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Author

Gardner, David P.

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9/21/82

October 7, 1982
UEA KEYNOTE ADDRESS

David P. Gardner

EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE: THE HOPE OF THE FUTURE

I welcome the opportunity to address so many of Utah's educators convened here this morning and can only hope that my remarks will prove to be helpful as your annual meeting proceeds. I have been asked to focus my remarks on excellence in education as my views on this issue have come to be informed in the course of the work this past year undertaken by the National Commission addressing this subject and then upon the recently announced changes in admission requirements at the University of Utah scheduled to take effect with the autumn term of 1987.

In a recent Time Magazine editorial entitled "Have We Abandoned Excellence?", a pervasive national concern for excellence is reflected:

"Americans seem especially wistful about excellence now. Standing waist deep in a recession, after 20 years of change that hurled the cultural furniture around and turned much of it into junk, they are apt to think longingly of excellence. . . ."

A yearning for excellence, both in education and in other endeavors, has been rooted in our aspirations as a nation and in the startlingly widespread belief that high standards of performance and expectation have slipped in recent years across our society in general. This trend is of consequence to us all and should be especially disquieting to educators.

Excellence, of course, is by definition difficult to attain and is rarely reached. The successful seeking of it by the few, however, works a positive and encouraging influence on the many who, although in falling short of their ultimate hopes and aspirations, will in the process of striving have accomplished more and grown more and learned more than if standards of excellence were not there for them to seek or if they had not chosen to strive for them at all.

Excellence, and more particularly for our purposes this morning excellence in education, is, therefore, a concept of vital importance to our society. It helps fashion expectations and should define the standards which will command respect from those who both monitor our efforts and pay for them.

My involvement with the National Commission on Excellence in Education, which will issue its final report next spring, has provided those serving with a unique opportunity to view education at all levels within a national perspective. The Commission has held a number of hearings, panel discussions, full Commission meetings and site visits throughout the country and continues to receive both expert and lay testimony on a wide range of the most critical education issues and programs. Neither the time allotted to me nor reasonable levels of patience on your

part will allow me to share with you a detailed report on these varied activities. I would, however, like to draw your attention to certain findings that tend to illustrate the basis of our concern about the present standards and performance of American education.

At the Commission's hearing on science, mathematics, and technology education, held at Stanford University last March, several areas of concern emerged both in expert testimony and public comments:

1. A survey of the 50 state science supervisors in 1981 reveals that over 75% of the states are experiencing a "critical shortage" or "shortage" of mathematics, physics, and chemistry teachers at the secondary level. Another 1981 survey of college and university teacher training programs reveals a 10-year decline of 78% in the average number of mathematics teachers and a 64% decline in the average number of science teachers graduated with preparation necessary for teaching in secondary schools. Nationally 50% of newly employed science and math teachers in 1981 were unqualified to teach these subjects but were hired on an "emergency basis" because no qualified teachers could be found.

2. The National Research Council's recent report entitled The State of School Science reports that only one-third of U.S. high schools require more than one year of math or science and that only one-half of U.S. high school

graduates have taken more than one year of biology with no other science and math beyond algebra.

3. Up-to-date curricula in science appropriate for students not planning a career in science are in very short supply.

4. Enrollments in remedial (high school level) courses in 4-year colleges and universities rose 72% from 1975 to 1980 compared with only a 7% increase in undergraduate enrollments during the same period. Remedial courses now account for 42% of all two-year college mathematics enrollments.

The Commission's hearing on Language and Literacy, held in Houston last April, revealed other equally salient concerns:

1. Professor Richard Anderson of the University of Illinois' Center for the Study of Reading presented persuasive evidence about the diminished level of readability and difficulty of most school textbooks today compared with those of earlier years and the negative effect this has had upon the reading comprehension of our students.

