

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

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SANTA BARBARA • SANTA CRUZ

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA 93106

May 15, 1986

Dr. Neil Smelser
Department of Sociology
University of California
Berkeley, Ca. 94720

Dear Neil:

I am very mindful of the fact that you are working to have a complete draft of our committee's report ready for the next meeting on June 5. With this in mind, I am jotting down some considerations, not necessarily to be circulated to the other members of the committee, but in the hope that they might prove useful as the project reaches its final phase.

1. Length of the Document

I believe that the length you estimated at our last meeting, based on your experience with similar reports, makes excellent sense. There is always a reason to make a document brief, primarily to be certain that it will be read. But the length should be dictated by the purpose of the document as well as by the mode in which its information and contentions are presented. I am very pleased with the prose that I have seen so far, and, in those sections that seem most complete, believe that significant reductions in length will detract from the report's authority. In other words, it wouldn't bother me at all to have my name attached to a document of some 60 to 70 pages.

II. The Audience

The tone of the report, in its present form, is what one would expect

of a document that is meant to be read primarily by an in-house, academic readership. This, it goes without saying, is what must be. But we should be aware that the report will also attract outside attention -- which I believe is desirable -- if we are willing to court the same more deliberately. After all, our report is the University's primary response to the national reports on the status of American higher education. And it comes at a time when the subject of education has the attention of the public. As far as I know, the University of California is the first of the major universities in the nation to respond in such careful formal terms. While I'm not asking for a Tom Hayden-like document (I'm referring to his recent report on the Master Plan) or anything quite as catchy as The Nation At Risk (since ours is a report to the campuses), I think it would be important to offer a document that might be featured, say, in The Chronicle of Higher Education, or the Los Angeles Times, or The New York Times. Why not? But to do this, we have to make certain that the key recommendations are stated with such succinctness and force that they are readily identifiable by persons who may or may not be familiar with the inner workings of the University of California. I'd like its positive contribution to the current national discussion to be deliberate and explicit.

III. Basic Themes

A specific question is being debated today concerning whether the liberal arts remain as the core of an undergraduate education. It was easy to safeguard the centrality of the liberal arts a half century ago, say, when only 3% of the population went from high school to college. It is more difficult to provide the same safeguards today when more than 60% are able to go to a college or university. If we are reasserting the centrality of the liberal

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arts (are we?) -- and, if we are, this is one of our major contentions -- we should be doing so with deliberateness and real force. I read Carol Newton's comments about the desired characteristics of an undergraduate engineering program to underscore this point. I would anticipate that this would be one of the items that will be commented upon by those who receive the report.

Also in the national debate are a host of questions about the moral dimensions of current American higher education. To what extent, for example, should today's college and university students be given exposure to traditional moral values, or, perhaps more to our liking, to the tested moral considerations of a variety of cultural and intellectual traditions? I don't know that the committee has taken a stand on this range of issues, but they do indeed carry implications regarding the content of lower-division course offerings as well as the content of our proposed freshman-sophomore seminars. I think I'd feel good about including a sentence or two in the report on this subject, perhaps in the same temper as that employed by the writers of A Nation At Risk. In other words, without involving ourselves in the so-called "secular humanist" debate, I think it would be wise to offer some evidence that we have considered whatever philosophical issues are worth considering in this regard, and we have responded in a particular way. Again, I offer this as an item to be considered when we try to anticipate how the report will be read after it is issued.

A related point: We talked some about the value of the honors program for undergraduates. Recognizing that our report is about the first two years, and not about the entire undergraduate program -- I heard Leon --

I think it would be useful nevertheless to include a sentence or two about the value of honors programs. After all, our readers will be wondering how what we have proposed for the lower-division relates to the reality at the upper-division level; we can guide them along by highlighting some of the educational features we believe in.

After reading most of the reports that have come along in the past two or three years, I find myself concluding that one of the weaknesses of contemporary higher education is that those most responsible do not see themselves in a primary sense as educators. This sounds like an astounding fact, and certainly mistaken, until one realizes that those of us who teach in the university were hired not for our known or claimed ability as educators, but because of our expertise in certain fields and disciplines. Wouldn't it be appropriate to include some lines about the desirability of raising the level of individual and collective consciousness about the dynamics of education, the learning process, and, most importantly of all, the art of pedagogy. I'm not suggesting that we fill out these categories with firm and extended substance, but only that we call attention to the need. Typically, when we recognize that changes are necessary, we go immediately to the curriculum, assuming that we need to make substantive or structural alterations. While all of this may be true, we should also be devoting attention to how students learn, to what happens (or does not happen) in the classroom, to some greater professorial sensitivity to distinctions between a mode of address that applies when one is standing before an undergraduate class and one that is appropriate when one is communicating with one's professional peers. I'm suggesting that we should have a paragraph or so on teaching: the activity of teaching.

