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## Commencement Address, "Public and Private Higher Education: The Ties that Bind"

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COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS - UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC

David Pierpont Gardner

"Public and Private Higher Education:  
The Ties that bind"

President McGaffrey, members of the Board of Trustees,  
members of the faculty and staff, graduates and their families  
and friends, it is a privilege for me to share this special  
occasion with you.

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS - UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC

A university is a place that sits on the top of a hill  
just climbed, that moment when one catches a breath while  
surveying the past and viewing the future, is one of life's  
grand rituals. The ceremony of it lifts us above routine and  
animates our respect for the civilizing traditions which bridge  
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"Public and Private Higher Education:  
The Ties That Bind"

I earnestly hope that my remarks this evening will further  
these purposes, although I harbor no illusions whatsoever about  
the recollective nature of commencement addresses among anxious  
candidates for graduation.

I respect the accomplishments of this graduating class and  
congratulate each of you on having met your purposes here.

David Pierpont Gardner

May 20, 1983

While your academic journey here has been a common one, I know that each of you is a distinct individual.  
Some of you will have found your studies here to have been  
routinely accommodated; others will have struggled to possess  
the same knowledge or skill. Some of you have enjoyed undis-  
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COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS - UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC

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"Public and Private Higher Education:  
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President McCaffrey, members of the Board of Trustees, members of the faculty and staff, graduates and their families and friends, it is a privilege for me to share this very special occasion with you.

A university commencement, that pause at the top of a hill just climbed, that moment when one catches a breath while surveying the past and viewing the future, is one of life's grand rituals. The ceremony of it lifts us above routine and animates our respect for the civilizing traditions which bridge self and society and link the generations.

I earnestly hope that my remarks this evening will further these purposes, although I harbor no illusions whatsoever about the recollective nature of commencement addresses among anxious candidates for graduation.

I respect the accomplishments of this graduating class and congratulate each of you on having met your purposes here. While your academic robes suggest a certain sameness about you, I know that each of you is a separate and distinct individual. Some of you will have found your studies here to have been routinely accommodated; others will have struggled to possess the same knowledge or skill. Some of you have enjoyed undisturbed good health; others will have been obliged to overcome physically debilitating handicaps and/or illnesses. Some of you will have given no thought to the source of your next

dollar; others will have been uncertain as to whether or not there would be a next dollar. There is real, personal drama in this ceremony and meaning in this occasion for graduates and their families and for those who, as trustees, faculty, and staff, have been privileged to touch your lives for the few precious years you have spent here.

I hope that each of you comes to this occasion and leaves this university with a decent sense of self-respect, self-confidence, and self-esteem. You have earned it, and as you move into the world you will need it. You have set a course and have followed it to a successful conclusion. That quality and that accomplishment commands our respect as it should yours.

That the president of a public university should have been invited to speak at the commencement convocation of a private university is, in and of itself, deserving of note. There has tended to be in the country recently a heightened sensitivity about those matters that tend to divide the private and public sectors of American higher education and a diminished regard for the shared values and purposes that have historically reinforced our respective endeavors.

I wish to direct my remarks today to what unites us rather than what divides us and to the prospects for collaborative efforts, drawing both from my experience as Chairman of the National Commission on Excellence in Education and from my familiarity with private and public institutions of higher education in the United States, and especially here in

California. My purpose in speaking to this subject is two fold: First, I believe that the quality of American schools, colleges and universities will be the first item on the education agenda during the 1980s and, together with the economy, will be the domestic issue most discussed in the 1984 elections. Second, I believe it is important to recognize and acknowledge the contributions that independent colleges and universities have made and will continue to make to the education of our people and to the freedom our public colleges and universities possess.

You may wonder why I have chosen this subject for your commencement. The answer is that all of us are facing an era of ever-accelerating competition and change, of ever-greater danger, and of ever-larger opportunities for those prepared to meet them. As graduates of a leading university, you will need to understand these forces and bring informed judgment and committed citizenship to bear on their resolution.

