

ON THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY¹

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The American Research University is in danger. I am not referring to the immediate problems of finances and political oversight. These are serious problems - but there are others which are more insidious and, ultimately, more threatening. In particular, there are four sources of danger to our universities to which we need to attend. Briefly put, these are (1) the lack of institutional loyalty on the part of faculty and the culture of peripatetic professional administrators, (2) the general issue of institutional loyalty to the faculty, (3) the warping of the vision of the research university, and finally (4) the failure of the faculty to participate in public debate. I begin with the first issue. Let me turn directly to the problem of institutional loyalty.

It is probably an exaggeration to claim that the creation of the National Science Foundation, the NIH and the National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities constitute major sources of the danger to our universities, but, I am willing to try to defend it. At the heart of my argument is the following empirical assertion, equally contentious, but, I submit, one that can be verified. Since the launch of Sputnik we have produced 8 to 10 generations of scholars whose loyalty is not to any particular university or college, but to their larger “profession” - which professional identity is closely tied to two phenomena, the professional society and to the federal funding agencies.

¹ This essay originated in the form of a series of talks beginning in 1995 to the Graduate Program in Science and Technology Studies at Virginia Tech, culminating in the final part as an invited address to the Virginia Philosophical Association in November 2008. It owes a lot to the comments and reflections of those audiences. But in the end these remain my observations, complete with all their flaws.

The careers of university faculty are no longer seen as tied in important ways to the school where they hold a position. Rather, it has become accepted practice to move from institution to institution with the deliberate intention of improving one's circumstances, whether that be in terms of salary or research conditions, or both. Institutional loyalty is a thing of the past. More important is your status in "the profession".

Let us begin by asking what is wrong with faculty moving on to improve themselves and their circumstances? There are many benefits for the faculty who move, in fact they won't move unless those benefits are clear. Salary is always an issue. I doubt if many people will move to take a cut in salary. But, especially in these days of shrinking resources, who can blame someone for taking a position with a better salary, better benefits, better students, better colleagues, better research environment? What is so problematic about trying to improve one's lot in life? In short, the mobility I am decrying seems to have enormous benefits.

But, where there are benefits, there are also costs. What are the costs? For the faculty who move, the costs come in the uncertainty of the new situation. It takes a while to find out if the promises will be kept, if the students are in fact better, if your colleagues are more congenial and exciting, if the computer support is as good as it was at your previous institution. For the institution the problems of new hires are universal - will the person live up to his or her promise? How will the new personality fit in? how disruptive will he or she be? How productive will they be?

All of the above is fairly obvious and little of it touches my major concern, although it helps to set the context. As I see it, the symptom of the major problem is the lack of stability created by the mobility of faculty. But it is just a symptom. The bigger problem is a general confusion over the nature and role of the university - the research university. I believe that if we understood, in ways that have been neglected, what it means to be a

member of a university faculty, as opposed to a member of a profession who merely gets his paycheck at university X, the problem of faculty mobility would decrease. When mobility decreases, stability increases. As universities increase their stability they will increase their ability to identify and correct the problems they face. For example, a stable faculty produces cohesion within research groups yielding greater productivity. Cohesive research groups also spend less time fumbling around trying to find the correct connection to funding agencies. Instead they build a record of success and continuity. But, it might be objected, won't this also lead to stagnation and a loss of cutting edge research? Why should it? These researchers will still be attending conferences and exchanging ideas with other researchers, they just be spending less time moving their labs, reestablishing a working cohesion and learning the ropes at the new place, all of which obviously cuts into research productivity.

In addition, there is more to being a member of a university than being a productive researcher. Let me begin by endorsing at the beginning something my immigrant Sicilian grandfather would often tell me: "Giuseppe, if you are going to do something, do it to the best of your ability, or don't do it at all". This, I believe, is something we have forgotten when it comes to being a faculty member. When you accept a position on a university faculty you are taking on the responsibility of being a member of that faculty. This is different from being a scholar. One can be an independent scholar, but not an independent faculty member. Being a member of a faculty entails assuming certain specific responsibilities and obligations to students and to your colleagues at that university. As noted above, the last several generations of scholars have been raised in a climate of competitive grants, where personal success is measured by success on the national and international levels and not at home in such terms as improving the quality of one's home institution. Furthermore, the idea that working to improve the quality of your university may relate to the overall survival of the university system as we know it, seems to have slipped by unnoticed.

iv

To begin with, not anyone can be a faculty member. Membership requires credentials, credentials which certify that the holder is an expert in a field. Students, on the other hand, lack those credentials, but seek knowledge and also credentialing. The kind of credentials the students receive certify that they have acquired a certain amount of knowledge. So far, so good. Basically, then, faculty are the guardians of knowledge. As members of a university faculty they are entrusted with that knowledge and given the charge to enhance it and then transfer the old as well as the enhanced knowledge to the next generations. The fundamental feature of a university is to be found in that relation of transferring knowledge. But we can conceive of other similar relations, where knowledge is transferred and yet we would hesitate to call the arrangement by which that happens a university - for instance, a trade school. And surely, the transmission of knowledge takes place up and down the educational ladder, from kindergarten to graduate school and with the same sets of players, students and teachers. So, while the relation is basic, it is not defining of a university.

