

Faculty Control of University Teaching

Who is responsible for the quality of teaching in a university? Who is responsible for the trivia that clutters up our university catalogues? In this article Frederic Heimberger, Vice President for Instruction and Dean of Faculties at the Ohio State University, says that faculties have abdicated their responsibility for maintaining the quality of instruction and no longer have effective control over courses and curricula. The result is a vacuum that is rapidly becoming intolerable.

By FREDERIC HEIMBERGER

THERE is real danger at this moment that the traditional power of the faculty to govern teaching may soon be either a myth or a memory in many of our large, multi-purpose universities. This may seem incredible to most university professors, but there are clear signs of trouble ahead. While the warning cloud may be no larger than a man's hand just now, it is there and it is black enough to be cause for deep concern. Unless it is dissipated before too long, this gathering storm may eventually sweep away a major part of faculty responsibility in university affairs.

Serious questions are being raised with increasing insistence, not so much about the time-honored principle that those who know should determine what is taught as about the failure of many university faculties to keep their academic houses in order. While the voices of doubt and criticism may seem to be few and weak at this moment, they

are growing in number and authority. Moreover, the critics are likely to gain strength very rapidly once the bold few have weathered the first storm of outraged faculty reaction.

The hard fact is that discriminating and effective control over courses and curricula offered in the name of the governing faculty has already become something of a myth in at least a few of our huge and very complex universities. The memory may linger on but the substance is either gone or going fast. No one has wilfully taken away this vastly important part of academic authority. Instead, the university faculty as a unified governing body has simply abdicated by allowing its great power to fall into neglect and disuse. The result is a vacuum that is rapidly becoming intolerable—and that void will soon be filled in one way or another.

All that one needs to do to find proof of neglect and disuse is to turn to the catalogues of some of our larger universities. There he will find, presumably published with the full ap-

proval of the faculty, the titles and brief descriptions of courses numbering literally in the thousands. In content and quality these will range all the way from many demanding real effort and tough intellectual exercise to many others pitched at the level of those old favorites, "elementary basket weaving" or "personnel procedures for alligator farm managers." With but a few exceptions, all will be listed as acceptable for full credit toward the baccalaureate degrees that are supposed to mark successful completion of undergraduate higher education.

A further examination of university catalogues over the past decade or two will also reveal a substantial increase in the number of highly specialized and tightly prescribed curricula, each calling for more and more fragmentation of what can be taught and learned during the student's brief stay on the campus. In a good many of these narrowly limited degree programs, the critical reader will find that the broad and deep forest of learning as a continuing process of intellectual growth has been almost obscured by the countless trees of "practical" courses which are required, it is argued, to gain immediately useful goals. Furthermore, even the casual reader will easily see that this increase in the number of excessively narrow specialties, each demanding its full quota of "splinter" courses with low enrollments, often leads to an extravagant waste of the university's resources of money, facilities and, most vital of all, its men of learning.

As individuals, many faculty members are deeply concerned about this situation. They are quite aware of what has been happening, even within their own universities, and they don't like it one bit. Gathered for luncheon or cocktails, they often complain bitterly about the sad state of academic affairs—in the other fellow's college or department, of course. Sometimes they wonder why *somebody* doesn't do *something* about the puerile courses which are taught and accepted for full credit; or about needlessly wasteful and educationally unsound fragmentation of learning.

But most of these same professors who complain so bitterly fail to realize that, as members of the governing faculty, they must each accept a share of responsibility for the cheap and the



—Hanson Carroll.

“... an acceptance of individual responsibility born of jealous pride of membership in an honored profession . . .”

shoddy, for the unnecessary and the unsound. They also fail to see the possibly devastating effects of a kind of Gresham's Law upon the respect and confidence which they have earned and richly deserve because of the great body of their solid and truly significant teaching.

The few who fully realize this danger dread the thought of what fun a clever writer with a pen dipped in the acid of ridicule might have with the teaching programs of many of our larger universities. They all know too well what a price secondary school educators have paid in public esteem for their courses in "driver education," "marching band," and "life adjustment." They also know that like materials lie easily at hand in a good many catalogues of courses offered in the name of higher education.

There was a time when university faculties had little reason to worry about public scrutiny and possibly caustic criticism of their teaching programs. Off-campus concern was usually limited to the individual professor whose search for the truth led him along strange, and thus frightening, byways of speaking, writing, and teaching. But that time is rapidly passing and lay critics, in increasing numbers, are beginning to ask sharp questions about the whole of higher education—about its real and valid purposes, about the content and quality of teaching programs, and about the wise use of costly resources. Quite understandably, some of the sharper ones are also beginning to question the hitherto unquestioned authority of the faculty in matters related to courses and curricula.

It is high time for the faculties of our large, multi-purpose universities to realize that the spotlight of public attention which has been focussed on the secondary school is now beginning to swing toward the campus. A good many professors, standing in the shadows for the moment, have chuckled with glee at the sight of public school teachers and administrators squirming in the heat and glare. But their turn is coming very soon. In fact, more and more educational writers are beginning to say that teaching in our secondary schools, once bitterly attacked, has improved so greatly that the problems of content, quality, and effectiveness have now shifted to our colleges and universities.

