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THE ACADEMIC GUILD:
SELF CRITICISM AND SELF EVALUATION*

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As one who has spent his professional life examining the relations between universities and colleges on the one hand and various levels of government on the other, I offer the following thoughts with no pretense of having been a student of academic guilds. Nevertheless, the combination of my personal instincts based on twenty years in academic life, my assessment of possible developments in the attitudes of governmental figures towards Academe, and the challenge to try to avoid trivia in this first presidential address--all these embolden me to tackle this rather big topic.

Academic ethics has been much discussed in recent days by both AAHE and Carnegie Council sessions. But my emphases are somewhat different and these remarks are specifically directed to the constituency of the Association for the Study of Higher Education.

If I am at all correct in my diagnosis, the greatest friends of the academic profession may well turn out to be its own constructive critics rather than its more militant partisan boosters. Here I should make it clear that when I refer to the academic guild and its freedoms, I mean to include the whole panoply of Academe, from the individual professor on a campus to a statewide governing board of higher education--in other words, any individuals or organizations who receive or claim special status because of their links with the higher learning. In the case of the individual scholar, we call this special relationship academic freedom; in the case of campus or multi-campus governing boards, we speak of corporate autonomy. The two concepts are obviously related, but, as I have elsewhere (1971) argued, quoting Eric Ashby, they are not synonymous: Prussian scholars enjoyed academic freedom in non-autonomous early-19th century institutions, and autonomous Oxford and Cambridge universities during that same century themselves denied academic freedom in certain ways to their scholars.

The point I wish to stress today, however, is not their differences but their common element of a certain degree of exemption from normal standards of accountability. Because of this common exemption, I am urging that individuals enjoying academic freedom and institutions enjoying corporate autonomy have a special obligation to monitor their own academic integrity through self-criticism and self-evaluation.

In these days when philistine voices are raising increasingly hostile questions about higher education and its costs and special privileges, it might seem like a counsel of folly to feed fuel to their fires by furnishing searching criticisms from within. Clark Kerr yesterday made the important point of the need for higher education critics to keep things in perspective: there is much more right with Academe than wrong with it. But there are also questions being raised by other thoughtful persons about precious academic protections such as tenure, and intimate institutional dimensions, such as evaluation of performance or--hated word--"outputs"!

There are those who would insist that such cherished aspects of Academe are not to be tampered with by those who do not understand and love the Academy; but there is a consequent need to follow through on the implied contract. Those of us who do feel that we understand--and yes, even love--Academe must bring our best minds to bear on some of these innermost aspects of our professional life, must suggest even sensitive reforms where needed, and only then confront the doubting external elements with carefully reasoned rebuttals of their ideas, where these have been found to be inappropriate.

*President's Address presented to the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Annual Meeting, Washington, DC, April 19, 1979.

Here, I hope, is the relevance to ASHE of the highly personal odyssey to follow. If you, the members, and future officers find any merit in these ideas, there might emerge a working agenda for future actions by either individual scholars or even an occasional working party of this organization. ASHE cannot go chasing every passing rabbit but if I am right, the following issues are among the bigger rabbits! It is perhaps ironic that your President offers these suggestions just as he is leaving office, but preoccupation with keeping the traditional activities going has monopolized my time until now. Furthermore, it is good to be near the exit if one is going to shout "fire"!

What, specifically then, might be undertaken?

Again, lacking theoretical insights based on previous professional study of the academic guild, I must stick to the personal domain which I know well. Starting from the individual, I will work my way out to the statewide governing board, suggesting some problems and possible activities at each level.

Faculty members as individuals can range from the sublime to the ridiculous--and all covered by the same umbrella protection! The practice of tenure at its best beckons bright young scholars to a professional "life of the mind" in which, after a relatively brief probationary period, an individual is free to pursue truth in his/her teaching, research, and writing, usually free of fear of unemployment because of having offended some orthodoxy,--intellectual, political, or religious. Based on this wide professional latitude, faculty members exercise great personal discretion in allocating their time and energies, and society profits from the creative processes this independence permits. The justifications for the near guild-like freedom of the academy, then, include not only the individual benefit to the scholar but also, and some would say, more importantly, the broader gains to society.

