

Dean Reviews Problems Facing Higher Education

A report prepared by Dr. B. Franklin Lowe, Jr., Dean of the College, at the request of Dr. Bruce E. Whitaker, President of Chowan College, for the Board of Trustees and Board of Advisors.

Every segment of higher education—public, private, two-year, four-year, universities—is facing a staggering array of problems. In this brief time today we must limit ourselves to a few of these that have special relevance to private colleges, and in particular, to private two-year colleges.

Perhaps one of the most vexing problems facing higher education today is that of enrollment. While declining enrollments have perhaps posed a more serious problem for private higher education, the problem in some degree affects every element of higher education. For example, consider the following statement which appeared in the January 19, 1973, edition of the 15-Minute Report:

"Enrollments at state-supported colleges and universities appear to be leveling off, or in many cases, declining. A close analysis of federal statistics for this past fall shows that 20 states had fewer students at their public universities than they did the year before; 21 states had decreases at their public four-year colleges. Overall the state institutions had a one percent gain."

The enrollment problem is further compounded by the fact that while enrollment is leveling off or declining, and while some institutions are being forced to close, new institutions are opening at an alarming rate. For an example, the new listing by the U.S. Office of Education shows 2,686 colleges and universities in the U.S. and territories, a gain of 60 over the 1971-72 listing. The net gain includes 41 new public institutions, and 19 new private ones. Of the new public institutions, 32 are community or junior colleges (ref. p. 6, *Higher Education and National Affairs*, January 19, 1973).

According to a report issued by the research division of the National Education Association, enrollments in higher education will continue to grow very moderately for about six years, after which they will decrease each year for at least seven years. The researchers noted that the increase of 180,000 students between fall, 1971, and fall, 1972, reported by the National Center for DEducational Statistics is the smallest annual increase reported since 1957. The total 1972 fall enrollment was 684,000 less than projected last year by the U.S. Office of Education. (ref. p. 6, *Higher Education and National Affairs*, January 12, 1973).

Projected enrollments in higher education simply are not materializing, and the percentage of college age population enrolled in degree credit courses has leveled off or decreased slightly since 1971.

"First-time freshman enrollment in degree credit programs is smaller in the fall, 1972, than it was in either of the two preceding years. At the same time the population aged 18 has grown by 140,000, 106,000 and 80,000 during the past three years. As a result, the percentage of age 18 population represented by first-time enrollment in degree credit programs has decreased each year since 1969. (ref. p. 6, *Higher Education and*



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National Affairs, January 12, 1973).

This phenomenon is at variance with what has occurred previously in the U.S. The nation, historically, has had a trend toward an increasing proportion of college-age population enrolled in resident degree-credit programs—rising from 1.7 percent in 1969-70 to 50.3 percent in fall, 1969. Recent enrollment data show that this trend came to a standstill in fall, 1971, and regressed slightly in fall, 1972. (ref. p. 6, *Higher Education and National Affairs*, January 12, 1973).

One of the factors which has contributed to declining enrollments involves recent changes in draft laws. As a result of these changes, students may no longer use college as a four year haven from military service. Thus, those persons who were at one time attending college only for the purpose of escaping the draft are no longer enrolling. Under current law, if a student's number comes up and if he is called to military service, he is permitted only to finish the quarter or semester in which he is enrolled prior to induction. And now there are indications that the draft will virtually come to an end as the result of the cessation of the conflict in South East Asia.

While this has cut into college enrollment, it has also been a mixed blessing. It has eliminated from the campus many of those who are not serious about the matter of a college education and who have consequently served as a disruptive element.

Another factor affecting enrollment revolves about the debate over education versus training. The aim of education is emancipation. This is what separates education from training. Education aims to free man from his prejudices, his preconceptions; it aims to help men think and attempts to give them the "tools" to become a wise decision maker.

A recent television documentary which was aired nationally—"College—Who Needs It?"—emphasized a declining job market for college graduates and seemed to be an appeal for more people to consider blue collar occupations that do not require a college degree. It is unfortunate that the report contained just enough elements

of truth to make it dangerous.

It is true that all men do not need college in order to gain the tools and skills to make a living. But I propose that most people of at least average intelligence can benefit from some of the traditional college disciplines simply to prepare them for living in our modern society and for contributing to it as responsible, thinking citizens. We expect so-called professionals (lawyers, teachers, ministers, bankers, business men, etc.) to gain a liberal education before they pursue their specialized graduate training. Should not many of the blue collar workers follow the same pattern? These people also need to understand human nature and to be able to cope with the complexities of our society. There should be no question of education or training. Rather there should be both, and this Chowan attempts to provide in those vocational programs which it offers.

Related to this whole controversy of education versus training is the fact that there has apparently been a sharp drop in the public's confidence in educators. According to a recent survey by the Louis Harris polling organization, only 33 percent of the American public has "a great deal of confidence in educators". This figure, measuring confidence in educators at all levels, is down from 37 percent in 1971 and 61 percent in 1966. This is a situation which education can ill afford since it affects both enrollment and funding. While it is not possible in this brief time to discuss the causes of this decline in confidence, it is obvious that educators (including such persons as Advisors and Trustees) must do a better job of presenting their institutions to their various constituencies. And this we can do only if we have a good product to offer.

