SURVIVORS AND SURVIVAL--HOLDING ON TO THE DREAM

AT STOCKTON

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Having spent my academic life teaching literature, I may be forgiven beginning with quotations. These are fairly apocalyptic but I am speaking about survival.

> Your sons and daughters were eating and
> drinking wine in their eldest brother's
> house; and behold, a great wind came across
> the wilderness, and struck the four corners
> of the house, and it fell upon the young
> people, and they are dead; and I alone have
> escaped to tell you.[1]

> There is, it seems to us
> At best, only a limited value
> In the knowledge derived from experience.
> The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
> For the pattern is new in every moment
> And every moment is a new and shocking
> Valuation of all we have been.[2]

> And so each venture
> Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
> With shabby equipment always deteriorating
> In the general mess of imprecision of feeling

undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer
By strength and submission, has already been discovered
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
To emulate--but there is no competition--
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.[3]

What I want to suggest is that we are not always knowing (though we may be responsible) about the forces which overcome us. Then, too, we may well be unready for the task, being limited by our own patterns.

It is to that initial set of patterns that we had when Stockton's academic structure was founded that I want to address myself.

WHAT WE BELIEVED--CONVERTING THE NEGATIVE TO THE POSITIVE

The group of five specifically responsible for designing the College was dominated by (though not always in agreement with) certain negative conclusions about the prevalent system of education in the late 1960's, the State of New Jersey, the Administration, the yet-to-arrive faculty, and prospective students.

Coming from a variety of public and private institutions we perceived education as being fairly ineffective. We did not see it as being socially conscious, as being sufficiently able to criticize itself, as being unwilling to share power, and it was not openly concerned with those it taught. The first curricula sprang from these perceptions.

For example, we did everything we could to insure that power was available to the students. We even allowed them to design their own credit-bearing courses. All they had to do was to get 12 student signatures, a faculty sponsor, and a proposal of study. With a Dean's approval, the course could then be listed, advertised, and enrolled in. Strangely enough, not many of these student-generated courses ever occured. In hindsight, we should have been more concerned about this fact.

We also saw students as being unable to design much of their education. Power for making course choices almost always resided with an advisor--even if he/she was unavailable or inattentive. We felt that to act like empowered adults that we had to treat students as empowered adults. Who could better make decisions about life than those living it? We conceived, then, a double advising system; one advisor was concerned about major courses and another--the preceptor--was to be concerned about General Education. As a matter of fact, our initial idea was to have students gain credit for planning their courses. Preceptoring was seen as teaching, and therefore, worthy of bearing credit.

Students, we were absolutely convinced, had had no political power. So to insure their participation in the decision making process the administration developed an organization for advising the President, the members of which were chosen by a lottery. Theoretically every member of the community would be eligible and responsible for serving the whole community. All parts would be represented: groundsworkers, students, cafeteria help, administrators, teachers, and staff. The curriculum and the advising system would, we believed, prepare the student for this sharing of power by precept and example. It was not Paolo Friere but it was close.

In hindsight, we were far more concerned about the impact of the state than

we should have been. Academic politics of the late 1960's saw state legislators and departments of higher education as far more meddling than our experience allows. This is not to suggest that we had few disagreements or confrontations. Actually, I believe now that the Chancellor of Higher Education and the legislators who cared were far more interested in getting the College started than they were in our particular theoretical base. The difficulties we did have were primarily ones of finding a "common tongue"; we couldn't count on clear understanding because they did not comprehend the argot we spoke. What, they asked, was this thing called "General Studies"? What did all of our acronyms mean? Why did we have people called preceptors? Were they like advisors?

Perhaps a personal anecdote will be illustrative. My first official title was "Chairman of General Studies". When we started actually recruiting the first cohort we were receiving as many as 100 applications per day. Most of us felt that a dictaphone would help us keep up with the correspondence. When ordered, the State refused to supply them on the grounds that only Deans could have dictaphones. The College responded that we really were Deans; we were merely called "Chairmen". The State again said that if we were Deans that we should be called Deans and that it would be ever so much more convenient for them. Needless to say, we saw the perquisites and our titles were changed soon after that.

Our assumptions about the Administration was that we were part of it and, therefore, would have little difficulty with it. We felt part of the family and, in spite of disagreements, that we could get along. As it worked out, while we made major innovations in our curricular planning, the Administration and its processes were very much like we had been fighting throughout the decade. Power, at Stockton, resided totally in the hands of the President and the Board, and an

active power it was. Flexibility was the watchword which can be translated as power and room to maneuver for us and no power or room to move for them. We were so busy that we seldom turned our attention to the Administration; when we did, much later, we were not pleased.