What is common to trade schools and other educational institutions, but not to universities, is that these other institutions are charged primarily with the transmission of knowledge, while universities have two additional and unique charges: (i) to preserve old knowledge and (ii) to create new knowledge as well. That is; a university is by definition a research university.

If I am right that the basic ingredients of a university are students, faculty, the preservation and transmission of old knowledge and the creation and transmission of new knowledge, then we can continue. One thing stands out once we accept that these are the fundamentals: nothing necessarily follows from these five items with regard to any particular arrangement for achieving the goals of creating, guarding, and transmitting knowledge. This is reflected in the wide variety of institutional arrangements that have grown up to accomplish those goals. To be a university does not require that certain disciplines or areas of knowledge be nurtured in that environment. There are

In order to bring this all together, I need to introduce a few other things. First, I already noted that there is no generally agreed upon structure or arrangement for a university. Those structures that have grown up are the products of many factors, most of them accidental. What is interesting is that we celebrate these institutions both for their uniqueness and for the general characteristics they all share. In the grand experiment to forge the best means for creating, preserving, and transmitting knowledge, we encourage competition among universities, a competition that itself fosters the development and dedication to these basic values. In that context universities establish and nurture traditions and forms of relationships that result in loyal backers and dedicated believers in, for example, the Virginia Tech way or the Vassar Experience. Further, there can be no question but that this system of unique, competing institutions has created the premier set of research universities in the world. This is where the world comes for graduate work.

² For Example, The College of William and Mary was granted the status of “university” in 1776 (the first in the colonies), but still identifies itself as a college.



This is, by and large, where the best research is being done. Our system of diverse and unique institutions in cheerful competition with one another has produced one of the most significant creations of the civilized world. It is, however, as noted above, in danger of being destroyed. The mobility of faculty and the lack of institutional loyalty that implies threatens the destruction of this system because it represents an attempt, sometimes deliberate, sometimes not, to homogenize universities. From either side, from the side of the faculty member or of the university, if moving around is the name of the game, then unique traditions and idiosyncratic procedures will have to be modified, regularized and systematically sanitized. Faculty members are not going to move somewhere if that requires that they completely reformat all their files, for example. Or, if they do, they won't move unless they are going to be promised the necessary help to do that work. If a university is attempting to attract faculty, it is cheaper for it to adopt something approaching a generally accepted procedure or computer network or grading system, than to insist on retaining old, cherished, but complicated for the outsider ways of doing things. The more universities adopt interchanging ways of operating, the less unique they appear, the less there is to differentiate one place from another, and a vicious cycle begins - why not move if there is more money involved and nothing else is different? But it is just these different ways of performing the tasks of preserving and transmitting old knowledge and creating new knowledge that lies at the heart of our system of universities. The point is, since there is no proven best way to achieve these goals, we must do what we can to perfect the different ways which have grown up in context to see how close we can come to succeeding. To let the uniqueness drop for the purpose of personal gain, which I submit will be short-lived if this goes on for very long, to let personal gain rule the day, will be the end of the story. And it may not be personal gain alone at work here. Universities seem willing to enter the homogenization game if it results in attracting better (on some definition yet to be determined of "better") faculty. But, I suggest that is a case of pursuing short term gain at the risk of long term failure.

Faculty efforts to improve financial situations are understandable. What I find troublesome, however, is the view that my standing as a scholar comes from my recognition from my profession, rather than as a member of a university whose quality is universally admired. My work may, nay, most probably, make a small dent in the scholarly world. I may get my fifteen minutes of fame. But surely the greater rewards come from building a first rate institution, which, through its goals of preserving and transmitting knowledge and creating new knowledge, impinges on and changes the lives of so many students. These rewards far surpass momentary and fleeting scholarly praise. And I do mean fleeting – for how much of what is currently being published will be remembered or used 100 years from now? Or to put it differently, how much of what we studied when we were in graduate school is still being studied?

Let us look at this from a different perspective. When a faculty member identifies his or her wellbeing with the profession at large, there can be no doubt that there will be diminished attention to solving the problems at his or her home institution. More to the point, everything that goes wrong becomes an excuse to leave. One does not concern oneself with the well being of the department or the college or with attracting students when one sees his or her rewards elsewhere. When you cease to attend to the problems of improving your university, you engage in what is ultimately a self defeating action. If you fail to see that the improvement and success of your university is ultimately more important than your petty ego. You may soon face a day when there are no longer research universities. Minding home base is the best way to secure the future.

