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## Working with University Constituencies, Within and Without

### Title

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FORMAL REMARKS MADE BY DR. DAVID PIERPONT GARDNER  
TO PRESIDENT NIXON'S COMMISSION ON CAMPUS UNREST

(These remarks were made in the course of public hearings conducted by the Commission on Wednesday morning, August 5, 1970, at The Old State Building, Los Angeles, California.)

Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission.

My name is David P. Gardner. I serve the University of California at its Santa Barbara campus as Vice Chancellor and Associate Professor of Higher Education. I welcome the opportunity to share my views with you this morning on the troubled condition of higher education in the United States. Please know that the remarks I will make today are mine alone for I am not here as a spokesman for the University of California.

I

What should be the most obvious fact of all about campus unrest is that there are multiple causes for the disorders. These are related to an array of national, state, local and university and college policies regarded by one or another group of students as mistaken at best, and corrupt--even criminal--at worst.

Students enrolled in the nation's major universities--and I emphasize the major universities, for campus unrest is generally less severe elsewhere--are increasingly disenchanted with the country's military posture, foreign

policies, domestic priorities, and political system. They are uneasy about the political mood of the country. Students are critical of politicians and the news media whose interest in the nation's universities and colleges are regarded as deriving primarily from educationally irrelevant considerations. Student confidence in the governmental and political processes has waned in recent years, and alarmingly so in recent months, as has respect for authority in general.

The result has been a testing of the upper limits of frustration for a generation whose threshold of frustration is generally low to begin with. This in turn has disposed these students toward more aggressive political behavior whenever the right combination of issues and circumstances occurred or could be arranged.

The Commission has already heard ample testimony regarding student views on the Vietnam War, pollution, racism, and other, by now, well known public issues. I do not intend to go over that ground again. Student concern and resentment over these widely discussed issues should simply be taken as fact when considering the causes of campus unrest.

Student discontent with governmental, political, and institutional norms and goals, however, is critically compounded by two other crucial variables less often discussed: (1) an extensive drug problem among youth everywhere that creates not only the psychological and emotional problems associated with the widespread use of soft and hard drugs but also an aggravated relationship between students and interested law enforcement agencies as well as an unstable and unpredictable environment on campus during times of stress and unrest; and (2) a critical dissimilarity

in values between large numbers of students and the values shared by the vast majority in the larger society; that is, differences about the value, worth, importance, and relevance of private property, personal responsibility, self-discipline, and permissiveness.

The personal freedom so highly valued by these newer norms creates on and near our major universities a life style and environment--indeed, a counter-culture--unencumbered by social, ethical, and moral constraints--a situation of special significance given the immediate post-adolescent problems that ordinarily confront college-age youth.

One result of widespread student alienation from the political and personal norms of the general society is that what outrages most persons in the broader community does not necessarily outrage large numbers of students. For example, the war in Vietnam outrages large numbers of students but not a comparable percentage of persons in the society generally, whereas the destruction of property during campus disorders outrages most persons in the larger community but not such a large percentage of persons in the student community. I point this out not to aggravate already strained relationships between large numbers of students and the broader society but to bring sharply into focus the painful reality we face.

It should be clearly understood that this generalized hostility toward state and national policies shared by growing numbers of students provides ready tinder for the militant or aggressive political left to ignite in behalf of their own strategic objectives. Such political partisans have been generally successful in tapping the roots of student

discontent on a variety of issues, choosing those issues which at any given time are the ones most likely to draw maximum student interest and involvement, couching those issues in the form of demands usually as nonnegotiable as they are unattainable, and demonstrating their support of or opposition to those issues in ways calculated to be as offensive to the public as possible. Thus, such partisans gain wider support among the students generally when the backlash of public opinion hits the campus, public outrage ordinarily being indiscriminate in its criticism rather than only critical of those who planned the disruptions.

University and college administrators, therefore, have all too frequently been left, in terms of their external and internal publics, with the prospect of either acceding to ill-advised demands or of radicalizing a larger percentage of the student body by employing the use of police to restore order on campus. The challenge has been to avoid being placed in the position of having to opt for either one or the other of these self-defeating possibilities. It is my personal view that university and college administrations around the country have done a better job of this than the public either knows or is willing to grant.

To accuse the political radical of causing student unrest, however, is to confuse the issue. The political radical has exploited not caused the unrest. He is not the critical variable, although he obviously must be dealt with more effectively in the future than he has been in the past. There have always been political radicals on or near the nation's major universities, but students have not always been as alienated from the established norms and policies of the general society to the extent that they obviously are today. It is the alienation of some of the nation's

ablest young men and women that is the critical variable. And in this connection, it must be realized that students believe their assessment of our society is correct. Whatever our own views may be about their opinions, the reality of the problem is that they believe them to be true. This is the reality that must be recognized.