Finally, our assumptions about the faculty. First of all we were fairly distrustful about the established and the middle-aged. That suspicion produced the youngest faculty in the State. We were not so distrustful about quality degrees - we had (and may still have) the best faculty in the State system judged by degrees and the schools awarded them. We did not want a faculty which was primarily committed to research (until recently, an epithet of opprobrium); we sought and achieved a terribly student-oriented faculty. What that produced that we didn't see (and might not have desired had we foreseen the results) was an inexperienced faculty. They worked very hard and very creatively on their courses; what they lacked was experience in academic politics. They were eager converts to unionism when the going got rough. The AAUP never had a chance.

Therefore, we saw the students as needing to be empowered and needing to be offered as many education choices as possible, as having both the desire and the maturity to act like adults, and as having the ability to be more than usually objective about their education. We saw the faculty as needing to be very interested in students and their lives. We saw the State as a potential hinderance to our efforts but that fear never materialized. We mistakenly saw the Administration as agreeing with our goals; it did agree with our classroom objectives but not with our objectives of sharing power with the whole community.

GETTING THE SHOW ON THE ROAD

Basically, then, the Stockton that resulted had a fairly typical set of Arts and Science programs. Few of the programs were unusual. Other colleges

begun at the same period changed their curricula to fit the time. Our approach was more to change the environment and to leave the standard curricula alone within that more innovative setting.

We opened, after 15 months planning, in September of 1971, in a run-down hotel on the Boardwalk in Atlantic City. Our campus ten miles inland in the Pine Barrens was not ready. We had hired 55 faculty out of 5300 applications--they were young, eager, and a bit naive. We had admitted about 1,000 students -- one third from southern New Jersey, one third from northern New Jersey, and the remaining third from the Delaware Valley.

Perhaps the most spectacular initial event was being picketed for a few days by Carl McIntire's fundamentalist religious crusade against communism. In some ways, it was a significant symbolic beginning. Prof. William Daly presented a series of public lectures on "Revolutions and Revolutionaries" outlining major figures and events in the last century. The speeches, while brilliant, were hardly beyond republicanism let alone communistic. McIntire, however, was a victim of our publicity and saw us as a tool in the hands of the international conspiracy. So he and his geriatric crusaders came to the boardwalk and marched. When our President went out onto the boards and invited the crusaders in, they refused. They were not going to have their minds tainted even with conservative facts. We probably should have given them an award for predicting the future. Since then we have been locked into an early reputation and many of those who come to us have resisted being tainted by the facts.

WHAT WORKED AND WHAT FAILED

Some of our initial ideas failed within the first year and they need to be mentioned and briefly examined.

Our most spectacular early failure in my judgement was what we called the

collegia. These were small groups of students and faculty--actually made up of preceptors and their students--who were to meet and discuss or plan any activity they found important. Each collegium had a small budget for purchasing supplies. The initial concept for these groups was that they could (1) learn how to plan for their own educations; (2) learn how to set and achieve group goals; (3) act as sources of input for the college decision making process; (4) function as educational arenas--bringing in speakers or visiting local institutions; and (5) serve as a socializing force in the lives of students who were fairly isolated in the Pine Barrens.

Primarily our assumptions were wrong. Students, we found, did indeed need to know how to plan together but didn't want to spend their time at it. They had little valuable input into the decision making process because they were so inexperienced about politics. They did not need the socializing because they left for home each weekend. The activities of the collegia became more bizarre and less important as the months rolled by and finally almost everyone termed them a disaster and they were abandoned. Unfortunately, there was little modification of the original concept to see if something could be salvaged. Ironically, the College now has its share of fraternities and sororities which, from one definition, serve about the same purposes. In some ways they are equally bizarre.

The dual advising system failed also. It did because faculty resented two disparate groups--one group of majors (where faculty interest will always lie) and the other a group of General Studies students usually confused and resistant to the whole idea of general education. Students were equally confused. To get their majors planned they went to one person and to get their General Studies courses arranged they went to another. It didn't take long for most everyone to demand that both advisors be the same. The point that everyone overlooked was

that the two curricula were substantially different. Advising for General Studies was supposed to involve defining goals, shaping courses to meet those personal goals, and trying to learn what experiences were out there which might liberate. Efficiency spoke loudest and the idea, again, didn't really get a fair chance for testing.

