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A Profession In Quest of Itself

By Ralph F. Fuchs

When one surveys the academic scene from the vantage point of this Association, with the concerns of rank-and-file faculty members particularly in mind, two developments in the American system of higher education since World War II assume fundamental importance. The first of these is the steady increase of sheer administration on most campuses and a resulting transformation of faculty participation in institutional government from informal collaboration or advice to the use of formal machinery. The second is the rise of an informal but influential national community of higher education possessing deliberative organs, agencies of research and criticism, and means of promoting the acceptance of policies and judgments collectively formulated.

Many other developments of high importance have, of course, also taken place during the same period. No one here is likely to forget the struggle of the mid-1950’s to maintain academic freedom against the particular threat of that period, or to overlook the fact that a deposit of laws and of governmental practices harmful to higher education, produced by the conflict, remains to be removed. The pressures of financial inflation and of mounting enrollments upon colleges and universities, with the resulting resort to new sources of funds, is a second development of concern to all, accompanying an enhanced significance of higher education in national and world life which is generally welcomed. The adaptation of technological innovations, notably television, to use in teaching is a striking current phenomenon, in which resides great potential progress as well as considerable possible harm to higher education. The spread of specially financed research projects in colleges and universities contemporaneously raises serious problems of assimilation of these projects in a manner consistent with institutional integrity.

These and other developments, important as they are, seem less critical to me than the first two I have mentioned; for, given the philosophy, the resources, and the skills higher education possesses, the changes they necessitate are likely to take place, not without great difficulty, but with preservation of the values at the core of our institutions of higher learning. Such has been the experience with the addition of many new schools, departments, and curricula to our universities—as the observance of the centenary of the Morrill Act has just reminded us in relation to the land-grant institutions. If this statement smacks of easy optimism and requires both qualification and demonstration, I nevertheless believe it to be true. Despite the mundane emphasis which still characterizes many professional and vocational schools and departments in our colleges and universities, the tendency—slow at times but impressive in the long run—is for these units to rise to higher standards, to recognize their relationship to science and the humanities, and to develop basic research. Not conquest of the old by the new, but assimilation of the new to the main academic organism, is, there is reason to believe, the fundamental law of American institutions of higher education. As a result we academicians, however motley a group we appear to be at a given time, succeed in maintaining a consensus as to our basic values and purposes, as the rarity of serious conflict in the Annual Meetings of this Association amply indicates. We are likely to continue to maintain that consensus as we meet the exigencies of expanded enrollments and changed technologies, provided the institutions in which we work retain their essential authority and manner of functioning.

The mode of operation and degree of independence of our institutions could change fundamentally, however; and I suggest that if these changes should take place the reason is likely to reside in one or both of the two recent developments I have chosen to stress. Within each college or university the primacy of the faculty in determining the teaching and research programs within the framework of the institution’s purposes has lain at the core of its processes. Now the fourth estate of administration has become at least as prominent in institutional affairs as trustees, faculty, and students, and the role of the faculty is changing in form if not in substance. Participation in the rising national community of higher education has, at the same time, become essential to each institution; and the nature of that participation—whether by trustees, administrative officers, students, or faculty members—will determine the character of that community’s influence.

1 Presidential address given at the Forty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the American Association of University Professors in Chicago, April 27, 1962.

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The problems, both local and national, for each institution are compounded when state-wide systems of higher education emerge, whether under the aegis of an expanding state university or under the control of a state board of higher education.

