PROSPERITY IN THE 1980's FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

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The dual vision of Upper Iowa University in the early 1970's may be someday regarded as higher education's greatest asset or higher education's tragic flaw.

But society itself gave birth to this dual vision. Since World War II a definite trend toward an older learning society was discerned. The myth that college had to be taken in the late teen's was exploded and older students were hungry to be credentialized.

European education recognized this change in society before American education. The 104,000 students in the British Open University seemed to suggest to the administration at Upper Iowa University, Fayette, Iowa (1971) that there were needs of older students that demanded some form of alternative education.

All of 1972 was spent in confirming a cluster of education assumptions that would either affirm or reject the idea. In October 1972, the idea was affirmed and this writer and Dr. Charles B. Clark,[1] proceeded to activate a non-traditional program.

By this time our committee had somewhat agreed that present education (1971) seemed to be tied to a formalized program of acquiring knowledge and skills. Not only did they agree a change of attitude was necessary, but also more informal programs must be accepted to facilitate learning. The committee accepted the

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[1]Presently at Salisbury State College, Salisbury, Maryland

attitude that people are constantly learning regardless of sex, age, or conditions.

Therefore, formal instruction was a bit old fashioned and new learning situations and schemes seemed appropriate. But the committee was mindful that radical changes would threaten the average faculty, so the adopted pathway was to blend the old established courses on campus into independent study modules.

Our definition of lifelong learning at that time (1972) was:

> "Learning that engaged the individual over a life span, involving internal motivation rather than a mechanistic configuration. And the learning process could involve various experiences, be evaluated in a variety of ways, and have a variety of purposes."

This definition left a wide berth for more sophisticated definitions later on. This has certainly been done in the past decade, as new terms like "alternative education" have been introduced. But regardless of the confusing labels and the subtle differences, we are speaking of lifelong learning whether it be tagged as alternative education, non-traditional education (which is now becoming traditional), independent study education or continuing education. These terms will be used synonymously in the remainder of this paper.

Another assumption was the decision that non-traditional and lifelong learning was within the mission of the institution. The Board of Trustees gave approval. Discussions with the Iowa Department of Public Instruction, the North Central Association of Accreditation and the Veteran's Administration were held in order to follow proper procedures. This program of directed independent

study coupled with campus residency was the first program completely approved by the United States Veteran's Administration.

Existing courses on campus were modified into directed independent study modules of eight hour blocks as well as two, three, and four week courses to be in residency on the home campus. Sixteen modules of directed independent study were developed leading to a B. S. degree in Public Administration or Business Administration.

The content of the courses of study was the same as taught on campus only expanded in the writing exercises. For example, Economics I, II, III were combined for eight hours of credit. ACE and CAEL guidelines were used. A faculty evaluation committee was formed for conversion purposes. This committee of eight faculty met once a week to gain a consensus of the total amount of credit that should be awarded. Many times final evaluations had to be delayed in order to verify transcripts. The transfer credits from accredited institutions were seldom a problem, but the multitude of non-accredited schools had to be rejected, but allow challenge examinations to prove their proficiency.

Many of these older students had diversified backgrounds, ranging from passing CLEP examinations, military schools, life experience and past college work. Over two-thirds of the students had an equivalent of two years college work, but had failed to go ahead and graduate. Their average age of 32 gave them the maturity and self-discipline to work independently.

A leading educational marketing company from Roanoke, Virginia, called Atlantis, Inc. and headed by Dr. Price Hurst, was contacted and arrangements made to promote and recruit students.[2] Atlantis, Inc. was to recruit civil service employees, military personnel, and multitudes of other adults that desired to be further credentialized.

It is worth pointing out that many institutions develop fine educational programs, but have no system to deliver the final product. This writer can visualize a delivery system that utilizes the communication satellites which can transmit continuously and cover all parts of the world. This would help recruiters, because prospective students could see education in action, and perhaps be stimulated to engage in some form of alternative education. Many schools try their own recruiting, which is nearly impossible because of its specialized nature.

As assignments were sent in, on-campus faculty corrected and returned comments to the students. A WATS line allowed faculty-student conferences. Many techniques were experimented with, some tried and discarded, some tried and kept - the program is now a model for other institutions.

The program grew between January 10, 1973 from one student to approximately 800 by 1974 and 2000 by 1975. The National Institute of Education in their 1977-78 study showed a retention rate across the nation of less than 50 percent. The U.I.U. program always produced a 55 to 65 percent persistency.

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[2]President and Chairman of the Board, Atlantis, Inc., Roanoke, Virginia

Though the program struggled in the beginning, the periodic reports from the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education kept the institution reinforced that the direction was reasonable and the struggle should continue.

The problems encountered in the early 1970's are still present in the 1980's.

One of the toughest obstacles was the constant consulting with regulating agencies of the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association, the United States Veteran's Administration and Iowa Department of Public Instruction. The monitoring system, which is important, involved much duplication and sometimes vagueness in interpretation of the regulations. And, of course, because of the newness, various regulations were changed faster than the old ones could be put in place.

A second obstacle was the constant defense of the program. Traditional critics including doubting faculty, Washington Post newspaper, and the Des Moines Register and Tribune required constant explanations as to the authenticity of the program. Any new concept or change in the status-quo worried educationists, and no matter what air tight standards were utilized there were constant critics concerned with the quality of work, as well as quantity. Actually, the quantity of writing was approximately three times the amount that was expected in a similar class on campus. And the quality of writing was approximately three times better by the older adult than by the student on campus.

A third obstacle was the substitution of writing experiences for interacting classroom experience. This was costly and time consuming. Realizing that student interaction was minimal writing exercises were added to all modules. Reading time became long and heavy and adequate compensation for this overload was difficult. When turnover became a problem the compensation rate was readjusted.