One might hope that the primary motive for sharply increased concern about university teaching would be to re-establish valid purposes and methods in higher education. Thus stimulated, severe and even intemperate criticism might be welcomed by many faculty members who are appalled by what they see today. But, at least in the be-



—Luoma (Monkmeyer).

"The questions are those of purpose, quality, and effectiveness . . ."

ginning, the principal reason for increased attention and concern will probably be found more in dollar costs than in educational validity.

The people of America are going to get a rude jolt when hard facts can no longer be evaded and they must really face up to the costs of providing opportunities for the flood of students now passing through the secondary schools on their way to higher education. All colleges and universities, but particularly the very large tax-assisted ones, will be subjected to a degree of scrutiny that they have never known before. The management of university affairs will become everybody's business because it will strongly affect everybody's pocketbook.

This new and active public concern will almost surely find its origin in attempts to force all possible economies—to stretch the university dollar to its utmost limits. But, hopefully, other motives may soon gain equal importance. What will begin as an escapist's dream of a bargain basement may lead eventually to growing realization that the real questions are those of purpose, quality, and effectiveness in higher education—and that there simply must be a heavy and continuing investment in colleges and universities if the needs of America's future are to be fully met.

In the early stage, there will be strong public interest in such things as television and teaching machines. The primary purpose will not be the proper and commendable one of trying to improve instruction through the use of new techniques. Instead, it will be to find easy short cuts to lower costs. In fact, we are in this stage right now. To a great many people, the principal reason for mechanizing education is to spread the teacher over a greater number of students and thus increase his dollar efficiency.

But, at a somewhat higher level of

sophistication, some of the newly interested may soon be influenced by other concerns. In addition to the cost factor, they may begin to wonder whether the narrowly prescribed curricula of certain super-specialties are educationally sound for what ought to be an introduction to a lifetime of learning by the student himself. A daring few may even go so far as to question the need for taking the student's precious time and paying the university professor's salary in order to teach things that a reasonably intelligent young person with a fair ability to read English might be expected to learn on his own.

The process of public probing into what is taught on the campus is likely to increase in scope and intensity as time goes on. Carried far enough, it will almost surely prove to be a source of great embarrassment to some of our larger universities and, particularly, to their faculties. The severest critics will contend that faculties have clearly demonstrated that they are either unable or unwilling to take concerted action that is discriminating and decisive enough to prevent even glaring weakness and waste in university teaching. Thus, in their view, it is time to place responsibility elsewhere.

This is no wild dream of what may happen. It has already been suggested in all seriousness that, for their own good, university faculties should be relieved of responsibility for planning courses and curricula. This function would then be performed by curriculum specialists or administrative officers acting directly as agents of the governing board. The proposal has been made more palatable for the faculty by a sugar coating that is ankle deep. The money saved by a more "businesslike" use of teaching resources would make possible a very substantial increase in professorial salaries.

Another proposal is to allow the initiative for planning teaching programs to remain with appropriate faculty agencies, but to vest the final power to decide in a financial officer of the central administration. It is not too difficult to see where this kind of dollar decision-making would lead. Courses would be planned and perhaps taught with one eye turned always toward the long shadow of a possible administrative veto based upon cost accounting. It would be naïve not to realize that, while faculty control of university teaching might seem to remain, the hard substance of full and final power would no longer exist—that former reality would have become a myth.

The hour is late, but there is still
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—*Black Star.*

"Any eleven-year-old who can identify the players on the major league teams should have no difficulty with the states."

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO GEOGRAPHY?

By ROBERT N. SVELAND,
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NO ONE has yet written a book about why Johnny can't learn geography. But sooner or later someone may because there is a good deal of evidence that Johnny doesn't.

Perhaps the student of a generation ago who could rattle off the names of the forty-eight states and their capitals didn't really know much more geography than today's students, but he could make a better show of knowledge. And there is little doubt that geography as a separate study with meaning and value of its own has largely been lost in the uneasy amalgam of academic subjects known as the social studies.

The social studies include history, economics, sociology, political science,

and psychology. Geography is unique in that, while often classified as a social study, it also deals with the composition and forces of nature and so is closely allied to the natural sciences. Thus it has a particularly vital role in bridging the gap between the natural sciences and the social sciences.

If geography is only partly in the social sciences, why has it been integrated into the social studies curriculum? The reason given by educators is that geography and history overlap. For example, the study of early civilizations includes a study of Egypt. Geography also is concerned with the study of Egypt. Why not, it is argued, study the geography and history of Egypt at the same time? This saves time and permits the building of many meaningful relationships because geography obviously influences the course

of history. Why not learn about the natural environment through stories about the explorers and settlers who first visited a land?

THIS argument is convincing in theory but what are the results in practice? One result is that less time is spent on *either* geography or history. In Baltimore, for example, geography and history were taught as separate subjects in the junior high schools prior to 1953. Nine periods a week were devoted to these subjects. Class periods were forty minutes in length, which meant that 360 minutes, or six hours, a week were given over to these two subjects. When the integrated social studies curriculum was installed, the class periods were lengthened to fifty minutes, and six periods a week were utilized for social studies instruction.