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Publication Date

2014-07-29

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Peer reviewed

Cybernetics, Simulation, and Conflict Resolution

Proceedings of the
Third Annual Symposium
of the
American Society for Cybernetics

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and
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SPARTAN BOOKS
NEW YORK • WASHINGTON

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Cybernetics, Simulation, and Conflict Resolution

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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 77-118150
International Standard Book Number 0-87671-165-4

Sole distributor in Great Britain, the British Commonwealth, and the Continent of Europe:

MACMILLAN & CO. LTD.
4 Little Essex Street
London, W. C. 2

Printed in the United States of America.

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The University in Disarray: Causes of Conflict and Prospects for Change*

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"Universities in America are at a hinge of history: while connected with their past they are swinging in another direction."¹ Clark Kerr's apt commentary of six years ago, however sufficient then, no longer adequately describes the revolutionary manifestations for change in the structure and purpose of higher education. The American university faces today not merely a swing "in another direction" but an unhinging from its past. It is a community in disarray with constituents and suitors unrelentingly competing for its invisible and elusive product—the power of organized knowledge.

The causes of conflict in academe, while importantly related to the social malaise currently afflicting the larger community, are primarily to be discovered historically and contemporaneously in its system of governance and balance of interests. The critical variables include (1) the distribution of authority within the university, (2) the order of university priorities, (3) the relationship between academic freedom and university purposes, (4) the changing values of students,

*A portion of this paper appeared in the *Educational Record*, published by the American Council on Education, Spring 1969, pp. 113-120.

(5) the reward system, and (6) the curriculum. This paper is an attempt to analyze these variables, calculate their implications, and assess the prospects for change.

Evolution of University Government

The modern American university emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century with the rise of science and in response to the imperatives of agricultural and industrial expansion. The dominant centers of political and economic power in America early exhibited a vital and expansive interest in the fledgling universities, rewarding men of means and influence with commanding positions in university governance. But in the twentieth century, the pattern of university government evolved into one that more widely shared responsibility for university affairs and carefully distributed the levers of institutional influence and control. The changes especially favored the faculty, whose authority over educational policy, admissions, faculty appointments, and internal organization increased dramatically.

The road leading to the present structure was long and hard. It was, nevertheless, as willingly traveled by the governing agencies as by the faculty. To put it more directly, it was a *quid pro quo*: in return for the goods, the governing boards gave essential control over the educational process to the faculty. The "goods" were clearly relevant contributions to man's understanding of his natural environment, his institutions, his government, his enemies, and himself. So long as the scholar's pen and the scientist's laboratory yielded such useful knowledge—especially when related to the interests of agriculture, industry, and national security—faculty expectations for meaningful self-government and academic freedom were accommodated.

University priorities in recent decades, therefore, have been dominated by the needs of the advanced industrial state, an enormously profitable arrangement for the nation's productive apparatus on the one hand and for the faculty's well being on

the other. Hence, the pattern enjoys the derived stability of a mutually useful alliance. The arrangement, however, is especially discordant at present, for the social, political, and economic goals of vast numbers of students are largely unlike those animating the broader community. Student pressure for change in university process and purpose, therefore, is as understandable as it is predictably resisted, from without by the dominant forces in society and from within by the faculty whose interests continue to be served by the system. The continuing viability of the present pattern, of course, depends in the end on the willingness of the student to acquiesce in a situation made possible primarily by the university's relative neglect of what he perceives as critical to the survival of our society. He is obviously less willing to acquiesce today than before. That is, he is less willing to permit the university's attention, energy, and resources to be expended in the service of external interests regarded by a sizeable proportion of today's student body as less deserving than other more critical and pressing social and environmental problems. In other words, the students are not buying the status quo any more than they are paying for it and their revolt promises inquietude in the nation's institutions of higher learning for the foreseeable future.

Power vs. Principle

The rise of the academician, his dominance over the curriculum and learning experience, his influence over faculty appointments and student admissions, his control of the degree, and his power over the professional organizations have all been essential to the achievement of intellectual maturity in the United States and to the freedom of the scholar to teach, inquire, and publish. But it seems, if current student restiveness is any indicator, that the freedom of the scholar and his control over the learning environment have been nurtured more to advantage the teacher than to impart meaning and relevance to the learner. While it is gladly granted, as Sidney

Hook argues, that "where teachers have no freedom to teach, students have obviously no freedom to learn . . .," it does not follow that what students wish to learn, teachers choose to teach.³ And the evidence is everywhere at hand that the disparity is very great, the principal cause being that the curriculum reflects and the teachers teach matter more responsive to the imperatives of professionalism in the academy and to the commands of the surrounding society than to the variegated needs of a highly democratized student body, that is, a student body whose intellectual dispositions, motivations, goals, and cultures are significantly diverse.

