effectively to the challenges of growth and change, and to develop a greater capacity for teaching with those challenges.



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