Impressions About Higher Education

by

Morris Norfleet
Associate Project Director
for the
National Commission on the Future
of
State Colleges and Universities

American Association of State Colleges and Universities
One Dupont Circle
Washington, D.C.
As part of my work with the National Commission on the Future of State Colleges and Universities, I have been doing a study on "Planning for Change and the Change Process in Higher Education." This study was designed on a personal interview basis to elicit responses to questions on the topic. My general impressions about higher education on various campuses are the result of my interviews with college administrators and faculty members, the majority of whom were top administrators within their respective institutions. As well as getting new impressions, the procedure enabled the researcher to verify existing impressions held as a result of prior work in the field.

These impressions are not new or startling, but they come from a cross-section of the administrative hierarchy of state colleges and universities and may be worth sharing. Each impression shall be dealt with in turn.

One and two year programs. This group may well become the bastard and/or favorite son of state colleges and universities. There is mixed reaction to this entire concept, as voiced by presidents and academic officials. Presidents want to move in this direction because of increased enrollment and the possibility of outside support to start such programs, i.e., programs in the allied health field. They see this also as a dramatic way in which the university can provide a service to its region through self-supporting programs.
The academic officers are less optimistic about one and two year programs, and say the faculty will not accept them as a part of higher education. The academic dean, instead of the faculty, was most negative about these programs.

Frequent disagreement on this type of program was found on the same campus, when in fact, administrators thought they were in agreement.

Institutional Long Range Planning. By and large, long range planning in the past has been done by an architect who developed a "master plan" for physical plant development covering a five to ten-year period. Very little input has been made by academia into these physical plant plans.

Only recently has any total long range planning been done by academia. This has been at the insistence of the state coordinating bodies of higher education. These plans take the form of Role and Scope studies and do not really provide an operational plan which can be followed by the administration of the university.

There is a definite felt need for this type of planning, but because of the lack of experience and personnel to do the job, frustration reigns supreme.

Lack of direction from the state coordinating body and indecisiveness as to what is to be done and when, further confuses the issue.

In most instances long range planning or Role and Scope studies have been completed by ad hoc committees with little planned follow-up.
Institutional Research. I think I could make a good study showing there is a high degree of correlation between planning for change and the presence and effectiveness of an office of Institutional Research. At many institutions, the Office of Institutional Research is seen as an additional administrative post and cannot be afforded. Yet this office should be in a very vital position to provide data for decision making by the administration.

In cases where there is such an office, in all too many situations, its time and energy are so divided that it is impossible to do an effective job. The responsibility of coordinating the federal programs is often the task of this office and because of the visible dollars brought in as a result of this endeavor, it tends to take top priority on time.

Outside agencies — (councils or commissions of higher education, state budget bureaus, accrediting agencies, etc.) are going to control — if they haven't already — and establish the direction of higher education in the future unless immediate steps are taken by the leadership in higher education.

The degree of take-over of the control of higher education varies from state to state and depends on the presence and tenure of a state coordinating body. It is probably a misnomer to call these coordinating bodies. If they aren't already governing or controlling bodies, they are rapidly moving in that direction.
This move is being perpetuated by many forces. Public sentiment against higher education, reflected by state legislatures, is taking the form of punitive legislation toward higher education. Another force is the state council or commission's thirst for power. These bodies have been struggling for identity and a place in the hierarchy, and they are using the immediate public reaction against higher education as the time to move in. Budget restrictions and allocation of scarce resources have forced more internal analysis at each institution and working out budget plans cooperatively has taken away some autonomy in budget making.

With the loss of autonomy in budget making, other areas within academia lost ground. Probably the saddest cause of loss of autonomy is the fact that institutions lack clearly defined goals and adequate measures of accomplishment, leading outside agencies to get in the act of setting goals for them.

