

March 2, 1965

MEMBERS OF THE BERKELEY DIVISION:

In Chancellor Meyerson's address to the Berkeley Division of March 1, which is attached, he challenges us to join with him in developing a program of academic improvement and innovation on the Berkeley campus.

He asks the Emergency Executive Committee to consult with members of the Senate, and with other committees of the Senate, and to make "definite and practical proposals for action" at the next meeting.

In other words, how should we organize ourselves for searching inquiry into the academic organization and processes of the Berkeley campus; what procedures should we follow in studying Chancellor Meyerson's ideas for academic improvement, together with other ideas which have been developed inside and outside of the Berkeley campus?

Many of our schools and departments are already engaged in re-organization of curriculum and structure. How can these experiments be evaluated and discussed throughout the campus? What contribution can be made by special "commissions," by regular committees of the Division, by special colloquia, Division meetings, etc?

The Emergency Executive Committee will appreciate having your views.

Raymond G. Bressler  
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Carl E. Schorske  
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Arthur M. Ross, Chairman

Martin Meyerson  
March 1, 1965

SENATE COLLEAGUES:

One of our problems at the Berkeley campus is our reputation -- our reputation, I hasten to add, for being one of the most stimulating centers of learning anywhere. Students coming to a university with an excellent faculty and excellent fellow students sometimes expect even more stimulation than exists and are disappointed. In my observation, this is true of all the great universities of the world. Expectations which exceed actualities can produce alienation; alternatively they can be a goad to betterment.

That goad exists here. I have never seen a university with more ferment for educational improvement than we now have. Paradoxically, a study recently done by one of our Senate members showed a very high level of satisfaction among students with the education offered to them at Berkeley. Nevertheless in both the fields of letters and sciences and in the professional fields, individual faculty members, groups of faculty members, and whole departments and schools are considering new approaches to higher learning. Some of the questions that are being raised currently are ones which have been discussed many times before on this campus and elsewhere. Other questions are new and arise from changes in the state of our knowledge and our urban civilization. Yet even questions which were once asked and resolved must be asked and resolved again, and then again.

Today I wish to raise some, but only some, perplexing questions about educational issues. These questions derive from my statement on education of a few weeks ago. I would like to enlist the aid of the Senate in a search for answers. In that search we must be both deliberative and resolute. We should act soon, before our determination to define ourselves anew weakens. Yet, we must also recognize that questions which affect the very character of our university can never be settled finally since our university, like all great universities, is itself in flux.

A key question is whether or not there is a body of wisdom which should be common to all educated men and women. Many students and faculty here report the felt lack of such a basis for a community of discourse. We have long since passed by the notion that an educated person is one who has forgotten the Greek and Latin he studied. General Education with a capital G and E has become a most attractive beacon for some who are concerned with colleges and universities and a repellent for others who see no single formula leading to intellectual development. We should discourage the superficial name-dropping characteristic of some general education programs in which students learn to identify a Lucretius, a Buddha, a Bentham or a Freud with a capsule sentence. But should not all our students be exposed to certain central ideas that have dominated man's civilization, Eastern as well as Western?

The general education programs started by Robert Hutchins at Chicago, by John Erskine at Columbia at an earlier time, and more recently at Harvard, have not seemed persuasive to the great state universities with their many professional programs. Would it not be better for a university such as ours to travel many paths rather than the single paths chosen elsewhere to understand man's civilization? For example, it may be more meaningful to some prospective engineers to understand history in terms of man's technology and his reactions to it than to understand it through diplomacy or other views of history. After all, we always use selective lenses to examine the world, and it ought to enrich our view of the world if we develop more rather than fewer lenses.

Alternatively, a field can be taught in general terms designed for students from many disciplines: students whose intellectual bond is their ignorance of the field. General education in the natural sciences might fall under this category. Most general education programs have had a humanistic bias and even a bias which concentrated on the past. I have often thought that the natural scientists seem the better educated in the two-cultures controversy because they know science and

also frequently are interested in and knowledgeable in the arts. But it is a rare person in the humanities who is conversant with science. I believe that the natural sciences should be central to any effort to achieve a general education.

Although I share the disdain of the specialist for those who wish facile paths to a wisdom which is necessarily intricate, I am nevertheless convinced that it should be possible to distill the exciting ideas from specialized fields and to make them accessible to those who are not specialists. This is particularly true for those students (probably the bulk of them) who prefer a general education which stresses the present and the future to one which stresses the past.

Although reasonable men may differ, I feel that we do not now achieve the breadth that an educated person should have through our distribution requirements in any of our undergraduate programs. Nor do I think that there is any model of a clearly superior kind of general education -- or for that matter undergraduate education itself -- which will meet all our needs at Berkeley where students are so diverse not only in their backgrounds but also in their interests and motivations. Ought we not to consider a pluralistic approach to general education? For example, could not more courses, cutting across disciplines be offered by teachers or groups of teachers with the intent of providing that enriching educational experience at which our departmentally oriented breadth requirements now aim? Let there be a healthy competition between such general education courses and some of our present courses.