How are we to deal with this reality? Surely not by denying its existence, or by stifling views contrary to our own, or by politicizing the university on our own terms before it is politicized on someone else's. No! Not by any of these means or those similar to them. We must do what our country has always done, and that is to talk our disagreements through with one another in the expectation of discovering ways and means of living together with our differences. It is the American way and the strength of a free people. The alternative is tyranny.

I recommend, therefore, that the Commission devote a significant portion of its Report to the President <sup>to</sup> the many programs that have been undertaken this past spring, mostly student-initiated, to establish communication on a one-to-one basis between students and the larger community. The Commission may even wish to recommend other approaches with the same end in mind. We must begin talking with one another instead of shouting at each other through the media.

It should be obvious that if there are multiple causes for campus disorders then there can be no single solution to them. It is equally apparent that no one man or agency or institution can alone be blamed or called on to relieve the underlying grievances that give rise to student restiveness.

Campus unrest in America is not a phenomenon to be understood apart from the culture with which the university is inseparably connected. It is a national crisis that cannot be wished away any more than it can be solved over the short term. The universities, which must bear their fair share of responsibility for the prevailing disorder, perhaps carry the heaviest burden to reform and respond. The system of governance and undergraduate curriculum in the nation's major universities are critically in need of reinvigoration and I wish to address my remaining remarks to these two pressing matters.

## II

University governance should be determined by what seems most likely to achieve its purposes; and where skill and degrees of competence are the essence of the issue, as in a university, the egalitarian ideal of political democracy is as alien as it is unobtainable. "The assumption of a political democracy," as Sidney Hook has pointed out, "is that there are no experts in wisdom, that each citizen's vote is as good as any other's." The university's main business, on the other hand, is not government but the discovery and transmission of the truth, however one may wish to employ it pragmatically. This purpose is not to be controlled by majority rule but by the uncompromising application of rigorous professional standards coupled with the unwavering protection of intellectual freedom.

The country, of course, is undergoing a fundamental political crisis provoked in important part by a "crisis of legitimacy." Confidence in and acknowledgement of formal authority are waning for a variety of philosophical, social, and political reasons. The legitimacy of the structure and of the aims of the nation's primary institutions is under



grave question by significant numbers in our society; indeed, that legitimacy is under severe attack by the revolutionaries among them.

This erosion of confidence and trust has in turn given voice to demands that there be more consent of the governed, not less. The call is for more participation, more involvement, more influence and more power in the formulation of decisions affecting the vital areas of one's life and work. The impact of these forces on the American university in recent years should be clear even to the most casual observer.

But simply because our society is organized as a political democracy, it does not necessarily follow that communities of persons within it, joined together for different purposes, should be similarly organized-- churches, professional associations, universities, museums, and orchestras, as examples. This does not excuse such institutions, of course, from being sensitive and responsive to the views of those they serve. And as for the university, it has long been my view that we should listen to and consult and work with students more often than we do, and that we should do so in more sensitive and systematic ways. We should remember in this connection that students possess a special kind of competence not enjoyed by the remainder of the university community. For example, they are competent to make and report judgments about what happens to them as students in class, laboratory, or living quarters, and thus to question the relevance, fairness, and appropriateness of what the rest of us expect of them in these places.

I would recommend, therefore, that the Commission support an active role for the student in the governance of our nation's universities and



colleges. To favor their involvement along with the administration and faculty is not to argue for the equal participation of all elements in all decisions or for a majority rule standard on all problems. Competence and continuous accountability in the end are the decisive variables.

Should our universities and colleges fail to modify the prevailing system of governance in ways substantially responsive to those students who desire greater responsible participation, then we will witness a continuing erosion of student confidence in those institutions.

Now for a word about the undergraduate curriculum.

### III

The American university, as Max Lerner puts it, "is the convergence point of the major revolutionary forces of our time." And it is largely a values revolution, one, therefore, that insists upon an examination of the contemporary scene within the totality of the culture. The undergraduate curriculum, therefore, makes sense in whatever measure it seeks systematically to communicate the vital ideas of the culture, to establish relationships, to tie historical evidence to discernible trends, and to synthesize knowledge into a cohesive whole. In that whole, it is of the essence that the interrelationships of the parts be as critically understood as are the separate parts themselves.

In recent years the undergraduate curriculum in American higher education has evolved more in response to the research interests of the faculty than to the learning requirements of the student. Thus, instead of breadth in the curriculum, there is mostly proliferation. In place of

unity, there is unrelatedness. Rather than synthesis and cohesion, there is atomization. The undergraduate student body is increasingly resentful not only of a fragmented learning experience but of those devices employed by universities and colleges to standardize and quantify educational achievement. The masses of students which the nation's institutions of higher education have admitted in recent years have prompted bureaucratic procedures that place a premium on precision, efficiency, speed, control, continuity, and similar administrative arrangements which optimize returns on input, depersonalize human relationship, and minimize nonrational considerations. When applied to a generation of students who highly value spontaneity, individual autonomy, and free expression, such procedures are obviously dysfunctional even though they may be administratively advantageous.