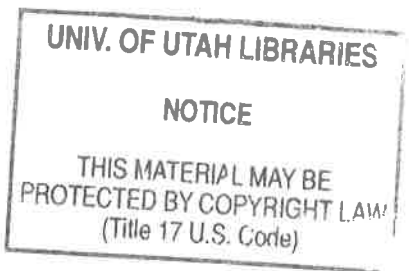
2. In an era of increasing internationalism in business, trade, government and education not only is foreign language instruction in this country geared toward minimal levels of competency but a much smaller proportion of young people both in the grades and in higher education are studying a foreign language than in earlier years.

Countries that do educate students in a second language devote a much longer period of time to language training than do we and with much more meaningful and demonstrably superior results. Moreover they commonly begin the study of foreign languages in the elementary grades and continue such studies throughout a student's entire schooling.

3. Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress and from the National Institute of Education's Compensatory Education Study indicate that while reading instruction in the elementary grades is relatively effective and continues to improve, the performance of secondary students, particularly in higher order reading comprehension skills, is much less encouraging.

In May, the Commission held a public hearing on "Teaching and Teacher Education," a subject of some interest to this gathering. There the commission received testimony on such issues as preservice teacher training programs, inservice programs, the work environment, attrition rates in the profession, salary structures, and certification. Some very selected, yet important and illustrative points, are as follows:

1. Between 40 and 50 percent of those employed as first-year teachers this year will not be teaching seven years from now; furthermore, two thirds to three fourths of those who do leave will do so in the first four years of teaching.



2. Several studies, including the National Longitudinal Study, have shown a differential rate in the retention of those teachers who are highest in academic ability and those who are lowest. For example, of those who are in the upper 20 percent of measured academic ability, only 26 percent intend to teach at age 30 as contrasted with approximately 60 percent of those with the lowest academic ability.

3. The tendency of many schools is to discourage shared decision making thereby degradating a sense of professional collegiality on the part of teachers. The research on effective schools indicates that those schools in which teachers engage in a great deal of job-related discussion and share in decisions regarding instructional programs are more effective than those schools in which decisions are made by more rule-bound bureaucratic procedures.

4. Several witnesses at this and other hearings of the Commission have recommended that schools adopt differential salary structure in an attempt to attract and retain teachers in critical shortage areas such as mathematics and science.

While these and many other problems have been reviewed with the Commission, one should not gain the impression that

public education is a wasteland of despair as some would have us believe. Our problems run deep and wide but our schools retain the competency, capacity, and, if encouraged and helped by interested parents, school boards and legislators, the morale and will sufficient to redress these problems. Many schools here and nationally are now responding in innovative and positive ways to the particular educational problems they face. Permit me to cite some examples:

1. Several states, including Minnesota, Maryland, Florida, and California, have launched cooperative and systematic efforts to strengthen high school science education. The "Minnesota Wellspring" program, for example, is a cooperative enterprise of the state, the University of Minnesota, and the high schools of the state to expand and enrich high school science curricula;

2. Research and pilot programs on writing skills have revealed some very successful programs at both elementary and collegiate levels. For example, experimental writing programs in Vermont in grades one through four, emphasizing constant revisions in writing exercises, have revealed surprising levels of writing ability and have demonstrated how reading and writing skills can develop in tandem and reinforce each other. At the collegiate level, very successful writing skills programs, all of which emphasize writing across the curriculum as opposed to confining such

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instruction to English courses and which emphasize writing at upper division as well as lower division levels, have been adopted at such institutions as the University of Michigan, UCLA and the University of Texas.

3. Secondary school students are showing a willingness to take more demanding subjects such as foreign languages, mathematics, and science. Colleges and universities, which quite frankly encouraged students to take the easier rather than the more exacting courses by offering remedial course work as part of their regular curriculum and by relaxing their standards for admission, are for the first time in years beginning to review such standards and to strengthen them. Ohio, California and Utah are examples.

4. Utah secondary schools lead the nation in participation in Advanced Placement programs which provide fine opportunities for high school students to enroll in a challenging curriculum and to secure, upon passing appropriate exams, college credit. The prospect of improved funding for AP programs, and even higher levels of participation augers well for the college bound student and for teachers who desire the challenge and stimulation of teaching at more advanced levels.

