

THE IDEA OF THE UNIVERSITY

Talk the Talk, Walk the Walk . . .

by Earl J. Moniz

Through the very selective process described in the last article, the university has been staffed, prepared, and is now awaiting the arrival of the faculty. How are the faculty members selected? What sort of criteria should be utilized to select them in the first place?

At this point, I am reminded of a classical painting of Socrates conducting class at the head of a short rise of stairs. In the picture, Socrates seems to be discussing something with a small group of his students in the center of the painting while other, smaller groups of students seem to be conducting discussions of their own. Could they have been practicing what we now term *cooperative learning*?

Perhaps the Greek ideal of the university would have students actively participating in a discussion revolving around a certain subject. Once they had enough information to begin rationalizing and speculating on their own, they would break off into smaller groups to test their theories against the logic of other students. As sound logical arguments became formulated by these smaller groups, the arguments would be brought back and presented to the moderator of the discussion for further examination. The moderator (in our case, the professor) would then verbally analyze the arguments of the smaller group and give them additional food for thought and the group would once again break off and continue their examination or begin a reexamination. In this fashion, the knowledge, logic, and assumptions of the individuals in the smaller groups are either confirmed or refuted by the professor. Through this process of discussion, examination, further discussion, and further examination the knowledge of the students is enhanced by the comments and analysis of the professor and the knowledge of the professor is also enhanced by the examination of the topic under discussion by the fresh viewpoints of the individuals in the smaller groups. This process could probably be associated with what we currently call *discovery learning*.

This process brings us to the issue that has been plaguing the university since its original establishment all those many years ago: Is supreme knowledge the end of a higher education or simply the means through which a society may advance itself? The answer to that

question significantly effects the approach that a university will take in its presentation of information and its attitude toward the enlightenment of its student body.

If, for instance, we admit that knowledge is the end toward which an education is sought, then once all knowledge about a certain subject has been learned, further inquiry is useless and unnecessary. In geology, for example, once we understand the process through which the earth has been formed and how the continents move about on the surface through tectonic forces, then further examination of that phenomenon is not necessary. Professors armed with that knowledge can publicly announce that we understand how geology works in regard to the movement of continents and further inquiry is terminated.

If, on the other hand, knowledge is considered only a means through which other goals and objectives may be reached, an entirely different light is shed upon the educational process. If our objectives of learning about geology include the saving of lives and the prediction of natural catastrophes, then our discoveries and studies may never cease. Science and the scientific community would continue to refine its understanding and predictions in order to bring the loss of life to zero. In addition, once an understanding has been reached, the scientific community might even take upon itself the goal of not only predicting such catastrophes but also the prevention of those phenomena.

In relation to our search for faculty members, we would want to employ faculty members who regard the educational process as a means of improving and advancing

science and the raising of the standard of living for all. Professors with this mentality would perceive the increase of knowledge as a collective effort by both students and faculty for the advancement of all mankind and not simply the attainment of a certain level of skill or achievement in a certain discipline.

Faculty members should feel compelled to ally themselves on the campus as a unified group of individuals concerned primarily about raising the standards of living in their surrounding community and, secondarily, in the world in general. They should set an example for their students and the citizens in the community. If the university is willing to pay faculty members above-average salaries, the university and the student body has the legitimate expectation that these faculty members will conduct themselves in a fashion commensurate with their salaries. Additionally, these faculty members should feel compelled just as strongly to bind themselves together with the faculty members of other universities around the world in an attempt to establish a community of scholars that should be the epitome of social and racial cooperation, understanding, and harmony.

Let us recap our deliberations about faculty members. These individuals should feel that they are contributing to the continuous growth of knowledge to their students as well as their colleagues at their own university and the university community worldwide. They should also feel that they are contributing to raising the standard of living of their students, their immediate community, and the entire community of man as well. They should encourage students to provide input to the study of any disci-

pline in a scholarly fashion with the notion that "a good idea does not care who has it." They should also hold the notion that higher education is a collaborative effort and that no single individual, regardless of the number of degrees earned by that individual, can possibly know everything about anything. These faculty members must also realize that they, as members of an international community of scholars, are held accountable for their actions and beliefs and they must attempt to set for themselves a standard of living and value system above reproach.

At this point, we have an administration that is concerned about the facilities and the availability of materials to provide the faculty and the student body with the best possible opportunities for educational success and who will involve themselves in these learning opportunities from time to time; we have a faculty that understands that, collectively, the university community is setting the example for the discovery of new knowledge, the refinement of old knowledge, the encouragement of the students to pursue greater knowledge and also the use of the collective knowledge of all time to solve problems that have never been encountered before; and we have a well-tended and well-prepared campus with superb facilities awaiting the arrival of students. How do we attract them? Hold that thought. . .

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