Public and private colleges and universities have a common and vital interest in schooling at all levels, not only because the earlier grades are by definition crucial parts of the educational system but also because higher education cannot expect more from their students than the schools have prepared them to receive.

Those of us engaged in higher education have tended historically to regard the problems in elementary and secondary education as being remote and only tangential to our own principal interests. To be sure, we have added our voices to those

of others who have been lamenting the decline in test scores and other indices of reduced preparedness among high school students. Our concerns, however, have generally gone no further than their expression. We only infrequently translate our apprehensions into constructive, collaborative efforts with the schools.

What, then, has been occurring in the schools, especially those at the secondary level, for example, in the area of the curriculum? The following sample findings regarding the dilution of the secondary curriculum are taken from the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, entitled "A Nation at Risk":

- Secondary school curricula have been homogenized, diluted, and diffused to the point that they no longer have a central purpose. In effect, we have a cafeteria-style curriculum in which the appetizers and desserts can easily be mistaken for the main courses. Students have migrated from vocational and college preparatory programs to "general track" courses in large numbers. The proportion of students taking a general program of study has increased from 12 percent in 1964 to 42 percent in 1979.
- This curricular smorgasbord, combined with extensive student choice, explains a great deal about where we find ourselves today. We offer intermediate algebra but only 31 percent of our recent high school graduates complete it; we offer French I, but only 13 percent complete it; and we offer geography, but only 16 percent complete it.
- Twenty-five percent of the credits earned by general track high school students are in physical and health education, work experience outside the school, remedial English and mathematics, and personal service and development courses, such as training for adulthood and marriage.

How has this come about? There is ample blame to go around. State legislators mandate courses in parenting or in safety education or in some other cause important to someone. Parents demand changes in the curriculum so that areas of interest to them are included. Special interest groups in our society demand that the curriculum provide for their interests. Colleges and universities increase the number and type of remedial courses they offer so that their students can take in college what they failed to take in high school--and for college credit, thus signaling to the high schools and their students that the high school program is of less significance than it really is.

Fortunately, we are witnessing a renewal of collaborative activity between high schools and colleges and universities. Our institutions of higher education, public and private alike, are working more systematically and cooperatively with the secondary schools to clarify what college entrants need to know and to assist the schools as appropriate and as possible to improve the level of learning and quality of education our nation's children receive.

The Berkeley campus of the University of California, by way of example, now sponsors fifty-two individual projects, serving elementary and secondary school students, teachers and administrators, ranging from one-day teacher workshops to more extensive programs both on campus and at the schools.

Since 1978, a joint effort by Yale and the New Haven public schools has provided the opportunity for teachers in the

public schools to examine indepth topics of mutual interest while at the same time learning how to present these topics in their classrooms with more success. The heart of this program is a set of intensive four-and-a-half month long seminars conducted each year by the Yale faculty for public school teachers, especially those teaching in grades six through twelve. Over the past five years, more than 40 percent of New Haven's secondary school teachers have completed at least one seminar and 20 percent have participated in more than one.

The A. Phillip Randolph High School, created in the late 1970's as a laboratory school of the City College of the City University of New York, makes a concerted effort to recruit more minorities into the study of medicine. In addition to the school's regular enrollment, about 100 students are recruited each year at the junior high level and placed into a program limited to 20 students per classroom. The curriculum is rigorous, runs longer than the regular school day and demands at least two to three hours of homework a night. The teachers are of exceptionally high quality and the curriculum is developed jointly by interested individuals from the New York City Public Schools, City University of New York and Columbia University.

The underrepresentation of women in math related fields, caused Mt. Holyoke College to begin a residential summer mathematics program for high school girls. The program termed "Summer Math" is explained by the program's director as follows: "In a typical math classroom, students are fairly passive and some students only survive by memorizing rules. What



concerns us most is that the memorization leads to lack of a sense of control. That's why students feel so anxious when doing math--they don't have a sense of personal accomplishment." The Summer Math approach attempts to help students examine their own problem solving processes and to construct mathematical ideas for themselves--the process receiving more weight than the answer.

