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ABSTRACT

Issues concerning articulation between high school and college are discussed, along with the role of the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) agency. The situation in Louisiana is used as illustration. One important consideration is communicating clearly the meaning of general education within the baccalaureate degree, based on cooperation between State Boards of Education and higher education institutions. Statewide definitions of baccalaureate education are needed in order to communicate expectations or requirements to secondary schools. Additional issues of school-articulation that SHEEO agencies should address include: the abilities that high school graduates should possess; the range of postsecondary experiences provided to students; assistance available to students after they matriculate; standards for new teachers; and the appropriate authority for setting standards and curricula for high school teachers. In many states the overall responsibility for the governance of secondary schools and colleges is organized separately. Accountability for statewide educational policies is best achieved through the diffusion of power, characterized by different pathways to officeholding, multiple jurisdictions, and overlapping responsibilities. (SW)

SCHOOL-COLLEGE ARTICULATION: WHAT CAN SHEEO AGENCIES DO?

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The one lesson I learn annually from attending these yearly meetings is that the common themes which affect us all are shaped by the variety from state to state which affects us separately. Our abiding task is to extract from this diversity a common definition of the topic before us. As attention is focused on "What Can SHEEO Do?" we must consider as well expectations of what is to be done.

The appealing phrase "School-College Articulation" evokes diverse interpretations. What schools? What colleges? What kind of articulation? Each state boasts of a galaxy of schools and colleges (rural and urban, public and private, large and small) - each the sun in its own solar system - many encrusted with multiple administrative layers of boards, districts, systems, and departments. Some of these schools articulate quite well with the colleges which accept their students. In a minority of cases school standards are high, students pursue a rigid preparatory curriculum, and they perform well in the selective colleges which admit them. In many other instances standards in the high schools are less rigorous, standards in the nonselective colleges are comparable, allowing these students also to accomplish without difficulty the much heralded passing from school to college.

The sense, therefore, that improved articulation is needed suggests that effective communication among the different levels of education may not, inherently, be enough. It implies even more the need to articulate for a purpose, to establish harmonious relations toward the end of fulfilling certain societal expectations of the school-college relationship. Based on the plethora of recent studies and publications, high on the national agenda is improving the quality of high school graduates, primarily through two related means: strengthening of high school curricular requirements, and enhancement of the quality of high school instruction.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education, in its recent study, "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform," provided larger insights regarding social

goals. Two preeminent themes in the Commission's study are the need to maintain rigorous standards in traditional subjects, and the need to maintain broad access to public education. In the Commission's words:

> The twin goals of equity and high quality schooling have profound and practical meaning for our economy and society, and we cannot permit one to yield to the other either in principle or in practice.
>
> To do so would deny young people their chance to learn and live according to their aspirations and abilities. It would also lead to a generalized accommodation to mediocrity in our society on the one hand or the creation of undemocratic election on the other.

Similarly, the College Board's timely study designed to improve "Academic Preparation for College" was auspiciously titled the "EQuality Project." This study emphasized that improvment in academic preparation was needed "to fulfill our national promise of equal access to higher education."

HIGH QUALITY AND EQUITY—In one fashion or another restatements of these goals would appear in most major policy statements regarding public education at the local, state, and federal levels. The Commission's and College Board's goals relative to schools, our goals relative to colleges, is therefore the general dilemma of American public education. We desire twin goals which are frequently competitive; occasionally they are perceived to be mutually exclusive; and even under the most optimistic circumstances these goals are quite expensive to achieve: top performance by the very best in the very best programs, combined with broad access to a meaningful public education at all levels.

In the current issue of the Bostonia Magazine (an alumni publication of Boston University), I read these provoking comments of President John Silber:

> Why should high schools worry about their standards if the colleges and universities don't care? If students can come out of the high school ill-prepared and yet be admitted to a perfectly respectable college or university, then the high school

> may claim it is doing its job. Parents will not put pressure on the school system to raise standards unless colleges refuse to admit students who fail to meet twelfth grade standards.

A cynic might conclude that the major problem of articulation which the SHEEO agency must address is articulation among the boards and institutions of higher education in the respective states. I invite you to survey in your state, as we are doing in Louisiana, the variegated maze of freshmen--and sophomore--level requirements that we misleadingly lump under the euphemistic heading of "General Education." How can SHEEO agencies communicate with schools about anything of significance, if it is impossible for them to communicate clearly the meaning of general education within the baccalaureate degree?

What does baccalaureate education mean? What each campus says it means? Each college on each campus? Each department in each college? Each student at the university? Or does the state have more than a passing interest in establishing expectations for all college graduates? If there are no statewide definitions, then what expectations are we to communicate to secondary schools? Those of each campus? College? Department? Student? What right does the SHEEO agency have to sit idly by as colleges and universities maintain their curricular cafeterias, and at the same time insist that the schools wear shirts and ties and dine according to an elegantly prepared menu? May I humbly submit that so-called "College Preparatory Curricula" which a multitude of national studies as well as SHEEO agencies are recommending for schools, would <u>overprepare</u> secondary students for many of the curricula at our colleges and universities.