As a related question we should ask ourselves, how shall our vast university produce intellectual centers of identification? Because we are so large, we can, as I have suggested at other times, offer a range of choice which smaller institutions cannot. And this choice need not be only in specialized course offerings but also in the organization of knowledge. Thus, for example, if we wish we could provide an undergraduate option on our campus equivalent to that

provided by St. Johns College at Annapolis. Students and teachers who wish to join together to explore the great texts of man's past, including some of his scientific texts, could do so. Others could choose, as is now being proposed by one of our colleagues, to organize their learning about certain historical periods: Periclean Greece, contemporary America, and so on. For that matter, I can see no reason why we could not even have an Antioch or a Northeastern at Berkeley with those students who wished, taking part in a cooperative work-study program, learning part of the year at the University and part on the job. Engineering already provides such an option.

In such a pluralistic approach to education, a student at a St. Johns at Berkeley would have most of the advantages of a small college but also the advantages that only a large institution can provide: great libraries, laboratories and cultural opportunities. Furthermore, a student or faculty member need not be bound forever to a particular educational constellation; he might decide that another option was more appropriate to his interests.

These options, programs or centers could, but need not, cut across school and college as well as department lines. They are one way to bridge the atomistic pole of isolated students, teachers and courses and the cosmic pole of the great university. The options would be the intermediaries. The larger university through central facilities and cultural offerings could help provide the cement to hold the intermediaries together. There is a conceivable danger that there may be so many options, programs or centers that no amount of cement could keep the university from being fractured. (Cement can keep the bricks apart as well as join them.) Despite current yearnings for innovation I do not see that danger as real. There is another conceivable danger: that options would only further complicate an organizational structure which already demands a great deal of faculty time to work -- and a great deal of student time to understand. On the other hand, the consideration of options would give another push to simplifying our organizational structure.

I have not called these options or centers "colleges." I prefer to think of them as less structured and more tentative. Some may be associated with residence halls, but they need not be. We should also consider whether some should be associated with our research institutes.

Though the total budgetary requirements of multiple centers or options may be no greater than present requirements, certain reallocations no doubt would be needed. Departments would have to regard some of the new options as substitutes for some of their present offerings. I ask the Senate not to embark on implementing my suggestions but to consider them along with the other proposals for educational revitalization which are forthcoming from many quarters on our campus today.

Inevitably, proposals for such centers or intermediaries raise the analogy with Oxford and Cambridge. Admiring as I am of these great English universities, I fear that the corporate sense of the Oxbridge Colleges may have impeded the development of new fields of learning. The identification of the Colleges with particular pieces of real estate made them permanent and reluctant to change. What they did teach, they taught well. We must ask ourselves the question of what kind of excellence they encouraged, and also the question of how wise it is to over-concentrate talent: there was one period, for example, when Trinity College, Cambridge, with a few hundred students and teachers had half of Britain's Nobel Prize winners and all the officers of the Royal Society.

The Oxbridge Colleges tend to define excellence in terms of the numbers of First Class Honours the students in each receive. The examining is done by the University and not by those who teach the students being examined, so each College puts forth a great deal of effort to have its students do well in centralized schools examinations.

But what does a first signify? Is it really more than just mastering the system? At Berkeley, of course, many students complain about exams and grades,



which are to them only mile-posts in the rat-race. Perhaps their complaints about the rat-race are complaints about the human condition itself, in which time, like other resources, is more limited than are wants. Incidentally, those students who are most eager to eliminate the grading of students are also most vocal in recommending the grading of the faculty. It is difficult to grade either students or teachers.

If examinations are to be a learning experience, the experience should stress synthesis rather than the regurgitation of discrete items of knowledge. We should also consider the wisdom of separating teaching from examining as Chicago and other universities have done.

We can examine, of course, without necessarily grading. I suspect, however, that students are more competitive than they say they are, and that they would be reluctant to give up what measure of their accomplishments there is in grading.

The recently completed review of five years of grades by departments suggests many variations which cannot easily be explained. Why should one department have 48% A's and another only 8% at the lower division level? There may be good reasons in terms of the quality of the students or the demands of the field, but then again more capricious reasons, of which we may not be aware, may be in effect.

Many of you know my conviction that no member of the faculty should abdicate his responsibilities for grades to teaching assistants or readers. After all, teaching assistants are here to learn how to teach under supervision. Perhaps some should serve as tutors. We must put our own house in order in the rewards we should offer and the demands we should make of teaching assistants.

The evaluation of teachers is at least as difficult as the evaluation of students. An analysis of student reactions to teachers shows great differences in the response of the students who themselves get high grades or low grades. Thus in one study at another university, students who received A's seemed to have reactions opposite to those who received C's. The teacher favored by the C student was rejected by the A student.