It is not necessary to dwell upon the evident quantitative aspects of the growth of academic administration. The functions of student admissions, supervision and discipline of students, maintenance of records, counselling, housing, purchasing, property management, finance, academic and nonacademic planning, personnel administration, and school and departmental management have necessitated the expansion that has taken place. Whether, as is often asserted, this development has involved a transfer of control over teaching and research, or at least of the conditions under which these functions are performed, from the faculty to deans and other administrative officers, depends on the relation of the actual state of affairs in the past to the present reality. Compared to the teachers in many of the autocratically controlled small institutions which dominated the scene until late in the nineteenth century and still exist today, the faculty of the typical modern college or university have gained, not lost, in authority. In some of the one-man academic fiefs of yesteryear, however, there must have been an informal sharing of control and supervision with members of the faculty; and respect for the professional independence and competence of the faculty member in his own courses was surely widespread. A definite transfer of authority over the curriculum to the faculty took place in some of the larger institutions. In those institutions of the first third of the present century which developed elaborate curricula and the school and departmental structures necessary to administer these curricula, the educational and research programs fell under the dominance of the divisional faculties, while important aspects of student extracurricular affairs were in part faculty determined, as they still are in many medium-size institutions. Compared to such institutions, the position today of typical faculties in the large institutions may reflect some loss of authority to academic and other deans, department heads, and project directors. There is, however, very little interference, on the whole, with the faculty member's assigned work, even though one occasionally hears complaints that leniency in grading of students is sometimes demanded. Administrative fiat often bears upon the faculty member directly in the assignment of work, the determination of working conditions, and such incidental but important matters as travel and attendance at meetings. The administration of facilities, such as typing services, and funds, such as travel money, formerly not available at all, is prominent in this picture. Collective faculty authority over curricula usually remains; and there has been a multiplication of faculty committees possessing at least advisory functions in matters ranging from the annual budget to the occasional choice of a president. The assertion that faculty members are increasingly dominated by deans in our better institutions, even when made dogmatically and colorfully in the pages of such publications as the Saturday Review, is in the teeth of both a long-term trend and the contemporary facts. Proof of the actual prevailing tendency came from our own Committee T seven years ago, in a report which showed that in identical institutions the role of the faculty in institutional government had expanded over a period of years; and this tendency has continued.

It does not follow that faculty authority is generally in a satisfactory state. Far from it. Not only do the standards of faculty participation in determining strictly educational policies in many colleges and universities depart widely from any the academic profession deems acceptable, but even in many of the best institutions the educational programs are vitally affected by decisions as to buildings, athletics, student extracurricular affairs, and finance, which faculties have little or no opportunity to influence.

The most powerful contemporary challenge to the existing scope of faculty authority comes, however, not from those who would enlarge it but from those who would cut it down. It comes as something of a shock to read in an influential pronouncement that "[t]he liberal college faculty as a body is not competent to make the judgments and evaluations required to design a curriculum in liberal education." Similarly, one reads in a recent friendly study of academic administration, that the need for educational changes and certain obstructive tendencies among faculties "substantially disqualify most faculties for a large role in governance" of their institutions. In context these statements are less menacing than they sound; but they have been deliberately made. The evidence adduced in support of their general thrust is, moreover, far from negligible. It behooves us to appraise as soberly and objectively as we can the role of faculties in institutional government—the more so since that role is actually enlarging rather than contracting.

In making our appraisal we need, I think, to discard as a norm the European scheme of faculty-conducted institutions. The influence of that scheme, enhanced by its medieval origins and the luster which the 19th century German experience lent to it, has been powerful and beneficial in American higher education. It has benefited

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1 See the account in Hofstadter and Metzger, The Development of Academic Freedom in the United States (1955), pp. 232-238.

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our own Association, many of whose founders were inspired by it, and we inherit the values which it embodies. Its actual transplantation into our colleges and universities has not taken place, however, nor would we, I think, wish such a development today. A sufficient reason for not advocating it uncritically is that institutions, once launched, cannot change their natures completely. We may regret that the European ideal has not been embodied in those new institutions which are now springing up, to see what could be made of it; but these institutions will remain relatively few in number, and it is doubtful at best whether an experiment foreign to American experience could do more than modify slightly our prevailing pattern.

