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PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION AND THE LAND-GRANT SYSTEM

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The fundamental concepts and philosophies of universities are a subject of constant debate. It has always been so, and the reasons for different points of view are largely inherent in the nature of a university. The chief characteristics that distinguish a university from other institutions are its emphasis upon and capability to undertake creative research and original scholarship, to apply the results of its research to instruction and to problem solving, and to increase the number of people capable of doing both in the future.

Since a university is characterized by a commitment to the discovery of truth, and since research plays an important part in its functions, a university also should be a dynamic institution which is constantly changing in order to accommodate new knowledge. Our conception of the goals and objectives of a university also is subject to continuous revision, particularly for public universities.

Scholars began seriously exploring the goals of American institutions of higher learning as early as 1800. A Yale faculty report in 1820 took a highly introspective view of higher education. It advocated an "ivory tower" orientation that emphasized intellectual discipline and a "furnishing of the mind," and gave little consideration to conditions affecting a university from the outside world and little or no consideration to how the university affected the world. This view had the support of such outstanding leaders in higher education as England's John Cardinal Newman, whose words in *The Idea of a University* still inspire us when we consider the power of the intellect and the value of knowledge for its own sake.

One of the first major assaults on this conception of classical education was launched by Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard, who introduced an elective system into the curriculum in order that students could choose alternatives to the classical subjects, alternatives which could be useful to them in their lives and professional careers.

This early conflict in higher education, the pragmatic and utilitarian orientation versus intellectual development as an end in itself,

continued in full force throughout the 19th century. It began to intensify in the early 1900s when Americans who studied in German universities came home to advocate a new scientific research emphasis in American institutions.

Meanwhile, as scholarly voices debated the epistemological and utilitarian schools of thought, certain forces in society began to press in on the universities, and particularly the public universities. As the public investment in universities increased, the public demanded greater access to their services. This demand required that universities be useful to society as a whole, as well as to their students. This demand gained momentum early in Wisconsin, where research was emphasized as a means for achieving social and economic objectives. This emphasis was unprecedented and greatly broadened the service perspectives of Land-Grant universities. We are all familiar with the University of Wisconsin's pronouncement that the boundaries of the university extended to the boundaries of the state. Even that pronouncement proved to be too restrictive.

With the conclusion of World War II, organized higher education was shaken by revolutionary forces that had no parallel in the history of higher learning. Predominant philosophies shifted in emphasis from classical studies to studies of the knowledge and technology needed to cope with problems facing humanity on a global scale. Pure and applied sciences came to the fore, and the practical application of research provided a powerful stimulus for a continuing explosion of knowledge. These forces were so powerful and so pervasive that they gave a strong thrust to research in both public and private institutions, and generated a new sense of appreciation (especially in the major private universities) of the utility of knowledge and the value of extending it to the public.

The emphasis upon research and education was so great that what Machlup called "the knowledge industry" was created with ramifications which have extended to every aspect of American life and indeed to human life throughout the earth. When it became recognized that knowledge could be pursued as a resource, and that it could be expanded indefinitely through the commitment of our intellectual capacities, public investment in the generation of knowledge increased geometrically.

During the 1960s university research and education programs expanded rapidly, and expectations of the public accelerated even more rapidly. Under these conditions it was inevitable that disillusionment would occur and that questions would be raised about the value of these programs and activities. Indeed, for the past decade there has been a strong and growing conviction that the search for truth is not enough.

Currently, there is a widespread view that unless the knowledge which is acquired through research is transmitted and used it will become sterile, a belief that accompanying the obligation of the

university to seek new knowledge is a responsibility to present this knowledge to society in a manner that enables the people and the government to relate the findings of research to existing knowledge. Only in this way can the new knowledge be judged relative to the needs of the people. The university, therefore, is expected to be timely as well as timeless. It accumulates the knowledge of the past and it also is expected to draw upon that knowledge in the present and to place it in the context of present and future problems.

The universities must develop an appropriate educational response to policy matters of public concern. There is little doubt that the universities have become one of the active shapers of society. While the education system of a nation grows out of its culture, the education of the people of a nation also enters into the modification and renewal of the culture.

It is important for us to recognize that the characteristics of our society are changing rapidly, and that our universities must change if they are to fulfill societal expectations. This, of course, is not to say that the university must mirror the society or that it must necessarily change in the same direction as society. The university, however, is a social institution and if it is to relate to social needs it must take cognizance of the changes in those needs and respond appropriately.

The growing dependence of our society upon research and upon new knowledge is in itself a matter of great significance to the universities. Since the universities are the major source of basic research and patentable ideas, they themselves are a source of much of the dynamism of society and, therefore, bear a responsibility for helping the people to understand and cope with it.

Public policy education is assuming a more important role in our society as the nature of our economy changes. In addition to the growing dependence of our economy upon research, other major and related changes include a decline in self-sufficiency and a concomitant growing specialization of function among economic units and nations and, therefore, a growing economic interdependence among nations. During the current decade, as shortages of key resources have emerged and as government has been forced to assume a greater role in domestic and international markets, we have seen these changes accelerate. No national economy is likely to be self-sufficient in the 21st century. Indeed, in the recent actions of China we have seen a recognition of the facts that education is a key factor in the development of a nation and that national economic self-sufficiency is a policy which cannot be followed indefinitely.