The learning process has come to be defined within the context of institutional values as imparted by the faculty on the one hand and by the advanced industrial state on the other. Students whose values are out of harmony with those of their teachers and the larger community—the militant black students, for example—perceive academic freedom, at best, as wholly unrelated to their freedom to learn and, at worst, as the very cause of the university's unresponsiveness to their special needs. Some students respond to the perceived insufficiency of the modern university by founding their own Free Universities. (These places, of course, are as biased as those replaced, for selected values are reflected in each model.) Others seek to enlarge the students' role in the university in order to influence the order of its commitments. Still others, by attacking the reins of administered power in the larger society, attempt to weaken the hold of established influence on university loyalties and ally the incalculable power of organized knowledge with new causes—for example, away from agriculture and toward urban problems, away from armaments and toward poverty in America.

Students argue increasingly that the university can no longer stand disinterestedly in the midst of social turmoil, or claim neutrality as a reason for noninvolvement in the social ills of the day. But even if the university refuses to intervene, it is asserted, then at least it should not be permitted to prevent its students from doing so. This conflict over student involve-

ment in social and political causes *qua* student, which many argue on educational, not on political or civil grounds, has already radically modified the scope of university authority over student activism.

Those who oppose students implicating the university in social and political issues have argued the inevitability of the surrounding society answering in kind, thus threatening the institutions supposed autonomy. In response, it has been asserted that the university is already enmeshed in the military and industrial imperatives of the larger society, and to suppose it free of political influence evades reality; massive university ties to the Atomic Energy Commission, the Department of Defense, and the agricultural lobby are examples.

The university cannot, the dissidents argue, work both sides of the street. It cannot, for example, opt to engage its resources in behalf of the Institute for Defense Analyses, pleading service to the state, and be disinterested in the civil rights movement, alleging institutional neutrality. The argument is double-edged, of course, for it can be made in reverse. Thus, the character of much of the conflict in higher education is illuminated. It is a power struggle to convert the university from one set of concerns to another, for example, from weapons research to the elimination of poverty, from the development of tomato harvesters to the educational problems of migrant children, from a concern with pesticides to the social problems of the inner city; in short, from objects to more direct and immediate human needs.

Politicized University

It is not simply a matter, however, of rearranging priorities. It is one also of making distinctions between political inquiry, expression, learning, and teaching, and the use of the university primarily to stage and execute political demonstrations, organize and manage political campaigns, and plan and direct social movements. If one cannot make meaningful distinctions here, then one might as well count the university as a third

political party, an institution as politicized as it would be anti-intellectual, with an ethos favoring coercion over persuasion, intimidation over reason, threat over thought, and duress over dialogue. The description may already fit, at least to whatever extent confrontation politics increasingly dictates the resolution of differences within the academy.

If the university were to advocate the political refashioning of the larger society along particular lines it would become merely another instrument of social revolution bent on weaving the political, social, and economic fabric of our culture into a different pattern. Such a politically partisan commitment would necessarily bind the university's constituent elements and fundamentally alter its structure and purpose. And it cannot be pleaded that the description already fits. While it is one thing for the centers of power in our society to dictate the balance of interests in the university and to apply the abundant yield in ways that serve the productive apparatus of the technologically advanced state, it is quite another for the individual scholar and scientist to be bound by the institution to partisan causes. The difference is the viability of individual intellectual freedom, the very touchstone of a true university. For example, while federal contracts and grants for research in public health, agriculture, weaponry, and space have in substantial measure ordered university priorities by claiming a disproportionate share of its material and human resources, this fact does not bind the scientist intellectually in his work on these problems, any more than a foundation funding a study of migrant workers binds the social scientist to other than his own conclusions. The influencing of university priorities and concerns is not at all the same thing as the politically partisan commitment that admits to a surrender of intellectual freedom, for the options are inclusive in the commitment. Thus, one cannot hope corporately to commit the university to partisanship of a political sort without also binding its parts, any more than one can expect coercion as a style to exist side by side with persuasion in an institution dependent more on reason than on passion for its work.

