

# The College Teacher and the Surging Enrollments

**In view of the increasing shortages in staff and facilities, college faculties should explore several promising approaches to the improvement of instruction.**

CONFRONTING American higher education today are issues similar to those that faced other levels of the school at earlier periods in history. Most of these issues call for fundamental policy decisions though the tendency is now, as it was in the past when elementary and secondary schools dealt with these problems, to seek temporary or emergency solutions. An inclination to place priority upon physical facilities, administrative organization, and maintenance of traditional standards is present now in college and university education as it was only twenty years ago in secondary schools.

The basic question of policy is, "Should our society attempt to provide education beyond the high school for all youth who have a desire for it?" The remainder of this discussion is based on the assumption that our society can and should make the necessary opportunities for higher education available to all high school graduates who seek to continue their formal schooling. It is further assumed that a substantial increase in variety and types of institutions and programs is essential if the demands of youth are to be met. These assumptions imply a redefinition of purposes of higher education and a re-examination of curricular offerings, with probable expansion of both.

Larger numbers of students are graduating from high schools every year and the percent of graduates seeking education beyond the high school is on a steady increase. If there were any likelihood that either of these facts would not still be true in 1970, the accompanying problems might be viewed as temporary, but forecasts indicate both conditions will continue. Meanwhile entrance into college teaching as a career by those securing the doctor's degree has not kept pace with larger enrollments in undergraduate institutions.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, other demands in our society have drawn away from teaching not only recent doctoral candidates but many veteran college

<sup>1</sup> For discussion of basic issues confronting higher education today, see the following:

National Education Association, Association for Higher Education. *Current Issues in Higher Education*, 1955, 1956 and 1957. Washington: National Education Association.

National Education Association, Educational Policies Commission. *Higher Education in a Decade of Decision*. Washington: National Education Association, 1957.

American Council on Education. *Higher Education and the Society It Serves*. Washington: the Council, 1957.

Fund for the Advancement of Education. *Better Utilization of College Teaching Resources*. New York: the Fund, 1956.

Charles Hogarth. *Crisis in Higher Education*. Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1957.

Robert Hutchins. *Some Observations on American Higher Education*. London: Cambridge University Press, 1956.

teachers. Consequently, there exists now an imbalance in the supply and demand of college teachers, an imbalance that, it is predicted, will prevail for some years ahead.

Current opinions and practices relating to who should go to college, what kinds of higher education opportunities should be available, and how education beyond the high school should be supported are treated in other articles in this issue. Here we shall consider the problems of instruction brought about by increased enrollments in colleges and universities.

It has often been said that an institution cannot rise above the quality of its faculty. This is as true of the so-called "ivy-league" college as it is of the technical institute. It is as true in science as in health and physical education. Probably there is little disagreement on the importance of the college teacher as a determining factor in the quality of educational opportunity provided. But, what kinds of teachers and teaching contribute to quality in education? What is quality? Does it have to do with what a student learns and how he learns it or what a teacher knows and how he communicates it? Can quality in learning be maintained with the increasing number of students in college and a lack of corresponding increase in number of college teachers?

A well-known spokesman<sup>2</sup> on this latter question has stated his position thus: "Will we persist in keeping our classes small knowing that in so doing we will reduce the quality of instruction, or will we seek new ways of instruction? . . . Today the greatest teachers of the age

<sup>2</sup> Alvin Eurich. "Better Instruction with Fewer Teachers." *Current Issues in Higher Education*. Washington: National Education Association, Association for Higher Education, 1956. p. 10.

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**MARGARET LINDSEY is professor of education and research associate, Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York.**

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might be filmed or kinescoped and made available to students everywhere."

Introducing a rebuttal to this position, another spokesman said: "He (Eurich) seems to have suggested as a substitute for a cliché of the past a cliché of the future: American education will soon connote a professor at one end of the coaxial cable and 5,000 students at the other. This is an electrifying and shocking idea."<sup>3</sup>

One obvious approach to the problem of staffing the nation's colleges is the recruitment, selection, preparation and placement of more teachers. Difficulties in this approach are compounded by such prevailing conditions as: inadequate financial rewards, inordinately heavy and diverse teaching responsibilities, and certain personnel policies relating to status. Even if the undesirable aspects of these conditions could be wiped out overnight, there would remain two other factors militating against making college teaching as attractive as it needs to be if an adequate supply of college instructors is to be secured. The first of these is tied to the whole manpower picture, with demands for more and more highly-trained people in more and more production and service occupations. Competition by different groups to secure able youth is accentuated by a range of social values and traditional conceptions related to prestige.

