

# A College Administrator's Position Paper

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**T**HE focus of our nation in recent months has centered on colleges and universities. Students, faculty, and administrators have clashed over the roles to be played by each group within the framework of institutions of higher learning. Student and faculty unrest has evidenced itself in a variety of ways such as demonstrations, confrontations, sit-ins, and forced negotiations. The results, thus far, have been hazy and quite inconclusive.

The American public has watched the problem of the colleges and universities of this nation with great interest. The inconclusive resolution of the problems confronting the college community has caused the public to react through their state legislatures and elected officials. Laws have been passed dealing with the campus unrest, and numerous bills have been proposed in state legislatures in an attempt to bring the situation under control. Public reaction and overreaction have been evident but quite understandable.

In dealing with the vital issues facing them, faculty, student, and administrative groups must initially resolve the fundamental differences in their philosophical approaches to possible alternative solutions. The changing nature of American society, with its deep concern for the "right of the individual," has caused great confusion within the philosophical positions of each group. Coupled with this confusion in philosophy is the inevitable question, "Who will govern in higher education?" With each group wishing to garner as much decision-making authority as it can, the entire collegiate structure shudders from the impact of the struggle. It appears that this struggle will continue for some time.

Since all people speak to issues from a positional and philosophical base, it seems reasonable and quite vital that the groups state these bases for all factions to consider. Unfortunately, this is seldom done and attitudinal positions are obtained only through careful listening and analysis of statements made during negotiation. A more reasonable method would be to obtain written statements from the participants. However, this might not be achievable since some individuals would find it disagreeable to express their ideas on paper. This in itself tends to be a threat.

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The purpose of this article is to put on paper one man's beliefs regarding his approach to the groups with which he works. This statement shows how he feels and gives the reader an opportunity to compare his own position with that of the author. The question then could be asked, "Would it be possible for us (reader and author) to negotiate, provided that the reader's position is also openly stated?"

## A Statement of Belief

### 1. BASIC PHILOSOPHY

I believe:

- a. In the democratic process for faculty and/or students, with both groups having the right to voice their opinions in matters relating directly to them.
- b. However, that there are limitations to the democratic process, since the ultimate responsibility for the success of the operation of the college lies in the hands of the president and his immediate advisors.
- c. That local policy matters may be recommended to the president through committee action, but this does *not* necessarily mandate adoption.
- d. That there are a number of false assumptions about the nature of democratic leadership which need clarification in the eyes of those who are deeply concerned with it; for example, that a democratic leader never makes a decision and/or that all decisions must be shared.
- e. That unless college administrators take definitive positions on major issues confronting them today, the people will make the decisions for them through the actions of state legislatures, and the courts of law will be forced into policy-making decisions.

### 2. FACULTY

I believe:

- a. That the most binding obligation of the faculty is to support the collegiate institution so that the goals of the student and the institution are not jeopardized. This obligation supersedes the individual's obligations to his own feelings and desires.
- b. That faculty members have the right to participate in the formulation of policies directly related to them.
- c. That faculty members do *not* have the right to demand involvement in every aspect of the operation of the college, particularly where they have little experience and/or knowledge as individuals.
- d. That faculty members have a deep and abiding obligation to teach students. Thus, I do *not* support extremely light workloads and the academic freedom to do only those things (excluding teaching) which are of individual interest only.
- e. That faculty members have the obligation to work closely with students on curricular changes sought by students, because this communicative process is vital to the success of the academic program. I do *not* believe, however, that faculty members are mandated to produce change by such interaction.
- f. That faculty members have the obligation to further their own development through organized research activities, wherever possible. I strongly support and urge the development of proposals by faculty members to seek funds from the federal government and/or other agencies.

g. That faculty members have a deep and abiding obligation to demand of their students minimum standards of conduct and performance both inside and outside the classroom.

h. That faculty members should try not to be hypercritical of administrators, thus demanding of them what, at times, they cannot deliver due to extenuating circumstances.

i. That faculty members have the obligation to develop a feeling of "trust" in those individuals with whom they work toward the goals of the college.

### 3. STUDENTS

I believe:

a. That students should come to college to obtain an education from those capable of exposing them to the great truths of history, the major processes of human interaction, the basic philosophical positions of thought, the fundamental ideas and knowledge in the academic disciplines, and the basic concepts of living successfully in a democratic society.

b. That students have the obligation to conform to the standards of the college in the social and academic spheres, and that these standards should be established through consensus of students and faculty with the approval of the president.

c. That students have the moral obligation to themselves, to the college, and to their parents and society to conduct themselves within the minimum standards established for the college in the social and academic spheres, and that they do *not* have the right to do anything they desire and whenever they wish without penalty.

d. That students have the right to expect excellence from their teachers in the classroom, and that they have the right to question, to debate, and to disagree in their search for knowledge without apprehension and fear, providing they do this in the spirit of good will and social grace which this implies.

e. That students have the obligation to seek curricular change through interaction with faculty, but I do *not* believe that they have the right to mandate change using this process.

### 4. ADMINISTRATORS

I believe:

a. That administrators have the obligation to work closely with faculty members and students in establishing local policies for the college, where appropriate and workable.

b. That administrators have the moral obligation to demand minimum standards of performance and/or professional conduct from both the faculty members and the student body.

c. That administrators have the moral obligation to use their authority whenever it is necessary and vital for the good of the college and the preservation of the institution, providing such authority is not used for personal aggrandizement.

d. That a *laissez faire* attitude on the part of administrators is completely unsupportable. I firmly believe in position setting so that others have the opportunity to gauge, judge, and debate the issues at hand.

e. That administrators have the obligation and right to take a stand on issues.

f. That administrators have the obligation to insist that faculty and students work out agreements for the good of the college, and this insistence is not to be classified as "undemocratic."

g. That the abrogation of authority by administrators in many instances is completely unsupportable and 100 percent indefensible.

The present static situation in colleges and universities mandates the need for a higher degree of communication and action. Only through attempts, such as the one outlined here, will this be possible. Since people often verbalize excessively, thus causing others to become lost in the semantics of the discussion, let us consider the approach suggested in this article. Institutions, faculty members, and students will be the chief beneficiaries and who can argue against that?

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