Coordinating or controlling bodies are usually given their power by acts of legislature and there has been great difficulty in translating legislated mandates into a workable plan. Objectives and meaningful management plans have not been developed into a format that can be communicated to the institutions of higher education. This places the coordinating body at the mercy of political forces and causes a brush fire type of operation. Consequently, confusion, frustration and near chaos tend to develop.

In many instances, legislative bodies created councils but failed to appropriate adequate funds to develop a visible unit to administer the plan. Even when money is available to hire personnel, the salaries of these positions are often tied to an antiquated state salary system which prohibits hiring the most
competent people. As a result, the most competent people cannot be employed and those who are never succeed in gaining the respect of academia. Working and reacting to these bodies will require a new type of academic statesmanship.

**Communications.** There is a glaring void in the necessary internal communications systems of higher education institutions. The catastrophe is that administrators think they are doing a great job in this area. Yet the president has often neglected to establish a mechanism for conveying his world as president (rapidly becoming an external officer) to his academic community or to internal campus offices. There is disagreement over the goals of the university. Some disagreements are major, but administrators still feel that all has been communicated.

Faculty are disenchanted because they hear from the top relating to goals and how these are to be attained. They hear about the cut in the budgets but not about the reasons for the cut.

Frequently, they hear derogatory remarks about them from top administrative officials. All this has tended to widen the gap between faculty and administration.

**External Communications.** The image of higher education is tainted and badly soiled. The image began to shred when the old land-grant institutions, striving for academic status, began to move away from the people they were charged to serve. Their constituency was confused and frustrated by this move, but tolerated the trend because of the inalienable right vested in the ivory towers.
Movement toward humanization of education and a concern for relevancy brought new questions to the minds of many who had gone through the system, and gained momentum during the 1965-1968 period. There was a very evident and visible trend toward a quest for quality education.

What did most higher education public relations personnel do? They continued to grind out stories extolling the glorious achievements on the gridiron and the blistering pace set on the hardwood as the little round ball swished through the net. Now that we are faced with the need for a viable image, there is great dissension within the camp as to what the image should be or how to achieve it.

Role, Scope and Purpose. There is little unanimity of concept as to the role, scope and purpose of state colleges and universities and little evidence that a major move is underway to establish these concepts.

During the course of the interview situation these questions were asked, "How has the role of your institution changed during the past five years?" and "What changes do you hope take place in the role of your institution during the next five years?"

It was amazing to find the drastic dichotomy of thoughts on this point among top administrators within the same institution. For example, the President of one university said they planned to implement one- and two-year programs as rapidly as possible. The Academic Vice President and many department heads said they didn't foresee the development of any one- and two-year programs in the next five to ten years. Although there had been little discussion of this question on the campuses, it was very evident from talking to each individual that he thought everyone was in agreement with him on the future of one- and two-year programs in the institution.
Because of the divergent characteristics of the faculty, a concerted effort should be developed to achieve unanimity of opinion on the campuses of state colleges and universities. One finds the younger Ph.D.s striving to remold the college or university into the type of institution from which he graduated. The second faculty body is composed of those who have been at the institution during its formative years and still see it as a teacher's college, while a third group could care less. But hope remains in the fourth group -- those who talk about goals and behavioral objectives and are struggling against great odds to study the institution and determine its direction.

Administrative Structures. The administrative structures in all too many cases are "hold overs" from the days when the problems were less complex. The responsibility for decision making, with an inadequate data input system, rests in the hands of far too few people.

The president is still trying to fulfill the same role and carry the same responsibility he carried ten years ago. This will send many to an early grave. There needs to be considerable study done on the role of a president in the emerging university, an institution which makes his role different from that of any other type of chief administrative officer.

Academic Revitalization. The failure of academia to respond to needed changes in curriculum revitalization and improved quality in teaching is of great concern to all university presidents, who are seemingly more aware of the problems in academia than the academic deans or department heads. It appears that all the faculty is really concerned about is a reduced teaching load, academic rank
The president is encountering demands for change in academia from both students and outside forces such as the alumni and employing agencies. The present press for accountability could be an additional cause for the president's desire to reform; he sees the possible tie the state coordinating body will make between budget decisions and performance.