A fourth obstacle was the proving the academic quality of the program (in the face of various fraudulent programs across the nation). Everytime a new scandal regarding "diploma mills" or veterans receiving inferior academic programs, the program had to defend itself. Many copies of the North Central Accrediting Association and the United States Veteran's Administration approval would again be mailed to the critics. It was a never ending assault.

From this writer's experience (1971-1977) the legacy of alternative education suggests certain directions.

Further study is needed as to how to educate the 54-84 group of citizens. Across the nation many fine programs have been developed for the 24-54 age group. In the 1980's it will be imperative to have bold new thrusts for the 54-84 age group of interested learners. Elderhostel is an example of this.

One of the least publicized and yet very effective is the effort provided in New York State by a consortium of colleges and local social-service agencies. The program gives elderly housebound adults an opportunity to take courses and receive completion

certificates. Groups of 10 to 20 older adults called "learning companions" from senior citizen's centers, church groups, and social-service agencies meet once a week to take courses offered by the participating schools. After each class meeting the learning companions visit elderly house-bound students to teach them the course material.

> "Since the program was launched in 1978, 60 courses have been taken by 515 learning companions and taught to more than 600 house-bound adults, according to Joan E. Delaloye, who directs the project from the continuing education division of New York City Technical College. She says about 60 percent of the companions and students complete their courses and receive certificates.
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> Participating in the project, which is financed through the New York State Education Department, are three campuses of the State University of New York (Albany, Buffalo, and the Agricultural and Technical College at Farmingdale), and New York City Technical College which is part of the City University of New York."[3]

One could visualize professors emeriti continuing in some form of academic endeavor. This would reduce the cost of a program for elderly, as well as stimulating peer group learning among the 54-84 age group.

It is efforts such as this that future directions will take. Students over fifty have been overlooked and it would be tragic to simply forget that they are potential students.

A second area needing further study is the relationship of educational institutions with professional and/or proprietary schools.

As stated in the Chronicle of Higher Education, May, 18, 1979, the rivalry between academic institutions and professional asso-

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[3]Beverly T. Watkins, Notes on Continuing Education," Chronicle of Higher Education, October 14, 1980, p. 2.

ciations has subsided because of the market expansion. They have almost declared a "detente" position. But this writer sees this as surface cooperation. In the case of professional and proprietary schools, they many times have the financial power to control the type of alternative education they want. Andy they don't want to wait for one or two years for a college or university curriculum committee to agree on what to offer in the way of a professional training program. Many professional schools know what they need and simply go ahead and hire their own faculty and avoid the long procrastination of colleges and universities.

The case of proprietary schools is different in that they need status and recognition to profit and their success in alternative education systems depends on their marketing ability as well as the needs of society. There will always be proprietary schools in one form or another, and they will still prosper during the next decade.

This suggests a <u>third</u> area where further study is needed. As federal aid decreases, private and state aid will increase in regard to adults and part-time students. Present inequities will be overcome, so that a stable and partial financial underwriting will be present. In the coming decade non-traditional education for older adults will probably be subsidized in a similar pattern to the way we support youth now.[4]

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[4]Beverly T. Watkins, "Education Found Unused by Adults Who Need It Most," <u>Chronicle of Higher Education</u>, October 20, 1980.

A fourth direction during the 1980's is the need to examine and research the effects of alternative and experimental education on the long-range health of academic standards. There are a good many critics of alternative education claiming that alternative education has caused a downward drift of quality. But sometimes the loudest critics forget that all of academe has experienced the same downward drift. All degrees have suffered a loss of value as a respected medium of credentializing. As alternative education has tried to raise its standards, traditional institutions have done very little. Accrediting bodies -- regional, professional, and state have spent so much time probing alternative education programs, that they have neglected to enforce their original standards of traditional education.

A fifth consideration during the 1980's is the development of certain norms and guidelines on a national basis, rather than just state whims. Many states have developed different regulations pertaining to alternative education offerings, and many are in conflict with regional accrediting associations. Some method of evaluating quality must be developed. An institution of higher education is accepted in one state while a neighboring state may refuse to recognize them. Substandard institutions must be weeded out and this becomes a difficult problem.

And this suggests a sixth area which needs research and patience. It is nearly impossible to decide what programs are legitimate and what programs are illegitimate. There is a constant surge of diploma mills and fraudulent colleges which spring up.

Various states are attempting to battle this. As one example is the state of Texas which is cracking down on all out-of-state colleges that offer programs in that state.

Stanton Calvert,[5] the Texas Board's Director of Institutional Certification said they were concerned with "branch operations which are going up in temporary based facilities, with part-time faculty, with irregular meeting times, without an approved curriculum."

In the coming decade it will be imperative for every state to devise some kind of a monitoring system to insure standards and quality.

A seventh and last area of study needed is the problem of traditional faculties accepting and cooperating in alternative projects.

Many faculties pay lip service to the concept of alternative education but when the bottom line is there they are reluctant to actively participate. Only time will conquer this hesitancy of acceptance. Some help will come by the in-service teaching of faculty to enjoy and participate in guiding older students to an educational goal. Some faculty that have had this experience actually prefer the older student to the younger student.

Conclusion: As we progress through the 1980's many mandates will occur. Consumers of alternative education will force state legislators and institutions of higher education to pay more

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[5]Robert L. Jacobson, "Texas Plans Crackdown . . .," Chronicle of Higher Education, October 9, 1979.

attention to lifelong learning. The future and potential of lifelong learning is still there and the glorious vitality of it will be exciting in the 1980's.