It is entirely appropriate that one session at this Annual Meeting should be titled "Politicians or Academicians: SHEEO Agencies and Their Problems of Legitimacy, Identity, and Role," and for this session to focus on "School-College Articulation." We are searching internally for our own identity; at the same time in the school-college

relationship we are attempting to communicate an identify to others. Concurrently climbing two ladders of unequal proportions--perhaps that is our identify, and our fate. As SHEEO agencies probe the deeper meaning of their existence, educational as well as political imperatives require that they face these burning issues of school-college articulation:

> Above all, as I have emphasized, what is the body of knowledge and understandings, along with skills that one should expect of a college student? How should these expectations be related to what is taught in high school? In elementary school?
>
> What are the abilities and talents of graduating high school seniors? What should they be?
>
> What is the range of postsecondary experiences being provided for students? What should they be?
>
> To what degree should the matching of students with post-secondary experiences be a function of state and national policy? The relationship of students and their families to institutions? To other variables?
>
> Once the student begins to matriculate, what assistance is given in addressing those problems of articulation which remain? What assistance should be given?
>
> What are the standards for teachers to enter the profession? What should they be?
>
> Should professional educators have the decisive voice in setting standards and curricula for high school teachers? If not, how should this authority be exercised?
>
> And fundamentally, what will be the priorities as we place price tags on those answers which cost additional money?

How comforting it is, especially when one lives below sea level, to ascend to the height of the Rockies and fantasize about addressing these problems on a systematic basis. You and I know that in each state these issues are settled in a political cauldron where the forces of inertia, jurisdictional conflict, regional and institutional rivalries, misperceptions, and miscalculations share the arena with the forces of reason, logic, and dispassion.

One dimension of jurisdictional conflict deserves special consideration. In many states overall responsibility for the governance of secondary schools is organized separately from the governance of colleges. The manner of governance of vocational-technical institutions and community colleges may add to this disparity. These matters are further complicated by variety as to whether the superintendent of education or K-12 board members are appointed or elected. If you wish to view countervailing theories and a system of checks and balances in operation, visit Louisiana where the Regents, who are appointed by the Governor and have responsibility for higher education, interact with the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), with jurisdiction over schools and postsecondary vocational-technical institutions. Members of the BESE are elected by districts, and the Superintendent of Education, whose responsibility it is to implement policies of this Board, is elected statewide with his own mandate and his own agenda. The Constitution which established this structure recognized the need for both the Regents and the BESE to "articulate," by requiring that they meet jointly at least biannually. In no year have the two boards met more than twice; in some years they have barely met the Constitutional requirement; and at no time has the full meaning of cooperation which founders of the Constitution envisioned been realized.

Thus our view that more effective articulation is needed has to be balanced against this constitutional and political principle which is staunchly defended in many states, to wit: accountability for statewide policies in education is best achieved through the diffusion of power, characterized by different pathways to officeholding, multiple jurisdictions, and overlapping responsibilities. Viewed in this light, the lack of articulation between schools and colleges is not an historical happenstance; no more than the lack of articulation between private and public colleges can be viewed as an unforeseen occurrence. Rather, they are both inevitable results of carefully preconceived and dogmatically defended political concepts. Remember, some of those

societies whose highly centralized systems of education we admire are organized on the basis of political principles which differ substantially from some of the catalyzing forces of American politics and American education.

In Louisiana, and other states, should there be a superboard controlling the entire spectrum of education? This would be an attractive way to pinpoint the responsibility for meaningful school-college articulation. But let us reduce this premise to particulars. In Louisiana, should the Board of Regents or the BESE or a combination of the two be the new superboard? The Regents are not even a superboard for higher education. Colleges and universities are clustered under three management boards, which, along with the Regents, share Constitutionally-defined authority. And the BESE, as mentioned earlier, has to share policy direction for the schools with a powerful Superintendent of Education. Educational power--in Louisiana and many other states--has been so meticulously dispersed that genuine centralization would require an exigency of momentous proportions.

Yet some significant steps toward centralization are already underway. What the Commission on Excellence described as the crisis of mediocrity in our schools has already resulted--in Louisiana and many other states--in the evolving willingness of the citizenry to accept greater centralization of educational authority. Statewide standards of progression for students, and statewide tests for teachers, are notable examples of this trend. The degree of centralization which proves acceptable in the long run is likely to reflect public perceptions regarding the effectiveness of current structures to address the burning issues.

How effectively do the current structures address the burning issues? Or, to bring the matter home, "What can SHEEO do?" The answer is both simple and complex. Above all the SHEEO agency must be faithful to its roots, to the broad optimistic vision which nurtured its establishment and has sustained its existence. While viewing higher

education in all its related parts, the agency should weigh and balance related parts of the entire spectrum of education. While remaining in a sense above the fray, the SHEEO agency, by the nature of its responsibilities, must nevertheless be an advocate in the midst of battle. For a variety of reasons this is the case. In every state there are honest differences as to what constitutes the legitimate needs of higher education, or all of education. On difficult questions members of the agency are likely themselves to be deeply divided. These alternative visions of education must obviously be debated in the marketplace of ideas. Further, positions which the agency may perceive as visionary may be condemned by others as the bitterest partisan attacks. As a matter of information, the SHEEO agency must respond at least occasionally to those who publicly distort the agency's position. Partisan debate may also occur as the SHEEO agency defends, as it must, the legitimate needs and interests of the higher education sector.

Both philosopher and soldier, both referee and pugilist, the SHEEO agency must combine these antipodes in such a manner that even in the midst of battle, eyes of the agency must remain focused on the horizon. Immediate individual struggles must be, and must be interpreted as, quests for long-range and worthy educational goals. If this approach is effectively employed, limits to what the SHEEO agency can do will be set more by the public's perceptions of the agency's own priorities and visions than by the centrifugal forces of state politics.