Or, to put the point in its most obnoxious form - to take the perks a university offers, from salary to travel, and to ignore the obligation to work for the benefit of the institution is to betray a fundamental trust. And, please, do not haul out that sophism that the best thing you can do for the university is to do your work. There is more that needs to be done as well. We are not engaged in selling our scholarly services. We are engaged in the creation, preservation and transmission of knowledge, of our cultural heritage. This,



if anything is, is a sacred trust. We are privileged to be allowed to partake in these activities. To use this opportunity for personal gain at the expense of the institution and the people it nurtures is unsettling at the least. More to the point, it announces that you do not know what it is to be a faculty member or what it is to be part of a university thereby betraying the institutions that have nurtured you. The betrayal comes from the lack of commitment to perfecting the structures and building on the traditions of one university with its particular configurations. For the system to work, each university must work at becoming the best it can within the context it has established. If we don't work to perfect that unique way of creating, transmitting and preserving knowledge that we find here and if we give into the homogenization of universities, then the competition which has made this system so successful will not take place. Without faculty who are dedicated to perfecting this one university in which they are colleagues, no historically contingent institution can expect to survive. What to do?

Well first we must do something about the distractions of outside funding. In my opening paragraphs I asserted that the national funding agencies were part of the problem. Here is why: money to support research is most readily found outside one's home institution. To receive those funds, a faculty member must pass a peer review. The peers are not from his home institution - they are drawn from a national constituency. The audience one must please to get money to do a significant part of one's job - create new knowledge - is not to be found at one's home institution - it is elsewhere - at best the researcher will have divided loyalties - at worst, no loyalty at all to the university. I endorse a proposal that has been floating around in which has the federal government give its money directly to the top 100 or so research universities. Abolish the NSF, NIH, NEH, and NEA. Establish criteria for a periodic review, say every 5 years, to evaluate the progress and to determine if the university should stay on the top 100 list. Each university then is responsible for awarding research grants and for seeing that the best work is done. Faculty members doing the research won't have split loyalties.



In short, if we reduce the outside distractions, there will be few reasons to avoid the obligations to your university. Surely it is in fulfilling those obligations that the genuine satisfaction of being a member of the academy comes from. On the other hand, if you believe that all you have to do is sit in that office and write those obscure papers or do the equivalent in some lab - then your selfishness will be rewarded by your exclusion from the fellowship of the academy. You will meet your friends at conferences perhaps - but not your colleagues.

One last thought before returning to the idea of a university. There is also an obligation on the part of the university to its faculty. Loyalty is a two-way street. The university administration cannot expect loyalty if it does less than everything in its power to enhance the possibilities for the faculty to do its job. (More on this theme anon.) The atmosphere must be one of family not adversaries.

Finally, let me return to the idea of a university. There is no single idea of a university. A university is an ideal - a goal to be achieved - it will be the best means in a specific historical context for guarding the knowledge that has been created, for transmitting it to a deserving audience who will appreciate it and benefit from it and it will also be the best means for generating new knowledge. The only way to achieve that goal is to work for it, not to run away.

Part 2: Peripatetic Administrators

I have always thought of university administration as something a faculty member does as part of being a good university citizen. But not everyone thinks that way. For example, my father, a retired Air Force Colonel was extremely excited when my colleagues asked me to chair the Department of Philosophy. He kept talking about how it was a move "up". I tried to explain as patiently as I could that it was not a move up. When I end my term as department head and I return to the faculty full time is when I will be moving up. In a university there is no more cherished position than that of a tenured professor. Well, that obviously got nowhere. From a military perspective, being an administrator is better than being a grunt, and the more people one administers, the higher up you are on the ladder of something or other, administration being identified with leadership. But faculty are not leaders *per se*. Faculty are teachers and researchers. Nor do they regard administrators as leaders in the more traditional military fashion. Rather, faculty tend to view administrators as necessary evils, a theme I will return to at the end of this section. But first, there are evils, and then there are evils.

First, let's divide the category of administrators into two groups, university academic administration and university nonacademic administration. Under university academic administration I mean the likes of department chairs, deans, provosts, and maybe even presidents. They are responsible for ensuring the success of the threefold mission of preserving, creating, and transmitting knowledge. Under nonacademic administration I mean registrars, comptrollers, vice presidents for facilities, vice presidents for finance, etc. These folks are responsible for keeping the books, making sure the buildings don't fall down, and maintaining records. They are essential support personnel. Things go wrong, however, when the demands of the support staff takes precedence over the academic job. When, for example, the registrar's perceived need to process grades quickly results in a deadline for faculty to turn in final grades that does not give faculty

ample time to grade final exams carefully and to compute final grades fairly. However, these sorts of minor inconveniences can be overcome when there is a firm commitment from the President and the Board of Visitors to the absolute priority of matters academic. When that commitment is missing, the educational mission of the university suffers. When the support staff is allowed to arrange things for their convenience rather than in terms of academic importance, the students lose. And with respect to nonacademic administrators, that is all I want to say.