The prevailing institutional structure results, of course, from the community initiative which gave rise to our colleges and universities and led to the bestowal of charters on the lay organizers, conferring full legal authority over the institutions upon them. Not guilds of scholars but citizens or churchmen conscious of the social need for higher education organized our private colleges and employed their faculties. When legislatures established state institutions they followed the same pattern. As a result, with occasional modifications in particular instances, full legal power over the institutions has remained in uncompensated boards of trustees, and faculty members have retained the legal status of employees. This arrangement has in some ways hampered the sound conduct of our colleges and universities; but in many instances it has also bestowed upon the institutions the dedicated service and wisdom of public-spirited citizens. Their management of institutional resources may well have been superior on the whole to any that the faculties might have devised or employed others to conduct. Much might be said about the deficiencies of many boards and the desirability of improvement. Some boards are inactive; others scarcely contribute to the spread of enlightenment. The good boards, however, are sources of educational strength as well as of managerial skill. They often serve as a buffer between the faculty and community pressures that threaten educational objectives and freedom, and occasionally their members interpret the educational program to the community. More significantly, the trustees also provide the official channel through which the faculties account for the proper discharge of their educational responsibilities. I believe it is good, not bad or restrictive, for educators to be charged with responsibility and for this responsibility to be formalized. Because we have been so obligated in this country, our college and university programs are closer to life than they otherwise would be and, with all the distortions that community demands have brought about, the essential core of genuine learning probably receives better support than would be forthcoming otherwise. If I am right, we are fortunate on the whole in having a form of organization that provides a high degree of institutional autonomy, and that holds us to our social responsibilities; and we are infusing into this kind of organization the elements of faculty participation which are desirable.

In our effort to expand faculty authority we have tended to rely in part upon the democratic ideal which comes natural to us. We cannot, however, rely upon this ideal as fundamental to education, even though it will and should, like the European model of a university, continue to serve us in important ways. The natural rights of man, which historically underlie political democracy, can hardly be said to secure authority to the faculties of functional institutions such as universities, which one can enter or leave and which must stand or fall on the basis of their works. Faculties are entitled to just so much participation in college and university government as the successful performance of teaching and research functions requires, and as they can handle better than available alternatives.

We must deal, then, with the competence of faculties in administration, which has been so much bruited about in recent discussions. We should, I think, concede at once that faculty members are much given to preoccupation with their several academic disciplines and immediate tasks of teaching and research, and that they yield with reluctance to the demands of committee work and other forms of participation in administration. This characteristic is, of course, not a defect; the question is simply as to its consistency with a responsible role in institutional government. We are probably less preoccupied with our immediate concerns than the citizenry at large, which also tends to leave matters of government, both political and organizational, to the specialists; and we may justly claim credit for vast amounts of devoted service by faculty members to over-all administrative problems as well as to social and political issues on the outside. It is, however, the politics of faculties, as much as the nature of individual faculty members, which the critics stress as harmful to sound administration. Here again the defects are probably less than among other occupational groups; but there can be little doubt that the play for school and departmental advantage within our institutions, and abstention from over-all control over educational policy because it might affect vested departmental interests adversely, have been widespread and have resulted in considerable waste and inefficiency. These deficiencies we must strive to eliminate; but we cannot yield to others the primacy of the faculty in matters the faculty are best qualified to determine, which has been built up over the years and for which no adequate substitute can be found. Neither would it be feasible to share faculty authority over educational programs by transferring it to mixed boards of faculty, administrators, and trustees, such as have been suggested; for these would simply diffuse responsibility and dilute the professional judgment which
should make the essential determinations. Faculties do, however, need advice and leadership which they often do not generate by themselves; and for this role the well-chosen administrator, stimulating the faculty and proposing measures to it, is in an ideal position. We should welcome him as a needed resource, rather than deride and decry his role as some among us tend to do.

Many of the strains in our institutions tend, I think, to diminish when faculty authority is clearly bestowed, so that it may be exercised as a matter of right, and when faculty responsibility is clearly defined. Inertia and jealousy in the retention of existing authority by administrators and trustees should not be permitted to delay reforms in this direction. Strains also arise when administrative decisions, even outside the field of primary faculty responsibility, which vitally affect educational programs, are made without consultation with the faculties. Such decisions include those that relate to the treatment of students of different races on a campus, to capital investments, to athletic and military programs, and to annual budgets.

