DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 277 020 CS 210 216

AUTHOR Gale, Steven H.
TITLE Humanities Leadership: Where for the Rest of the 1980's?
PUB DATE [84]
NOTE 10p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Responsibility; *Administrator Role; *Economic Factors; *Enrollment Trends; *Faculty Development; Higher Education; *Humanities; *Humanities Instruction; Social Attitudes; Socioeconomic Influences; Trend Analysis

ABSTRACT

Three major, interrelated areas will be of concern to the humanities in higher education for at least the rest of this decade: economics, the student population, and teachers' professional image. Crises in the national economic situation will continue to have an impact on the humanities in the form of public disinterest and a lack of funding by private organizations. To face these obstacles, administrators must make do with available financial resources while seeking new sources of support. In response to declining enrollments due to general economic conditions and rising tuition costs, administrators must advocate maintaining high academic standards and must focus on meeting the needs of the substantial number of older students. The public's perception that teachers are not as valuable as they once were has resulted in a decrease in the funds available to educators in general, the demoralization of many faculties, and increased antipathy among disciplines. Administrators can improve the prospects for the humanities in the next decade by developing a strong, professional faculty and a high quality of education for students. In practical terms, they must make sure that everyday activities run as smoothly, efficiently, and equitably as possible, and they should set an example of strong leadership for both faculty and students. (JD)

HUMANITIES LEADERSHIP: WHERE FOR THE REST OF THE 1980'S ?

Steven H. Gale

As we have reached the middle of the decade, the future of the humanities in American higher education appears cloudy. The National Endowment for the Humanities report, "To Reclaim a Legacy," issued in November, 1984, makes this very obvious. Recently, I have attended several national seminars where concerned administrators, from department heads and deans to college presidents and chancellors, from defined and discussed the administrative task and tried to anticipate how that task will be affected by trends over next decade. These discussions have prompted the following observations.

There are three major, interrelated areas that will be of concern to the humanities and higher education in general for at least the rest of this decade and, if the projections are correct, may be the cause of even greater concern in the 1990's: (1) economics; (2) the student population; and (3) our professional image.

Economics are the most important causal element, and the one that clearly determines where and what kinds of answers might be found in regards to the other two areas. The impact of our national economic situation (inflation, a tight money market, a recession, rising energy costs, etc.) on higher education has been and will continue to be felt most obviously in public disinterest in the humanities as a whole and special programs perceived as "elitist" or of "limited impact" with a corresponding attack by legislatures and philanthropic organizations--who will be able to withhold funds. Unfortunately, this attack will be bolstered by some within the academic community itself who are professional and vocational-school-

oriented and who are in part trying to protect their own interests in a time of cutbacks (leading to the kind of futile attempts to justify our existence that former Yale President A. Bartlett Giamatti points out are leveled at specious areguments and are thus a waste of time and energy). For most in higher education, economic forces come to bear in their day-to-day professional lives, the nuts and bolts aspects of teaching and administering departments, programs, and colleges: salaries, student needs (including financial assistance), staff, materials, and so forth. We must be prepared to face the aspect of limited faculty mobility, increased tenure pressures, an increase in the average age of our faculties, retrenchment, and similar problems. In attacking these problems administrators in the humanities need to look for answers of how to make do with available resources while simultaneously seeking new sources of support. Unfortunately, because of the impact of heterogeneity, there are no universally applicable formulaic answers or even approaches to these problems, but the right attitudes on the part of those involved will allow effective problem solving to be applied in individual instances. We have been especially effective as inovators; now we need to be aware that we may have to be more independent that we have in the past.