5. The National Commission on Excellence in education will submit its report in March of 1983. It will deal with the present state of American education at all levels,

recommend how improvements can be made and quality enhanced, explicate the problems and deteriorating attractiveness of the teaching profession and what might be done to reverse the trend and restore the attractiveness of the profession both to those who remain in it and are thinking about entering it. It will also address the role of federal, state and local government and school boards in this process, as well of course, of the teachers, administrators and parents who will have to join in a common as against a divided effort if our difficulties have any hope of being resolved.

I wish now to comment upon the rationale and purposes behind the University of Utah's recently announced changes in its admission policies which are to be made effective with the fall term of 1987. These policy changes, while certainly not a direct outgrowth of my experiences on the National Commission, reflect the concern on the part of educators at all levels over trends in the levels of preparation of college-bound students. It is vitally important that as teachers in Utah's public schools you understand the University's intent and know of our desire to work cooperatively with the schools in every possible respect to meet our common goal of providing an excellent education to the young people of our state.

The University of Utah has historically admitted persons as first-year students who have completed the State's requirements for graduation from secondary school. For placement and counseling purposes, fully matriculated status has been accorded to high school graduates with an earned grade point average of 2.5 or higher or who otherwise evidenced a predicted grade point average at the University of 1.8 or higher. Applicants whose actual or predicted GPA fell below those standards were not enrolled as fully matriculated students but instead were admitted as "guided studies" students, were provided special counseling, were enrolled in remedial courses as necessary, and were, until fully matriculated, limited as to the course work for which they were eligible to enroll.

This policy has had both beneficial and hurtful consequences. On the positive side, because academic success or failure is not invariably predictable, late-developing students were afforded the chance to test their potential and to profit from the University's teaching and counseling resources. Thus, some students succeeded

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when they had been expected to fail. On the negative side, resources which should have been used to provide university-level courses have been used instead to offer course work to unprepared students who should have taken such courses in high school.

This policy, while not in every respect either fiscally or educationally sound, has on balance and over time served the University and State well--at least until the last decade when the level of preparedness of entering freshmen students, on the average, declined dramatically.

One means of assessing the readiness of students for university work is the American College Test or ACT as it is more commonly known. The mean composite ACT score of the University's entering freshmen declined from 21.9 in 1970 to 19.8 in 1980. More revealing than the drop in mean, however, is the shift in proportion of students scoring in quartile rankings, particularly the dramatic increase in those scoring in the lowest quartile.

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By Selected ACT Composite Score Interval

| Score Interval | Autumn 1970 | Autumn 1980 | Difference |
|----------------|-------------|-------------|------------|
| 26-30 | 23% | 17% | - 6% |
| 21-25 | 41% | 29% | -12% |
| 16-20 | 28% | 29% | + 1% |
| 1-15* | 9% | 24% | +15% |

*Only 1 out of 11 such students who enter the University graduate from it.

In 1970, 9% of enrolled freshmen at the University scored 15 or below on the ACT--the lowest quartile. By 1980, 24% of enrolled freshmen scored in the lowest quartile--an increase of 15 percentage points.

The decline in ACT and in other nationally administered, standardized examinations has been the object of considerable study and debate. While there may not be agreement in every respect as to the causes of the decline, there is no arguing with the fact that Utah high school students entering the University are today enrolling for fewer college preparatory courses per term grades nine through twelve than they did a decade ago.

UNIVERSITY OF UTAH ENTERING FRESHMEN

AVERAGE NUMBER OF SOLIDS TAKEN

| <u>Subject Area</u> | Grades 9-12 | | <u>Percentage Change</u> |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| | <u>1969</u> | <u>1979</u> | |
| English | 3.9 | 3.7 | - 5.1 |
| Mathematics | 3.3 | 2.9 | -12.1 |
| Natural Science | 2.3 | 2.4 | + 4.3 |
| Foreign Languages | 1.2 | 1.1 | - 8.3 |
| Total | 13.6 | 12.6 | - 7.4 |

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The impact of this trend on ACT scores should be self-evident. For example, roughly 20% of the ACT examination in mathematics deals with geometry. If a student has not taken geometry, it should come as no surprise that the student will do less well on the examination than if he or she had taken geometry.