The real object of my concern here is a fairly recent phenomenon, emerging in the last four decades. There now exists a group of academic administrators who move from university to university in pursuit of some sort of career path that takes them from one position of power or prestige to another position of greater power or greater prestige. The caricature of the administrator I have in mind is the faculty member who leaves university A to become a department head at university B, only to leave there to become a dean at University C, a provost at university D, a president at university E and then president at university F, which is a better university than university E.

Now, what is wrong with a person pursuing such a path? From the point of view of the person in question, probably not much. With each move, he or she ends up making more money and wielding more power. If power is what you want, and if it is what you think you are really getting as you make these moves, then I guess this is the right thing to do. Never mind that at each successive level, you are increasingly constrained by the audiences to which you must respond, audiences that wield more power than you do at every stage. Moving from a faculty position to that of a department head is a good example. As a faculty member, I taught my classes, more often than not the classes I wanted to teach. I did my research, which was virtually always on topics on which I wanted to work, and I came and went with minimal restrictions, maybe only office hours. When I became a department head things changed. Now when I teach, it is more often than not to fill in where something is needed. I must be constantly attentive to the needs

We all are familiar with the irritation that comes from listening to the new chair or dean or provost talk about what he or she did at his previous institution. "When I was department head at Podunk U," Who cares? That was there and this is here, and here is not only a different place, it is a better place. The frustration we feel when faced with that approach is due to two things. First, among other things, we know deep down



that our institution is unique, and we don't like hearing it treated as if it isn't. The fact that something worked elsewhere doesn't mean that it will work here. Second, there is also the lurking suspicion that lying beneath the appeal to what worked elsewhere is a general failure of that administrator, for example, to really listen to the problem we have here. That is, it seems that the administrator is not listening or does not really want to know what the problem is. Thinking though a solution in terms of the problem as it is seen by those experiencing it here is tough work when you are new to a campus. You need to know the players, the history of the problem, the kind of institutional structure already in place to deal with the problem, etc. Rather than taking the time to find all this out, it is much easier to import a "solution" with which you are already familiar. This is especially the case if you do not plan to stick around for more than five years. Why invest that much time and effort in learning about a place you plan to leave? What matters, to use a corporate analogy, is the quarterly bottom line. It matters not that the solution you import might not fit into this structure that we have evolved here. Nor does it matter if the solution, while having the appearance of success in the short run, turns out to be a disaster in the long run. What matters to the peripatetic administrator is the appearance, if only on the CV, of having come up with a solution and come up with it quickly. This then is something to point to with pride when applying for the next job.

Now it may appear that I am being too harsh. Surely not every administrator brought in from outside views the job here as merely a stepping stone. In typical fashion, I will now put my foot firmly in my mouth and give an example: Henry Bauer came here to Virginia Tech as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences from the University of Kentucky, and when he stepped down as dean he became a member of our faculty. I don't know if he sought other positions elsewhere, but I am pretty confident that he didn't. But, Dean Bauer to the contrary, there are many administrators who do view each new job as merely a way station to the next one. OK, what's wrong with it?



I have already suggested that one problem is the lack of interest in finding solutions to problems that will really work at this institution. There are no universal solutions to the types of problems which crop up in institutions that by their very nature are unique. Now let's be fair. The job of a senior administrator is not easy. It is complicated and it is extremely demanding time wise. It may be the case that there simply is not enough time available to the administrator to completely research the history of the problem and to recover earlier proposed solutions, the institutional resources available, etc. But that seems to me to say two things. First, if the job is so demanding, bringing someone in from the outside may not be the best way to have the job done well. This is not to say that someone new to the campus can't or won't do the job well. But it clearly takes a special kind of outsider, one interested in finding the right solution for this institution. Secondly, we need to find ways to identify these people. How do we tell the potential good administrators who will do the right kind of job for us from the undesirable peripatetic administrator? Some things to consider are: What do they know about Virginia Tech? Have they done their homework? And don't be snowed by the superficial. I am reminded of a candidate for the Directorship of a Center who tried, successfully so it seems, to ingratiate himself to his audience by uttering some platitudes about land grant universities. Most of what he said was false, but people were impressed that he knew this was a land grant university. I suspect that says as much about us as it does about the candidate. So maybe we need to give ourselves a little talking to. We should make it our business to be hard-nosed when interviewing candidates for administrative positions at Virginia Tech. How much do they know about us? Have they done their homework? Do they have more to say than nice things about what a great university this is? Have they taken the time to find out what sorts of difficulties we face, or what our internal structure looks like? Do they know our budget and our budget history? If not, and if we still hire them, or appoint them, then we deserve what we get.

