

1974

Lifelong and Global Views

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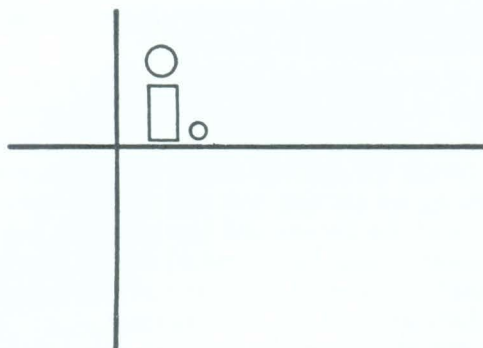


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Recommended Citation

Hannah, John A. (1974) "Lifelong and Global Views," *Perspectives (1969-1979)*: Vol. 6 : No. 3 , Article 3.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/perspectives/vol6/iss3/3>

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Lifelong and Global Views

By JOHN A. HANNAH

Some months ago when Dean Carlin first invited me to participate in this meeting, I reminded him that I have been away from the University arena for five and one half years and no longer claim any particular competence that would justify my presence here tonight.

He persisted and clinched his argument by reminding me that this year marks the 30th Anniversary in the life of the University College, and so I am here.

It was my privilege to meet with your Association for General and Liberal Studies when it held its first annual convention on this campus in 1961.

Much has happened since then in the education profession. And much has happened in this country and in the world.

It seems to me that I have been involved all of my life in one way or another in general and liberal education. For more than 40 years it was as a member of the staff of this University.

For almost five years as Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (U.S.A.I.D.), a substantial part of the thrust was in general and liberal education.

Now, as Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations World Food Conference to be held next month in Rome, that involvement continues. Here we are concerned on a worldwide basis with broadening mutual understanding of one of the most serious and troublesome problems facing most of the peoples of the world.

With your permission I would like to take a few minutes of your time to tell you what the United Nations World Food Conference is all about before we turn to dealing with the basic objective of this evening's program.

Very few Americans have any adequate understanding of the seriousness of the food problem faced by most of the world.

More than 10% of all of the people on this earth face chronic hunger and tens of thousands of them have died of starvation in the past two years. Unfortunately, many more will die in the months ahead.

More than 400 million people are now not getting enough to eat to maintain good health. Many are starving and will actually starve to death. Many more will die of the diseases and human health hazards that accompany gross malnutrition. Four hundred million people are about twice as many people as the total population of the United States. More than half of those who will die are children.

All of you know of the starvation tragedies in Bangladesh and in the Sahel countries of Sub-Sahara Africa and extending on east in Africa to Ethiopia.

Some of you know that parts of India now face a terrible crisis due to chornic drought and another poor moonsoon. India, in the months immediately ahead, requires ten million tons of cereal grains beyond their in-country production and there is not now available anywhere ten million tons of cereal grains.

In recent months there has been more rain in the Sahel countries than in the past two years, but not enough to produce enough food for all of their 25 million people.

The World Food Conference that convenes in Rome from November 5 thru the 16th will include ministers of foreign affairs, ministers of agriculture or other officials from all the governments of the world. The U.S. delegation will include Secretary Kissinger and Secretary Butz. Every country is entitled to not more than six participating delegates at any one time. More than 20 members of our Congress expect to participate—and that is good.

Basically the world's food problem is directly related to the world population problem. World population is growing more rapidly than the food supply.

Currently droughts and floods in Africa and Asia have reduced food production there.

In the United States the worst food producing weather in 40 years, with floods in the spring followed by drought in the summer and an early frost this fall, has turned what had been hoped to be a bumper crop into a great disappointment felt throughout the world.

Approximately 70% of all the food that moves in International Trade is of North American origin—coming from this country and Canada.

The Energy Crisis of the past year decreased the natural gas and petroleum available in many countries for the production of nitrogeous fertilizers. There was not enough fertilizer to go around this past crop year, and because many of the poor countries could not buy

the required oil, their fertilizer production was curtailed as much as 50%.

The World Food Conference is concerned with the problem of feeding the hungry people in the poor countries—short-range for the balance of this year and 1975 and 1976, middle-range for the years 1977 thru 1980, and long-range for the ten years 1981 thru 1990.

It is a certainty that there will be more than twice as many people on this earth at the end of this century as there are now. And the end of the century is only 26 years ahead. There are now about 3.8 billion people in the world. There will be about 8 billion in the year 2000.

Unless the number of children per family can be reduced to an average of two in the next few years, demographers tell us there will be 10 billion people in the year 2022, almost three times the present number.

It is noteworthy that the United Nations held a World Conference on Family Planning in August in Bucharest, Romania. It is no less noteworthy that the first worldwide United Nations conference to deal with the food problem will convene next month.

The world has no acceptable alternative but to marshal the forces and actions that must be taken to provide food for all of its people for a reasonable number of years.