The third failure, from my perspective, was a set of innovative programs which had been abandoned by the third year. As I have said, generally our programs were not terribly innovative. Few were very radical politically or educationally, few were unique, and few essentially changed the educational patterns which some of us had been struggling against. A small group were different, however, and they came under early attack and eventual abandonment.

I will not list them in detail but will try to give a hint of their quality. One was a program in Life Sports. The College had early decided not to get involved in large team sports--it preferred club sports and intramural competitions. These were primarily economic decisions. One thing we wanted to try was to set up a set of courses that would analyze the negative aspects of sports in American life - drugs, economics, competition, and racism.

Another was an attempt to study how knowledge is organized. There was and still is some talk about training the student how to think rather than training him/her to a particular discipline. We wanted to see if the ways that disciplines organized knowledge could be studied and learned. Our belief was that students would find far less disruption of their lives if they had to move from one job to another if they could quickly ascertain how the facts of the job were shaped. We also saw this program as providing information for the more traditional majors to use. This program--named Methods of Inquiry--had only two majors after two years and was seen as silly and irrelevant.

Finally, we wanted to produce a program to train teachers for alternate institutions like prisons, geriatric homes, hospitals, and alternate High Schools. New Jersey's colleges had been until the late 1960's primarily teacher education facilities and we did not want to replicate their efforts. We did, however, see a need for trained teachers in institutions beginning to set up education programs. We encountered two problems immediately: the State certification standards and the students themselves. The State simply couldn't understand what we were about. They actually had to invent a special category of approval to fit what we were doing. Needless to say, as bureaucrats they were terribly uncomfortable. We simply did not fit their categories. The problem with the students was tougher--they did not want to teach in prisons and geriatric homes. They wanted to teach in their home town schools like other teachers from the other State colleges. The program was, again, seen as inappropriate and was modified by 1973. Today, you couldn't tell the difference between that program and any of the other State colleges.

The most innovative curricula that succeeded, though not without wounds, was and is our General Studies curriculum. Mr. Daly will present a full analysis of that aspect of the College's history. I will merely review my own experiences.

There were two of the original planners who had primary interest and responsibility for developing a General Studies curriculum: the first Vice-President for Academic Affairs - W. H. Tilley - and myself. Our experience with General Education produced these conclusions: (1) It was not terribly liberating; (2) It was primarily a set of courses brought over from the major areas--they were usually not specifically designated for the General Studies

curriculum; (3) These courses were usually not taught by the whole faculty; many times these courses were the sole responsibility of the graduate students; and, finally, (4) they were, many times, standardized courses neither close to faculty expertise nor interest.

What we wanted, therefore, was a curriculum taught by all faculty, made up of courses designed specifically for that part of the students' education, close to faculty interests and expertise, and, most difficult of all, attempting to liberate and broaden student experience. It should be noted that we were not attempting to radicalize the student or to make his courses "relevant" or to raise his social conscience. None of these were prohibited but we did not take the tack that education ought to confront the student with the reality perceived in the late 1960's.

A second concern, and we were correct about this one, was that General Studies is usually politically treated as a second rate citizen on traditional campuses. To prevent this status or, at least, ameliorate it, we gave that curriculum clout by giving it a separate Academic Division and Dean. This, we felt, would somewhat equalize internecine struggles in the College itself. As it has worked out, we were certainly prescient on this one.

So, General Studies has worked. Most faculty are obligated by contract to teach two courses per year. Many of the courses focus on faculty interests rather than faculty expertise. Students have to choose within certain categories representing major divisions of information but their choice is wide by any standards. Courses are generally not mere introductions; they are, instead, fully developed, close-ended courses. They are different from major courses in a change in their level of abstraction--not in a change in their level of rigor.

To conclude this phase of the College's development, then, there were many "signs" for the observant of the direction the College was likely to take. First, we had produced a fairly innovative curriculum (certainly so for a State school) but had failed to surround it with an innovative administration. Secondly, things that were not self evident or clearly justifiable and easily understood by all were rather quickly abandoned. Third, a young and inexperienced faculty was terribly creative in the classroom but was equally terribly naive in the political arena. With a powerful, centralized and somewhat arrogant administration, the mixture was frought with explosive tensions. Fourth, we had produced a curriculum for a student body which we had no hope of attracting. Finally, we based too many of our innovations on a kind of "family"; what we actually had was a feudalism and, like any economic system, worth was going to be proved on who bought.

