

Specialization Dangers

--Allentown, Pa.-(I.P.)-The growth of specialization in higher education "has undermined and perverted" the liberal education of students, a Columbia University official told Muhlenberg College's centennial convocation recently.

Addressing about 600 students, faculty and administrators, Dr. Earl J. McGrath, who directs the Institute of High Education at Columbia's Teachers College, declared:

"The training of scholars and practitioners of the learned callings in the technical, specialized activities of their chosen occupation is an indispensable part of higher education. But it should not, indeed cannot, be the dominant goal of the liberal arts colleges if they are to preserve and enhance their distinctive service to American society."

Rather, the former U. S. Commissioner of Education asserted, the liberal arts colleges should set as their goal "the cultivation of the cultured human being, including as characteristics of culture broad knowledge, the capacity for logical and objective thought, and human sensibilities and actions."

The major part of Dr. McGrath's address was a blueprint for the "reform of liberal education for the 1970s" which will help Americans cope with "our confused culture." He explained that it is the role of a liberal education, and particularly the small, church-affiliated liberal arts college, to provide an education which gives society more than just knowledge.

Dr. McGrath urged these institutions to analyze their programs. Such examination will lead to four new vistas in strengthening education -- the restoration of the student as the center of all institutional concerns, the reappraisal of criteria for admitting students, the relating of curricula to issues of human concern, and increasing the role of students in academic affairs.

The prime responsibility in restoring the student to the center of concern rests upon the faculty. The faculty member's main duty is to teach, not to publish, conduct research or provide expert consultation--despite their importance, Dr. McGrath stressed.

Calling for college admission reforms, the speaker advocated less emphasis on test scores and grades. Dr. McGrath pointed out that society will be better served if colleges educate the more creative students and students from a broader social strata, rather than producing an educational elite. Moreover at least 50 per cent of high school graduates can profitably pursue a liberal education if taught properly, he said.

Many of today's youth find their course only remotely concerned with matters they consider of urgent importance, Dr. McGrath said. He pointed out that it is often the most creative student who suffers from this, "dropping out while his less imaginative colleagues "remain and sometimes graduate with honors" because "so-called liberal education today... is too often an academic exercise unrelated to age-old problems of humanity and irrelevant in applying modern knowledge in solving them."

To overcome this trend, Dr. McGrath suggested that the student be given a greater voice in planning curricula, stressing that academic freedom involves the right to learn. "Any new vista of liberal education must, therefore, envisage that students will play a larger part in the determination of educational policies and practices," he concluded.

Bethany College Calendar Change

--Bethany, W. Va.-(I.P.)-The newly - inaugurated Bethany Plan, a creative approach which combines innovation and tradition, centers around a modified semester system, according to Dr. Warner G. Peterson, Executive Vice President. The new Bethany College calendar consists of two 15-week semesters and a voluntary interim session in January.

During January, students will be free to take part in college sponsored academic programs which do not fit into the conventional calendar or they may prepare independent research projects. Or they are free to travel, rest, or earn money through employment.

Projects, which will vary from year to year, will involve three basic types of activities. They are (1) intensive work in one area of an advanced or remedial nature; (2) off-campus field projects involving faculty and student travel and study in various areas of the U.S. or in other countries, and (3) social service and internship programs.

Although the program is voluntary, it is hoped that all students will participate in at least one interim session during their academic career. Concentrated work in one course will be selected from a published list of seminars, internships and field projects.

The last week of January will be used by the faculty for departmental and all-college academic evaluation and planning.

Student Share In Major Decisions

--Parkville, Mo.-(I.P.)-Park College students now share in making administrative and academic decisions, reports Dr. L. Richard Meeth, new dean of the college. These changes are not being made under student pressure, he states, but because students should legitimately have a share in the kind of education they will receive and because the college believes that this is the best way to teach responsible behavior.

Students will serve on appointed faculty committees, evaluate current members of the faculty and will interview applicants for teaching positions, under innovations introduced by Dr. Meeth.

Students also rate non-tenured teachers on the basis of observed behavior--not professional competence. Ratings will be used as one of the factors determining salary increases, promotions and tenure. A student interview committee, appointed by the student council, will assist in the selection of new teachers. Its opinion will carry the same weight as that of a faculty member, Dean Meeth said. The committee's primary purpose will be to see how a candidate relates to students. Members of the committee will judge an applicant's approach--not his credentials.

Although student interview committees are not as yet prevalent, student participation in the shaping of college policies is increasing in American colleges and universities, Dean Meeth pointed out.

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