The second factor is the failure on the part of graduate universities to enhance

<sup>3</sup> Warner Rice. "Efficient and Effective Teaching." *Current Issues in Higher Education*. Washington: National Education Association, Association for Higher Education, 1956. p. 17.

for the doctoral student a career of college teaching or to provide specialized preparation for this career. Current developments in this regard present a basis for some optimism, but much more needs to be done by graduate universities and their faculties before they may be viewed as attaching significance to the profession of college teaching and to preparation for it.

What emphasis should be placed on the recruitment of an enormously increased supply of college teachers depends largely upon whether the purposes accepted by expanding programs of higher education can otherwise be successfully achieved. At the present time, there appear to be two different, but not dichotomous, approaches to maintaining the quality of instruction in colleges. The first is rooted in a conviction that the potential supply of college teachers who might meet the standard of "scholarly professors" is actually limited and, therefore, ways must be found to use this limited number to full capacity. The second grows out of a commitment to the importance of a personal relationship between teacher and student and implies that capable college teachers are available; the task is to get the supply and the demand together. Proponents of the first solution fear a lowering of the quality of instruction; they fear that mediocrity will be communicated to students. Advocates of the second approach maintain that there is no substitute for the person as a guide, philosopher and friend of college students.

### Possible Approaches

Cutting across the two seemingly different approaches to the problem of providing adequate instruction to increasing numbers of college students are suggestions which merit careful study. Chief

among these are: (a) using discrimination in the selection of methods, (b) making effective use of technological aids to instruction, (c) modifying traditional concepts of scheduling and credit allocation, (d) providing more realistically for individual differences in students, (e) placing more responsibility for learning on the student, and (f) using special competencies of staff members appropriately. These are the concerns that should occupy the major attention of college faculties and administrators. These are the problems that should be the center of cooperative study and in-service education programs for contemporary college personnel.

• *Using discrimination in the selection of methods.* There would seem to be more rationale now than ever before for the use of the lecture as a method of college teaching. This is true if the lecture is a means for communicating to students knowledge which is not available in print, for clarifying through delineation, illustration and contrast basic concepts which students may not comprehend from the printed page or the laboratory of experience, or for raising fundamental questions or stating challenging propositions to increase the motivations and readiness of students. But the lecture cannot possibly serve most, let alone all, of the needs of students. Some purposes cannot be achieved except through individual instruction; some can best be accomplished in small groups where intercommunication in the exploration of meanings is carried on; still others may well be attained through independent study.

Of the purposes that may be accepted by a college faculty or by an individual instructor, analysis needs to be made to determine which call for what kind of teaching. In addition, consideration

should be given to the fact that not all students can best be helped to accomplish a single objective through identical learning experiences. That variety in types of learning experiences should be available for college students is a conclusion that can be supported without further exploration. What is needed now is study of the question of what purposes call for what particular methods. When more valid data are available on this question, it is very likely that the time and competencies of college teachers can be more effectively utilized. Auditorium-size classes, some followed by discussion groups; small classes and seminars; and individual tutoring will all have a rightful place in the methodology of college instruction. Lecture, demonstration, discussion, observation, field trips, films, recordings, panels, symposiums, reports, role-playing—all these techniques for helping college students to accomplish desired purposes will be found useful. The key to efficient and effective use of procedures, however, must reside in discriminating and deliberate choice on the basis of purposes to be achieved.

• *Making effective use of technological aids to instruction.* College teachers are far from taking full advantage of what technology has to offer by way of instructional materials, including television, radio, films, and laboratory equipment. Overuse or improper use of such materials is as much to be regretted as failure to recognize the contribution they can make to more adequate communication. Improper use permits possible mechanization of education and lack of use may imply a paucity of attention to current developments in teaching. Telecasting the master teacher demonstrating a creative scientific experiment, or a renowned poet reading his works, or the anthropologist displaying and discussing

his collection from a recent study of a primitive civilization may be considered desirable, not because the technique of telecasting is being employed but because the procedure is providing for students a rewarding learning experience which they might not otherwise have. To say that most college teaching can be done effectively by this technique is to deny the range of purposes and of individual differences which exists. The chief problem here is that raised in the preceding paragraph: selecting methods on the basis of purposes to be served. College faculties should consciously examine which goals can best be achieved through the use of mechanical aids and which demand other procedures, particularly personal contact and interaction.

