

Broadening the Base of Educational Opportunity

By William Bennett Bizzell

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IN thinking of a subject for my address this morning, it has occurred to me you might be interested in knowing something of the service ideals of the University of Oklahoma. I propose, therefore, in the time at my command to point out the steps by which this institution has developed its present program and objectives and to discuss the possible educational services it may be called upon to render in the immediate future. In order to do this, I invite you to look at some of the origins out of which the University of Oklahoma and similar institutions have been developed.

Higher education traces its origin to an obscure past. Long before the rise of universities in the Middle Ages, centers of learning had existed in some of the cities of Syria, in Alexandria, and in other parts of the ancient world. They fostered knowledge through the study of geography, astronomy, music, aesthetics, ethics, and logic; and they imparted this knowledge to students who scattered over the Western World. While the patterns of these institutions differed essentially from their successors in later times, they served to light the torch of knowledge that cast its beams of light across the centuries. The universities that arose in the Middle Ages were debtors to Moslem, Greek, and Roman, although their organizations were very unlike their early predecessors.

But from the earliest times universities were more than centers of learning. They were functional agencies of society; and as such, they were continually broadening the base of educational opportunity. Among the earliest of these institutions were the Universities of Bologna with its single faculty of law and Salerno which was exclusively a medical center. It was a long step from these restricted programs of instruction in one branch of learning to the four-faculty program which included theology, law, arts (philosophy), and medicine at the Universities of Oxford and Naples. Very early in the history of these educational foundations they extended their programs to include the four recognized faculties; and due to the fact that these were sufficiently comprehensive to meet all the requirements of a relatively simple social order, they remained more or less stable for centuries. But it should be observed that within the scope of these four faculties there was a more or less continuous expansion of subject-matter and enrichment of the cur-

riculum as a result of philosophical speculation and ultimately the development of research which was first stimulated by Roger Bacon.

Every age since the early twelfth century has been vitalized by the universities that served it. Higher education has played an increasingly important part in human affairs since the days of Abelard, Duns Scotus, and Erasmus. Primarily designed to foster learning, these institutions have constantly extended the scope of knowledge and disseminated culture through the social organism.

IT is a rather significant fact that the four-faculty system which developed rather early in the medieval universities served the needs for training in civic leadership. The professional man since early times has been a community leader. It will be recalled that Harvard was established primarily for the education of the ministry, and the early American universities were essentially academic institutions designed to educate a small class of intellectual leaders for a social situation very different from that which arose in the earlier part of the last century.

The industrial revolution, which was made possible by the increase in the number of labor-saving inventions, resulted in greatly increasing the complexity of social

organization. The American state university is essentially a product of the new environment created by these conditions. In the hundred years since the first state university was founded, the patterns of educational institutions have changed rapidly from generation to generation, from country to country, and even among the institutions themselves. The whole program of higher education has been influenced by the social service objectives of the state universities. Composition and the character of the activities of these state-supported institutions of higher learning have been influenced by their origins and the sources of their support. They have developed and flourished in the soil of democracy. They have been supported and maintained by taxation for the purpose of raising the level of intelligence of all the people and training leaders in the various walks of life to serve the ends of a better social order. As a means of accomplishing these ends, it has been necessary for them to adjust their programs and assume an experimental attitude toward the social structure.

The state universities naturally built their organizations and programs of instruction upon lines similar to the universities that historically had preceded

(PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 30)



A new photograph of President W. B. Bizzell in his office

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(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13)

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them. Academic instruction and training for the so-called "learned professions" from the beginning were accepted as traditional and necessary for any university. In time, theoretical research was accepted as an essential part of university education; and as a result of the practical demands made upon these institutions after the Civil War, research was extended to the application of scientific principles to all kinds of realistic situations. More recently, the whole field of adult education has been explored by these institutions, as well as by some of the larger endowed institutions, as a means of raising the level of knowledge on the part of all the people. The belief that the ends of learning would be served by the publication of research resulted in the establishment of a number of university presses, among them our own, which has become one of the greatest agencies in the dissemination of accurate and important knowledge.

