

PREPARING FOR THE MILLENNIUM

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In 1967, together with twenty some other educators and national leaders from the public sector, I became a member of the Carnegie Commission on the Future of Higher Education. Six years and six million dollars later, in 1973, we published our final report. That same year we also published another report: The Purposes and the Performances of Higher Education in the United States: Approaching the Year 2000.

One would have thought after about a hundred studies and reports -- a veritable bookshelf of white jacketed books -- that there was little left to study or report upon. However, our genial Chairman, Clark Kerr of Berkeley, could still discern a few problems, so a successor body was commissioned under his Chairmanship, The Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education. Seven years later, in 1980, their final report was issued on the next twenty years for higher education. It was entitled, Three Thousand Futures.

For those of us engaged lifelong in higher education, it does focus our attention on the coming millennium by giving, in the first

chapters, thirteen fairly obvious reasons for gloom and doom to come. These are immediately countered with fifteen reasons for hope. At least hope wins out numerically over gloom and doom, but only narrowly. One has the impression that the report strained a little to tip the balance.

The rest of the report, plus a very thick appendix, attempts to prepare all of us for what we might expect realistically in the field of higher education before the millennium arrives. We are told that there is no compelling reason for either panic or euphoria, that what is most certain is that the next twenty years -- eighteen now -- are full of uncertainty, that higher education's recent problem of managing growth, has suddenly become a much more troublesome and difficult problem of managing retrenchment, and, finally, that the last three decades of full steam ahead through clear seas to wide open horizons now are to be followed by two decades of avoiding shipwreck and planning survival.

The report is clear on several salient points:

- 1) There is not one future, but three thousand futures for higher education, that being roughly the number of individual institutions and the title of the report. Each institution must study itself and prepare for its own future. No one will do that for us.

- 2) Among the uncertainties, there are certain facts, for example, the students who will people our institutions in the year 2000 are already born and compared to the present age cohort, there are 23.3% less of them. Since students are the life blood of our

institutions -- the public ones because they are generally funded per capita, and we in the private sector since we operate mainly on tuition income -- it does not require a prophet to discern the anguishes that this situation will engender. When the food is scarce, the many hungry natives really do get restless -- nothing like hunger to focus attention and overstimulate competition -- even among colleagues.

3) Another fact: more than half of the current faculties in higher education were appointed in the '60s and '70s. Since about three quarters of them are on tenure, nationwide, they will presumably be holding down the only available faculty positions until the millennium. Again, no need to speculate about what this implies for women and minorities (most of the current faculties across the land are white men). We can also easily imagine what it means for junior faculty competing for tenure, what it could mean for young intellectuals, especially in the humanities, who are seeking Ph.D.s for teaching posts that do not exist. Finally, and here I simply paraphrase the report, imagine what it will mean to have an aging and aged faculty (not to mention administrators!) who are not being stretched by younger colleague competition, who, finally have few if any other positions available in academe for which they might otherwise compete and into which they might grow.

4) Then there are the uncertainties: such as, which institutions get the fewer available students, which colleges or departments within institutions? What happens to the normal academic dreams of new programs and new facilities in the face of diminishing

financial support from the federal and state government, already a fact, or from donors who now have their own new financial problems? What happens to the young scientist who can no longer be placed in a university laboratory where alone he can associate freely with his mentors and in the past be financed by government grants, to do that basic research which has made America unique? An aside: how economically productive and competitive will America be in the world of the future without this basic research which universities have largely provided in the past? Young scientists may be employed elsewhere, mainly in industry to do applied research, but they will not grow and become the next generation of teacher-researchers on the endless frontier of science and technology. One can, of course, make the same case for young engineers in the university. In the frontier days of extreme hardship it was called: "eating your seed corn."

5) If future financing during a potential downturn in higher education is still in the realm of uncertainty, there is no uncertainty about what happens in higher education when financing shrinks and inflation grows. A whole series of things happen: positions are vacated without replacement and salaries presently paid get frozen or reduced; maintenance is deferred, which means who pay ten times more later to replace the whole roof for not having fixed the leak; laboratory equipment becomes not one, but two or three generations obsolete; library resources are cut, books are not bought, and periodical subscriptions are cancelled; computing facilities shrink or become outdated or both; programs without sufficient students or strength are cancelled and with them, attending

faculty, even though tenured; new promising programs are simply shelved for a better day, new opportunities lost for decades; faculty development, books and travel, sabbaticals and important conferences, secretarial help and fringe benefits, all look relatively unimportant in the face of survival. Many go overboard, some at first, some later.

I could go on with this list, but it is depressing and I think enough is enough to get the general idea of what could happen in the two decades to come. For all of you who read the educational journals, all of this will come as no surprise because there is not one thing I have mentioned that it not happening now, somewhere in higher education. In more than 100 institutions, it happened all at once in the past decade. They simply went out of existence. They are no more.