• *Modifying traditional concepts of scheduling and credit allocation.* There has grown up in American higher education a system of symbols and arrangements which seems to attach respectability to only certain kinds of learning activities on the part of college students. For example, rigid scheduling of classes to meet so many hours per semester at the rate of three times a week in fifty-minute periods is a common basis for allocating credits earned. Generally attendance at class sessions is viewed as important. Perhaps a re-examination of this concept would reveal that some purposes can be achieved through intensive workshop type classes over shorter periods of time, others through classes scheduled to meet for one larger block of time each week (one three-hour session in place of three one-hour sessions), and still others through independent study with few scheduled periods for class meetings. Again, the problem of major concern to college teachers should be that of determining what kinds of class schedules and credit allocation con-

tribute most toward goal achievement. Having done this, the task becomes one of selecting those arrangements and symbols which are conducive to the implementation of decisions made.

• *Providing more realistically for individual differences in students.* This is not as easily done in higher education as it is in elementary and secondary schools because of the obligation to society to insure competence on the part of graduating students who become licensed to undertake certain services. Then, too, tradition wields great influence on this point. The concept is widely held that higher education is for the intellectually able and others should be eliminated so that standards can be maintained. But neither the fact that larger numbers are going to college nor the acceptance of broader purposes of higher education in America needs to cause alarm about lowering standards. Rather these facts should result in increased attention to individual differences among students.

Even before educators were concerned about the increasing enrollments in higher education, progress was being made in doing something about the range of abilities characteristic of the college population. The elective system, at its height in the thirties, was one attempt. Differentiated assignments, optional activities, and cooperative planning represent ways in which college teachers have sought to provide for differences. But the introduction of prescribed general education programs appears to be accompanied by more regimentation of students. It would seem that now is the time to look at this situation quite carefully. Do all students need to take the same four or five courses during their freshman and sophomore years? Does every student need Mathematics in General Education, or Introduction to Science, or

First Year College French? Realistically, no—not *all* students need these courses.

The work of college teachers could be made more effective (and the experiences of students more meaningful and worthwhile) if greater effort were expended in molding the program to meet the needs of the student rather than vice versa. This might mean opportunities for students to “test out” certain required courses, to plan for individual study when this would meet their needs, to seek their own tutors in case of special needs—in general to take more responsibility for their own learning.

• *Placing more responsibility for learning on the student.* In contrast with European higher education, colleges and universities in this country tend to place a great deal of responsibility for the student’s learning on the teacher. Consequently, teachers find themselves bogged down with continuous preparation for classes, reading papers, making up and scoring examinations. Perhaps the surge of students seeking higher education now will force college faculties to think more clearly about learning, what it is and what brings it about. Not infrequently an insurmountable obstacle to doing what is thought best at the time forces creative solutions that prove to be advantageous. If surging enrollments bring about procedures for assisting students to assume more responsibility for their own learning, this will have been one rewarding outcome. Should this outcome be achieved, there is a chance that college teachers could then use their time more constructively.

• *Using special competencies of staff members appropriately.* One of the difficulties for college teachers now resides in the scope of responsibilities they are expected to assume and the implied expectation that all teachers should be able

to do all things. Some teachers are excellent lecturers, others work best with individual students; some are productive researchers and others excel as practitioners; some are successful counselors, others are not; some like to deal with advanced students, while others get their satisfaction from working with freshmen. There is need to discontinue the tendency to ascribe prestige to certain functions and to view college teachers as placed on a status hierarchy in terms of what they do. Various parts of the work of college teachers in an institution should be perceived as different in kind, not in quality. Perceiving them thus would enable college teachers to be released from certain pressures to do everything equally well and to concentrate their energies on improving the quality of those things for which their special aptitudes and characteristics fit them.

While society at large, and professional educators in particular, forge ahead to arrive at decisions on fundamental prob-

lems of making education beyond the high school available to those youth who want and can likely profit from it, college faculties would do well to set for themselves an organized program of inservice education focused on problems like the six identified here. The present corps of teachers in institutions of higher education in general have had neither the specific preparation nor the on-the-job assistance to encourage them to take seriously their responsibility for the improvement of instruction. It is to be hoped that current problems related to the necessity for teaching larger numbers in college will spark positive attitudes and deepen motivations on the part of faculty members. If this follows, college faculties, regardless of the particular circumstances surrounding higher education in the future, will view it as part of their obligation to their students to strive continually for ways of increasing the quality of educational opportunity which they make available.

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