We need, however, something more than a catalog of matters to which faculty authority should extend; we need an articulated conception of the nature and status of the academic profession, related to its history and its contemporary function. The 1960-61 Annual Report of the Carnegie Corporation attributes to President Harold W. Dodds' forthcoming book on The College and University President the statement that "There is little evidence that faculty members "are giving any systematic thought to a general theory of the optimum scope and nature of their part in government" (p. 10). I believe this statement to be true, although Committee T of this Association is making a significant beginning in formulating such a theory. There is a need for a formulation that extends beyond the matter of participation in academic government, to the entire set of activities and responsibilities attaching to faculty members as such. As a basis for it we need a study in depth of the implications of the institutional setting in which we work, the legal relation of employment into which we are cast, and the tradition of individual professional responsibility which we share with such largely self-employed groups as the practitioners of medicine and law. As matters stand, we do not know, for example, whether our salaries should be determined by individual bargaining or be fitted to a scale. We have not decided how far, repetitively, our employers, the faculty member independently, and faculty people as a nationally organized group or collectively on the local level are charged with securing the fulfillment of the professional obligations a faculty exists to discharge. We are sure of the need for full academic freedom and of the basic responsibility of the individual faculty member. We accept the propriety of administrative action to deal with cases of gross abuse or failure, subject to the observance of academic due process. Who should instruct the faculty member in his duties, check on his performance, admonish him on occasion, or perhaps take disciplinary action short of dismissal, we do not know. We have no agreed statement of his responsibilities to his institution, his sources of help, or the duty of self-improvement which may rest upon him. Hence, for example, we have no authoritative answer when the income tax collector refuses to recognize that faculty members sometimes make expenditures for professional purposes without being required by their employers to do so; and we cannot say whether we owe a duty to establish ethics or grievance committees, nationally or locally. In contemporary terms, we really need a project to find out.

If we were to fit our profession and its members more specifically into the world in which we operate, we would have to do so in the context of the national community of higher education which, as I have stressed, has developed so remarkably of late. It began, perhaps, with the learned societies, formed around the middle of the nineteenth century; but the organized community which concerns itself with the over-all affairs of higher education seems to have started with the establishment of the present American Association of Land Grant Colleges and State Universities in 1885-7, of the National Association of State Universities in 1895, and of the Association of American Universities in 1900. The Association of American Colleges and the American Association of University Professors followed in 1915. The Division of Higher Education in the then United States Bureau of Education began in 1911. With the formation in 1918 of the American Council on Education as an organization of associations and institutions, the growing community took more definite shape. It has generated many additional organizations since that time. The great foundations began to exert their influence shortly after the turn of the present century, transforming medical education in the process and contributing especially to the international influence and contacts of American higher education. Today their enormous resources and power are applied in many areas. Stimulated in considerable part by grants from the foundations, an impressive flow of informative and critical literature dealing with higher education issues forth annually and receives wide attention. Manuals for trustees and business officers have been published, and the presidency of universities is receiving a prominent share of attention. Recently the academic man and his mind have been analyzed in print, and the academic marketplace has been made the subject of a published study. Presidential commissions have inquired and reported. Organizations of professional schools exert strong power in their areas. The regional accrediting


caplow and mcgee, the academic marketplace (1958).
associations, dealing with entire institutions, share their accrediting authority with organizations in several of the specialties and with nonacademic associations in several of the professions.

Most of the activity that goes on in the national community of higher education is accompanied by no claim to the exercise of authority over individual institutions; but the climate of opinion which much of it generates is influential. In recent years that influence operates especially—although with less effectiveness than one could wish—in relation to the Congress of the United States, where legislation affecting higher education arises at every session. It is fair to say that, among contemporary developments in the non-legislative sphere, the spread of educational television and the particular forms it assumes, and the manner of securing support for higher education, have been vitally affected by developments at the national level. On the faculty side, it has been fairly well demonstrated that within the various academic disciplines national opinion determines institutional "prestige" and the reputation of the individual scholar, and that departmental curricula and personnel selection are to a considerable extent molded by it.

As to much of this national influence in higher education the justified complaint is often heard, especially in the ranks of our Association, that participation by faculty members who are not administrative officers is rare and, when it occurs, is quite inadequate. Certainly it is true that in virtually all matters with which national committees, commissions, and conferences deal, well-chosen faculty members would have much to contribute and would be likely to make contributions distinct in character from those of the administrative officers of educational institutions, citizens, and public officials, who commonly participate—with the aid, in most cases, of a single professor. It is true, of course, that the administrative officers of a college or university serve in these bodies as representatives of the entire institutions from which they come, and that their information and viewpoints may not differ essentially from those of the faculties with which they are associated. Their responsibilities at home are, however, somewhat distinct from those of the members of their faculties, and their experience in teaching and research, when they have come from academic ranks, often lies considerably in the past. All in all, the direct impact of the knowledge and experience of faculty members should find a larger place than they now have in national educational councils.

