



Chancellor John W. Schwada talks to his faculty

About Building Excellence

During the course of the last five to ten years, there has been a continuing dialogue within the educational profession—and to an increasing degree outside it as well—on the need for excellence and on programs designed to produce that elusive quality. Various incentives aimed at promoting excellence, aside from those inherent in the educational environment, have been offered through federal and private agencies.

While much has been said about the desirability of excellence and the distinction that accompanies it, perhaps less attention has been given to the nature of excellence and the means by which it can be obtained within a university setting.

Excellence is a comparative matter. While most universities, including the University of Missouri, have undoubtedly moved upward in quality over the post-war period, some have started from higher levels than others and some have moved more rapidly from their base, whatever it may have been. No university can attain ultimate "excellence," for this sought after quality is a moving target. The attainment of one level of quality in a good university simply means that it has a new base from which to move toward new objectives.

Rarely can an educational institution of broad scope attain across-the-board distinction through a shotgun approach. The resources required, the availability of faculty of top quality, and the development of the "critical mass" necessary for an excellence "explosion" are extraordinarily difficult to bring together. It is doubtful that these elements can be combined in the essential degree across the very broad range of disciplines present on a campus such as ours. Therefore, it seems wise to concentrate available additional resources and energies at selected points with the expectation that excellence in a given discipline or area will draw others along. Once attained, excellence can be at least partially self-sustaining and self-generating, so that attention can be turned to

other areas and additional resources concentrated on them.

Obviously, this process carries with it a number of operationally important implications for individual faculty members, departmental faculties, divisional faculties and administrators, and campus-wide faculty groups and administration.

Excellence is not limited to a particular role of the University, but because of the publicity and resources put behind improvements of quality in the research and graduate training field, there has been a tendency to view excellence only in the context of these university functions. Quality is equally important in the undergraduate teaching and service functions of the University. Therefore, it becomes important for a university to give consideration to its role and the disciplinary area or areas in which its efforts at a given point in time can best be concentrated in order to produce a significant quality change.

The State Commission on Higher Education, the University itself and this campus have frequently said over the years that additional resources available to Columbia should be concentrated primarily on improvements at the graduate level and on the associated research which is an integral part of quality graduate training. I hasten to add that this in no way precludes improvements in undergraduate and service programs or reduces the need for top quality effort on the part of those who teach primarily at the undergraduate level or participate in the various service functions of the University. The point is rather that if we are to markedly improve our educational standing we must concentrate on those areas for which the University can and must become most noted.

Given our present stage of development and the future as outlined partially for us and partially by us, I assume that we would agree that our first emphasis would be on a marked improvement of graduate training and research—areas which are growing most rapidly here and

which are characteristic of the kind of University this campus is and expects to become.

Regardless of our general choice as to where we put added resources, many specific decisions remain to be made. These deeply involve faculty as well as administrators. First is a careful and conscious planning effort as to how we shall go about creating the quality of distinction, the processes we shall use and the areas in which efforts will first be concentrated.

This means again the making of choices of several kinds including an assessment of our present quality, the assessment of contributions by individual faculty members, departments, and divisions, the areas to which we give early emphasis and an evaluation of the contributions made by all to the selected objectives.

I am certain in my own mind that the faculty of the University of Missouri is dedicated to the proposition that we should attain new levels of distinction in our programs and that faculty will actively seek ways in which to accomplish that objective. Ultimately some types of decisions devolve upon administrators at departmental, divisional, and campus levels, and they need the full support and cooperation of all the faculty as well as an understanding of the objectives being sought.

As you know, we are undertaking a very extensive planning process not only on this campus but on all four campuses of the University, and this will call for careful scrutiny of our programs, courses and educational policies. To plan the future of a university of this complexity is an undertaking of no small magnitude. The efforts of each of us will be needed to complete that process satisfactorily.

I ask each of you to join in this effort, which I am sure will make possible the development of a better University—one which possesses those qualities we all hope for and seek in this major institution in the higher educational structure of the State of Missouri.