However, the same guild freedoms that protect creative and ethical scholars can also tempt less-motivated individuals to exploit their relative immunity from accountability to coast along on half-effort or to abuse their relationships of power over students. One thinks, inevitably, of the uneasy jokes around the faculty club dining tables of this or that professor who shows up on campus just long enough to teach the assigned classes and to pick up the paycheck; or of another who has been known to engage in sexual harassment of students.

While, happily, such coasting or exploiting faculty are rare exceptions, responsible faculty should not close their eyes to even occasional abuses of the tenure system.

Any guild-like operation has a basic ethical obligation to attempt to monitor its own internal practices. It is as simple as the old cliché: "with freedom go responsibilities." Some members of the guild may argue that in this general problem area, the remedy could be worse than the disease (and thus the guild should leave it alone). But it may be decisive in protecting the practice of tenure from external attack to show that the occasional abuses of it can be handled from within.

How to do this? First, I am struck by Eric Ashby's earlier plea for an academic equivalent to the Hippocratic Oath (1969). I am pleased that the panel which ASHE sponsored in the general AAHE program was one on Academic Ethics. I also note here the recent AAHE Commentary by J. Wesley Miller (January, 1979) on "A Case for Commitment to Ethics in Academe." Could ASHE create a Task Force to consider drawing up an academic version of the Hippocratic Oath?

Even while working on that level of moral exhortation and inspiration, one should not overlook less idealistic approaches. Within my own Faculty of Educational Studies unit at SUNY/Buffalo, for example, a few of us among the department chairmen drafted a document this Spring urging that faculty responsibilities to their department and the Faculty of Educational Studies

itself be thought of in terms broader than "a six hour teaching load and some research and public service." For symbolic purposes, we proposed thinking instead in terms of fifteen equivalent hours as a moral obligation, with three equivalent over the six teaching being devoted to inevitable departmental duties and student advising. The other six equivalent would be negotiated by each individual, his/her department and the Dean--to cover whatever mix among the teaching, research, and public service activities most suited to the individual's talents and to departmental needs. In the case of most colleagues, we assumed that the negotiated understandings would probably differ little from existing practices. But for the few "coasters" amongst us, it might entail a new package of expectations and evaluation criteria, with tenure, promotion, sabbaticals, travel funds, graduate assistants, etc. allocated on a basis of some adjustments in assignment--e.g., to undertake more teaching (if considered good at it) or more university or public service, in lieu of greater research productivity.

Similarly a few years back when I was on the Faculty Senate there was some question of the faculty passing a formal code of conduct. You may remember that the Carnegie Commission report Dissent and Disruption (1971) included several appendices with examples of such Faculty Codes passed at several universities around the country. Abuses such as changing the class curriculum to extended discussions of United States involvement in Viet Nam had given rise to student concerns about protections from arbitrary and capricious faculty conduct.

While neither the Faculty Senate nor the Faculty of Educational Studies at Buffalo agreed with the logic of the actions being proposed, there is no reason why, at the minimum, ASHE could not now create here or encourage elsewhere a Working Party to undertake a serious study of how those faculty codes have worked at the universities where they have been tried, and, at the maximum, ask this Working Party to come forth with its own improved general model. I realize that the spread of collective bargaining will be a complicating factor here, but I have faith that sound scholarship could confront even that problem. We might need to seek modest external funding to pay some of the administrative costs, but this organization has some extremely well-qualified talent which could be brought to bear on the subject.

Let me here shift gears toward evaluation of academic functions. It is clearly an activity "blowin' in the wind." How appropriate, then, if departments of higher education charged with the professional study of the field could themselves set the tone by leading the way in initiating evaluations of their own programs? I am here making a virtue of a SUNY/Buffalo necessity, for our department has twice been evaluated by blue ribbon outside committees--a requirement each five years of our Graduate Division. The first such evaluation in 1971 by Jerry Miller of Ann Arbor, Lew Mayhew of Stanford, and Maurice Troyer of Syracuse was printed without its Buffalo identification as an Appendix in the Dressel-Mayhew book, Higher Education as a Field of Study (1974). The second such evaluation in 1977 was conducted by Jerry Miller again, this time accompanied by Fred Harclerod of University of Arizona and an inside law school professor. Copies of this evaluation will be furnished on request. In total candor, we have found these evaluations to be extremely helpful--as much in forcing us to greater self-knowledge as in the real wisdom of our friendly critics' advice.