The argument is not meant, however, to refute or doubt the legitimacy of calls for a realigning of interests in the university or the legitimacy of partisanship by individual members of the faculty or student body acting as private citizens in a free society. But, a reordering of university interests to accommodate social problems at the upper levels of university consciousness by making them objects of educational purpose promises to be more disruptive of university-community relationships than when such expressions of concern were less favored than the production of value-neutral technology. This will be especially true if faculty members blur the distinctions between their rights as citizens and their responsibilities as scholars, the first denying the teacher special treatment in the broader society, and the second preserving for the teacher a special position and protection in the university.⁴

But the student, who is most often neither franchised in the larger society nor credentialed in the academy, has no distinctions to blur except for those responsibilities imposed on him by the university and those rights securing his constitutionally protected liberties. It should not be surprising, therefore, that he has chosen to exercise his civilly assured rights to rid himself of institutionally obtruded constraints and thus to invite an analogy between the university and the civil community, one that pressures the university to adopt civilly accepted rather than academically derived concepts of structure, process, and style.⁵

The turmoil in American higher education today results not so much from efforts to destroy the university as from the competition of its suitors, whose dissimilar social, political, and economic goals impinge directly on the rights and responsibilities of members of the university community, that is, on the freedoms that have traditionally been associated with the structure and process of our institutions of higher learning. For example, students have recently won the freedom at a number of universities to organize on campus for off-campus political action, to recruit volunteers and solicit funds on campus for off-campus social causes, to make university facili-

ties available to off-campus speakers whose remarks are not subject to prior review by university authorities: in short, to engage university facilities and members in a super abundance of political and social activity. The rather vigorous use of these freedoms by students has already influenced university intentions which in turn have implicated the authority pattern and the decision-making processes within the university. Thus, as the objects of university concern shift away from a preoccupation with logical positivism and the production of technology and toward a commitment to more encompassing values and principles, there will also very likely occur a simultaneous restructuring of the university's authority system to include representative elements of the student body in institutional centers of power. In any event, new compacts must be conceived in the university among those whose rights and responsibilities are interrelated, and whose interests compete or conflict. While much is negotiable in constructing new treaties, intellectual freedom is not. There can be no accommodation with those whose political commitments are more important than the intellectual freedom of others, a principle increasingly compromised by the more aggressive elements of the student community who seemingly little regard either the academic freedoms or those protected by civil law. The prospect of losing these freedoms is not to be dismissed lightly, given the militancy of that element and the timidity with which recent violations of others' rights have been condemned by the academic community.

Professionalism and Teaching in the University

To realign university priorities and structure in ways more consistent with student expectations and goals than with the immediate requirements of the technologically advanced state responds only partially, however, to the overall problem of bringing into harmony the educational norms, standards, and expectations of the faculty on the one hand, and the needs, desires, and hopes of an increasingly differentiated undergradu-

ate student body on the other. Students differ from each other in style, identity, orientation, commitment, complexity, autonomy, and values quite as much as they do in interest and ability. And so, obviously, do faculty members differ from one another in similar ways. But as Joseph Katz and his associates have made abundantly clear in *No Time For Youth*, colleges have not sufficiently linked these varied styles and approaches to their educational tasks.⁶ Instead, higher education in the United States has preferred to measure and standardize educational progress and achievement by quantifying course and classroom experience, as Bradford Cleaveland harshly observed of the Berkeley model just prior to the "Free Speech Movement" that so disrupted that campus in 1964:

The salient characteristic of the multiversity is massive production of specialized excellence. The multiversity is actually not an educational center but a highly efficient industry engaged in producing skilled individuals to meet the immediate needs of business and government . . .

Below the level of formal power and responsibility (the Regents, president and chancellors), the faculty itself is guilty of a massive and disastrous default. More concerned with their own increasingly affluent specialized careers, they have permitted an administrative process to displace, and become an obstruction to, extended thought and learning for the undergraduate . . .

