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ABSTRACT

The term elite university refers to that institution that attracts a student body of exceptional capacity or at least a large proportion of students of outstanding intellectual ability. The elite university is essentially a fragile institution, vulnerable to political pressures, research problems, financial needs, federal support, and enrollment trends. The survival of the elite university is necessary for the maintenance of the excellence of ideas essential not only for the development of science and technology, but also for the attainment of a more humane, just, and civilized society. In order to survive, the university must make a sustained effort to explain its mission to the people and their elected representatives.
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Can the Elite University Survive?

T.R. McCONNELL

Professor T.R. McConnell, founder and director of the Center until his retirement in 1968, was honored recently by the presentation of a festschrift in recognition of his contributions to education as teacher, scholar, and educational statesman. Upon that occasion, Professor McConnell gave a public lecture at the University of California entitled, "Can the Elite University Survive?". The Research Reporter is pleased to bring readers a shortened version of the McConnell lecture followed by brief excerpts from the festschrift containing the works of a few of his former doctoral students. With this special issue, The Research Reporter joins the thousands who throughout the years have found themselves appreciating and admiring "Mac"—the man and the scholar.*

Editor

The term elite university refers to that institution which attracts a student body of exceptional capacity or at least a large proportion of students of outstanding intellectual ability. To give this small group an education of exceptionally high quality is essential not only for the development of science and technology, but also for the attainment of a more humane, just, and civilized society. In explaining the necessity of high scholarship Sir Eric Ashby (1971) wrote:

All civilized countries . . . depend upon a thin clear stream of excellence to provide new ideas, new techniques, and the statesmanlike treatment of complex social and political problems. Without the renewal of this excellence, a nation can drop to mediocrity in a generation [p. 101].

The education of the ablest for high leadership is not an inexpensive mass production process. The education of the innovators in intellectual life and the pace setters in cultural and moral standards requires, declared Sir Eric (1973), "sustained dialectic with a master whose own intellectual and cultural achievements are distinguished. So, within the system of mass higher education, there must be opportunities for the intellect to be stretched to its capacity, the critical faculty sharpened to the point where it can change ideas, by close contact with men who are intellectual masters [pp. 15-16]."

The elite university, then, is an intellectual community; it is not a large-scale Esalen. However, in concentrating on ideas the university need not ignore values. One of the university's intellectual purposes, wrote Sir Eric (1973), is to carry it "from the uncritical acceptance of orthodoxy to creative dissent over the values and standards of society [p. 13]." All of us are frequently unaware of the values which implicitly shape not only our attitudes, but also our ideas. One of the principal purposes of education is to encourage the student to identify the values which unconsciously guide his behavior, to subject these values to critical appraisal, and to revise them in the light of their intellectual validity and their individual and social consequences. The purpose of learning is not to divorce it from feeling. Its proper intent is to subject emotion to intellectual discipline and to invest with commitment ideas and values that are rationally derived.

*A festschrift is a volume of learned essays contributed by students, colleagues, and admirers to honor a scholar on a special anniversary. This 300 page volume is available for \$5.00 from: Office of the Dean, School of Education, 1501 Tolman Hall, University of California, Berkeley, Ca., 94720.

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As an intellectual community, the elite university will be heavily engaged in research and will have a high proportion of doctoral students. Approximately one-fourth of all students enrolled in 1968 in institutions which granted the doctoral degree were in post-baccalaureate programs. The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education identified about 50 major research universities with heavy emphasis on doctoral studies. My own view is that these 50 major research and graduate universities should become, as they now are to a considerable degree, a network of national and international institutions which might appropriately be called elite universities. I shall return to this point later.

Appraisal of California's Differentiated System

In his recent history of the development of California's system of higher education, Smelser (1972) ascribed the evolution of postsecondary education to tension between values of competitive excellence and egalitarianism. California's method of reconciling these tensions, which never produced more than an uneasy truce, was to devise a three-tiered system in which the community colleges, the state colleges, and the University of California were assigned differential, and to some extent overlapping functions. These functions were set forth in the Master Plan of 1960. The legislation incorporating provisions of the Master Plan designated the University of California as "the primary state-supported academic agency for research", and as "the sole authority in public higher education to award the doctoral degree in all fields of learning." In addition, the University was given exclusive jurisdiction in public higher education over instruction in law, medicine, dentistry, veterinary medicine, and architecture. The legislation also provided that the University could offer instruction in the liberal arts and sciences and in other professions.