So the first danger is the prospect of getting an administrator more concerned with easy fixes and with his or her own career than with making this place better. The second



danger comes from importing someone with an agenda. Well, maybe that is too strong a claim. After all, T. Marshall Hahn, (former president of Virginia Tech in the late 1960s and early 1970s) had an agenda: to make Virginia Tech one of the top 50 comprehensive research universities in the country. Now some might argue that that was the ruination of VPI. To achieve that goal we had to abandon the great traditions which made VPI what it was: the Corps of Cadets, the top down administrative structure, the almost exclusive commitment to agriculture and engineering and the Extension Service. To attract the faculty who could bring in the big grants we needed to attract better students and to develop serious graduate programs. To become a comprehensive university we needed to develop a College of Arts and Sciences and encourage the arts and the humanities. These changes upset the status quo and led to serious divisions which plague us still, witness our continuing battle over what name to use. T. Marshall had an agenda. Many of us think it was the right one, others disagreed because they understood the consequences of transforming VPI into Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. And in some ways, I think many of the battles we have fought over the proper direction for the university have at their root this tension between the perception of the uniqueness of VPI and the uncertainty, nay even the fear that Virginia Tech will not be unique, but will become only one more faceless mega-university. But not all such resistance to change is understood with sympathy. Some will resist another's agenda because it threatens their cozy nest. It strikes me that while cozy nests are nice, and we all want one of our own, they should only be protected if they can be justified in terms of the greater interests of the university.

There are other types of agendas of which to be beware. There are political and social agendas. Public universities are not strangers to being pawns in political battles which are waged at state wide and even country wide levels. Most recently, we have felt the impact of our current (1996) Governor's campaign to eliminate extension service programs in the inner cities of the Commonwealth, reflecting the Republican antagonism toward the needy. A land grant university without an extension service is not a land



grant university. We have won only half that battle, retaining that portion of the extension service working with agriculture. The attacks on the productivity of university professors and the success of universities in training students is another example of the way universities are the subject of social agendas. But these do not speak to the social agendas of peripatetic administrators.

Universities, especially public universities can be instruments of social policy. For example, the creation of the land grant university was a conscious effort to institutionalize a means for rebuilding the American South after “the war of northern aggression.” Universities can also be used to change social attitudes and to implement social policy. Now there are different sorts of social policies. There are policies that have been passed by legislatures and which have the force of law. It is our duty to abide by these policies. Hiring someone from the outside who intends to make a university abide by the law doesn't seem to me to be a problem. A university in flagrant violation of the law is cutting its own throat.

But there are also social agendas which do not have the force of law, but which can best be described as ideologies and there exist academic administrators who view universities as vehicles for social venues, where the kind of agenda is the implementation of a social ideology that does not have the force of law. Such administrators can be deadly for a university. The implementation of social policies that have been publicly debated in the university community and agreed upon is one thing. Universities are the ideal place for that sort of debate to take place. But it is yet another thing, yet another example of the lack of concern for the uniqueness of the institution, for a senior administrator to impose his or her own social agenda without benefit of debate. Not only does the imposition of a social ideology reveal the lack of respect that administrator has for the faculty and staff at that university, it demonstrates the failure of that administrator as a leader. To be an academic leader is to be able to persuade the university community to follow your vision. Academic administrators who view the move

Now all this may be true, but there are two counter arguments to this view that need to be considered. First, there is still the old chestnut that we need people from outside because they can bring a fresh perspective to our problems. This argument parallels the argument for not hiring your own Ph.D. students. We need to bring new faculty into the

But I want to argue the stronger point as well: university academic administration ought to be the job of that university's faculty. It ought to be something that a faculty member can see himself or herself moving into and then out of again. Administration is not, of course, for everyone. Some people are better at it than others. However, it should not be viewed as a career change. It should not be considered necessarily a permanent change of status for a faculty member to become a department chair for a term or two or three and then , maybe even a dean or provost. They are, after all, members of our faculty, doing a job for us, just we as all do when we sit on committees and task forces. When we finish our committee work we return to our teaching and research; likewise with faculty administrators.

Finally, if you combine the peripatetic administration with the personally ambitious faculty, then the goal of maintaining the uniqueness of our institutions will be totally undermined. There is no incentive to keep the traditions. Rather, what we want to do is make it easier for people to move around. That argues for an increased homogenization of the university system, from budgeting to criteria for promotion. And as I argued earlier, the strength of our university system lies in the competition among unique



institutions trying to perfect different ways of preserving, creating and transmitting knowledge.

Part 3: Excellence or Status?