As public policy becomes more directly influential in our lives, public policy education becomes increasingly important to us. This fact should be recognized by the Land-Grant universities, and public policy education should be assigned a higher priority.

It must be recognized, however, that meaningful educational programs in public policy cannot be conducted without confronting controversial questions. The very essence of public policy involves conflict, compromise, and consent. The development of public policy involves values concerning what is good and bad and how society should be structured and operated. Obviously, these ideas are deep-seated, conflicting and powerful. Moreover, the hierarchy of valuations differs among individuals. Consequently, given the same data, analyses, and scientific conclusions, individuals and groups may arrive at different decisions with regard to the most desirable public policies.

Indeed, the existence of these conflicts, inherent within the nature of public policymaking, attests to the need for public policy education. The public policy specialist must deal with conflicts in ideas. The resolution of conflicts between ideas is a fundamental part of our education. Intellectual integrity demands that we challenge existing knowledge and prevailing ideas with new knowledge and different ideas. In a democratic framework, the merit of ideas is tested by bringing them into conflict with others so that the conflicts can be identified and resolved. In this process, beliefs with respect to facts may be challenged and subsequently rejected or confirmed. When this happens, valuations based upon the rejected beliefs are undermined and may be discarded. Valuations based upon those confirmed are thus strengthened. Thus, in some instances research and education may lead to a reconciliation of differences in valuations.

Even so, generally it will not be possible to reconcile differences in valuations and to arrive at a consensus with respect to public policies. Seldom, if ever, is opinion on policies unanimous. In our society, public policy is made possible by the fact that those in the minority consent to abide by the will of the majority in the hope that they themselves can eventually acquire a majority.

While the universities have a definite responsibility for helping to educate the public on matters of public policy, there is little to be gained by becoming embroiled in the heated controversies of the day. The responsibility for education requires that the programs of the universities be forward looking. They must anticipate the important needs of the people in order to be in a position to provide relevant information for solving problems when the need arises.

Researchers and educators, therefore, can neither be content with repeated involvement in controversy, nor with analyzing current problems. The extent to which problems can be anticipated — and their consequences analyzed and alternative solutions weighed — before the problems become serious is a definite measure of the effectiveness of educational programs, particularly those in the public policy arena.

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The objective of university-sponsored public policy programs is, and must remain, that of education — the generation of knowledge and the development of understanding. The unique contribution of universities is to develop knowledge and understanding.

As a center of learning, the university is dedicated to searching for truth and making knowledge accessible to people. Its mission is to develop the intellect of people while only indirectly developing the society. The value of a university rests in the fact that it produces and tests ideas. By its nature, therefore, the university seeks to impart a questioning and challenging attitude. In such an institution, tolerance is much more appropriate than advocacy. The university, therefore, is by its nature, better equipped to serve as a social critic than as a guide to social progress.

The universities learned from the experiences of the late 1960's and early 1970's the difficulty of maintaining a strict educational posture with respect to matters of current public policy. On many university campuses, groups of students, faculty and staff vigorously sought to use the university for political advantage. Most universities, however, were quick to see that the area of public policy was so controversial that they could not defend academic freedom — freedom of intellect, speech, and action — and at the same time make specific recommendations to people with regard to the positions they should take on public policy issues. Above all, the universities desired — and found it necessary to maintain — an environment conducive to free and independent inquiry if they were to perform the research and educational roles expected of them. Obviously, this was impossible if they should become partisan in matters of public policy.

While it is true that the area of public policy is fraught with controversy, it is equally true that universities cannot afford to shirk their responsibilities in the development of strong and effective programs in this area. When the people of the nation vested in the publicly-supported universities authority for free and independent inquiry, they vested in these institutions the public trust to cope with public policy questions. They expect the universities to serve as intellectual institutions where deep-seated and conflicting points of view are expressed and debated.

On the other hand, the universities are expected neither to advocate, make, nor administer public policy. They are expected to help people to understand the society in which they live, analyze problems which develop in it, and to evaluate alternative means of coping with these problems.

In our society, pressure groups, organizations, and citizens, as a whole, make ultimate decisions on policy matters by voting in referenda, selecting and electing candidates, developing platforms, and exercising their voices through representatives. Nevertheless, only those who are aware of the issues, the alternatives, and their consequences are in a position to make intelligent decisions. It is

the responsibility of the educational institutions to create this understanding. To fail in the development of strong educational programs in public policy is to leave the uninformed to the mercy of those who would tell them what to do. Decision by arbitrary decree, with illiterate acquiescence, most certainly is not appropriate in a society in which the individual is expected to make rational decisions with respect to public policy issues.

In a free and open society, an unrestricted and continuous flow of information is an essential prerequisite to citizen awareness of issues and citizen participation in the democratic processes. However, such a flow of information is not automatically achieved. It must be pursued resolutely and protected vigorously. The research and adult education programs conducted by universities and by other institutions will assume even greater importance in their educational responsibilities in our society in the future.

The acceptance of these responsibilities by the universities, and the effectiveness with which they are discharged, may well determine whether the great social experiment which we have come to know as American democracy will reach the state of maturity and fruition which it so richly deserves.