THE PROCESS OF CHANGE--CREEPING INCREMENTALISM

There was no doubt in any of the planner's minds that change would come. We assumed that it would be the result of evidence, analysis, and planning. It seldom was. One exception was our program on basic skills. Originally we decided not to have a separate effort to work with skills deficient students. We wanted each faculty in each course to set writing standards and then hold the students to them. It did not seem to be a very naive attitude when we conceived it; as a matter of fact, we are now heavily involved in "Writing Across The Curriculum" which is the same idea but more dependably organized.

At any rate, it soon became evident that writing problems were not going to be solved this way. Faculty did exactly as we asked but the problems were too severe to be affected. By 1976 we had developed a basic skills program

which has since become a model in the State. It is a program which is a very specific response to a specific set of circumstances; it was designed with a great deal of information at its base. It was change in the best sense.

Pressure for change, whether incremental or not, came from three sources: administration, faculty, and students. Administrative pressure came most forcefully when the first Vice-President was replaced. That change involved a more conservative perspective. In a more widely implemented power base, such a change would not have had such a pronounced effect. In the feudal model however, it was difficult to counter prejudices and biases at the top. There were simply too many non-traditional ideas operating at one time. Some, if not all, had to go. With Deans constantly jockeying for power, it was difficult for them to defend ideas or programs which had low enrollment, slight popularity, or those which could not be easily understood.

Faculty pressure occured because the nature of faculty appointments had shifted. Our first two cohorts were young and eager; beginning about 1973, the age of the faculty moved upwards and, while still eager, they were on the whole less eager to make the College the center of their lives. They had a great deal more academic experience and, therefore, thought they knew what an appropriate educational institution looked like--their own experience. Stockton, many seemed to feel, was not a bad place to teach. The College, they felt, was just misled in all this silliness about wide course choices, student participation, new programs and, in particular, General Studies. Change those, they concluded, and it would be a fine place to retire in.

The change in the students was, for some, the hardest of all to accept. While evidence about the inadequacies of the student body was available to us,

we believed that they would respond to what we had to offer. Optimistically, we saw education not as a leveller but as a powerful force to liberate. Southern New Jersey students, we felt, would no longer have to be tied to a depressed area but could now compete with all the graduates of the New Jersey system--even better because they had participated in our special form of education. It was water hitting a rock. They didn't want, on the whole, what we had to offer. I remember clearly an early advisee who complained somewhat bitterly that he didn't want to choose all of his courses. What he wanted, he said, was a sheet telling him what to take. If you know the "Perry Model" he was a perfect number 1!

These changes had all occured by 1974-75. A great deal of the innovative thinking had disappeared by 1973. On the whole, we've lived on old currency since 1975. We are still perceived in some quarters as different and as an alternative to the other colleges in the New Jersey system. For those who know we are a shadow of what we might have been.

STABILIZATION--WHAT ARE WE TODAY?

The conservative forces operating on American higher education today has certainly not missed Stockton. For example, our first dormatories were actually apartments for four students. The new dorms will be tradition double-rooms-off-hallways for students with meal tickets, who have ample fraternities and sororities to join, with a new student union to wile away their time. Can organized sports be far behind?

What is student life like? Exactly what it is on most every campus we wanted to avoid becoming. We pride ourselves that they are getting academically better (which really means that our recruitment strategies and word-processor

are paying off) but whether they're exciting, open, risk-taking folks is never asked. We say we want more non-traditional students but so far have a limited view on how they might be attracted. Better students will probably mean more homogenous students and more placid students. It may well mean that they will be more serious than they are--which from my perspective is almost epidemic. While many live on campus now most still go home at the slightest opportunity. When the new dorms are completed, we will have the largest on campus student body of any of the State colleges. I have a suspicion that the Library will not be any fuller.

The faculty is also getting more conservative and, sad to say, less concerned. There are many reasons for this shift. The first is a subtle but real emphasis on publication instead of teaching. Not that teaching isn't stressed; but publication is surely being rewarded more than it was. Can young faculty be blamed when, in this market, they choose to publish rather than spend time risking new courses? Certainly not. With student evaluations of teaching definitely correlated to popularity and grades awarded, most faculty play it straight and somewhat easily. A second force for conservatism is, in my view, the union. Its rhetoric incessantly states that a concern for quality education is there--it is privately for many members. But the actions of faculty and its relative powerlessness in the State system tends to limit its risk-taking. When it does take risks they are within very restricted patterns, i.e., a strike. When defense is the central concern of the faculty, how can free, liberating, and creative teaching result? The union, I believe, has a dampening effect on heterogeneity--a factor that I believe healthy educational institutions have. The pressure to join the union, to speak unionese, to see all administration as suspect if not bankrupt, has, I suggest, subtle effects on the environment, unmeasurable but existent.