Directly related to the economic problem is that of the student population. Enrollments are declining because the baby boom has ended, but they are also declining due to general economic conditions and rising tuition costs; many students can no longer afford to go to college, or they feel that the benefits do not warrant the expenditure of time and money required, especially in the humanities. We have to recognize the new ne is of our students from nontraditional population pools, which in turn raises

more questions about differing student needs. Given the situation created by competition for smaller numbers of students, administrators must be advocates for maintaining high standards and for a continued seeking after excellence (in 1979 the Carnegie Commission warned that standards may deteriorate rapidly). At the same time, another aspect of the problem of falling enrollments holds part of the answer (so long as we avoid the danger of fadism), for there are sources for students and for support that have not been utilized fully heretofore. For instance, twenty years ago 7% of all college students were twenty-five or older. Today nearly one-third are in that age catagory. At my institution the average student age is twenty-five. This means that older students are emerging from the business world who are more mature in their needs and expectations than the conventional college student has been--as illustrated in a renewed awareness of the importance of training in my own academic department, English, with an awareness that effective writing can be used to attract monetary and moral support from community elements that may have been less able to see the relation between their work and higher education previously. The maturity and experiences that these students bring with them can be seized upon positively to provide a broader eduational experience for all on our own home campuses than we have been able to do. This is particularly true on small campuses, but my experiences at several multiversities indicate that it is applicable at that level too. Clearly, the informational role of educational institutions can and must be vigorously conducted.

For teachers in the humanities generally, all of these elements come together most personally in our professional image. Those outside the profession do not have as high an opinion of the profession as they once

did; this both stimulates and reinforces our images of ourselves. Morale is low. In the 1950's university professors and dentists earned the same average salary. Today, dentists earn two to two-and-a-half times what professors earn. This descrepancy is due, at least in part, to the public's perception that teachers are not as valuable as they once were, and, consequently, there has been a withholding of funds. Teachers need to know that they are more than unappreciated, overworked paperpushers. Sadly, one ofthe major effects of the economic situation is that faculties are becoming even more demoralized and there is increasing antipathy between disciplines. Furthermore, there is a deteriorating sense of community and professionalism within the profession. Since this sense of community and professionalsim has always been one of the essential aspects of the profession, it is incumbent upon administrators to help reverse the movement toward deterioration of image both without and within the profession.

Humanities programs are particulary vulnerable to the conditions described above, yet they are also in a position to lead the fight to reverse these trends. The first thing that is evident is that in spite of the plethora of other problems besetting the profession, humanities programs must be led by administrators, not bureaucrats. A bureaucrat works from nine to five and is interested only in working by the numbers (credit hours generated are more important than academic quality). His/her job is seen as more important <u>per se</u> than as a means of serving others. Bureaucrats do not like teaching, by and large they are not good at it (or scholarship), and they have little or no understanding or sympathy for teaching or research (they do like meetings and memos). Those who can't, envy. To the administrator the overall job is important, not the details. Administrators want to see that

the best teaching and scholarship possible under local conditions is accomplished. The humanities provide an opportunity to bring together the best forces on campus and to focus on the above elements in highly visible ways.

Most administrators have been effective classroom teachers. The teacher as administrator concentrates on those tools that are necessary in the classroom. Effective management means research, assessing needs, setting goals, planning and carrying through, working with people, educating and evaluating. Schedules, resources, materials, and mechanical aids can be handled in the classroom--and good teachers apply them on the departmental, school, and university levels too.

First and foremost, administrators must be committed to developing both a strong, professional faculty and a high quality education for students. Everything has to be based on these interlocking goals. In practical terms, this breaks down to two functional areas. The first has to do with the managerial part of an administrator's job, the nuts and bolts operations. This is making sure that everyday activities run as smoothly, efficiently, and equitably as possible. Personnel, budget, curriculm, and other such matters fit into this category. Equally important is the second area--leadership must be by example. It is imperative that goals, expectations, and procedures be clearly articulated (always keeping in mind that the flexibility to adjust is vital) and the successful administrator must be able to represent the college's and university's interests to those inside and outside the immediate unit. Staff and faculty should be encouraged in their work and meritorious activities need to be recognized. After all, it is the people who count. Indeed, people are not taught; rather they learn, if sufficientlty motivated to do so. The most important thing that students

can learn from the humanities experience is how to think. Thus, as teachers our role is to expose students to concepts and materials, to stimulate their interest, to serve as reference tools, to act as guides. The relationship between administrator and faculty should be similar.