If it is any comfort, this drop appears to be part of an overall decline in confidence in the leaders of most public and private institutions in this country. These appear to be times in which the U.S. public views the leaders of almost every sector of the American establishment with skepticism. Incidentally, ranking lower than educators were leaders in psychiatry (31 percent), religion

(30 percent), retail business (28 percent), U.S. Supreme Court (28 percent), federal executive branch (27 percent), major U.S. companies (27 percent), Congress (21 percent), the press (18 percent), television (17 percent), labor (15 percent), and advertising (12 percent). (ref. p. 1, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 4, 1972).

Related to all that has gone before is the problem of inflation and rising costs. For the last few years the total cost of higher education has been increasing at about 12.5 percent per year. Fortunately this seems now to be leveling off somewhat. This year will see total costs amounting to \$27.7 billion, about 7-8 percent above last year's total cost of \$25.0 billion. This slowdown in the rate at which costs are increasing is due primarily to more stringent cost controls at all levels. (ref. p. 12, *College Management*, January, 1973.)

While this is good news, if we look closely we will note that the costs of running the nation's colleges is still escalating at about twice the rate of the nation's inflation. Everywhere the colleges turn they encounter increasing expenditures—salaries (to include higher minimum wages), electricity, social security, fringe benefits, and on and on ad infinitum.

The total deficit for all institutions of higher education this year will amount to \$435 million (roughly \$48 per student—whether degree or non-degree). While this deceleration in spending may not save all the 150 or so schools which are reportedly facing bankruptcy over the next few years, it may help some of them survive.

In a recent national survey conducted for *College Management* by Market Data Retrieval, Inc., responses were received from some 732 two-year and four-year colleges enrolling 2.6 million students. These represent 21.8 percent of all U.S. institutions of higher education and 28.1 percent of enrolled students. Of the responding institutions, 29.4 percent report income lagging behind expenditures. (ref. p. 12, *College Management*, January, 1973). Apparently for many, deficits are becoming a way of life. Chowan is indeed fortunate that it has been able to maintain a balanced budget, but this has been extremely difficult and required close planning and budgeting—including no salary increases for the current academic year.

Total income for all institutions will amount to \$27.3 billion for 1972-73, or \$2,932 per student. Nearly one-half of this amount (49.5 percent) comes from the government. On the average the two-year college receives almost twice as much from public funds as do four-year institutions—77.9 percent as opposed to 44.8 percent. (ref. p. 12, *College Management*, January, 1973). This is obviously an average with all two-year institutions lumped together. In the case of Chowan where virtually no public funds are received, almost 90 percent of revenue for operating expenses must come from student fees. This means that we must maintain an adequate enrollment if we are to operate in the black. We are in direct competition with the community colleges where tuition is virtually nil due to the amount of public funds received. In these two year public colleges only about 15 percent of the in-

come comes from tuition and fees.

Nevertheless, all institutions of higher education are having to struggle for support. Tuition and fees in all types of schools have doubled in the last decade. The private schools (both two-year and four-year) are increasing tuition in a real battle for survival and at the same time running the risk of pricing themselves out of existence.

Not all private schools will win the battle for survival. Each year sees a report of college closings. As a clear example, we saw Southwood College in this state close at the end of the fall semester of the current academic year and Mitchell College is in the process of going over to state control. In Tidewater Virginia, Chesapeake College is in the process of being merged into the Community College System, following the example two years ago of Fredrick College.

As a result of trying to balance budgets and due in many instances to declining enrollments, numerous institutions, both public and private are cutting back on various services and sometimes on faculty and staff. The September 25, 1972, issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* carried a brief article to the effect that New York University planned to eliminate 200 faculty positions in an effort to help cut a \$14 million deficit in half by next year. Hardly a week goes by that we don't receive at least one letter from someone looking for a faculty or staff position because his position had been eliminated in a cut-back. For example, on Friday, January 26, 1973, I received a letter from a faculty member at Miami Dade Junior College, indicating that his was one of 56 positions being eliminated. And Chowan has not been able to escape this problem. We also are trimming our faculty in an effort to bring the total number of faculty into line with projected 1973-74 enrollment and in order to maintain a balanced budget.

To be sure, these are only a few of the problems that vex education today. The list is almost without end and any attempt to do justice to them would fill volumes. Simply for the sake of illustration there are such matters as: the need for additional scholarship funds; the need for additional endowment; the question of tax reform as it might affect philanthropy; the need for additional state incentives to private higher education; the possible adverse affect of a proposed restructuring of the student financial aid system by the Federal government; the need for constant evaluation of curricular offerings in light of changing trends and needs; the question of faculty tenure; the trend toward collective bargaining in institutions of higher education; the questioning of college employment practices by the Federal government; and countless other needs and problems.

As we at Chowan College face these problems, we will tighten our belts, but we have too much going for us to die. And we will survive as a private institution offering quality Christian higher education. We will not survive unless we do maintain quality.

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