In urging this point, members of faculties are obliged to remain conscious that through some of the disciplinary organizations exacting demands are sometimes made upon institutions, without consultation with administrators. This Association also takes unilateral action, leading directly to pressure upon college and university administrations which are deemed to have violated the principles of academic freedom and tenure. No one but Active members of the Association participates in the process of investigating alleged infringement of these principles and of censuring administrations found to have violated them. We claim to perform our enforcement function by virtue of a delegation of authority or responsibility from the academic community as a whole, and that we speak as representatives of the entire body of higher education. I believe these claims to be essentially correct, even when we make pronouncements in a manner and to an effect which does not have the immediate approval of many administrators and others in higher education. Our essential role, however, the value of which seems by and large to be appreciated by our valued Associate members and by the academic community at large, is to render the influence of faculty opinion as strong as possible in relation to this and other matters. There have been no demands by other elements in higher education for a continuing share in the discharge of the enforcement function in the area of academic freedom and tenure. A pronouncement by the Association of American Universities in 1953 with regard to the position of faculty members who invoke the Fifth Amendment seems to have been an exceptional excursion into this area.

In formulating the principles of freedom and tenure, as well as others which apply to particular aspects of academic affairs, we have, of course, practiced continuing collaboration with the Association of American Colleges. This process has been an invaluable aid in arriving at acceptable conclusions, and a continuing reminder that we have a duty to serve well the entire body of higher education. As we carry forward other programs parallel to that in freedom and tenure, such as those relating to economic status and faculty participation in college and university government, we will have increased need to enlist the cooperation of others. It is a source of great satisfaction that in the past year important instances of this kind of collaboration have taken place.

Even in respect to our highly successful methods of enforcing the principles of academic freedom and tenure, ultimate solutions may not have been reached. Wider sponsorship of the governing principles by institutional associations would be desirable. A more representative and less unilateral means of dealing with violations may also at some point call for consideration. We have sought to maintain objectivity and scrupulous accuracy in ascertaining facts and formulating judgments, and we may justly claim to have succeeded. Nevertheless, in proceedings which involve a large element of guilt determination, we combine the investigation of cases and the decision-making process in one organization. Means of separating these processes and securing decisions by mixed or neutral tribunals are not inconceivable.

We operate as a profession, then, in an institutional setting which has a long history different from the history
of colleges and universities in other countries. The latest chapter in that history records significant transformations both locally and nationally. The situation is to a considerable extent fluid. Despite basic criticism of the competence of faculties, the principles for which we stand have gained ground, not lost it, and we may look forward confidently to the future if we develop our basic thought and preserve both flexibility and an adamant purpose to effectuate those principles.

In looking ahead we need, also, to envisage the ensuing chapter of the history of higher education, which is now being written; for it seems clear that increasingly we shall influence and be influenced by the academic institutions and professions of other lands. In the process of mutual interaction with them we must again relate ourselves to discovering and serving common ideals. The membership of this Association in the International Association of University Professors and Lecturers is, I think, an extremely valuable means to this end.

Underlying our efforts at all levels, from that of the behavior of the individual member of our profession in his daily tasks to our organizational participation in national and international affairs, we need, in sum, an articulated conception of the academic profession as a functioning group in society. We possess some of the elements of such a conception; but many others, as I have tried to demonstrate, remain to be worked out. To seek to know ourselves well and to give voice to our true purposes in an ongoing world is the most fundamental task that confronts us.

... the weakest point

It is my belief that the faculty must have a direct role in the establishment of the budgetary policies of a university. In this connection, I appreciate the leadership that the AAUP is providing as far as salaries are concerned. An adequate salary structure is the weakest point in our educational system today—not only in institutions of higher education, but in secondary and elementary schools. Steps should be taken as soon as possible to double the salaries of persons in the teaching profession. The success of this movement will depend to a large extent on the kind of leadership which is provided our institutions of higher education. Members of the faculty should have a role in the fund-raising policies of the university, which policies can and do have an impact on the objectives of the educational community.

*From "Address by the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare at the Forty-Fifth Annual Meeting" by the Honorable Arthur S. Flemming, Bulletin, Autumn, 1959, p. 408.*