I repeat, the current state of higher education is, to be blunt, ominous. Several colliding trends threaten to undo what has taken approximately 125 years to create, i.e., the most successful university system in the world. It is successful, I argued in Parts 1 and 2 because, in large measure, of its diversity. We have small colleges, large colleges, small universities, large universities, specialized universities, general all-purpose universities, research universities, public universities that can be research universities or not, private colleges and universities fitting all of the above and the list goes on. The key point here is that the variety means that not only can students find a place where they can flourish, but that by not following a cookie-cutter model, these institutions have evolved a variety of means for sustaining, conveying and developing knowledge. When I said it is the most successful system in the world, I refer not only to Nobel laureates, but also to the number of students who come to this country to study from around the world. Until recently, America has been *the* educational Mecca. This influx of international students and researchers has further sustained the excellence we exhibit by not only bringing us their skills, but also by broadening our perspectives. Despite our vitality and the robustness of our institutions, we are beginning to see some trends that threaten this system in ways that we have not anticipated.

In this section I look at two trends are particularly disturbing. The first we are all aware of: decreased state support. Budget shortfalls are to be found across the country and the impact they have had on public university funding has been severe. The second is not quite as obvious. It is the developing bifurcation of the university system into two distinct groups, the haves and the have-nots. The bifurcation I refer to has been noted

by others. What has not been discussed are the negative consequences resulting from this possible future.

Of the roughly 300 universities in the United States, and now I am restricting myself to institutions with “university” in their name, not the entire range of post-secondary educational opportunities, we appear to heading for a situation in which there is a small group of 30-50 elite of research universities and the rest will increasingly become universities in name only.

One measure of academic prestige is the amount of research dollars a university brings in. The amount of research dollars results from successful grants and, increasingly, partnerships with industry. The lion’s share of grants come from federal agencies, NSF, NIH, DOD, etc. These agencies favor, to put it mildly, work in the sciences.

Prestige/money, money/science; result: humanities, arts, social sciences in decline → university in trouble. This means that the search for dollars puts the sciences and engineering in the limelight. The humanities, arts and social sciences suffer in this climate, as we have already seen. This, in turn, paints a dark picture not only for the future of these disciplines, but eventually for the sciences themselves and the university system as a whole.

This dark picture can be made darker as we see what it entails for the sciences. There is something in this picture, rosy as it appears for the sciences, that also sows the seeds of their decay. In going after the money researchers run the risk of traveling the road already well- worn, picking up projects that merely play out the details of a once exciting field – doing what Kuhn would call normal science. If there is NSF money for research in an area, it is because the area has already been marked out, identified and, worst of all, the exciting cutting-edge work has been done. That is, of course, a contentious claim, and it suggests that all of my friends with lots of NSF money are not

In the frenzied competition to become a member of that emerging elite, some university administrators have taken to exhorting their troops to seek bigger and more high profile grants. But, if what I said before is anywhere near the mark, that is not the way to do great science and build a great university. It is, however, ultimately the way to mediocrity and the end of the kind of scientific research that escapes the status quo.

So, what to do? The problem, as I see it, lies in the conception of a university behind the push for research dollars. Having the dollars does not mean we have achieved greatness, in the same way that having a ACC football team does not mean we have achieved greatness on the football field. A great university is first and foremost an institution of higher learning. Another way to put this is to say that institutions that focus on fostering learning by creating the circumstances in which it flourishes have the greatest chance of achieving greatness. How do we do that?

The October 20, 2003 issue of *The Scientist* contained a report of the results of a survey that aimed to “help researchers identify the universities and centers where their work will be nurtured and fairly remunerated”. They posted the survey on the web and invited 38,000 individuals in tenure and tenure track positions in noncommercial organizations to respond. They had 2,120 usable responses. They also took into account variations between the US and the rest of the world and produced two lists, one for the US and another for the rest of the world, of the top ten research institutions. The results are interesting, to say the least:

Top Ten US Research Institutions.

1. Fox Chase Cancer Center, Philadelphia, PA
2. Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN
3. Yale University, New Haven, CN
4. University of California @ San Francisco
5. University of Minnesota, St. Paul
6. Cornell University, Ithaca, NY
7. National Cancer Institute, Frederick, MD
8. Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI
9. University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Neb.
10. University of Texas, Southwestern Medical Center, Dallas, TX

Top 10 Research Institutions Outside the US

1. Dalhousie University, Halifax, CA
2. INRA Research Center at Versailles-Grignon, France
3. University of Dundee, Scotland
4. University of Alberta, Edmonton, CA
5. McMaster University, Hamilton, CA
6. Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel
7. University of Manchester, England
8. University of Toronto, CA
9. Ghent University, Belgium
10. Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium

Even more interesting are the factors that were listed as contributing to the best workplaces:

1. Build collegial relationships
2. Provide appropriate tools and decent work spaces
3. Fill funding gaps to maintain research
4. Fair pay, fair negotiations
5. Provide security today and tomorrow – meaning by that benefits.
6. Cultivate tomorrow's researchers
7. Ensure academic freedom
8. Hire effective managers
9. Take down the boundaries and let other organizations in – i.e., no impediments to publishing.
10. Let scientists share the fruits of their research – IP rights.
11. Make sure scientists have a system to turn to when trouble comes – appeals system.
12. Keep track of the rules.