The University of the Pacific has spawned significant innovations of its own. For example, UOP's intensive programs in Dentistry and Pharmacy have enabled students to complete these programs in three years by working on an eleven-month schedule. Its School of Education has been particularly effective in creating new programs to meet California's need for bilingual/cross-cultural teachers, early childhood education, teachers for special education, and teachers for the children of migrant workers.

The list of such established and fledgling examples could go on. But it does not go on long enough when viewed against the breadth and depth of the problem. Public and private colleges and universities need to be more centrally involved in these problems and to reach out in cooperative and complementary ways, not only to the senior high schools but also into the elementary and junior high years where the roots of the retention problems first develop. Were they to be able to do so collaboratively would be even better.

One of the authentic benefits of having two strong sectors of higher education, that is the private sector and the public

one, is that our efforts, often taken independently of each other, tend to be more mutually reinforcing and beneficial than one might suppose at first glance. Other nations do not possess strong, private institutions of higher education and as a consequence the overall strength of their higher education systems tend to suffer compared with our own. The independence from state control, characteristic of the private sector, and the ability of the public sector in turn to use that independence as a referent has been a crucial factor in the ability of the public institutions to secure their academic, intellectual and institutional freedoms. The protection thus afforded the public sector, in turn, redounds to the sustained benefit of the private sector and to the overall well-being of our free society.

Programmatic initiatives in one sector challenge settled opinions in the other; educational innovation in one sector confronts established ways of doing things in the other; and greater expectations in one sector cause standards to be re-evaluated in the other. The significance of this relationship is not that the response of one sector should be to copy the other or to be different from the other. Rather, it is that the one provides a stimulus to the other, indeed, even sometimes a provocation; and it is this awareness one of the other that causes people to remain alert and alive to their potential rather than to remain either comfortable with the present and/or content with a future indistinguishable from the past.

The educational agenda for this decade is a long one but, as indicated at the outset of my remarks, the highest priority on this agenda will be to improve the quality of education offered to our young people, and not just to some but to all. This priority was high on the agenda of the National Commission's work and in its final report, the Commission observed as follows:

We do not believe that a public commitment to excellence and educational reform must be made at the expense of a strong public commitment to the equitable treatment of our diverse population. The twin goals of equity and high-quality schooling have profound and practical meaning for our economy and society, and we cannot permit one to yield to the other either in principle or in practice. To do so would deny young people their chance to learn and live according to their aspirations and abilities. It also would lead to a generalized accommodation to mediocrity in our society on the one hand or the creation of an undemocratic elitism on the other.

In the years to come the traditional meaning of literacy will surely be expanded to include a much broader knowledge of other cultures, a more complex understanding of technological and scientific concepts, and a deeper understanding of our governmental, political, economic and social systems--all this in addition to the traditional basics. The failure of an individual to complete a secondary school education in the 1980's will, I believe, come to be less associated with having attended too few years of school than with having completed a woefully inadequate course of study, however many years one may have been in school. To graduate from a high school (or a college or university for that matter) having taken a diffuse array of courses which in reality neither prepares one for employment nor for further education, is, in my view, a more accurate

description of what should be meant by being disenfranchised within the context of contemporary society.

This agenda has self-evident implications for educators, but what, you may ask, does it have to do with you who are graduating today and those friends and family joined with you for this occasion?

In most countries of the world, education is a social service funded and controlled by the central government. Educational issues and policies are usually far removed from the prerogatives and activities of the average citizen. By contrast, the citizen in this country has something to say about such policies and about the funding levels for our schools. Informed discretion, as Jefferson put it, is the strength of our political system. Informed discretion effectively employed is real power if citizens are willing to give voice to their views and to support those willing to lead out on these issues. Be an informed advocate of both the private and public sectors of our higher education system. Be an informed advocate of education generally by being active in your school district, by participating in the educational system in various volunteer capacities, and by being informed on issues that fundamentally affect our country and its institutions. Education is a strategic asset and its rise or fall will depend less on the apparent intentions of government than on the preference of the American people to favor excellence over mediocrity--both in the schools and in our society. As graduates of the University of the Pacific, I know that you will do your part.