Without wanting to minimize the appeal of a teacher to his students, surely we would not wish to evaluate faculty in a popularity poll. Max Planck did not attract huge numbers of students but his students became superb scientists. You know my view that most of us do not publish lest we perish, that we publish or in other ways do creative work because we have something to contribute.

Also, in fields which are being transformed, research is essential if the faculty member is to be at the frontier of his field and thus able to teach well. Nevertheless, there is an unfortunate tendency in American education to stress quantity rather than quality in publication. The teacher who rewrites a mediocre contribution in a dozen different articles is sometimes favored over the person who writes once but makes an important contribution. In some fields we seem to have an amnesia about past literature. It is a functional amnesia for how else could we continue to publish more and more papers which go over the same ground as earlier ones?

More important than the evaluation of teaching is the encouragement of the teaching of undergraduates. We shall receive helpful proposals from the Special Senate Committee on Recognition of Distinction in Teaching. Our ratio of students to teachers probably ought to be lowered, but even with our present ratio, by rearranging courses and sets of course offerings, we could provide every undergraduate student opportunities to work closely with professors in small classes. These opportunities already exist for some students. How do we extend the opportunities to others? How do we persuade distinguished scholars that they have a responsibility to teach beginning students and that it can be tremendously stimulating to do so?

Though I favor seminar type classes, I also recognize they can sometimes be a euphemism for skimpy preparation by students or teachers and that some teachers are at their best in small groups and others need the stimulus of the lecture audience. I think there is little excuse for giving the same lecture year after



year. If it is worthwhile of that much repetition, it should be written and published. Lectures should largely be restricted to new formulations and tentative materials. They should not be what many students seem to want -- an organized spooning of material the student should dig out for himself.

We must realize that the faculty has become more important for the student than before. A generation ago undergraduates wanted their first degree and a job. Today, a large proportion of them either expect to do graduate work and teach themselves or expect to do advanced professional work in the field of their teachers. Students have become as a result more competitive with their professors.

While I have found little support for the notion that educational policy should be made jointly by faculty and students, I have found great support for the notion that student views and suggestions should get the greatest airing and that faculty-student opportunities for discussion of education must be extended widely. There are a number of problems in this evolving relation of students to faculty: the faculty and the administration must beware having -- and the students must avoid being -- "court" students who just give back what they think we want. Learning, which is one of the greatest pleasures of life -- partly because it does not come easily -- must be shared by the teacher and the taught.

I have asked the Senate several questions. How can we provide a general education commensurate with the excitement and fluidity of modern knowledge? How shall we in this large, diversified seat of learning provide communities or centers for intellectual identification? Can we not reassess the way we evaluate the progress of learners, whether they be faculty or students? What are the best ways in which we as a community of scholars may rededicate ourselves as a self-conscious community of teachers, both at the undergraduate level of instruction and the graduate?

I doubt that there is any single committee of the Senate or of the administration which has for its competence so broad a range of questions which we now face.

Perhaps we need a kind of commission on the state of education at Berkeley. This commission, bringing together and clarifying the many ideas being suggested on the campus could then develop for our consideration specific proposals for the revitalization of our educational aims and practice. The responsibility for the educational offerings of the university rests with the faculty. Yet only through a clear understanding of the students' needs and interests can a vital program be developed. I should expect that a commission, if established, would determine the best ways to elicit students' assistance. In suggesting such a commission, I am aware that many departments, schools, and councils are embarked on educational reforms. A commission would not replace but could help coordinate these efforts. For example, the College of Letters and Science is about to undertake a reevaluation of its entire program (the program was revised seven years ago).

With your consent I shall ask the Emergency Executive Committee to discuss with members of the Senate and other committees of the Senate the best ways to organize to deal with the intellectual ferment about education on our campus. I expect that on the basis of these discussions the Executive Committee will make definite and practical proposals for action at our next meeting. It is the province of all of us to develop a strategy for educational advancement.

My comments have focussed on a few of the educational issues which face us and which are the proper concern of the Senate. I shall close not with a flourish but with several administrative questions which the Chancellor's office faces and for which we would be pleased to have suggestions and advice from individual colleagues.

I have agreed to make suggestions to President Kerr on the best division of administrative labor between University Hall and the campus administration and on possible ways of further decentralizing and making more effective the administration of the campus.

I am concerned with simplification of all kinds of routine activities, including paperwork, from registration to graduation.

Policies and rules on the time, place and manner for students to use campus facilities must conform with Regents' policies. I expect to meet this weekend with a Regents' committee. Following that, I expect to circulate a draft of proposals.

On all of these matters, I respectfully seek your written comments.

In closing, I want to tell you how grateful I am to you, my colleagues, for your help during these past weeks, your forbearance, and most of all, for your encouragement.

Thank you.