The legislation allocated to the state colleges the primary function of providing "instruction for undergraduate students and graduate students, through the Master's degree, in the liberal arts and sciences, in applied fields and in the professions." Finally, the public community colleges were authorized to offer instruction through the 14th grade, including standard collegiate courses, vocational and technical curricula, and general or liberal education.

The statutory definition of function, nevertheless, did not for long dampen the determination of some of the state colleges to join the university club. Stung by what they considered to be the second-class status to which the Master Plan relegated them, the colleges continued to strive to redress their deprivation by pressing for equivalent salary schedules, time and support for research, lower teaching loads, and designation as universi-

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ties. Finally, in 1971 the colleges succeeded in persuading the legislature to authorize the California Coordinating Council and the State College Board of Trustees in unison to designate particular colleges as state universities. The Governor, the legislature, and the Chancellor of the state college system all declared that in changing the name of the colleges there was no intention of changing the functions assigned to them in the Master Plan legislation. One can be fairly certain, however, that whatever the formal profession of adherence to stated differentials, the state universities and colleges will redouble their efforts to attain university status in organization and function as well as in name.

In spite of the efforts of the state colleges to change their role, the differentiated California system survived the sixties without serious impairment. The division of responsibilities among the three sectors has also survived the scrutiny of two investigatory committees appointed to review the Master Plan, a Select Committee created by the California Coordinating Council for Higher Education and a Joint Committee established by the state legislature. (The legislative committee has issued a draft report on which hearings are now being held and which may be revised later.) Both committees reaffirmed the principle of differentiated functions among the three sectors and carried forward the main lines of the distinction. Although the Legislative Committee reasserted the University's mission as "the primary state-supported agency for research," it qualified its reaffirmation by saying:

We are not convinced that every member of the University of California faculty should be funded at every point in his or her career as a half-time or more researcher. We believe the University should provide for the pursuit of excellence in both teaching and research There should be a place in the University for a variety of faculty roles and provisions for faculty to alternate roles at different stages of their careers.

The committee was more restrictive with respect to the second sector, saying:

We likewise reaffirm the vital teaching mission of the California state universities and colleges. The recent attainment of university status ought and does not imply any change in mission. We are alarmed to find publication requirements imposed upon faculty in some departments on some campuses as a condition of employment, promotion and tenure.

Although the Legislative Committee reported that it had experienced pressure for open admission to all three sectors, it recommended that the present differential standards for selection should be retained: the community colleges should continue to accept all high school graduates, which assures open access to the state system; the California state universities and colleges should admit freshmen from the upper third of high school graduates; and the University of California should select its freshmen from the highest eighth. However, after commenting on serious deficiencies in conventional methods of selection, the Committee mandated research and experimentation throughout the system on methods of identifying students most capable of profiting from instruction in the three sectors (Joint Committee on the Master Plan for Higher Education, 1973, pp. 61-62).

Elitism in Jeopardy

Since both committees appointed to appraise the Master Plan endorsed the broad outlines of a differentiated tripartite system, why should I have put the question, Can the elite university survive?

Fragility of the university

The first reason is that, despite its apparent durability, the university is a fragile organism. "The greatness that is Harvard and the glory that is Berkeley can perish in but a few years," wrote Nisbet (1971), "their presently celebrated degrees the objects of ridicule, their halls untenanted by any of the illustrious, their mission degraded to the caring, the feeding, and the policing of the young [p. 235]."

One might well ask, then, whether those in Sacramento who have been starving the University of California fail to realize the deterioration which the University now faces, or whether they have deliberately decided to reduce the University from scholarly eminence to mediocrity.

Political vulnerability

Another reason to question the survival of the University of California as an elite institution is that the state university-state college system is likely ultimately to become politically more influential than the University. This may be expected to follow from sheer size and penetration. In the fall of 1972, the 19 state university and college

campuses enrolled about two and a half times as many students as the nine-campus University. This gives the former sector two and a half times as many points of contact with the people of the state through students alone. In time, state university-state college graduates will outnumber University graduates in the legislature and in other positions of influence. Governor Reagan's proposed budget for 1973-74 allocates a larger sum to the state universities and colleges than to the University of California for the first time. As the discrepancy in enrollment and support becomes even greater in the future, it will be possible for the state universities and colleges to mobilize enormous pressure on the authorities to turn them into graduate and research institutions. For the time being, financial austerity will blunt this effort, but ambition will not be stilled.

