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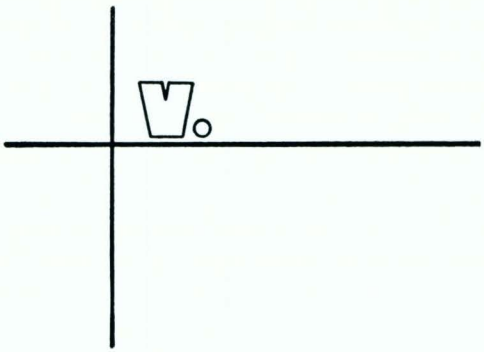

RETIRING PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS

A Proposal for a Long-Range Project for the Association for General and Liberal Studies

By Malcolm Correll
University of Colorado

Bob Hope is supposed to have said that he always leaves a party with one or the other of two diametrically opposed regrets: "Gee, I wish I hadn't said that!" or "Gee, I wish I had said that!" Retiring from the presidency is a time, of course, for me to assess what I have or haven't done as president. The activities of AGLS in the interim between annual meetings are generally at such low-key that it would be difficult to have much regret about what we *have* done. But something has happened this year and we can all look upon it with some pride and satisfaction, certainly with no regrets. Through the good services of Bob Limpus and Ted Marvin, we now have our own journal—*Perspectives*. In its formative years the Association rode piggy-back on the *Journal of General Education*. That journal gave our members access to a collection of scholarly essays that encompass or at least impinge upon some of our interests. But since JGE antedated AGLS, it had a tradition of purposes and commitments that superseded those of AGLS. JGE could not really serve as a house organ for the Association and we had no annals not only to make permanent published record of mundane things like treasurer's reports, membership lists, and minutes of Executive Committee meetings but, perhaps more importantly, to chronicle what hopefully would be the Association's persevering efforts to enhance the vitality of general and liberal studies. In *Perspectives* we have a journal that can serve all these

needs of AGLS and more. It is a place, of course, for you to submit appropriate perceptive manuscripts. May the muse command you often and well.

But what of the opposite pole—"Gee, I wish I had said that!" A retirement marks the passing or at least the waning of certain kinds of opportunities. Let me explore this with you not to get you to commiserate with me but to analyze some ways in which AGLS might go—or perhaps the phrase is "*must* go." As John Hicks told me, being president of a young organization is difficult; by the time you figure out what you ought to be doing, your term is up. Aside from our annual meetings we have no tradition to carry on. The president has little to run in the sense of keeping a program going. What then is his role? What is his responsibility to the fledgling organization? It is, of course, to lead in the definition of purpose, to create enterprise which will become the tradition that moves the organization toward the ideals which it seeks to fulfill. My thoughts on these matters have become a crescendo as my term draws to a close. It would be presumptuous of me, of course, to tell our new president, Horatio LaFauci, how to do his job. But for whatever they are worth, I should like to parade my thoughts before the Association and our new president on this occasion. In a sense this is my testimony of regret that I cannot say "This is what we have achieved!" Rather, it's a vision of what might have been were it not for human frailties. This is the kind of occasion that does not occur often in the life of any man so, with your indulgence, hear me out.

I think that AGLS ought to have a great deal to say to higher education in these troublesome times but the question is what to say. It is a great paradox of our time that we have more people with bachelor's degrees, more people with higher degrees than ever before and yet the educated man is more frustrated than ever in his attempts to understand our neighborhood, our nation, or our world. The metaphor that comes to mind is the hackneyed slogan, "Are you smoking more now but enjoying it less? Then it's time to change your brand." Do we need to change our brand of education?

How is it that we can tolerate, seemingly without end, the debilitating paradoxes of our time? You can draw up your own list of these paradoxes, but let me give you a few samples.

In a year defined as "peace-time" our defense budget is $80 billion, as much as we spent at war in 1945, the peak year of World War II. In a year when we have just committed $5 billion to something called "the safe-guard system," we are assured that this is insufficient to bring security and that it will be grossly inadequate before 1975. In a nation which claims to be a democracy of free people, 12 million young men between the crucial ages of 18 to 26 years are enslaved by a system which denies them the leisure to contemplate, to

explore, to inquire, to formulate a life philosophy and to choose careers which they will find the most rewarding and in which they will be most effective. In a year when we land men on the moon, large segments of the American population live in dispiriting despair, as most of their ancestors have always lived, hobbled by poverty, disease, hunger, ignorance, unemployment, and a lack of opportunity to break out of this morass.

These paradoxes are manifestations of the collision course on which our society runs. It's really a double collision course. By ignoring the physical, spiritual, social, and economic needs of our minority groups and our poor, to say nothing of our perennial tampering with the life styles of 12 million young men, is to court trouble. But to pursue defense policies which offer only vaporous hopes, which offer no ultimate hope of peace and security, is to pursue catastrophe. We, the people, and our government have not been creative enough to develop new methods of approaching our problems. We are sterile and impotent in the 20th century when our only response to growing problems is to pour ever-increasing sums of money into the support of 19th century methods.