It was quite evident from the beginning that the state university could not serve adequately the needs of all the people on the basis of the four-faculty organization of the older universities. A new type of trained leadership was required and pressure was brought to bear upon the state-supported universities to supply this training. The public has not yet realized how adaptable these institutions have been in meeting the needs of business and vocational requirements. It is a long step from the four-faculty program of the medieval universities to that of the state university of today. The University of Oklahoma, which is rather typical, is organized into thirty-four schools and colleges. There are nine coordinated colleges and schools; and in some of these colleges, there are subordinate schools of equal rank within the colleges. The organization is a complex one that can be understood only by those who seriously study the university system.

Most of these new schools have been incorporated as integral parts of our university organization since the beginning of this century. Every time a new school or department was established there have been those who have criticized or ridiculed the undertaking. When departments or schools of business, for example, were first established in our universities there were those who declared vociferously that educational institutions could not train business executives and that the only way men could rise to leadership in large business enterprises was through actual experience. The success of thousands of college men in the business world has about silenced the critics of this type of training. Even today there are those who are skeptical about the value of educational training for journalistic careers, although our schools of journalism have

long since demonstrated the value of preparation for success in this field. Since the organization of public welfare departments of government, there has been continuous debate going on as to whether college trained social workers should be employed to do the personnel work or whether so-called "practical workers" could do it better. The college trained women in this field have been frequently referred to as "sorority sisters" for the purpose of ridiculing the utilization of the services of those specially trained for this type of work.

But the service function of education is today well recognized by intelligent people everywhere. While there is a difference of opinion about the application of this educational ideal to new activities, it is certain to continue. If our educational institutions, particularly our state universities, are to serve the larger ends of society, they must not only supply the best possible training for the professional and vocational workers already provided for in our present program, but they must constantly seek new opportunities for equipping trained leaders in the ever recurring new fields for which there is a demand.

THIS ideal of educational service recognizes three classifications—public, semi-public, and private. Training for public service is becoming an increasingly important obligation of state universities. Training for such private services as law, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, journalism, engineering, business administration, etc., is well established. But in the years that are ahead, undoubtedly, many other similar private or semi-private services must find their way into the formal programs of our educational institutions.

It is my conviction that in the immediate future the training function for public service must receive primary consideration. The crisis that confronts democracy in America at the present time places a great obligation upon the universities. One of the most common criticisms of democratic institutions is that they are inefficiently administered and wasteful of public funds. There are those who believe that mediocrity is a characteristic of democratic administration. One frequently hears that private enterprise is much more efficiently administered than public agencies, and we may just as well recognize that this is an inevitable consequence of the democratic organization of society. This situation to the extent that it is true presents an unprecedented challenge to our educational institutions, particularly our state universities, which have a direct responsibility for improving the quality of the public service. The fact that there has been a decline in the efficiency of public ad-

ministration in recent years, due to patronage practices and other causes, makes this about the most acute problem that confronts the American people. Many of our people are deeply concerned today about the encroachment of alien theories of government upon our democratic society, but I am inclined to believe that democracy in America is more seriously threatened by inefficient administration and selfish office holders than by the substitution of some form of government foreign to our tradition and ideals.

The time has come, it seems to me, when there is a real demand for special training for all kinds of public service. It is certain that we cannot secure efficiency in the administration of our laws, except by substituting civil service for patronage. The patronage system has reached such proportions and has so vitally affected efficiency of administration and integrity of office holders that many of our political leaders are demanding that something be done about it. They naturally advocate a civil service system as a means of improving the quality of public service.

Out of the extremities in this crucial situation, then, comes the opportunity of our educational institutions. It is important that provision be made for the training of men to assume responsibility in public life when the opportunity comes. The University of Oklahoma some years ago established a School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. The purpose of this school as stated in the announcement is three-fold: "to develop interested and intelligent civic leaders; to furnish training for those contemplating public service as a career; and to further scientific research and disseminate information in the field of government." The University has not been able to give full effect to this program. Public service administration, under existing conditions, has not been a very inviting field for college trained men and women. The uncertainty of tenure and the small rewards for superior qualifications have discouraged preparation for careers in government service. Every one knows that civil service has done much to increase efficiency in those departments of the Federal Government where it is required. Many of the ablest men in the nation are serving the Federal Government through the protection of the civil service, and the safeguarding of tenure has given them an opportunity to make the work count for the most. It is only where this system has not been applied that patronage has taken its toll. I hope to see civil service established in this state; and if this is done, I am sure that our School of Citizenship and Public Affairs will render valuable service to the cause of good government in Oklahoma.

