

Is the Graduate School In Step With the Times?

By ROY F. NICHOLS

Following are excerpts from an address by Dr. Roy F. Nichols, 1949 Pulitzer Prize winner in history, who is vice-provost and dean of the Graduate School of the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Nichols spoke at a University of Missouri Graduate School-sponsored convocation held on the campus last spring on "What Changes in Graduate Education Do Changing Times Suggest?" Earlier in the address he pictured this era as one of accelerated change and traced the development of the graduate school in America as influenced by educational systems in Germany.

The Graduate School so called is practically as it was when it was imported and when new schools have been created they have been too frequently unblushingly copied rather than invented, though nearly a century has passed and the world is so different and change so accelerated.

Now we are in trouble, we are swamped by numbers. The original Ph.D. concept was that of a group of scholars lecturing to such students as wanted to hear them enough to pay for the privilege without gaining any credit. Then the professors would sit down in seminars with such disciples as they chose, often in their own homes. But today we have hordes who must amass stated numbers of credits. Students are too often admitted without adequate prospects for the seminar training that should be the core of their experience. Too many of their masters accept too many, assume responsibility for direction that they cannot give.

Then so large a group of the students are married and have family duties, diversions, expenses and invasions of time and attention. Speed is the essence, financial support is essential. No one can afford to do anything any more for which he is not paid. Apprentice teaching is a convenient way of earning money and is otherwise an opportunity excellent for the student. Despite many disparaging statements heard nowadays, it is often very good for the undergraduates so instructed. These graduate assistants are nearer the undergraduates in age, outlook and understanding and do not flaunt the boredom sometimes characteristic of older professors. But apprentice teaching is time consuming, two years of it does delay a thesis.

All around us is evidence of the growing demand which society makes upon graduate schools for Ph.D.'s well trained in teaching, in research, in public service and business. But proper graduate education, particularly as prescribed in Germany seventy-five years ago

and swallowed without understanding here, is expensive and those who seek it, at least until recently, have had little prospect of becoming the wealthy alumni who might ease the paths of their successors. Nor do they have the voting power of the flood of college alumni, of business and farm organizations who remember Old Siwash with such gratitude and affection and who hope to get a continuous flow of advice and information from Alma Mater. Where are the resources coming from and with the prospects of support which seem to lie ahead of us how can we expect to meet society's demands?

Another complexity of our task is the fact that knowledge is both so much greater and so much more intricate. Can we teach quantity and complexity with methods devised to impart what was relatively small and simple? It is my impression that the sciences have better grasp of the nature of this problem and through their development of laboratory association and program are making more progress in keeping up with this problem of quantity and complexity. Also as far as I have ascertained the great majority of the post doctoral students are in the sciences. The social scientists are likewise experimenting in ways of meeting these problems by such means as greater recourse to quantification and the techniques of more rigorous analysis. The humanists on the other hand have not found the seminar as viable an instrument of change as the laboratory and here there has been less experiment and less innovation, in fact the seminar, with remarkable and notable exceptions, is often the citadel of the traditional.

In the humanities the students on the average take the longest time to complete their work. The dissertations are more apt to be unedited sprawling books, though some in social science press them closely. In this division, faculty attitudes on the foreign language are the most inflexible. The humanities in my humble opinion should be the most inspiring, imaginative and, if you will, the most glamorous of our divisions. They deal with beauty, the spectrum of the human imagination, the meaning of life itself and our sense of values. No more meaningful and challenging realm of problems exists, yet in this great range there can be detected perhaps an unfortunate tendency to pedantry.

Present conditions, however, must compel the graduate school to generate new ideas. And here is where some of our most creative minds should be functioning more effectively than they do. Those who teach

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graduate students are or should be those who are farthest out on the frontiers of knowledge, those who can best command the cooperation of the most brilliant students and those who are best fitted to guide their disciples in raising their sights to the highest level. As the graduate schools by present definition should be most free from the trammels of vested interest, their faculties should be more at liberty to experiment in teaching and in research organization. Here is where new fields of exploration should be conceived and organized. But there are self imposed limits to developing new methods and creating new combinations of scholars to try them out, because of the budgetary and curricular confines of traditional college and professional school vested interests.