Large numbers of students are insisting that their interest in discrimination, poverty, the inner city, rural slums, pollution and related social problems be acknowledged by the university as legitimate objects of educational purpose. The modern American university student has made it clear that his university will either come to grips with the larger social values as an integral part of the learning experiences, or it will risk enduring conflict and the substantial loss of a generation whose energies and talents will find other outlets. Should that occur, the university would be as obsolete as it would be irrelevant to the condition of mankind--what W. H. Auden perhaps would describe as "lecturing on navigation while the ship is going down."

There is substantial agreement among faculty and students on the need to rejuvenate undergraduate education. I think there has been agreement for several years now, but the changes have not occurred owing

to (1) a reward system that favors the specialized pursuit of knowledge more highly than it does the cultivation of young minds; (2) the influence of Federal contracts and grants on university energies and priorities; (3) a waning of faculty loyalty to the university because of professorial mobility and closer ties with the Federal agencies funding faculty research; and (4) the tremendous growth in undergraduate enrollments during the past one-quarter of a century which has both eroded student-faculty ratios and depersonalized the campus.

I recommend, therefore, that the Commission urge the President (1) to place undergraduate education nearer to the top of national educational priorities; (2) to seek funding for the purpose of assisting universities and colleges in their efforts to reform the undergraduate curriculum while contending with the inhibiting influences ~~noted~~<sup>just</sup> noted; and (3) to take closer account of the implications for undergraduate education whenever Federal programs are sought for research and graduate programs.

#### IV

Time does not permit me to discuss the significant impact on higher education in recent years of the minority student, the news media, and public opinion, among others. I would like to close my remarks, however, with a brief comment on what may in the end prove to be the most crucial variable of all, namely, the rising level of political activity on university campuses around the country.

My conception of the university's mission is avowedly traditional. I believe that the function of the university is to seek and to transmit

knowledge and to train students in the processes whereby truth may be made known.

Those engaged in this task must be as committed to the welfare of their students as they are to the advancement of knowledge. To achieve either goal, the scholar must approach knowledge with an attitude of concerned and impartial detachment, for such "is the only preservation against the fluctuating extremes of fashionable opinion," as Alfred North Whitehead once observed.

Such impartiality, of course, is currently fashionable to condemn as though it were a form of moral indifference or apathy. "Where is your commitment?" one is asked for having failed to vote affirmatively on a faculty resolution condemning the Cambodian invasion. The answer is not to be discovered in discussing the merits and demerits of that military action. Rather, it is to be found within the principles of a competing commitment to the conception of the university as a place where ideas are not voted on but shared and exchanged, as a place where questions are examined under conditions which give play to intellect rather than to passion, and as a place where truth is impartially sought by free men instead of being divined by those whose intellectual options are bounded by their political commitments.

The critical distinctions between professional obligations, civilly secured rights of free expression, and academically protected rights of intellectual freedom are terribly misunderstood today. Thus, as Professor Richard Schier has noted, there is confusion within the academic profession generally about "both the basis of political action by teachers, which is

that of constitutional freedom, and the basis of academic freedom, which is in the pure sense academic rather than constitutional, and certainly not political."

Given present trends, the failure to make these distinctions clear will inevitably transform the university from a place of learning into a base for political action. If this were to occur, the university would at once become socially and politically superfluous. It would have abandoned its authority. It would, as Professor Philip Rhinelanders recently suggested, have gone down into the arena where as merely one more gladiator it would in the rough and tumble soon fall victim to institutions more versed in the uses of such power.

Is the university then to be wholly insulated from knowing and learning about the political process? Of course not! Political inquiry, expression, learning, and teaching are critical parts of the educative process. But distinctions must be made between political inquiry, expression, learning, and teaching and the use of the university to stage and execute political campaigns, and plan and direct social movements.

The commitment to impartial scholarship is perhaps one of the more difficult of commitments to make, not only because it is currently unfashionable with some students and even with some faculty, but also because it is more intellectually demanding of the individual than are most other endeavors, political ones included. The university will not long remain a center of learning without the dedication of its faculty to what Rhinelanders has called the "exacting moral commitment" to impartial scholarship and the cultivation of young minds.

The trend in American higher education, I regret, does not currently favor this view. I am hopeful, however, that by the mid-1970's the American university will with a more sensitive and responsive system of governance together with a realignment of its internal priorities reassert the primacy of scholarship and learning in the university and move into the 1980's with renewed confidence and vigor.