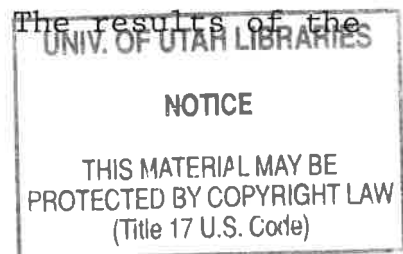
Many observers are of the view that in the 1960's, during which time softness in the scores first became apparent, the pool of students studying for and taking the examinations grew significantly as a function of the nation's commitment to increased educational opportunity. The impact on test scores arising out of this enlarged pool of students, however, is believed to have been accommodated by the early 1970's. Since then, the decline in scores has been attributable in significant part to a much expanded high school curriculum, minimal standards for graduation from high school and for admission to colleges and universities, and to the dramatic increase in college and university sponsored remedial offerings which have the effect of permitting students in high school to defer college preparatory work until they are enrolled in college.

High school students, of course, need not defer their college preparatory work. Utah high schools offer a full range of such courses and students who choose to avail themselves of what the high schools presently offer come to the University as well prepared, if not better prepared, than earlier generations of students.

What students choose to study in high school, of course, has a direct bearing upon the percentage of freshmen students who succeed or fail in their studies at the University. For example, a student at the University is considered to be on academic probation when his or her GPA falls below a 2.0. Roughly one-third of the University's freshman class is on academic probation at one time or another during the first year; and the freshman class constitutes by far the greatest segment of all undergraduate students who are on probation.

The presence on campus of an increasing number of poorly or marginally prepared students accounts for the rise in the number of remedial offerings the University has been obliged to arrange and for the hindered rate of learning our average and more qualified students have been experiencing. This trend, if left unchecked, and when coupled with the huge increases in enrollment that are predicted for the University beginning in the latter part of this decade, will prove to be the undoing of any effort we might make to sustain much less to improve the quality and rigor of our teaching programs and the national respect which they presently enjoy.

Earlier this year, the University had an Open Letter published in the Salt Lake Tribune addressed to high school students and their parents in which was outlined a suggested course of study for high school students intending to enroll at the University of Utah. The response to this Open Letter was immediate and overwhelmingly positive.

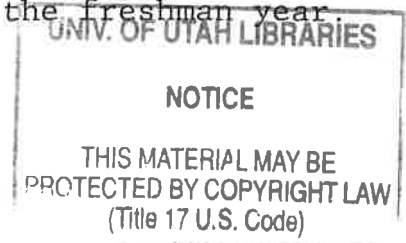


recommendations were seen almost immediately at the secondary school level as measured by changes in course registration for the fall 1982 high school term.

Since then, appropriate committees within the University have been working to refine these recommendations and to frame them in the form, not of recommendations, but of requirements for admission to the University of Utah for students wishing to enroll beginning with the autumn term of 1987.

University officials have discussed this matter with school superintendents, counselors, principals, and interested parties on the staff of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. Advice received from these various, interested sources has been incorporated into the new admission requirement [reference to brochure on new admission standards -- available to teachers here at the UEA convention].

Please note that these recommendations do not impose a grade point average beyond satisfactory completion of the required course of study in high school (2.0 or better), do not impose a minimum ACT score as a condition of admission, and do not fix an enrollment ceiling at the University. They do, however, define what the University means as a qualified or a prepared student and assure that such students will be admitted. Students who meet these course requirements will not only be enrolled in the University, but they should succeed here, thus reducing the rate of academic failure during the freshman year.



Moreover, properly prepared students at the University will permit a higher standard of classroom instruction, will allow University resources to be used for university-level work and will enable the State's high schools to counsel students in a more effective and definitive fashion than is presently possible. Most importantly, it will help students to prepare themselves for success at the University rather than their supposing that what they take in high school bears little relationship to what the University will expect of them with respect to study-habits, levels of performance and completed course work.