The Carnegie report also predicts that an unknown number of presently existing institutions of higher education (some mention the figure 200) are unlikely to be around to usher in the new millennium. In a somewhat cruel and yet realistic fashion, the report implies that these unlucky ones deserve their fate, mainly because they will react in a short term manner to long term (at least two decades long) problems, they will not analyze their particular situation and take corrective action, they will attract few students, they are already educationally weak and behind the times, their faculties are the reason for the weakness of the curriculum, and the lowering of standards because they, too, are already weak and try to attract weak students. Anyway, the report says, in general, that the weak institutions will get weaker and die, and that they will not be missed, and that higher education may well be better off without them.

That is a sad requiem, not entirely true I'm sure, but probably mainly so.

I am moved to say at this point, so much for the bad news as we march towards the millennium.

The good news can be put in promising capsule form and it is both a wish and a possibility. It goes: the strong institutions might just get stronger, not by growing externally, but by pursuing frugality, integrity, and quality internally. It will require a good deal of analysis by all parts of the University to be sure of the facts and to predict, as far as possible, the general uncertainties as they will or will not apply. This will call for leadership and understanding on all levels of the strong university, cooperation of all in applying stringent solutions instead of competing for scarce turf. The common good of the institution must once more be the guiding star. There must be hope, morale, pride, imagination, wisdom, and so many other great qualities at work together in both faculty and administration. Fundamentally, all must believe that in a time of potential disaster, their institution can and will not only survive -- as Faulkner put it in accepting the Nobel Prize -- but prevail. The university will get stronger even if not larger, it will augment quality in ways not thinkable in easier halcyon days. It will do all this, or it will not survive, at least not as a strong university with a future.

The report outlines, towards the end, ten hard choices that individual universities and colleges must make for themselves, at whatever cost, during the next two decades, but the sooner, the better. I will briefly review them, as they summarize the whole report.

1. Quality. This is central to the whole endeavor and should be the focal point to be emphasized and not compromised in any and all academic adjustments during the present time of crisis.

2. Balance. This means in a word that each university must decide what are its special priorities among all the possible academic programs available.

3. Integrity. If we are to deserve widespread support from our constituency, we must be, as best we are able, without fudging, that which we profess to be, a great Catholic university. Integrity also speaks to the inner life of the institution -- what we really stand for, and what against, not only institutionally, but in our personal lives as faculty, administrators, and students.

4. Adaptation. This means that we do not sell our birth-right while planning to survive, grow, and become better, even in difficult times.

5. Dynamism. This means that we have to be lively and inventive enough to do with confidence and vigor what must be done -- to grow inwardly while now growing outwardly, to be able to substitute this for that, if this is better.

6. Effective use of resources. This speaks primarily to the money available, but also to the people. Faculty productivity in the United States has been unchanged in the past fifty years. There may be innovative ways of doing more with less, such as using the new technologies and arranging our working patterns somewhat differently. At least, it is worth a look, although one's initial reaction is usually to maintain rigidly the status quo. It has been

reasonably reported, for example, that the quality of teaching is more related to the approach of the teacher than to the size of the class. Obviously, some classes must be small and others can be larger. The savings involved in knowing the difference, and doing something about it without affecting quality, are tremendous. Also involved here is the needless proliferation of courses, especially those that attract very few students and contribute little to an integrated education. Clark Kerr once said that every university has at least twice the number of courses as teachers, representing for each, one they wanted to teach and one they had to teach. That may sound cynical, but it is not far from the mark.

7. Financing. The report warns us not to expect more, even probably less, federal financing, although we might guide the effectiveness of the support available -- for example, financial assistance preferably for able, but indigent students or for basic rather than applied research. If we are doing something unique, necessary, difficult yet promising, we will be supported no matter what the cost.

8. Leadership. Since I am here speaking of myself (the report does ask for more presidential power, or at least, for fewer roadblocks and veto bodies), as well as speaking for provosts, deans, directors, and department chairmen, may I just for once quote the report:

"A period such as that ahead does not readily attract the ablest leadership -- the tasks are grinding ones, the victories too often take the form of greater losses avoided, the constituencies are more likely to be united around doing nothing than doing something."



"The problem of administration (they here quote Ken Boulding) becomes more difficult and the quality of leadership is likely to decline, and the new skills required call for an 'all to rare mixture of compassion and realism.'"

I can assure you from past experience that this mixture of compassion and realism is rare, because humanly difficult to pull off and then try to explain to oneself and others.

9. How best to preserve the private sector of higher education which in 25 years has gone from 50-50 public-private share of students to 80-20 today. All agree that we in the private sector are what makes American higher education unique in all the world, but how small a percentage can we become without losing that uniqueness or effectiveness.

10. Basic research. I have spoken on this subject earlier.

These ten are all listed as hard choices. The report adds that no choice is the worst choice.

Beyond these ten hard choices, even more important than most of them, is the inner quality of life on the campus. Who can calculate the value of a caring community, a vibrant spirit of teaching and learning, a coming of age in an atmosphere that bespeaks goodness, truth, and beauty and entices young people to embrace them. Who can put a price on the value of younger and older people sharing dreams, working together for the less fortunate, planning a better world and preparing to help it be born, and espousing great causes with courage and integrity.

One cannot really define the elan that makes an institution more noble, more promising, more effective than another. But one senses it when it is in the atmosphere; it is present in the tone and the spirit of the place.