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## ORIENTATION

A few months ago there was an interesting story making the rounds in the satellite nations of Eastern Europe concerning a recent meeting of the Politburo in the Kremlin. At this meeting one of the commissars proposed a dramatic program of sabotage in key American port-cities. He suggested that a dozen atom bombs be concealed, each in a fine leather briefcase, and that Soviet agents, carrying the briefcases, plant them in port facilities in the key United States cities. The plan was warmly received by all of the commissars, except the Commissar for Industry, who squelched the idea by reporting that the latest five-year plan had failed to solve the technical problems of producing fine leather briefcases.

As workers in the American industry of education, we are too frequently awed by the unlimited power of the ideas we are supposed to be producing. As the commissars of our industry, we too often assume that the figurative atom bombs we are constructing in our social science committees, and the literal atomic research we conduct in our biological and physical science departments, need no special delivery. It is shocking to note that our well-intentioned plans and high-sounding objectives are too often subverted by the lack of fine leather briefcases.

In our zeal to grow big, and to outdo one another with our respective research projects, we have lost sight of the simple fact that our purpose is to teach--to teach students to think, and to think independently. This purpose must be viewed through a devotion to peace. And an industry which cannot deliver intellectual bombs for want of educational briefcases is failing to produce for peace.



The fine leather of educational briefcases consists of the art of bringing students and scholars into a community where they can be taught to think. This art is not confined to the classroom, and it must begin at the beginning. When the student arrives on a campus for the first time, there is a strong presumption that he is entering a community devoted to teaching him the techniques of thinking. There are also a multitude of facts which rapidly tend to overcome the presumption. Orientation is part of the teaching process, as legitimate as a classroom lecture. But the purpose of orientation is not to overthrow the obvious presumption, but to buttress it and to explain it. A well-oriented student should be impressed with the intellectual nature of his new home, and should be informed of the agencies of his new government which are designed to promote the fundamental purposes of his community and his individual and personal welfare.

"To orient" is a transitive verb, which means "to set right by adjusting to facts or principles; to put oneself into correct position or relation; to acquaint oneself with the existing situation." We should heed the meaning of the word, for too many orientation programs depend upon artificial, temporarily assembled facts, and refer little, if at all, to principles of education. Too many orientation programs are expressly designed to conceal the existing situation and deny to the student the opportunity to acquaint himself, or to put himself into the correct position or relationship.

There is no natural and immutable law that orientation, as an educational process, must be compressed into one hectic week of smiling, friendly greeting, lecture series, parties, dances, and discussion groups any more than there is a natural, immutable law



that all students must confine their thinking to classroom hours.

The nature of the orientation which means "to set right by adjusting to facts or principles" will properly be determined by the existing facts which characterize the college or university; and the facts which describe any educational situation follow from the basic principles of education upon which that community is constructed. Thus our job as educators in orientation is to give the student the facts, to assist the student to extract the important principles which govern his existence as a student. In essence, we have two responsibilities--to communicate and to interpret.

Some of our colleagues say that we deans and personnel workers are creating, rather than solving, problems. "Coddling" is a recurring term used to describe what we have been doing, and to the extent that we have viewed ourselves not as educators, but as something distinct from men and women charged with a duty to teach, we deserve the label. It is unfortunate, however, that the ambivalence our actions have created in the minds of most educators on the subject of guidance, has left us queer patterns in our colleges and universities. The "personnel point of view" is still a hazy one, and much of the haze is of our own generation. A short-range view of orientation can only result in selling ourselves short; only a long-range view can bring our professional strivings into correct focus and remove from the minds of our colleagues any doubt as to what our proper place is in the total scheme of an educational institution.

What are the facts we must communicate and the principles we must interpret? First, the student must realize that the act of admitting him to our college or university symbolizes the assumption



by him of inflexible responsibilities. These commitments are to an academic program, a curriculum consisting of courses of study, which are designed to appeal to his intellect. The student may assume this, but he is entitled to more than the vagueness of an assumption. He is entitled to a complete description of the exposures we plan for his brain, and to a reasonable explanation of why we plan these exposures. He should be informed of his curriculum; the courses should be described, and the interrelationships of the courses posited. If there is a scheme or pattern in his education, his first learning should be understanding that scheme or pattern. If he has choice in his academic bill-of-fare, he should be told why he has the choice, the limits of the choice, and the pitfalls which beset choosing. When he is told of the pitfalls and the limits, he should also be told of the agencies which exist to help him to avoid those pitfalls and to deal intelligently with the limitations. If he has no choice at all, he is entitled to know why he has no choice. This phase of the orientation program should impress the student with the primary fact that he is a student; and to the extent that there are distractions during the year, it is our job to constantly and consistently reimpress the student with this fact during the year.