Yet this ought not be true in the graduate schools where there is greater freedom of association. For this freedom of association does pay off, experimental work in American Studies, area language combinations, molecular biology, biophysics, bio-medical engineering illustrate some of the new fields which have been organized in the graduate area. Also sponsored and contract research seem to be making great impact upon graduate schools, unhappily not always to the best interests of creative scholarship for too many original minds are channelled into narrowly prescribed operations. Also in the graduate realm post-doctoral work is developing and while this may often be merely a refueling or a retooling operation it can also be a field to which men and women resort to develop new ideas.

In truth the graduate school should be the place in the university where there are the greatest potential opportunities for breakthroughs in the barriers impeding the expansion of knowledge. But these barriers are formidable. Let us ask ourselves what they are and whether they are necessary, whether they may not be survivals of the process of accepting something alien to our experience imposed without too much thought.

Some of these barriers as I sense them can be described as follows. We have, under the pressure of undergraduate practise and numbers made too much of the accumulation of credits, we have resorted to bookkeeping as a measure of achievement. We have likewise tolerated cramming, spoon-feeding in departmental categories unshared with

related disciplines. We have been pedantic rather than inspirational. We have too often permitted the most creative of our enterprises, the thesis, to become a punishing chore which kills the spirit and joy of discovery.

Could a Herbert Spencer or any philosophically talented interpreter emerge today from a graduate school or are graduate schools designed to kill them at intellectual birth? Are the humanities merely drudgery or something to be laughed at? What doth it profit a student if he gain the Ph.D. and put his mind in a strait jacket? How can students be provided with inspiration and zeal for discovery if they are so numbed by drill and drudgery that they go forth with their hard-won sheepskins, firmly resolved never to do anything like that again? Is the grad-



uate school to be a treadmill or a take-off point for flights to new worlds of the intellect? If these are problems accurately described, what are the solutions?

So far I believe I have stayed pretty much in the world of reality but now I am going to indulge in what may seem phantasy, imaginings in what is and should be the "never never land." I have noted above that there has been very little change in graduate school organization and program. A set pattern has dominated it which has not been much altered. It seems to me that the problems of the expanding numbers of students, the increasing incidence of matrimony and particularly the growing number of colleges which are seeking to become universities and which are inevitably going to set up graduate schools and Ph.D. programs indicate that we are in a situation which demands different ideas even at the risk of radical change. As our economics friends say, we must build new models, if not for ourselves, at least for others. I present two which I know in advance in the present climate of graduate education will be hard to take, but we face desperate times with seemingly im-

possible demands and must pay some heed to counsels of desperation.

The first of these is based on a premise which I believe to be true. We are not now consistent in our definition of the Ph.D. In Germany there were state educational systems, it could be decreed that all civil servants and all gymnasias teachers should follow a pattern set by a program of state examinations and in the universities there were enough professors in the Faculty of Philosophy to lecture, conduct seminars and judge the defenses of the printed dissertations. Here on this side of the Atlantic we have no national system of education and not too many state systems but we have a rigorous social imperative maintained by accrediting agencies. Our collegiate faculties must be staffed by Ph.D.'s. We have therefore developed a great demand for what is basically a research training degree as a qualification for teaching. The universities have had more students than they can effectively train to be really creative research scholars, a situation which they have made worse by yielding to the very real pressure for teachers by admitting students not socially or intellectually adjusted to research achievement of any high order. This has meant that we award, perhaps not consciously, two types of Ph.D. degree, one to a research oriented group who will go on and discover, even when teaching, and another to a teaching oriented group who will devote themselves rather exclusively to teaching, particularly in educational institutions where there is no pronounced research orientation.