Thus, we believe the adoption of these admission requirements will materially improve the preparedness level of the University's entering freshman class, will increase rather than decrease real educational opportunity by informing students and their parents of the course of study that students should be pursuing if they intend to enroll at the University of Utah, will strengthen the position of the State's high schools as they counsel students into the more demanding courses rather than the less exacting ones, and will elevate the academic standards in both the high schools and the University. These changes will significantly enhance the quality of education that Utah's young people receive and, therefore, the career and personal benefits that will be afforded to them in a world badly in need of well educated rather than poorly educated citizens.

The University is keenly aware of its obligation to assist

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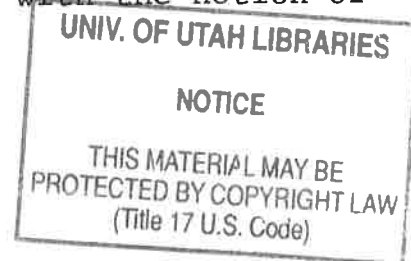
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Utah high schools in realizing the adjustments in their curricula and in their counseling and teaching resources that these changes will require. We have, therefore, initiated plans to develop arrangements and relationships with the high schools, the Office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Office of the Commissioner for Higher Education as may be necessary to assist in this effort (e.g., what summer offerings and financial assistance might be arranged by the University to facilitate the further education and preparation of teachers who wish to improve their existing competencies or who may wish to prepare themselves for certification in some other subject area?).

CONCLUSIONS

By way of conclusion, I wish to emphasize three issues that I believe are central to improvements in educational excellence in our schools--both here in Utah and nationally.

The first is that we as educators, whether it be at the elementary or university level, are in the position to set standards and levels of expectation in our schools. The concept of excellence assumes the existence of standards against which performance and achievement are judged to be excellent or not so excellent. Standards of excellence must necessarily be particularistic to the event or specific area of interest. In some areas, of course, there is little agreement about what the standards should be or about how best to define them and, hence, uneasiness with the notion of

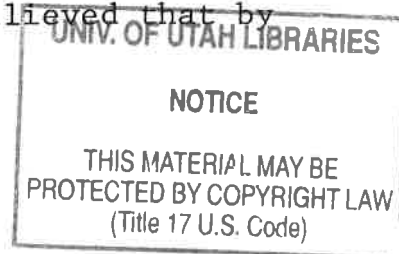


excellence itself. This difficulty, of course, should not deflect us from engaging standards as appropriate.

The importance of expectations for high standards, for students' ability to grow and achieve, and for a high sense of professionalism among faculty are continually reaffirmed in research studies on effective schools and teaching. I believe it vitally important that we as educators articulate standards and hold high expectations for individual effort and achievement.

A second issue of concern, and one that consistently enters any discussion of excellence in education, is that of elitism. There is a tendency for some to view a recommitment to excellence in education as elitist, intended only for those who aspire to a university education and consequently as hostile to the need for expanded educational opportunity for those historically underrepresented in our colleges and to the need for education and training in vocationally oriented institutions. Educational excellence and equality of opportunity are thus viewed as competing, almost mutually exclusive, with undue attention to the former being considered undemocratic and to the latter being considered too democratic.

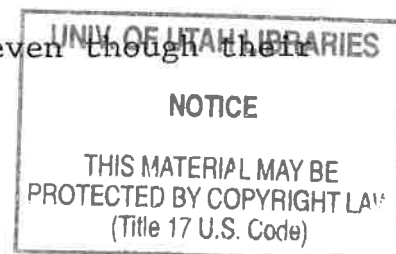
We do indeed have a long and cherished tradition of egalitarianism in our culture. In the 19th century, many foreign observers and even many Americans believed that by



its very nature, the United States was incapable of producing anything of real distinction. The British critic Matthew Arnold, for example, deplored the forces that worked against any kind of distinction in our national life and talked about the leveling process fostered by a democratic society. John Quincy Adams once said that art and literature would never flourish in the United States. He and others thought that art and literature were aristocratic in their nature and, thus, not achievable in a democracy, not even desirable perhaps.