The whole field of public service administration has increased in importance in recent years. As the Federal and state governments have entered upon vast pro-

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The Oklahoma Union Cafeteria

Watching O. U. for Half a Century

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12)

more, in order to meet the needs of today. I think university work should be made to apply to every phase of every-day life more than it has in the past. I don't mean to concentrate on the bread-and-butter motive entirely, but I think we ought to come down out of the clouds and get down to earth and teach students how to get along in the world after they get out of school.

"Students should be encouraged to select a vocation not later than their junior year and select the rest of their work on a basis to help them prepare for that vocation so that they will have a way of making a living."

Mr. Amos believes that faculty members would benefit from more contacts with the outside world, in order to get the viewpoints of people off the campus who face practical, every-day problems, and in order to avoid a "fishbowl" sort of existence.

Mr. Amos sees this need of practicability in education, not as a throwback to earlier days, but as a modern problem.

"In the pioneer days of Oklahoma Territory, making a living was not such a problem. There were always plenty of opportunities. Even going bankrupt wasn't so serious then. A man could always go homestead 160 acres of government land, get himself a pair of mules, and you couldn't starve him out!"

Mr. Amos regrets that there isn't so much of a flavor of religion on the campus now as there was in the early days.

"But this change in the campus atmosphere is in line with the rest of the world. I believe the students are just a cross section of the people of Oklahoma.

"Anyway, parents are expecting the impossible if they expect the University faculty to straighten out their children if they have been allowed to roam the streets at home and grow up like Topsy. They can't expect the University to develop their characters when they couldn't do it themselves. It's like a tree; once it starts crooked, you can't straighten it out."

All in all, Mr. Amos is optimistic over the future of the University. It's too big and too important, he believes, for any one man or group of men, no matter how powerful, to do more than give it a bump.

Dr. DeBarr, sitting in the living room of his comfortable Norman home and reliving the years of progress and achievement and difficulties at the University, also said he would like to emphasize two important needs he sees in the future of O. U.

"First the University needs a greater library because that is fundamental for an educational institution; and second, it needs all the facilities necessary to keep the best available men and build a high

quality faculty that will see the needs of the young people of the state and try to supply those needs—but not the fanciful ones," Dr. DeBarr said.

"You can't keep good men on the faculty without good tools with which to work. They need good libraries, and good laboratories and equipment, and good classrooms. Those things ought to be supplied."

It's the best men who leave to take better jobs when the facilities they need to do good work are denied them, he pointed out.

The University has been plagued with political troubles from the very first, Dr. DeBarr recalled. Every few years there has been some threat of political meddling that has upset things on the campus, and in some cases seriously interfered with the work for years at a time.

Seven times, he recalled, efforts have been made to have the College of Engineering transferred to A. and M. College at Stillwater. Once the threat was so acute that the representatives of the University had to threaten to demand removal of education and fine arts and other cultural courses from Stillwater to Norman, in order to block the attack.

Dr. DeBarr has some definite theories about how political problems of a state university should be handled.

"I commend the president of the University for not lobbying for favors from the Legislature," he said. "It's the job of the Board of Regents, as I see it, to do whatever is necessary to get adequate financial support for the University. If the president gets mixed up in politics there is sure to be a downfall some day.

"I think the regents then should leave the president free to select the heads of departments and handle the administrative details of the University. The department heads should be free to select their faculty members, after consultation with the president. That way you bring about a maximum of co-operation."

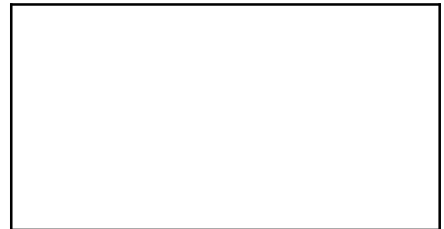
Dr. DeBarr has not been on the faculty since Dr. W. W. Bizzell became president of the University, but he praised the present executive as a high type educator and administrator, and a man whose personal influence on students and faculty members is inspirational.

As for possible improvements in the institution's teaching methods, Dr. DeBarr believes that more continuity is needed between different courses.

"The student needs to understand better what has gone before and what comes next," he said. "Too many instructors emphasize their own subject matter without showing the student its relationship to other fields of study. However, I think there is more co-operation between faculty members now than ever before."

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