In order to meet the goal of accepting all qualified students, the University established new campuses in several regions of the state. As it has turned out, however, it is not enough to be ready to accept exceptional students if they apply; it is doubtful that the University attracts as large a proportion as it should if it is to maintain its special role in the state system. Therefore, it should unabashedly set out to recruit qualified students and to secure funds to provide financial assistance for those who need it in order to go to college outside their home communities. Then it should make every effort to give these students an undergraduate education which will stimulate their intellectual interests and give them a sense of high accomplishment.

Research endangers undergraduate teaching

Another reason for concern about the future of a Berkeley is that its preoccupation with research leads it to neglect undergraduate instruction. The University's budget for organized research (which does not include "departmental research") grew from about \$17,000,000 in 1951-52 to \$191,000,000 in 1970-71. These massive research funds have enabled the University to

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attract a distinguished faculty, which in turn has raised the institution to the nation's most eminent graduate university.

But the faculty's heavy commitment to research has not been entirely salutary; there have been deleterious effects on undergraduate education: a decreasing emphasis on lower division instruction, less time devoted to undergraduate teaching, less frequent contact between faculty members and undergraduates, and increasing reliance on teaching assistants for lower division classes. But there is an opportunity at places like Berkeley to develop an institution in which intellectual values and intellectual discourse permeate undergraduate instruction as well as graduate education and research. This would require the University to recruit a much larger body of students who are seriously interested in ideas. Berkeley now attracts a much smaller proportion of such students than one might anticipate.

Distinctive characteristics of undergraduates

A recent report on the characteristics of Berkeley undergraduates through the 1960's summarized their scores on an index of intellectual disposition which embodies an intrinsic interest in ideas, tolerance of complexity, and enough freedom from traditional patterns of thought to permit imaginative and creative responses. The authors of the report observed that, "Brilliance and intense intellectuality . . . are included in this student population but are by no means typical or highly characteristic (Jako, 1971, pp. 29-30)."

However, simply attracting more students who are intellectually and perhaps creatively disposed will not be sufficient to enable the University to translate its public image, its professed values, and its intellectual resources into living reality. It is not enough to attract young scholars to the campus. They need to find one another, to stimulate and support one another intellectually, to engage in vigorous intellectual dialogue, to question, to dissent, to strike out in new directions, and to generate new ideas. Important as the student culture is, it needs to be enlivened, enriched, and stimulated by association with faculty members. One can envision groups of students with common interests enthusiastically taught by like-minded faculty in small seminars throughout their university careers. (A start on this has been made at Berkeley.) To teach these students would not be a burden to a distinguished faculty, but an opportunity, one to be sought rather than one to be avoided.

Studies of the index of intellectual disposition indicate that it is only moderately correlated with general academic aptitude. This suggests that the conventional methods of determining which students are qualified for admission to the University

of California are inadequate, and that if the University wishes to recruit students characterized by high intellectuality, it will have to adopt new methods of selection. This underlines the admonition of the Joint Legislative Committee on the Master Plan to experiment with new bases of admission.

Public attitude toward research

Another of the chief difficulties in maintaining the elite university's commitment to research, especially in a period of financial stringency, is a lack of understanding on the part of legislators, government officials, and the general public of the nature of research and of its crucial importance for the general welfare. The understanding of, and sympathy for, the research role of the University of California and pride in its eminence seem to have waned on the part of legislators, and especially on the part of the governor.

State support for research will not be forthcoming unless the University makes a continuing effort to explain to the citizenry the role of research in an eminent university and the contributions of research to the people's welfare. It is easier to explain the value of applied research than it is to illustrate the importance of basic investigation. In justifying a land-grant university's research role, it is customary to compute the economic value of research on agricultural production. Less frequently do we make it clear that applied agricultural research required the concomitant development of the underlying agricultural sciences. It would be instructive to make at least a partial inventory of the technological, ecological, social, economic, and human problems that wait for their solution on the discovery of fundamental knowledge which does not now exist.

Fortunately, it is not always necessary to make a choice between basic and applied research. I have given elsewhere many examples of investigations which have made two-fold contributions—to underlying theories or concepts on the one hand, and to the solution of significant educational problems on the other (McConnell, 1967).

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Both state and federal support essential

Essential as it is, state support for research is insufficient. In today's world the federal government must make a large contribution to both fundamental and applied university research.