Change in Higher Education. Since change will be handled more extensively in another paper, little attention will be given to the matter here — except to say that change in higher education results from external forces and from internal planning.

Research in Higher Education. Even though the money available for research purposes is dwindling, the research function of a university is still felt very strongly in the form of applied research with findings applied either in the classroom or in a community service project. The professor envisions sharing his research learning experience with his students, involving them in his academic growth and thus, in turn, creating a healthy learning environment.

Service in Higher Education. It is projected that service will take on a much more important role in state colleges and universities. In many institutions service has been directly mainly toward the teaching profession. Now, however, it is taking on a multifaceted nature involving other segments of the university service region.

The feeling is that university students should be involved with professors in community service work to provide an additional dimension to the classroom situation. Theory can be readily put into practice by this type of arrangement, although budgeting for this service will be difficult and will have to be built into the total
load of the professor.

**Involvement of Outside Groups in Educational Planning.** It is apparent that there will be a rapid trend to appointing advisory bodies to work with different components of the academic community. Advisory boards consisting of business men, industrial leaders, etc., for example, will work with the professors in business administration and recommend the type of experience and training young graduates should have before taking a job. It is visualized that this will be extensively development in many areas. The unspoken reasons for this may be to serve as a communications device to gain support for higher education and to bring about curriculum reform.

**Relationship to Community Colleges and Graduate Institutions.** The state colleges and universities are finding themselves with an identity problem in a never-never land. They are not community colleges, even though some four-year institutions have developed community college programs within their framework. They are not land-grant or private graduate type institutions. They are designed to serve a different function, but this has not been accepted in concept nor identified in concrete terms.

Some institutions are thinking about dropping the first two years of their programming and depending on the community colleges to provide undergraduate education for students who will eventually transfer to the state four-year institutions. Therefore, more emphasis will be placed upon expanding the graduate programs through the doctorate program. Others are developing rather extensive one- and two-year programs, to compete with the community colleges for students desiring a terminal degree.
The state colleges and universities should take immediate steps to determine how they can and should relate to the other types of institutions within their service regions and develop coordinated activities. Specific educational functions not being met by the other institutions should be identified and evaluated to determine the advisability of including them in the role, purpose and scope of the state college and university.

There is much to be said for certain types of one and two-year programs offered by four year institutions -- their faculty can focus greater depth upon these terminal programs. Also, there is more possibility in four year institutions of developing re-entry points for graduates of terminal programs to continue their education beyond their original efforts.

**Faculty Development.** As was indicated earlier, there are four classifications of faculty members. These could improve the quality of instruction because of diversity of expertise they bring together on one campus. Lack of consensus as to what the foci of the state college or university should be, however, tends to waste faculty capabilities. There is a need for a continued faculty in-service program, developed by the faculty and based upon their identified needs which would enable them to do a better teaching job with the type of student attending a state college and university.

There is very little current effort directed in an organized, constructive manner to enable faculty self-improvement beyond attending professional meetings which tend to be content oriented instead of technique based.
Who Speaks for State Colleges and Universities? The constituency of state colleges and universities is largely composed of teachers and administrators who haven't been noted for their vociferous or financial support of their alma maters. Most of the professionals who have graduated from state colleges and universities have their loyalty tied to the institution where they completed their professional degrees.

Most legislators are graduates of law schools and tend to support these institutions as well as the community colleges within their own political districts. Therefore, few remain to speak for state colleges and universities.

A new constituency can be developed through the community service role of these institutions and as a result of the work with business and industry of the region.

Summary

As I indicated early in the paper I have not listed many new and startling ideas. I have tried, however, to consolidate the many pieces of information gleaned from extensive interviews with university people who are concerned about these problems.