I see no reason why this model cannot be used across the board for all researchers. This is in opposition to an atmosphere of brutal competition, fear and angst, created by

Part 4: The Public Intellectual

In the previous components of what I had not originally intended to extend further, I argued (1) that the continued success of the American Research University requires that faculty refocus their attention on their respective institutions rather than professional organizations, and (2) that the universities, each unique in its own way, are endangered by peripatetic administrators who import “solutions” to non-problems from institutions at which they previously served and then depart to leave the mess for someone else to clean up. (3) that excellence in research requires a faculty that feels its efforts are appreciated even when it does not bring in external funding. Essentially the ideas explored in those previous talks had to do with respecting the basis for the core strength of research universities, i.e., their unique traditions and structures, in the face of simplistic solutions tending toward homogenization. The strength of the American university system, I argued, comes from the diversity of its components and the willingness of the administration to both defend and support that diversity.

The fourth danger facing the university is twofold: we are increasingly seen as either vocational training institutes or irrelevant. At the heart of the issue is not just a not-so-subtle anti-intellectualism, but rather a more general lack of appreciation for the role of ideas in culture. For this state of affairs we have no one to blame but ourselves. To the extent that the public fails to understand the crucial importance of a liberal education and the life of the mind for democratic societies, and to the extent that that very public is increasingly college-educated, it is clear that as educators we have failed to make our case, which ought to give us pause as to what our students did learn.

There are many reasons for our failure and I will not shirk from speculating on many of them below. But first, whatever those reasons are, it is critical for us to understand that as teachers we have failed our students by not creating in them a deep appreciation of



and excitement regarding a life of learning and exchanging ideas. They leave our classrooms enriched in certain ways, but also impoverished.

Some of the factors that have contributed to this sad state of affairs are:

- intellectual arrogance
- insecurity
- willful ignorance
- self absorption.

First, let us be careful to identify the guilty parties. In the immortal words of Pogo, “We have met the enemy and they is us.” The “us” is primarily the faculty. The senior administration is also at fault, and I will address their role later, but we are the primary culprits.

To defend the world of ideas is to defend a value. Defending values is difficult work. It is not enough to simply assert a value and expect your audience to accept it. So, perhaps the problem is that most of us either aren’t equipped or don’t believe we are equipped for the job of defending our values. In part, that is due to a combination of intellectual arrogance and insecurity. It’s arrogance because we are inclined to assert that we shouldn’t have to defend our values since it is obvious our values are superior—after all we are the professors, right? Well, it is not obvious and the fact that we are professors is irrelevant. The intellectual arrogance is evident in our unwillingness to enter the fray. Part of it is, on the part of some, a genuine unmerited sense of moral superiority. Having a Ph.D. and being on a university faculty entitles you to nothing. Just like everyone else, we need to earn our right to evince our values.

But earning that right requires engaging an audience and whenever you engage in argumentation you run the risk of losing. So the result is a retreat behind the walls of



academe armed with the self-absorption that is justified by appeals to demands of our profession (see Part I).

This sticking our collective head in the sand has to end. But what are we to do? The only way to achieve the goals of being appreciated as the guardians of our cultural heritage, charged with developing its values and passing them on to the next generations, is to engage the public for whom we are, in a very deep sense, servants. This is a call for a reassessment of our role as intellectuals. “Intellectual” has a bad ring to it these days. I am not sure where the anti-intellectualism we experience today began, but I know the sting of the phrase “pointy-headed intellectuals” from the ‘60s. Perhaps it began in the McCarthy era, but even before that period rejection of intellectualism was evident. For example, writers and poets and jazz musicians of the 20s and 30s were labeled “bohemians” which, when uttered, supposedly left you with a dirty taste in your mouth. Following McCarthy’s persecution of all those alleged communists associated with the arts there was the Civil Rights Movement, spurred by opponents of repression and injustice. Hard on the heels of the civil rights movement, opposition to the Vietnam War came from many sectors of society. Universities were hot-beds of unrest and the attacks on students and faculty who stood up to object to injustice or the war were ceaseless. The result was a retreat by faculty behind the walls of academe. We became private intellectuals, talking to ourselves, decrying the sad state of public life and feeling unjustifiably smug. But the tradition of hiding from social engagement has a history. We are simply following in the footsteps of those intellectuals who responded to McCarthyism by “professionalizing” our organizations—i.e., urging academics to depoliticize their public stands. Oh there were exceptions such as the Union of Concerned Scientists, but they were dismissed as naïve left-wing do-gooders.