Five years ago, in an address on the Davis campus of the University, I predicted the emergence of a network of universities in this country which would be both nationally and internationally oriented. I pointed out that at that time half of the federal funds contributed to higher education had been funnelled into only two percent of the institutions. In this way the federal government had not only recognized and strengthened excellence, particularly in graduate and professional education and research, but also had fostered the concentration of intellectual talent. The states are unlikely to provide the level of support which would enable these institutions to make their resources and their contributions available far beyond the areas in which they are located. Generous federal support will also be essential. Federal support in fact expanded rapidly during the latter part of the 1960s. By 1968 about three-fourths of all university research was federally financed. The concentration of federal funds in a relatively small number of universities underwrote a great expansion and a significant improvement in graduate and advanced professional education. But now federal funds for higher education, including research, may be drastically curtailed. This cutback would have an almost disastrous effect at Berkeley and at other comparable institutions. President Hitch has estimated that the proposed federal reductions will cost the University of California more than \$100,000,000 dollars over the next 28 months, with heavy damage to the support of graduate students, graduate education, and research.

This massive reduction in federal support for higher education comes at a moment when institutions have attained only a fragile financial stability at a level of operation which cannot continue for long without serious adverse consequences, and it is the research universities which seem to be most threatened (Cheit, 1973). This context gives special urgency to the recommendations of the Carnegie Commission for Higher Education for federal support for research, doctoral fellowships with cost-of-education supplements to the institutions, special programs like library improvement, and the development of the health sciences (Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1970, pp. 61-79, and 1972, p. 94). Even these subventions are likely to be insufficient.

Research or teaching?

In a report prepared for the Joint Legislative Committee on the Master Plan, Professor Lewis



T. R. McCONNELL

Mayhew of Stanford University presented a set of alternatives for future research policy in the University of California and the state university-state college system. One alternative would be to scrap the present differentiation of research functions and to convert the two public sectors into co-equal comprehensive institutions. My reaction to this option is that research funds will not be sufficiently generous to spread excellence over a large number of institutions; they will be sufficient only to scatter mediocrity. Another possibility suggested by Mayhew would be to concentrate research on three, or possibly four, University of California campuses and turn the others into teaching institutions. Mayhew presented no evidence, however, that the state, aided by federal funds, is economically incapable of supporting selective programs of research and advanced graduate and professional education on most if not all of the University's campuses. There have been proposals that a larger proportion of the research effort should be given to applied research. Only a little more than a fourth of the new funds which the state provided in 1971-72 for research and training in the University was for basic research (*University Bulletin* 21:119-121, April 2, 1973). Surely this is not a profligate expenditure for the pursuit of the fundamental knowledge on which the progress of commerce and industry, government, education, the social services, and most of the other enterprises of our society depends. There may be those who think that we already have enough fundamental knowledge to carry on civilized activities indefinitely. Most of the people I know don't think so.

One of Mayhew's observations was that, "What is needed is a legislative posture which will allow research and scholarship but which will restrain such a preoccupation with research that every permanent appointment is presumed to do research [1973(2), p. 61]." It is not clear whether Mayhew would go as far in this policy as was

proposed some years ago. In the early stages of the statewide study of higher education in which I participated in 1954-55, the legislative auditor suggested to me that, as the University expanded, some undefined portion of the faculty should do research, but that most of the additional staff required by the expected increase in enrollment should be assigned fully or almost entirely to teaching. I wrote then, as I would write now:

The quality of the University over the next two decades will be determined largely by the quality of the younger faculty members it recruits in the immediate future. . . . The surest way to maintain high excellence is to continue today and in the future the same standards for appointment of new faculty members, and to assure them the same opportunities for scholarly development [Holy, T.C., Semans, H.H., and McConnell, T.R., 1955, p. 79].

The pursuit of this policy, generously supported in the next two decades by the people of California, is surely in great part responsible for the eminence which Berkeley and some of the other campuses of the University of California have attained.

While in my judgment it would be undesirable for the University of California, or any other major research university, to develop two relatively separate faculties, one devoted to teaching and the other to research, and while I believe that it would be unfortunate to mandate a uniform University teaching load of nine hours, which the state finance department would like to do, I nevertheless agree with the Joint Legislative Committee's (1973) position of being "not convinced that every member of the University of California faculty should be funded at every point in his or her career as a half-time or more researcher," and that "There should be a place in the University for a variety of faculty roles." This need not be construed to mean that a sizeable non-research faculty should be appointed. It does suggest that some faculty members might be promoted more on the basis of excellence in teaching than in research. Beyond that, I believe that the University should require, even on the part of tenured faculty members who have attained higher salary levels, a periodic evaluation of competence and accomplishment together with a review of how they distribute their time among research, teaching, administration, professional activities, consulting, and public service. Not only do I object to a mandatory teaching load of nine hours; I also deplore any arbitrary minimum which a faculty member may demand regardless of other services that he performs or fails to perform.