Second, the student must realize that we, as educators, look upon him philosophically, and that we see him not as a machine, or as an animal, but as a person. As a person he is more than a physical body, but he is a physical body, and that body has a relationship to the mind and the soul with which we are concerned. A health service, a counseling center, and a staff of psychiatrists are taken for granted. They should not be. These agencies have no particular place in a university unless they contribute to the educational process. If they



do make such a contribution, we should state what it is. Too often our own relationship to the psychiatrists, psychologists, and medical doctors is ambiguous and unsatisfactory because we ourselves have failed to rationalize the relationship of these technicians to the educational process. As a person the student is not a machine, but for some purposes he is dealt with in a mechanical manner. As deans and personnel workers we often sit as courts of equity, hearing and deciding each case on its own merits. But to the majority of the students who never become cases, the rules of conduct and the regulations concerning morality can easily appear to be mechanical and arbitrary. If they are mechanical and arbitrary, they are unsatisfactory. If they are not to appear mechanical and arbitrary, we must educate the student as to why they exist, how they were conceived, how they are applied, and how they may be changed. To hand a student an official manual which contains the rules is not enough. To lecture him is not enough. A student's conduct and morality is, after all, of only secondary importance to us; it is of primary importance to the student, and therefore we must deal with his conduct and morality delicately and with consummate consideration. We are not privileged to take his most precious concern for granted.

As a person the student is not an inanimate object like a fraternity pin, a set of football numerals, a plaid sport jacket, or a cream-colored sports convertible. Yet in some situations these things are the students with which we must be concerned. If fraternities and sororities, big-time athletics, and a whirling social season exists on our campuses, the student will assume that they should exist, and that he should be a part of them. But even if these things do exist on our campuses, there is no conclusive reason



that they should, or that they exist in the form and in the proportions that they should. Only by challenging the student's natural assumption that these things do and should exist can we bring to his attention their proper form and proportion. If we are sincere in our philosophic view of the student, then we should sincerely--and incidentally, rationally--be able to explain to the student the educational functions of social, athletic, and recreational activities. Indeed, if we cannot make such explanations, and achieve a reasonable understanding of these things, then we should labor assiduously to remove them from our area of professional responsibility.

As a person the student is an Aristotelean political creature, with civic, and political obligations to his community, present and future. It may be unfortunate that these obligations usually take the form of the extra-curriculum, but the fact that they usually do, poses a special problem of fact presenting and interpretation for us. The student-citizen's relation to a student-controlled and operated monopoly press is an important one. To expect a student to vote in a student government election without knowing issues or why he is expected to vote, is to expect a blind, and thoroughly undemocratic, action, which we, as educators, cannot tolerate. If a student is to be given a choice of extra-curricular activities, we have an educational responsibility concerning the intelligent exercise of that choice. If he is NOT to be given a choice, if he is expected to bury his political instincts in a racoon coat, or to take his political meals off-campus, then the least we owe him is a rationale for this state of affairs.

Finally, as a person the student must be fed and housed. But there is no reason in the world why the college or university, as a



public agency and authority, should feed and house him, unless feeding and housing him has something to do with educating him. Indeed, our Congress, state legislature, and city councils are loathe to embark on public housing projects, and the parents of our students, as citizens in a capitalistic democracy, for the most part seem to feel public housing is socialistic--or worse, communistic. Thus, if we are to do in our private bailiwicks, what these students have been opposed by authority elsewhere, we must explain why we are doing it. Our explanations are going to be lame unless they are framed to justify education, which is our purpose. If a residence hall is to be a clubhouse center for social and athletic activities, then the student should be informed of this fact, and told not to expect more. If our dormitories are to exist merely to feed and to house, then the student should know we view them as necessary appendages, and told not to expect unusual efforts on our part in this direction. But if our residence hall programs are to be related to the curriculum of the institution, then this is unusual, and is in need of explicit outlining to the student. Indeed, it is so unusual that unless we make of it a special point, our students may go through school completely ignorant of the fact.

I hope I may be forgiven for what is, after all, a highly presumptuous, personal exposition of what an orientation program should be. Perhaps I am unduly impressed by our opportunities. After all, our colleagues who look askance at us, ultimately may deal only with that part of the student which the student choose to bring with him into the classroom. Any one of our colleagues alone may appeal only to a limited part of the total person. The sum of our colleagues' efforts is supposed to equal an education. But the



vital mechanism which brings the individual digits together is ours. Each of the vari-colored streaks of light which compose the student's total brilliance passes into our reflector. For this reason, in suggesting that initial program which introduces the student to our campus, I have also suggested the annual beginnings of our year's long job, and I have tried to say that a sensible orientation program is but the beginning assumption of our responsibilities as deans and personnel workers for a democratic education--the development of man's reason with a devotion to the principles of living for which we stand.

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