The process [of education] is a four-year-long series of sharp staccatos: eight semesters, forty courses, one hundred twenty or more "units," ten to fifteen impersonal lectures *per week*, and one to three oversized discussion meetings per week led by poorly paid, unlearned graduate students.⁷

Cleaveland's hostility centered on the faculty for what he perceived to be their collective neglect of the undergraduate in favor of their own collective aggrandizement. Undergraduate education, those of Cleaveland's persuasion argued, had been usurped and demeaned in favor of a bureaucracy fashioned as much by the faculty as by the administration. The system thus contrived favored precision, efficiency, speed, control, continuity, and similar measures which optimized returns

on input, depersonalized human relationships, and minimized nonrational considerations. In short, the faculty, by their preoccupation with research, consulting, and graduate instruction had given the goals of undergraduate education over to these bureaucratic processes.

The diminished role of teaching in the university, of which the educational dysfunctions noted above are symptomatic, are attributable primarily (1) to a reward system that favors production of knowledge over the cultivation of young minds, (2) to a scarcity of able men in relation to demand whose resulting opportunities permit them to dictate terms of employment that assure high visibility (i.e., a distribution of time that favors research and writing over teaching), and (3) to a shift of faculty loyalties from the university to the academic profession and the research granting agencies. While these realities do not require the individual faculty member to opt for research over teaching, they do indicate the cost individual members of the profession must be prepared to pay if they choose the reverse emphasis. To favor teaching over research within the present context is to discount the prospective value of the faculty member's worth measured on any scale other than his own personal satisfaction and whatever derived benefit his students enjoy because of his greater interest in them than in his own professional advancement.

Teaching and research are not, of course, as exclusive as they have thus far been made out to be. Indeed, they are complementary at the level of graduate instruction and to a lesser extent at the undergraduate level. But the reward system, a seller's market, and a waning of institutional loyalty allows the faculty member, if he chooses, to push student needs down the scale of university priorities while moving his own to the top. *To put it bluntly, the production of knowledge not the education of the student is the overriding preoccupation of the modern American university.* Were the great bulk of students as professionally oriented as their teachers, the grave dysfunctions of the present arrangement would be greatly moderated. But they are not, and the ever increasing diversity of the Ameri-

can university undergraduate student body promises to create more not less discontent among a growing proportion of students, especially among those studying the social sciences and humanities.

Changing Values

When societal expectations and those of the great majority of students were in harmony, as was generally true when the veterans of World War II inundated America's colleges and universities in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the educational experience was minimally dysfunctional, however uneven the quality of instruction may have been and however crowded were the conditions. But if the educational expectations of students change and those of the larger society do not (a fair but highly generalized observation of the contemporary educational scene), then educational dysfunction is predictable.

The values that shaped the present condition of modern man in America are chiefly those embodied in the Protestant ethic of hard work and achievement in a highly competitive social milieu. "Thrift, self-discipline, hard work, asceticism, worldliness—these and similar characteristics of the Protestant ethic," Max Weber has observed, "nurtured the conditions necessary for the development of capitalism, modern science, and bureaucratic organization—all of which support one another to a large degree."⁸ But the Protestant ethic, William H. Whyte, Jr. has argued, no longer meaningfully functions in American life, it having been replaced by a bureaucracy which has become the controlling end in itself.⁹ Thus, modern man looks less to the ethic for meaning and security in society than to the big organization—corporation, government, military, church, labor union, and professional association. On his ability to move effectively among these organized units, hinges not only the individual's claim to income, success, and security, but the viability, rationality, and efficiency of the organizational system itself. Thus, the attributes of organization man are carefully nurtured by society, the essential ones being (1) a desire

to achieve, (2) an ability to postpone gratification, (3) a tolerance for frustration, (4) a willingness to compromise, and (5) a capacity and drive for disciplined work. These qualities reflect organizational imperatives for commitment, career aspirations, functional expertise, rational behavior, and cooperation.

Whether Whyte's observations about the submergence of the Protestant ethic to the organizational needs of the society it created are generally valid or not, it is surely true that the values of the ethic are waning in importance as the scientific and cybernetic revolution supplant the earlier industrial revolution. And it is the newer revolution not the older one that the younger generation will live through; and the university student senses that his education inadequately anticipates the changes in values, life styles, and patterns of work with which he will be confronted. Instead, his education largely reflects the priorities, expectations, and personality preferences of the earlier generation whose own sense of identity, individual worth, and security are interwoven with the older values that formed contemporary society. Thus, for the student to reject the older values and the society it produced is to threaten not only the established order but also the viability of an educational process designed not to modify or alter the system but to nurture and sustain it. But for the student to accept those same values and the institutions that dictate the conditions of life in contemporary society is to compromise his own perception of the world in which he will live the greater part of his mature years. And in a rapidly changing world, the student is impatient with and insensitive to a university more committed to serving the established order than to preparing the student for the social, cultural, religious, political, and environmental dislocations with which his generation will be expected to cope.