The university itself is a constellation of paradoxes. At a time when about 50% of the college-age young matriculate into a college, we find ourselves highly vulnerable to claims of irrelevance. At a time when we need generalists to comprehend the complexity of social and political problems, we prod students to commit to a specialty as early as possible. We need generalists not so much to solve the problems as to know whose expertise is appropriate. At a time when scholarly publication is doubling in the decade, we create specialists who cannot intelligently communicate with each other about problems common to us all and who cannot participate in the establishment of programs that may result in solutions. At a time when research is better supported than ever before, we are not free to direct this support into channels that would be most helpful to our nation.

Now let me be specific about this last point—the kinds of research support which we get—for it testifies to the confused purposes of higher education. In early 1957 the USSR launched the first Sputnik. Between 1957 and 1959 the moon race was on. We responded during that interval by tripling our research support to universities in the biological and physical sciences; we quadrupled our support of graduate fellows in the sciences; and we increased our support for improvement of education in the sciences by a factor of 4½. That this is indeed a response to Sputnik is implied by the fact that there has been no comparable step up or down either before or since. But what is more significant is that we have now been engaged with the Vietnam problem since 1954, with a truly agonizing involvement dating from 1964. Yet, there has been no effort, comparable to our response to

Sputnik, to create a community of specialists on southeast Asia, to evolve a body of knowledge about its peoples and to improve our education with respect to knowledge of those peoples. That these are not vacuous claims is borne out by reference to a *Summary of Federal Funds for Research, Development, and R. and D. Plant: Fiscal Years 1966, 1967, and 1968.* In each year we find that the Federal Government supported basic research in the life sciences, the physical sciences, and the social sciences. About 50% of all this research was done in universities. But the hitch is that the government spent 12 times as much on life sciences as on social sciences and 27 times as much on physical sciences as on social sciences. (We are talking here about a total investment of $4 billion per year in Federal funds so the amount going to universities was about $2 billion per year.) If we look at the government's support of applied research, we find that only about 20% of this is done in universities; perhaps this is as it should be, but the point is that here again we spend 6 times as much for life science applied research and 20 times as much for physical science applied research as we do for social science applied research. (Again, the total amount per year is $4 billion so the universities received a little less than one billion dollars per year.) Yet, I submit, if we are to understand people be they black or white, Arab or Jew, Asiatic or European, capitalist or communist, or just plain American, we must look to THEIR history, philosophy, religion, sociology, economics; we must look to THEIR value systems and this includes their arts, music, and literature as well as the social dimensions of their culture.

On the 15th of October—the Vietnam Moratorium Day—I used some of these figures in a speech in Boulder. One of my esteemed colleagues, a psychologist, said afterward, "Malcolm, you over-estimate the social scientists. They couldn't spend money like the physicists even if you gave it to them." The point, of course, is not how much money we spend but where we put our confidence; it is rather what quality of solution we will demand and how wisely we will support the investigations that lead to such solutions. I think that research in these directions can be and must be pursued as vigorously as that in NASA or in its earlier prototype, the Manhattan Project, even if such research *is* less costly!

But the hitch is the educated man, be he citizen or a part of the government, does not seem to have a compelling vision of quality solutions to our social problems. How then can we make such vision be a part of education? It is here, I believe, that AGLS can define its role, and a vital one, for the years ahead.

Now let me assert forthwith that lack of money is not our fundamental problem. I mentioned earlier that the government's expenditure for education in the sciences increased by a factor of 4½ between 1957 and 1959—from $11 million/year to $49 million/year. By 1965

the amount spent on education in the sciences had increased to $80 million/year and in 1968 it stood at $75 million/year. Yet, in 1968 my physicist colleague, Professor H. R. Crane of the University of Michigan says:

"You may now ask, reasonably: Hasn't a great deal been going on in the way of curriculum development and improvement of teaching materials? Are we not making progress? I will answer that this has simply not led to the breakthrough that is needed in regard to the noncalculus group. The effort has mainly been directed at the physics major. We have become very sophisticated and the physics major on a given birthday is probably a year ahead of where his predecessor used to be 20 years ago. Teaching for the noncalculus student supposedly has ridden the coattails of this development, and has shared in its riches. If the inference is that this spill-over is solving the noncalculus teaching problem, I must strongly disagree. There has been one fatal error in logic: Through it all we have clung for dear life to the maxim that what is good training for a future physicist is good for anybody who takes physics. Consequently the noncalculus captive sees, to his dismay, that the aim of the course is to train him (a) to solve physics problems, and (b) to think and act like a physicist, i.e., the instructor. His desire for either of these could not possibly be less."[1]

In Crane's view, then, even the massive curriculum revision projects, at least those in physics, have not served the purposes of *education* as something distinct from *training* in the specialty. Crane's criticism shares a common theme with the views of other critics. For example, Joseph Schwab[2] and Harold Taylor[3] each would agree, broadly if not in detail, that most of the courses which are offered for the generalizing or liberalizing dimension of education, or as distribution requirements, do not start with the general student in mind but, as Crane says, presuppose that what is good for the specialist is good for anybody seeking some exposure to the subject. Schwab uses an interesting phrase to describe where such courses come out when he calls them a "rhetoric of conclusions."[4]

