

January 8, 1968

To: The Directors of Webster College

From: Jacqueline Grennan

Re: "Liberal learning" at Webster College

In an open, complex, dynamic society, liberal education--inside and outside the structures of formal schools--must be preoccupied with the central problem of man's learning to learn. Stability in our time is clearly more the maintaining of dynamic equilibrium of forces in continuing change than any attempt to identify and maintain a form of technological, political, social, or religious status quo.

Within this framework, the educational institutions themselves must again focus on learning to learn, on continually attempting to find and maintain the stability of dynamic equilibrium for the institution and for the students and faculty who make up the institution.

In an age of intense specialization and expertise in the professions and in the trades, the distinctions between liberal, professional, and technical education have begun to blur. In an age when leaders of our society are often identified as the "action-intellectuals" the distinctions between academic, political, and businessmen have begun to blur. In an age in which we are beginning to see humanistic, aesthetic, and pragmatic concerns as overlapping, the distinctions between humanities, the arts, and the sciences are beginning to blur. In an age in which the struggle for civil liberties and responsible citizenship in a democracy has produced both hope and frustration, the distinctions between the governors and the governed have already become blurred.

How do students, faculty members, administrators, and directors of a college in today's world continue to search for and to maintain dynamic

equilibrium for their institution and for themselves?

First, I want to explore four important areas of concern underlying the ferment and turmoil within the college-age population in America today. Then, I will attempt to describe how Webster College, as a comparatively small institution committed to undergraduate education, has and will continue to be an important experimental station in dealing with this national problem.

The four areas of concern which I have identified are:

- 1. Intellectual-cognitive development
- 2. Personal and communal morality
- 3. Philosophic and religious development
- 4. Personal "enrichment" and social involvement

1. Intellectual-cognitive development

Tribal societies in which the flow of information was internalized--whether the society was a town or an empire--could and did educate their people principally by imparting to them the political, "scientific," economic, aesthetic, religious syntheses under which the society maintained its stability.

"Revolutionaries" like our American forefathers broke from the old tribes and found new lands in which they were forced to "learn to learn," to invent new systems; but, primarily they educated their children in the schools in the facts of the older syntheses rather than providing for them the experience of forging new and expanding syntheses.

In the past quarter of a century, the technological achievements in transportation and communication alone have shattered the tribal closure of towns and of empires. Plural and often conflicting systems are immediately available to students in our schools and in our society. Learning "a system" is important and viable for such a student only to the degree that it "liberates" him to synthesize, to make new and better patterns by incorporating and rejecting those

elements of earlier systems which other men invented as partial solutions for their own times. The world of scientific theory-trial-feedback-modification is essentially this cognitive style. Modern business and industry have incorporated it fundamentally as their own "life-style." The high degree of tension in our social-political life today may well be the inevitable consequence of the body politic struggling to learn to learn how to invent a humanistic bureaucracy which can operate effectively and affectively in an urban-technological society.

To be liberally educated in and for this world, students must be involved to some degree in the conditions, problems, and attempts at new synthesis being made in mathematics and the sciences, literature and the arts, political and economic theory, language and communication, philosophic and theological formulations. "Field work" which exposes them to the baffling elements of those areas and compels them to attempt a solution is far more important than "practice" in a how-to-do-it formula for student teaching, laboratory technology, beginning social work, commercial design, or computer technology.

Having invested themselves in the attempt to synthesize, they return to examine earlier syntheses and theories with a new respect, as well as a new skepticism.

It is obvious that no student can do this significantly in any large number of areas. It seems to me we must accept and embrace the necessity of personal specialization, that we must form the specialist-person for the universal society. The new principle of community within the society is the shared search, the recognition of partialness by each individual, by each area of specialty and the community of investment made by the specialists in the larger questions and larger issues. Again, the world of business and technology has in many cases appropriated this process long before the formal world of education.

2. Personal and communal morality

Social justice and civil liberties are always in tension. Yet neither can really exist without being reinforced by the other. The drive for shared decision-making in the college community being made today by both faculty and students forces on the university world the necessity of learning to bring personal freedom and social justice into productive equilibrium. If we attempt to keep the self-contained world of the college community in a tribal sense, as the demands for more and more permissiveness increase, we will, I believe, sustain an irresponsible adolescence in our students and even in our faculties. Only to the degree that one is responsible for carrying out the consequences of a decision can he be involved in making the decision. If we are to allow students to make more and more decisions--and I submit we must--there must be multiple alternatives from which they can choose and they must be prepared to accept the consequences of the choice.

Students can go on demanding extension of the curfew or parietal hours for institutional dormitories, better food, better book stores, better recreational facilities, better teachers, more "freedom" of course selection, and more "security" in job placement. Faculties can go on demanding lighter loads, smaller classes, higher salaries, better students, more "freedom" in course invention, and more "security" in institutional standards.

Only if they are allowed and pressed to share in facing the complex choice of alternatives and in bearing publicly the personal and institutional consequences of those decisions can they develop a healthy respect for, as well as skepticism about, more comprehensive levels of authority.

This is why I press for both delegation of specific and limited areas of decision-making below the level of board and president and for faculty and student advisement on top administrative councils. We will avoid the immobility of the

town meeting in which everyone is supposed to have equal access to all information and equal vote in making every decision only if we break up the power-bloc of decision making.