The Learning Process

The American university, as Max Lerner puts it, "is the

convergence point of the major revolutionary forces of our time."¹⁰ 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 university curriculum, therefore, is relevant for the student to whatever extent 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 where the parts are understood in relationship to each other as critically as they are perceived separately. But 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. 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. Moreover, the stress is on educating students to man the productive components of the industrial complex rather than on educating them to live with and participate in the problems and derived benefits of the scientific and cybernetic society.

The teaching and research interest and experience of the faculty determine the character and content of the curriculum, and these traditionally center on what Katz calls the "academic-conceptual area" with an emphasis on subject matter, analysis, description, hypothesis, and cognitive rationality. The curriculum thus devised is essentially devoid of what could be a more encompassing and larger learning environment. In other words, the faculty, and therefore the curriculum, dwell nearly exclusively on but one of several discernible teaching and learning areas, thus favoring students disposed toward the academic-conceptual model and disadvantaging students for whom reality and learning are best understood and carried on within different contexts, e.g., those stressing esthetics, emotions, feelings, and sensibilities; those preferring the affective domain; those responding to people-oriented activities and services; those favoring inanimate or artificial objects; those preferring motoric expression; those wishing for the develop-

ment of skills in human relations, social ability, friendship, and intimacy in the human experience.

Because the faculty perceives its teaching responsibilities primarily within the academic-conceptual model, the measures and standards that determine access to and exit from higher education are understandably reflections of that bias. Thus, grade point average in a core curriculum, units completed, and numbers of courses taken in subject-matter fields standardize and quantify students in ways that systematically push out all but the one teaching and learning area that presently predominates. To make room for the others would require major changes in criteria and curricular offerings. These would be as insistent and demanding as the present, but differentiated to accommodate differences in student characteristics that bear on achievement and performance.

If such changes were to be made, they would necessarily emphasize a complete program for the development of the individual student in contrast to the existing disconnected, fragmented, and partial approach that is so clearly a reflection of the knowledge rather than the student-oriented university. But such programs would compromise the essential dominance of the academic departments over the curriculum, whose structures of disciplines and courses, as Nevitt Sanford has observed, "were designed less for the purpose of teaching than for the production of knowledge."¹¹ And the issue is thus joined. On the one hand, the career aspirations of the faculty are currently so interwoven with the integrity and power of the academic department that any proposal to modify the effective control of the department over the reward system and the curriculum would be met with the faculty's tenacious and unrelenting resistance. On the other hand, the educational aspirations of an increasing number of students are inconsistent with the fragmented curriculum and the professional bias of the faculty whose pursuit of specialized knowledge continues to be more highly regarded and rewarded than is their work with students. An accommodation of these critical differences

may very well be preceded by an intense and prolonged confrontation between the students and the faculty.

The members of the faculty, of course, are in an uncomfortable position. On the one hand, they rely on the stability of their existing interface with the dominant interests in society for the resources necessary to undertake research, and on the other hand, they depend on the willingness of the students to cooperate in an arrangement made possible primarily by the university's neglect of them. The reward system as presently operative supports the viability and congruence of the faculty's research interests and the prevailing requirements of the technologically advanced state, as already noted. But the current escalation of student discontent suggests that higher education is at the point of having to grapple with the malfunctions of the system if the university's essential character is to survive. This will mean not only a reordering of priorities and the involvement of students in the authority system as noted in the early part of this paper, but it will also require major modifications of the educational experience including the criteria used to admit and graduate students. And finally, it will mean that the educational environment must necessarily be as diverse in approach, methodology, and outcome as the student body it chooses to serve is varied in style, motivation, values, and expectation.

The changes in university priorities, structure, and curriculum can be made only if the faculty chooses to make them and indirectly if the society wishes to pay for them. Whether basic modifications will be made voluntarily or only after persistent and extended student discontent will largely determine if higher education in the United States preserves or loses the freedom and self-determination that are regarded as essential to the integrity of its mission and the individual intellectual freedom of those dedicated to its noble principles.

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