If the international and national leaders of the world by the end of the century have not reduced the rate of human increase to what the world can feed and assure lives of better quality for all people, the pessimists and purveyors of doom of that day will contend then as the Paddocks and other Malthusians do now that it is hopeless to try to feed all the world's hungry people, and we should let them die. My grandchildren and yours may have to participate in making that decision. Difficult as today's problems are, we do not have to make that decision now.

The world can produce the food required for many more people than the present world population. But it will not be easily accomplished.

There are many opportunities available to the peoples and governments of the world that can make a real difference.

Some of the priority issues that will be before the World Food Conference include:

First, we must substantially increase the food production of the less developed countries and of the entire world.

To accomplish that goal requires more fertilizer, more pesticides and more of the good new seeds.

There must be much more emphasis on the worldwide network of International Agricultural Research Centers now in existence with some expansion in the numbers of them and with greater emphasis in their research on the problems of the small farmers on the very small

farms in the poor countries. The International Research Centers must be backed up with regional and national institutions that will adapt what is known or becomes known to local problems and situations.

Beyond that we must reestablish substantial food reserves in the world, to assure some sort of food price stability for all. For more than 40 years the North American food reserves were a hedge against starvation anywhere in the world. The disappearance two years ago of our food reserves changed the whole world picture.

There must be created food stocks sufficient and available to deal with the victims of floods and droughts and disasters. A mechanism is needed to deal with these recurring problems.

And the last item I will mention is the requirement that there be an effective international entity created and maintained to assure the implementation of the decisions that hopefully will be made at the World Food Conference next month in Rome.

This is the kind of general education I am presently concerned with—now we will return to my role here tonight and the kind of general and liberal education you are concerned with.

In 1944 this University, the prototype for the land grant colleges, established the Basic College, now called University College, dedicated to general education.

At that time I reminded our faculty, our students and the people of the state of Michigan that “there are some words in the first Morrill Act which established the land-grant college system that sometimes are forgotten. We seem to have had no difficulty remembering that the Morrill Act was passed to promote practical education but have at times neglected to remember the phrase in its entirety . . . “in order to promote the *liberal* and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits and professions in life.”

Let me now undertake a brief historical review. On March 9, 1944, the President charged the faculty at its monthly meeting to look at the possibility of establishing a program which would develop some common educational experience for all students. Dr. Floyd W. Reeves of the University of Chicago was invited to express his views on general education to the faculty. Following his presentation the faculty indicated its interest and appointed a committee to study the problem and bring back recommendations.

On May 22, 1944, after 33 meetings the Committee submitted its report to the faculty. After heated discussion the faculty without a dissenting vote adopted the Committee's recommendations. With the approval of the faculty the matter was referred to the Board of Trustees on July 1, 1944. In my presentation before the Board it was stated that “the establishment and support of the Basic College (now University College) provides institutional evidence that Michigan State recognizes that the man lacking a liberal or general education is but

a partial man; incomplete as a citizen, as a professional, as a human being.”

I would submit to you tonight that the statement made before the Board 30 years ago is, if anything, more true today.

With that bit of background, let us share experiences and views on the role of liberal and general education in American society.

In order to meet the needs of citizens in a democratic society with worldwide commitments any program of general education must have two major ingredients: a philosophical foundation and an organizational structure. Long experience has taught us that a philosophy without implementation can be meaningless, and a structure without philosophy falls within the meaning of Parkinson’s Law in its worst sense.

Many modern scholars have tried to define general education—from Alexander Meiklejohn’s inaugural address at Amherst in 1912, through President Hutchins of Chicago, to President Harold Taylor’s attempt to classify and describe the philosophical positions which underlie all the collegiate general education programs in the United States.

Probably the most ambitious attempt at codification occurred in the Harvard Report, *General Education in a Free Society*, published in 1945, the year after the development of University College at Michigan State. The Harvard Report philosophizes that the “true task of general education is to reconcile the sense of pattern and direction deriving from our heritage with the sense of experiment and innovation deriving from science that they may exist fruitfully together, as in varying degrees they have never ceased to do throughout Western history.

Parenthetically, it would seem Harvard did not recognize that we owe much to the rest of the world as well.

Belief in the dignity and mutual obligation of man is the common ground, the keystone of a democratic society, between these contrasting but mutually necessary forces in our culture.

All attempts at codification have fallen short of an all-encompassing definition. It is possible that this state of affairs has left general education open to its many critics.

There is no need to lament this difficulty in building an orderly philosophical position. One of our nation’s greatest strengths is its pluralism, in which no single value system holds sway over the minds of all of our people. Even if we in education could agree on a basic definition the only way we could impose and maintain it would be through authoritarian enforcement and coercion. Such coercion would be abhorrent. Such enforced unity is not in the tradition of American higher education, nor in the American tradition itself. All of us may not agree, but all of us are charged with the opportunity to participate

in the decision leading to the adoption of sound policies. Whether in education or in world food problems, imposed solutions will not solve permanently the problems confronting mankind. General education is to free men's minds, not to indoctrinate them with imposed values.

Tonight we are looking at the definition of general education that has served as a guide here at Michigan State. In 1944 the exploratory Committee report submitted by the faculty attempted in the preamble to build a working definition of general education. This definition became the keystone of policies followed thereafter.