This is why I press for a new concept of "total college living" under multiple authorities, many of whom are not within the line and staff authority of the college. Students must learn to choose among lease arrangements for housing with consequences of those lease arrangements, with course selections and the consequences of those course selections, with job commitments and the consequences of those job commitments.

To give students the right to demand, rather than the right to choose, is to abdicate on the moral level the exercise in decision-making and perception of pattern in making decisions which we have come to value so highly on the intellectual-cognitive level.

They are free to accept my authoritative counsel and human compassion in this most important learning experience, if the institution does not subsume all of the choices for them. Modern students are anti-authority only if they see authority as totalitarian. As we release to them the freedom to make decisions and to live with their consequences, then and only then can they experience their own fallibility and learn the human compassion of which social justice is born.

3. Philosophic and religious development

An open society is a questioning society. A society which multiplies answers forces us to ask more sophisticated questions.. Even as today's students become more skeptical about ideological and doctrinaire positions, many of us believe they become more concerned about the questions beyond available empirical data. They call for both verifiability and relevance, for respect for data and for meaning beyond the data.

In many universities, philosophy departments have become involved in limited concerns of linguistic analysis, even as the students press for consideration somewhere of the broad questions of human life. Only recently have departments of theology freed themselves from the bondage of closed doctrinal positions and become involved in the tension of respect for data while searching for meaning beyond the data.

Inasmuch as some philosophy and theology departments retain their commitment to the broad and ultimate questions, they may regain in the minds of their students a really privileged position.

4. Personal enrichment and social involvement

In the pursuit of his intellectual, moral, and religious development, the student is everywhere confronted with choices that are ego-focused or other-focused. The community that is the college must help press this tension on them, but it must not so insulate itself as a community that it presents this small world as a precious sanctuary from the larger, looser, and more complicated world outside the limits of the college.

Here the commitment to a struggle for equilibrium in the action--intellectual tension, in the personal freedom--social justice tension, and in the verifiability-search for meaning tension all confront the student as he is forced to face the reality of individual choices.

I believe we have made important beginnings in these directions at Webster in recent years. The extraordinary public interest and national support (as well as some intense pockets of criticism) has been generated because of the rather clear commitment of the college in these directions. Your own involvement and assumption of responsibility has, I believe, sprung largely from this realization.

Research and development is seldom done on the assembly line. Yet research and development must be continually in touch with the assembly line, providing

new models and being motivated by assembly line successes and failures to confront new problems. The assembly line of undergraduate education is obviously in need of new R and D centers. They are emerging today in two basic forms: 1) the attempt to separate an "experimental college" within a university community from the red tape of the larger bureaucracy, and 2) the clear focus on experimentation of a few comparatively small "liberal arts colleges" with the concurrent determination to hook them into the larger systems.

I hope we are all agreed that Webster should continue to be and to become the latter kind of research and development center for undergraduate education.

If we are fundamentally agreed on these basic assumptions, I would like to suggest some priority aims for the next steps in our common adventure:

A. Continue, refine, and expand our programs in experiential learning: (Curriculum invention in teacher education; urban action, mental hospital, political campaign projects in social science; laboratory experience in mathematics and the sciences in research programs at Monsanto and Washington University; involvement in projects for art and English majors in environmental design and communications media; continued development of the professional educational theatre experience.)

B. Move toward full coeducation in the general college. The experience in the fine arts departments - art, music, and drama - has been overwhelmingly positive. The college commitment to the action intellectual synthesis is certainly as important and attractive in the education of man as in the education of women. Students, faculty, and administration are convinced that the open world to which we are committed makes any sustained isolation by sex internally inconsistent.

- C. Continued focus on undergraduate education for the baccalaureate degree and limiting of the number of majors so that no department has less than five full-time professors and no less than ten graduating seniors in any average class. This, I feel, is as crucial to vitality for quality as it is to sound economics.
- D. Increase the student population in this undergraduate program from the present 900 to 1800 or 2000 in approximately ten years and achieve a viable ratio of men-women students within that period.
- E. Significantly increase student aid funds to sustain the present socio-economic distribution in the college and to increase the representation of American Negro and foreign students.
- F. Move with deliberate speed toward further co-operative arrangements with Washington University, industrial research centers and other universities toward complementing the strengths and weaknesses of our own focus on undergraduate instruction as well as the universities strengths and weaknesses of their focus on graduate education and research.
- G. Set up a research planning office to provide the best possible data as we attempt to:
- a) Raise faculty quality and salaries
 - b) Reduce course proliferation in order to slow down the rate of faculty increase without increasing loads
 - c) Use present facilities creatively and focus building plans for the immediate future only on library and science facilities, but here, making every investigation of cooperative programming before commitment to duplicative facilities.
 - d) Investigate graduate school and professional placement possibilities to provide for our students the most viable avenues of articulation after graduation.
- H. Explore every possibility of providing alternative choices in housing, eating, social and cultural activities for our students as we attempt to find within the college a relevant and viable but partial

community sense.

I. Seek every avenue of providing intellectual, moral, psychic, social, and religious support for students as we press them to learn to make decisions and to suffer the consequences of those decisions.