Because the ultimate goals of college teachers and administrators are the same, administrative and educational philosophies should be extensions of one another. Again, the most important thing that an administrator can do is provide an atmosphere that fosters the best teaching and research possible in the unit being administered. This means managing daily affairs of the unit professionally, efficiently, and fairly, never forgetting the organization's purpose nor subverting the human, personal element. Beyond this, it is important that humanities administrators especially be leaders, role models who can speak to and for faculties, the administration, and the community. Furthermore it is imperative that those who fill administrative positions be people of vision who see beyond the daily routine and paper pushing to stimulate and support our programs and exciting approaches to teaching.

Likewise, the administrative position requires someone with experience in a wide range of situations, someone with flexibilty and a talent for innovation yet who appreciates the traditional strengths and goals of the profession. We cannot afford to be led astray by devisive and inappropriate issues. Some things seem self-evident, yet the pages of professional publications indicate that they are not. In academia, for instance, far too many have fallen prey to the fallacies of marketplace-based salaries and accountablility. To begin with, there is a problem of definition. When the marketplace is discussed in academia, it should be the academic marketplace

that is refered to, not the world marketplace. What someone can earn outside the college's walls is inconsequential because it is within those walls that the position is being sought; it makes sense to compare a proposed salary with that available at a Fortune Five Hundred Company only if the alternate job possibility is with another Fortune Five Hundred Company. Furthermore, the future of the humanities in American higher education can be sanguine only if our leaders recognize that the popularity of specific majors is cyclical and fadish. When I was a undergraduate, for example, business courses were underenrolled becarse they were not considered academically respectable; they were perceived as serving those who cared only about making money and were not interested in a true education. To allow one area on campus to receive higher salaries than other areas breeds discontent and actually does a disservice to the institution. The marketplace still argument does not apply; those who chose to teach to do so for reasons other than monetary gain. If they are really at the top of their profession, no college could afford to buy them away from private enterprise (and why pay high prices for second-rate talents?). If one unit is robbed to pay another, sooner or later the institution ends up losing the first unit, and very few institutional administrators seem able to utilize long-range planning to the extent that they can comprehend that when the cycle is completed they will be overstocked with highly paid faculty for whom there is no longer much demand, and they will be understaffed where previously they were healthy, thereby being forced to reenter the bidding wars to rebuy those whom they once employed. Ironically, some of the reports referred to above have concluded that just as there is a shortage of teachers in math and the sciences now, in the 1990's there will be a shortage of teachers throughout the humanities.

Even more important, those who opt for accountability have no understanding of the nature or purpose of the university. Cost effectiveness has no valid definition in determining an academic curriculum. Honors programs, nursing programs, English departments, foreign language departments, business schools, computer departments, whatever the unit--these should be seen as interconnected, as part of a whole. There must be a realization that all academic disciplines (I do stress academic) are equally legitimate, valuable, and essential in the scope and mission of an institution and of higher education.

With the help of the members of their profession, the good administrators described above gather, distill, and synthesize ideas, opinions, and facts, identify areas of concern or for emulation, and set examples. The areas of concern do not represent unsurmountable problems; the greatest resources that our profession has are its subject matter and its people. The strengths inherent in these two sources will continue to serve as the best foundation that any administrators will be worthy of this support.

I realize that some of the stances that I have articulated will be derided as having no "real world" basis. However, as an article in the Chronicle of Higher Education (Malcolm G. Scully, "Possible Faculty Shortage in 1990's Worries Today's Academic Leaders," October 6, 1982, pp. 1, 10) makes clear, the concern about leadership in the humanities in general for the rest of this decade is particularly germane now, for today's shortsightedness is demonstrably going to lead to a shortage of well-qualified faculty members in the humanities in the next decade unless the problems outlined above are recognized and new strategies are developed to

address them. The fate of the humanities in America in the next century will be determined by how well our leadership responds during the rest of the 1980's; humanities programs across the nation can to a large extent determine what that reponse will be, for not only should humanities studies be at the academy's cutting edge but they should also be influenceing the next generation of leaders.