We have been an ambitious nation in attempting to achieve both equality and excellence in our educational system as well as in other facets of our cultural and economic life. And, contrary to the pessimism expressed by our critics, the American educational system has long enjoyed a deserved reputation for both its egalitarian achievements and the excellence of its programs and products.

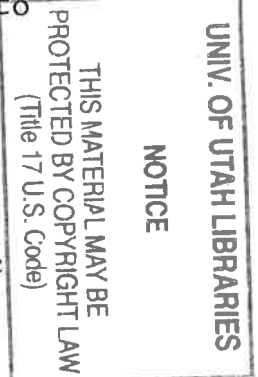
Our schools serve a much broader segment of the population as compared to other countries, yet we have produced, as a percentage of our larger student pool, as able and well-trained individuals as any nation on earth. Dr. Thorsten Husén of the Institute of International Education at the University of Stockholm, Sweden, recently testified before the National Commission on Excellence in Education and reported that the top nine percent of American students perform just as well on standardized achievement tests as the top nine percent in other industrialized countries, even though their



educational systems tend to be more "elitist" in their purposes, programs and selection of students than our own. Similarly, our colleges and universities, which admit a far larger proportion of 18-year-olds than other countries, produce exceptionally able students and are responsible for the graduate and research programs that are indisputably the best in the world.

It is not only a matter of our having possessed abundant material resources or a free society, or a representative form of government that has enabled us to seek for both equal opportunity and individual achievement simultaneously. It has also been our commitment to an educational philosophy, which differs from that held in most other parts of the world, that has been a major source of our nation's strength. I refer to the basic purposes of education, as expressed by John Dewey and others, which hold that the aim of education is to encourage individuals to live their lives to the fullest, to enable them to expand their horizons and to provide for both individual and societal growth.

This philosophy is at base egalitarian and democratic in that everyone, irrespective of race, social, or economic background, is believed to be capable of and, therefore, should be afforded an opportunity for, personal growth and an education responsive to each person's potential and promise. Such a view, although still more of an ideal than a reality, is in no respect inconsistent with fostering the achievement of excellence if one is willing, as I am, to accept a notion

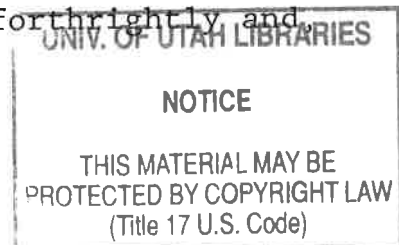


of excellence that John Gardner so many years ago and with such understanding and insight observed:

A conception (of excellence) which embraces many kinds of excellence at many levels is the only one which fully accords with the richly varied potentialities of mankind. . . . Our society cannot achieve greatness unless individuals at many levels of ability accept the need for high standards of performance and strive to achieve these standards within the limits possible to them. . . . The tone and fiber of our society depend upon a pervasive and almost universal striving for good performance. And we are not going to get that kind of striving . . . unless we can instruct the whole society in a conception of excellence that leaves room for everybody who is willing to strive. . . .

The views of Dewey and Gardner encompass the notion and value of rising standards of excellence for individual performance as well as a general level of enhanced societal accomplishment. It is in our best interest to encourage individuals to achieve new peaks or standards of excellence for it is in the defining of such excellence and the attainment of it by a few that the middle is pulled toward the upper reaches of their potential rather than permitted to slide toward the bottom.

Finally, I wish to conclude on a third point, viz., that teachers are at the heart of the educational process and central to any real change that will occur in our schools and colleges. Your aspirations, expectations, frustrations, and motivations are central in any consideration of educational policies and practices. This reality is inescapable and the National Commission will be addressing it forthrightly and



we earnestly hope, helpfully.

It is my opinion that the time is ripe for the schools, colleges and universities, working more closely and cooperatively than they are inherently wont to do, to tap the reservoir of public desire today that is crying out for educational programs that will truly prepare young people to succeed and to function effectively in our society. It is imperative that we as educators recognize that conditions are ripe for change and that our role is crucial in defining both the direction and content of the changes that demonstrably need to be made.