These criticisms are not new in kind, of course; they have been extensively expounded for several decades and most of us are familiar with their content. To us in AGLS, as we seek to determine how best we can serve the cause of general and liberal studies, it will be much

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1. H. R. Crane, "Students Do Not Think Physics is 'Relevant.' What Can We Do About It?" *Am. J. Phys.* 36, 1137, (1968).
2. Joseph J. Schwab, *College Curriculum and Student Protest,* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1969.
3. Harold Taylor, *Students Without Teachers: The Crisis in the University,* McGraw-Hill, New York, 1969.
4. *Ibid.,* p. 19.

more useful for us to look long and hard at what Schwab, Taylor, Crane and others propose to do in response to their own criticisms. It is in teaching ourselves to apply these remedies that I believe our association might locate its first long-term program.

You can get a glimmer of what I mean by a quick reading of two sections of Schwab's book, one section called "Principles of Enquiry" and the other "Arts of Enquiry."[5] I can only highlight these here by a few well chosen quotations:

> ". . . In all fields . . . systematic enquiries begin in principles of enquiry, guiding conceptions of the subject matter which determine what questions to put to it, what data are relevant to its solution, what these data indicate."
>
> "In the biological and physical sciences, the involvement of principles of enquiry as the ground on investigation only occasionally gives rise to the existence of pluralities of answers to questions, because these sciences have long since adopted the habit of obtaining a consensus of principles within the field. Most practitioners of most such sciences use the same principle of enquiry within a given era of research, changing or replacing it when it ceases to be useful, but doing so mainly in concert."
>
> "Most of the social sciences, on the other hand, are in the condition of ecology. Numerous conceptions of community, society, culture, personality, learning . . . exist. None is seen by a substantial majority of the concerned scientific community to exceed other conceptions in both reliability and comprehensiveness . . . (therefore) diversities of view and pluralities of knowledge arise."
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> ". . . (These) diversities of knowledge . . . often appear to the reader as competing answers to precisely the same question. In fact, they are answers to somewhat different or radically different questions. In consequence, they are not so much competitive as complementary."
>
> "The curriculum (which makes good use of the principles of enquiry) can put such materials, facilities, occasions, and invitations in the way of the student that he is moved and enabled to pursue enquiries in his own right: focus on an interest of his own, shape a problem concerning it, search out materials, choose his methods, apply them, formulate the products of his enquiry."

Schwab then pays some homage to the bachelor's thesis as an enterprise that may pursue just such enquiry, but stresses that this misses his point. He says with that:

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5. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-94.

"If we are to consider engagement in enquiry as a curricular resource, . . . the respectability of the product is not the point, and its production should not wait on developed competences but, on the contrary, *(should) be the means for their development.*" (Italics are mine.)

So Schwab's remedy for some of the ills of education is, in part, to build teaching around enquiry.

I think Crane would agree with this. He casts his remedy into the context of physics[6], of course, but what he says can be applied in any field.

Let me try to summarize. Crane prescribes his medicines under eight different headings only two of which I shall touch—communication and sequentialness.

First, the students come with a highly developed language of their own. If we insist on making distinctions—e.g., force and energy—whose difference the student has not yet seen, the student is confused. Crane says, "It would be fine if we could start at the beginning of the course discussing physics in their language and gradually convert to ours by the end of the course. Instead, we feel that we have to start right off using ours." The reaction of the student then becomes parrot like and communication is lost. Crane cautions, too, against the early use of abstractions and the intonations of absolute truths that are also blocks to communication. The appreciation of the worth of abstractions is something that grows slowly. And to cite *conservation of energy* to dampen a student's enthusiasm for a proposed perpetual motion device may be interpreted as evidence of a closed mind that doesn't know a break-through when it sees one. All of these things—the recognition of differences, the need for distinctive terms, the value of abstraction, absolute truth—all these things emerge from enquiry and they can never be appreciated nor understood by one who has never participated in disciplined enquiry.

Concerning sequentialness Crane points out that nowhere in ordinary life do we have all the necessary principles, laws, derivations, and formulas before we encounter the problem. Why then should a course be highly sequential? Here, too, he is suggesting, I think, that enquiry as a mode of instruction can be a more valuable approach.

Now the old cliché that we teach as we were taught is all too patently true. Even if we are persuaded that enquiry is a more viable method of instruction I doubt that many of us—given our backgrounds, academic climates, existing materials, etc.—I doubt that many of us can teach in that manner. What we need, it seems to me, is an intra-professional effort to develop our skills. I propose then that we seek ways to conduct some experimental conferences or workshops

6. *Ibid.*, p. 1139 ff.

which will have such a redirection of teaching as their aim. Hopefully, we could set a pattern which might ultimately provide such conferences at the intra-campus level.

Somehow, it seems to me, improvement of teaching has to come through self-education of faculty. The vicious circle represented by we-teach-as-we-were-taught gives us no grounds for hope of improvement by the mere passing of one generation and the coming of the next. So if the vicious circle must be broken from within, then perhaps AGLS can find a way to strike the first blow.