Uncertain fate of graduate education

Graduate school enrollment is closely related to facilities and support for research. A major

reduction in research grants and fellowships such as that proposed by President Nixon would tend to reduce enrollment of doctoral students. The present apparent oversupply of doctorates in certain fields, especially the humanities, may also discourage doctoral study. However, society is likely to show considerable absorptive capacity for Ph.D.s. It will require professionals in many new fields. If past response is any guide, secondary schools, junior colleges, and four-year institutions will upgrade their faculties, and industry, science, and technology will raise their educational requirements. Thus an intellectual proletariat does not seem to be in prospect for several decades (Mayhew, 1973(1), p. 17). Nevertheless, *unrestricted* growth in graduate education could produce an oversupply of doctorates fairly quickly and at the same time impose indefensible increases in university expenditures. What should be done to guard against undue expansion?

The Carnegie Commission (1971) has declared that, "We find no need whatsoever in the foreseeable future for any more research-type universities granting the Ph.D. [p. 5]." It proposed that state coordinating boards or similar agencies should prevent the spread of doctoral programs to institutions which do not now offer them, and in addition, that steps should be taken to prevent the adoption of new Ph.D. programs by institutions that already offer the degree, unless an exceptionally strong case can be made. The Commission (1973) also emphasized the necessity of specialization in doctoral offerings among the institutions of multicampus universities.

The University of California has already begun to review its present doctoral programs and to revise its plans for the expansion of graduate work on the new campuses. Some Berkeley graduate departments had become much too large, and there was not always a high correlation between size and quality. The Dean of the Graduate School began to discuss with certain departments means by which they could reduce their numbers and strengthen their programs. Two departments have been eliminated as being too small to continue, and other departments are still under review. In the meantime, faculty positions were being diverted from Berkeley in order to build up the smaller campuses. But these adjustments would not satisfy the plan which, among other alternatives, Mayhew seemed to favor, namely, that doctoral work should be restricted to the University campuses at Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Davis, and that doctoral programs on the remaining campuses should be eliminated (Mayhew, 1973(1), p. 44).

The University had intended to expand all of its nine locations into general campuses offering a wide range of doctoral and professional studies. The new plans call for greater specialization in

graduate and professional offerings instead of duplicating most of the departments and programs of the established large campuses.

This is a much less drastic curtailment of graduate education than Mayhew appears to believe desirable. But I submit that drastic surgery is unnecessary. With no more than reasonable support from state and federal sources, and sensible distribution of specialties, the University should be able to extend its distinctive functions to most or all of its campuses. A state with a surplus approaching a billion dollars is not in penury and its financial position provides no excuse for acting penuriously in supporting its distinguished university.

Summary

At stake in the survival of the elite university, let me reiterate, is the maintenance of that "thin, clear stream of excellence" which supplies the new ideas necessary for the development of a more humane, just, and civilized society. This is of necessity an expensive process. It entails intellectual interchange between able, highly motivated students and more experienced scholars in an institution heavily engaged in graduate education and research. In order to survive, the university must make a sustained effort to explain its mission and to win the loyalty of the people and their elected representatives. The state must provide a generous measure of financial support, but federal assistance will also be required for a national network of major research universities. The vitality of these institutions is essential to the continuing flow of the intellectual capital on which the solution of complex human problems depends and which the attainment of civilized values requires. I am confident that once the people understand this, and that once they come to realize that a great university which is starved for loyalty and support can slide from eminence to mediocrity in a decade, they will insure its future despite growing demands on the public purse. The moment of choice in California is not far away.

McConnell Festschrift Available from School of Education at U.C. . . .

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This collection of papers and articles has been prepared to honor Thomas Raymond McConnell as a teacher, scholar, and educational statesman. The authors were his doctoral students at the University of California, Berkeley. The subjects presented here were drawn mostly from the authors' dissertations and demonstrate the range of interests and scholarly work of his students.

To obtain the Festschrift write to: Office of the Dean, School of Education, 1501 Tolman Hall, University of California, Berkeley, Ca., 94720.

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