It is time to come out. It is time we became public intellectuals. What do I have in mind? I think the model we should explore can be found in Europe. European

In Part 1 I put a lot of blame for the deteriorating state of the American University System on faculty who see their loyalty to their “professional colleagues” rather than to the institutions that pay their salary. Faculty members are quick enough to complain when state legislatures fail to provide raises. But do you see them presenting carefully reasoned arguments to the general public on why this is short-changing their children’s future? No. Why? (1) It would take much too much work to explain the ramifications, both social and economic, to folks who either (a) we falsely assume could care less, or (b) for whom we have little intellectual respect, after all they are not professors (intellectual arrogance again) (2) Besides, I have a conference paper to write for next week (3) That is the administration’s job. Faculty members are self-absorbed,

concerned about their own national and international reputations, and more than willing to pass the buck. So let's look to whom they are passing the buck: "the administration."

When university faculty members refer to the administration they usually mean the university president and his or her immediate staff, i.e., the provost or chief academic officer and the chief financial and administrative officer and their immediate staffs. It usually does not include the college deans, department heads, and the people who really make the place work, the secretaries, administrative assistants, bookkeepers, grounds people, cleaning and maintenance staff, cooks, etc.

In the typical administration, the president is responsible for external relations and the provost and chief administrative officer are responsible for the day-to-day running of the place. So, it is the president that is responsible for dealing with alumni, donors, the press and most importantly in the case of public universities, the governor and the legislature. It should also be the case that it is the president's office that is the first line of attack in making the case for the role of the university in the public life of our society. But, this is not what happens. A President who offends potential donors by speaking up for what is right is likely not to be President for very long.

Instead, today public universities are engaged in a battle for status. The criteria are blurred, but if you are ranked as a Carnegie Research University 1, then you are in the top tier, and within that category there is much pushing and shoving over who is at the top and what the cut-off is for being really special. We are all familiar with some of these rankings venues. The one with the least credibility and ironically the greatest public acceptance is the U.S. News and World Report annual rankings. The one the president of Virginia Tech touts is the top 30 according to the National Science Foundation account of research expenditures. Another way to show how special you are is to be invited to join the American Association of Universities, which has about 50 members. In any event it is about status. It is not about the students or the quality of an

undergraduate education, not an undergraduate experience, but an undergraduate education. . It is not about being the guardians of our cultural heritage; it is not about the generation of new and useful knowledge.

Now there are arguments supporting the push for top 30 this or top 50 that. One such justification is based on the prediction that the American university system is bifurcating into one group of elite research institutions that will get all the federal money and the rest (see Part 3). One question that should be asked is “so what?” Well, we want to be a great university, don’t we? Well, yes, I guess, but for what purpose? Should we be pursuing status rather than excellence?³

There is something to be said about being content with doing what you do well. It used to be case, back in some mythological golden age, when some institutions of higher learning aspired to become a first class liberal arts colleges, with the emphasis on quality undergraduate education. Somewhere in the last twenty-five or so years that ideal has been replaced by university inflation. It used to be case that as you drove up and down I 81 you saw signs announcing this or that college – James Madison College, Radford College, Shenandoah Conservatory – now all universities. Alas, their elevated status has not been accompanied by any noticeable improvement in their academic quality. I cannot resist the temptation to venture that failing to achieve quality in undergraduate education they sought prominence by proclaiming themselves universities, as if the title is enough to confer status.

When we turn to universities the story is similar if not exactly parallel. Institutions acquire the status of being a university by offering Ph.D. programs and nurturing and supporting research in addition to fostering quality undergraduate education. It is the

³ After this was first drafted, an article appeared in the Chronicle of Higher Education (2-9-05, p.A63) citing a paper posted on the Social Science Research Network, “What’s Really Wrong

xxxiv

A university cannot be a great university if it is not a vital part of the community's life and culture. The way to do this is for the faculty to become engaged in that culture and continue the job they started in the classroom. This is not to suggest that we should be out there lecturing. We should be out there teaching, which takes a lot more work than writing a lecture. Let me take this one step further and then stop. We have failed as teachers because teaching is a life long enterprise. Teaching is one of the most noble of human activities. It is, at heart, the process by which we nurture the human spirit.



There is no one place for this to occur, it is a continuous process. That means it must not stop at the classroom door. But that is what we have allowed to happen. As it stands, today we are doing only half the job – the part in the classroom or the lab. The other half is yet to be done – out there. And if you don't finish the job, then I would argue you are not only not a teacher, but a fraud.