The faculty said:

"Basic education, as proposed for this University is designed to provide students with a sound foundation on which to build an intelligent interest in personal, family, vocational, social and civic problems, a better understanding of these problems, and a greater ability to cope with them. It includes the study of man's relationship to physical, biological, and social sciences, an increased knowledge of the historical background of present-day civilizations and enhanced appreciation of cultures, past and present, that have been expressed in literature, music, and art." "General education should give students an opportunity to explore broad areas, should aid them in the discovery of their own interests and aptitudes, and should equip them better to assume their responsibilities as individuals and as citizens of a democracy. Students whose training may eventually become highly specialized need this foundation of general education experience that each may have a greater appreciation of the relationship of his special field to the needs of society as a whole."

There are at least two characteristics of a general education program for which this definition can be used to distinguish such education from education for specific majors, including majors within the liberal arts and sciences.

First, general education is that minimum of a liberal education in both the arts and the sciences that should be part of the educational experience of every college or university graduate. The second distinguishing characteristic is that the conventional disciplinary lines are broken, and the focus of such courses has shifted from preparation for additional work in the discipline area to a course that may be the only formal intellectual experience the student will have in that particular area.

In implementing this philosophy of general education there were many alternative structures available. We at Michigan State looked carefully at many models. One approach is to locate general education within the various departments and colleges of the University. The temptation in this model is to designate introductory courses as

general education. This threatens to defeat the very purpose and philosophy of general education, for courses are taught as *introductions to a discipline*, and most instructors stress their own specializations within their discipline. This is as it should be, but it strays away from the general. The second defect in this approach is that it tends to become a smorgasbord of courses with no consistent whole.

We at Michigan State decided to implement the general education program by establishing a college, with a dean and faculty specifically chosen for their dedication to the general education philosophy adopted by the faculty. This approach has the advantage of demonstrating both institutional commitment and awareness that general education is an integral part of a total educational program.

One of the major sources of strength of the general education program at Michigan State comes from the Committee's recommendation that all general education courses should be taught by fully qualified faculty members having the same academic status as do the instructional staffs of the other colleges within the University. At Michigan State the teaching of freshmen and sophomores is not relegated to graduate assistants whose primary interests naturally are the completion of a major and the doctoral dissertation. Graduate Assistants can properly be used as teachers in courses within their majors, but not in general education; that requires a wider breadth of maturity as a scholar.

It was the Committee's feeling and mine that too many colleges and universities have slighted the undergraduate program in order to concentrate on graduate education. It has always been my feeling that this is not an either-or proposition; each should strengthen the other. One also must realize that at a state university, the great source of political strength to insure adequate funding from the Legislature is to fulfill the entire mission of the University. For Michigan State our basic and enduring mission had been spelled out in the Morrill Act of 1862.

Howard Rather, a distinguished scholar and chairman of the Agronomy Department was appointed Dean of the new college. Dean Rather, like all deans, reported directly to the President of the University. As established in 1944, the Basic College was composed of seven departments offering courses entitled Written and Spoken English, History of Civilization, Biological Science, Physical Science, Social Science, Literature and Fine Arts, and Effective Living. All students were required to take Written and Spoken English and at least four of the six other courses. The student's grade was determined by his performance on comprehensive examinations given at the end of each full academic year course by institutional examiners.

In 1952-1953 we consolidated the general education program into four areas—Communication Skills, Humanities, Natural Science, and

Social Science—and returned to the instructor the authority to grant grades.

Perhaps more importantly, an Office of Student Personnel Services was created under the Assistant Dean, John Winburne. This was a new concept. Until this time we had relied exclusively on faculty advisors who could give only part-time attention to this responsibility. Although we believed strongly in the principle of using teaching faculty as advisors whenever possible, it was apparent that entering students at Michigan State needed more assistance if we were to fulfill our mission of personalizing the University. Our rapid growth dictated a strong system of student academic advisors, specifically trained, who would be continually available when students wanted to discuss major choices, registration problems, grade problems or selection of courses. As designed, the advisors would be part ombudsmen, part friends and good listeners. Newt Winburne became the perfect Assistant Dean. It has been said many times that "Newt knew the difference between bending a rule to fit an occasion and breaking one."

Later—in 1958—we changed the Communication Skills Department to the Department of American Thought and Language.

From this modest beginning 30 years ago, the University College has grown to be the largest general education college in the United States. Today, on its 30th birthday, it has a staff of over 200 faculty members and serves the needs of over 14,000 students each year.

In the world in which we live today, it is no longer possible to roll back into Pan-America positions, for what happens in any part of the world may affect every individual in the world.

General education, which was designed to educate Americans for a democratic society, must serve today to broaden man's horizons beyond the shores of America, beyond Western Civilization, to encompass the needs of a global inter-dependent society within the nation-state framework.

Let us continue to hope, and to work, for a wider acceptance of general education as a key foundation stone in a structure of worldwide understanding, cooperation, and brotherhood.