The Administration has always been managerial at Stockton. It has always seen itself as having the best interests of the College at heart; the faculty, in their view, has only its own interests at heart (another result of unionism?). It has generally defended its actions as arising from "Managerial Flexibility". What this means is--"We always want operating room so that we can change our minds if necessary. To maintain such operating room we will, if we perceive it as necessary, treat the faculty any way we want". Needless to say, such an attitude has provided constant issues for the union to threaten or to take action on. As I've suggested, we did not create an innovative, broad power base for all the constituencies in the College when we created the curricula. In some respects, that fact has created more problems than anything we did (or did not do) at the beginning.

The present Administration, while somewhat more faculty-oriented, is more tradionally faculty-oriented. It is marked by promises (many times weakened or prohibited by contract negotiations) without much substance, a confused educational vision (which forces it to retreat to earlier, non-Stocktonian perspectives), and an inherited paranoia which freezes all of the constituent parts into suspicion and inaction. We continue to operate without real consultation though some rectifying efforts have been made. The lessons of the 1960's have, I've sadly concluded, had minimal if any effect.

And the faculty? Couldn't one hope for unity and clarity of vision from this group to pressure the Administration to adopt its values and professional perspective. Hardly! Fear of job loss (New Jersey's Board of Higher Education also wants managerial flexibility so it has issued plans that allow firing of tenured faculty on the grounds of retrenchment alone), disillusionment, simple non-caring behavior, and cynicism has taken its toll on faculty efforts.

Let me be careful at this point. I am not suggesting that such attitudes are rampant at the College. Far from it! I am suggesting that almost all efforts, studies, task forces, and planning has to contend and adjust to these attitudes. For example, a recent faculty committee was responsible for examining our present student evaluation of teaching instrument and the process of evaluation. This came about because of a self-study a year ago which concluded that the area needed faculty attention. We are, many of us believe, the most assessed college in America. Every aspect of the College, except the Administration, is analyzed, evaluated, simulated, studied, and concluded about constantly. At any rate, the committee for looking at evaluation was set up.

The first fact it had to contend with was the clear warning that the evaluative instrument was a negotiable item and therefore the union would in no way be bound by any conclusions of the committee or of the Administration, also, the instrument (which no thinking person could possibly support) could not be changed until contract negotiations were begun. The committee, somewhat dampened, still undertook to look at the issues. The final report, though well-meant, was hardly encouraging. More study was called for, little agreement could be found, and standards could not be established. Their efforts were valiant but not terribly helpful.

I am not, then, merely suggesting a powerless faculty at the hands of a merciless, uncaring Administration. I am suggesting that the faculty is not too much better at moving ahead to what it sees as a moral, clear, and imaginative solution. It is as jealous of its hard won power as any other part of the College.

The students, also make futile efforts to organize themselves into a

coherent power base. I should say "a few students". Most students could care less. Many work full time or close to it. Many live off campus and don't see the College as a center for their lives. Those that do live on campus, have many distractions (keep in mind that we are located 10 miles from Atlantic City). Their schedules are frequently arranged not for the class or the teacher but because they want all of their classes on Tues/Thurs. Some activists remain but their messages seem tired and irrelevant. A big issue this Fall for many students was the fact that the college Pub was not open in the afternoon! So much for their coherent vision of education.

What I'm trying to suggest is that Stockton is only a little different from most of the other colleges in New Jersey and, indeed, in America. Those things that made us clearly, even radically, different are gone. We have the rhetoric and the memories left of what was. What is left is, in some ways, more shadow than substance.

SURVIVORS AND SURVIVAL

We have served our purpose well, I believe. Like an old blueprint we suggest another aesthetic in another time. We can stand for what we saw as a positive, human, liberating education. Those who follow--and there will be those who follow--will be able to have something to build from. They will modify here and trim there, they will utilize different materials but the pattern will hold. It will, as my initial quote states, be lost and found many times. Experiments that fail are not popular in America but they are necessary.

We should not lay our vision on the future. They must build from their own. Ours can, at the last, only show that we did what we could with what we had. The fact that the effort was made is supremely important; the details of the effort will hardly be remembered outside of our lifetimes. In the End is the Beginning.

NOTES

[1] Job, 1, 18-19

[2] T. S. Eliot, "East Coker" in The Complete Poems and Plays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company 1952) lp. 125.

[3] Eliot, Complete Poems, p. 128