Perhaps the words "friendly critics" provide the key to my next comment. These blue ribbon visits clearly fall into a category which jargon labels "formative evaluation;" but we are now also faced with the prospect of a "summative evaluation" by a panel of peers ultimately selected by the New York State Education Department. While we are being consulted about the members of this panel, we know that the State Education Department may use the evaluations to decide on the continuation or termination of various doctoral programs in education in the state. Their writ runs by the State Constitution to both public and private higher education, and they have already exercised their powers to terminate doctoral programs in other subject areas in both sectors. A SUNY challenge in the courts led to a verdict confirming the powers of the Board of Regents and their agents, the State Education Department (SED).

Thus we have had to prepare reams and reams of new material for this forthcoming visit, and found that our record-keeping had been something less than rigorous. For those wanting to know the various categories in which you might want to keep careful records, I could make a copy of the SED questionnaire available to you.

In the meantime, let me suggest that ASHE might establish panels of dry-run outside evaluators who could visit other departments on request and furnish friendly formative evaluations. Costs could be negotiated among the concerned parties, and we could see whether, over time, certain criteria might emerge as fundamental frameworks for departmental evaluation. I know Mary Jo Clark of ETS has been doing some excellent work in this regard, and Bob Barak of the Iowa Board of Regents is currently working on this also. It should be highly appropriate for ASHE to make its contribution too. Once departments of higher education have established a firm pattern of self-evaluation, perhaps they can play a leadership role among other departments on their campus.

For better or for worse, external authorities are not likely to accept institutional or departmental self-evaluation as a sufficient measure of accountability. Statewide boards seem to find even regional accrediting too much a variation on self-evaluation by members of the club. In Maryland there is currently an interesting project to develop a joint Middle States and statewide coordinating board evaluation of institutions. One will watch to see whether the two related but distinct purposes can both be served by this process. A real irony is that in some states, there are legislative performance audit units which may not even accept statewide coordinating boards' evaluations because these boards have allegedly been brainwashed by contact with Academe. Let us hope that these state units will ultimately agree to monitor the rigor of institutional self-evaluation and themselves not enter directly into evaluation of academic programs.

Harclerod and Dickey (1975) have suggested another alternative which may be politically unrealistic in the near future, but which is intriguing as a conceptual model and which some day might emerge as a possibility. These authors refer to the relevant precedents from the collapse of confidence in the American business community in the crash of the 1930's. Instead of instituting direct federal examination to determine honest business practices, the federal government agreed to defer to professional accounting firms which established a rigorous code of procedures and which operated in that middle area where they transcended the domain of institutional self interest, but still stopped short of direct governmental action.

Might there someday be a few parallel academic audit organizations specializing in higher education problems? If so, ASHE might consider what aspects of such a complicated process it might be able to facilitate. I can see two ways: first, by helping to establish a National Board of Examiners; second, by playing a leadership role in encouraging multi-disciplinary study of educational outcomes--micro-macro--broadened to include both affective as well as cognitive dimensions and lengthened to begin to deal with longitudinal data. The NCHEMS indicators study is one beginning but ASHE can encourage its own membership and other organizations to accept the challenge recently offered by Howard Bowen:

To evaluate outcomes is difficult partly because it is hard to sort out causes and effects, partly because the final outcomes may not be known for decades and partly because some of the most significant outcomes may be impossible to identify or measure in objective terms. Yet, despite the difficulties, educators have an obligation to assess outcomes as best they can, not only to appease outsiders who demand accountability but also to improve internal management There are some useful procedures for obtaining quantitative data on outcomes, and ongoing research (which should be multiplied

many times) will produce more ways of measuring outcomes. Inevitably, however, the assessment of outcomes will require large elements of judgment. One of the problems is to bring to bear on evaluation the judgment of professionally qualified but disinterested persons (1974, 121).

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