I propose that we recognize this fact and that in effect we offer two types of Ph.D. One of these will be research oriented and the other teaching oriented. One would be designated as a Ph.D. in research and the other a Ph.D. in course. The first of these I would set up with no lecture courses. The student would spend at least two years in seminar work under a committee and a supervisor. These guides would recommend whatever work, whatever languages, whatever tool courses his field of research required, and would supervise his research. The graduate school would set up qualifying and final examinations and interdepartment committees to judge his research. The student would pay tuition comparable to that now required but not assessed on a course or credit hour base. Admis-

sion standards for this type of Ph.D. would be high based upon research potential and research motivation. To these students we should be in a position to say with some real hope of honest fulfillment: Enter the laboratory and experiment, the library and read. Learn to know the minds and methods of at least five of the faculty. Seek advice as to how to train yourself and take it. Learn to work in small groups and pay particular attention to the art of fellowship, know your companions for you can often learn much from them. Write something you can enjoy writing and which you can be proud to submit. Welcome criticism, it is easier to take from the university than from the world. And above all enjoy watching your intellectual stature increase. These are halcyon years, they will never come again, profit by them to the full.

The second type of Ph.D. would be a degree in course to be planned definitely for three, perhaps four years. These students would be definitely teaching oriented and teaching motivated. He or she would take the present lecture courses and become thoroughly trained in his subject matter field. He would have some instruction in teaching and some practise in it. The foreign language requirement would be reduced to one. He would also have seminar training but the research prescription would be a paper of journal length, of a type which a scholarly journal might accept. The student's work would be planned to insure the degree at the end of four years at the latest if he were competent.

To these students we should say you are dedicated to teach to succeeding generations, the confusing intricacy accompanying accelerated change and the means of understanding it and coping with it. We will try to give you the keys to such understanding and to teach you to think constructively of its implications. We will show you the variety of behavior patterns and value systems and help you to choose wisely from among them. You will strive to master the fine arts of comprehension and communication, as we endeavor to guide you among the bewildering patterns of life. There should be no stigma attached to the choice between these programs, merely a realization that there are different types of dedication needed by society. Besides any students in this latter group with the necessary ability and motivation should be able to change to the Ph.D. in research.

These two definitions of the degree would free the more gifted students for greater independence, originality



and creativity. It would train teachers more efficiently. Both would rejoice in the title Ph.D. and satisfy the accreditation. We are now hampered in our effectiveness because we say we are only doing one thing when we are doing two. Why not admit it? It would cost little save in formal teacher training, and make us honest, less frustrated by ambivalence.

The other dream I would share with you is a pattern for institutions planning to introduce Ph.D. training. In these new ventures I would avoid creating a graduate school, I would let the misbegotten term die, nor would I use the title dean. These two designations, school and dean, in a context different from their traditional and practical use as I have said above I feel to have been a disadvantage. However they are well established and as I know it requires more effort to secure organizational changes than they are generally worth, I would confine this idea to new operations. In institutions where new programs are in the making I would organize the post-baccalaureate pre-doctoral students not in a school but in a graduate community which would have a building of its own as a center with auxiliary living quarters. This community would be presided over by a rector and a council of distinguished professors. The rector, no longer bothered by the title dean which somehow seems to identify him with other deans to his disadvantage, would deal directly with the president or the provost regarding his educational and budgetary needs. It would be understood from the beginning that he would have a budget, not to pay salaries, except in the case of distinguished service professors, but to grant research leaves, encourage educational experiment in the graduate field by securing released time and by financing visiting scholars in new fields or in areas where experimentation is in order. I feel that such an order would increase the effectiveness of the operation, particularly by eliminating unfortunate ambiguities.

We need truly to purge ourselves of our ambivalence. We are placed in the unfortunate position of trying to do

too much with too little under circumstances which invite undesirable compromise from the start. It is like entering an automobile race in a Model T Ford. Society cannot afford the waste which arises from anachronism and indecision.

This is a critical time in our educational world in general, and in our graduate school world in particular. At least a hundred graduate schools are in the process of organization. This operation means that their students will soon be in residence. How will they be trained? Shall our too limiting mistakes be perpetuated? Or shall we embark on the perilous seas of educational experiment and new thought?

Four hundred years ago the adventurous were ready to risk their lives on unknown seas, today men are willing to take equal or greater risks in unknown space. But we need other adventurers, not those who are willing to risk their lives in strange quarters of the universe, but those daring to do the harder thing, to risk their reputations by attempting to think their way through the confusion of new ideas. It must be done. The twentieth century is insistent and will not be denied.

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