I may be by myself in making the next suggestion, but I'd like the report to have a statistical section which summarizes a diagnosis of the lower-division situation in deliberately dramatic terms. And I think we ought to let the chips fall where they may. Bill Bennett's report, To Reclaim A Legacy, complained that today's student could graduate from, what, 75% of the nation's colleges and universities without having to take a full-year course in western civilization, or without ever having had to confront Plato or Shakespeare. Tom Hayden's earnest request that California's Master Plan for education be re-examined makes the claim that the three-tier plan (which is more pyramid than triangle) reinforces the social and economic stratification that stands as obstacle for many who might otherwise qualify to participate in a better life. Without offering a comment here about the soundness of either Bennett's or Hayden's contentions (or charges), I'd like for us to consider a corresponding element of alarm, but within the lower-division educational program of the University of California. Perhaps it is true that the current expectation -- that students will get a sound general education during the first two years of college -- is completely misguided. First of all, scheduling demands prevent students from taking such courses during the first two years. Second, students tend to treat such courses as points of entry rather than as general education. Third, general education should not be conceived as an enterprise that is restricted to the first two years of college. I'm suggesting that we should do something statistically and/or factually to make sure that we have the reader's attention. The other reason for doing this is that some of our readers will believe that our committee has been assigned its by the fact that there are national reports out there, and the University

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is probably under some moral obligation to respond to them, in some form, since so much effort has been expended already. I'd like to convey the more potent idea that -- partially as a result of the self-studies that were conducted on the campuses, partially as a result of our own collective convictions, and for a number of other compelling reasons inherent in the situation we are describing -- we recognize that the University of California needs to make key improvements in key areas in its lower-division educational program. In other words, we didn't write this report because we were given the assignment (which is also true, of course). We also sense the propriety of our work given the real needs, questions and challenges that we discovered in the course of a rather systemwide investigation and inquiry. Perhaps it's about tone again, but I think we strike the right chord if we encourage the University of California to assume national leadership in dealing with current weaknesses in lower-division education.

Finally, I must say that you've chaired the committee in a masterful way. I've learned a tremendous amount simply by serving on the committee. I've probably learned even more by observing your skilfull and knowledgeable way of conducting the committee's proceedings.

Sincerely yours,

Walter H. Capps

cc - Julie Gordon

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
SANTA BARBARA, CALIFORNIA 93106

15 Oct. '86

Dear Walter,

I just finished reading the "Smelser Report."
I note that you were a member of the taskforce.

I have so many questions about that report, especially on the issue of temporary, tenure-ineligible faculty, the increasing use of that series and its implications for lower division instruction. By accepting the two-tier system, the task force seemed to brush aside a host of issues bearing directly, I believe, on its charge. I can't believe, for example, that the task force saw no connection between the abolition of tenure for 50% of the teaching faculty and the quality of lower division education. The task force urges that temporary faculty be "better incorporated into the educational life of the campus" yet seems completely unaware of the systematic disenfranchisement of temporary faculty pursued inexorably by the university during the last 8 years.

Have other people raised any concerns about this report? Any chance for discussion and dialogue? I know you're terribly busy, but if you can find some time I'd at least like to sit down and talk with you about it.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David Cooper".

David Cooper

Part-Time Faculty Members Deserve a Break From UC

By MICHAEL SCHWALBE

Two recent study commission reports, one by a group of UC faculty members led by Berkeley sociologist Neil Smelser and another by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, agree that the quality of undergraduate education in this country is diminishing. Both cite as reasons the lack of career rewards for good teaching, chronic underfunding of core liberal-arts areas and creeping vocationalism. But neither report adequately confronts an equally serious factor: the ways in which universities as employers treat part-time and temporary faculty members who do a large share of the undergraduate teaching.

This is an especially serious yet underplayed issue in the University of California system, where job insecurity, excessive course loads and lack of say in making education policy have made it difficult for part-time and temporary faculty members, who teach the majority of lower-division courses, to do their best work.

Lack of job security has been the worst problem. Until recently no formal guidelines existed for evaluating the work of part-time and temporary faculty members. Many found their job security depending more on ability to get along with a department chairman than on ability to teach. In the absence of proper evaluations it was not always the best teachers who were rewarded with continued employment.

Job security has also been undermined by administrators wanting to preserve "flexibility" in budgeting and scheduling by hiring large numbers of lecturers on a course-by-course basis—sometimes immediately before the start of a term, leaving them little time for preparation.

The tenuous nature of this kind of academic employment forces many lecturers to take positions at several colleges. These "freeway flyers," as they sometimes call themselves, may be teaching at as many as three institutions and, in some cases, teaching as many courses in one term as a regular UC faculty member teaches in a year. They do this to earn enough to get through periods of unemployment and to stay in favor with alternative employers. The quality of instruction can only suffer when part-time and temporary faculty members must stretch themselves so thin.

In some instances full-time course loads for lecturers have been only slightly greater than full-time loads for regular faculty members. This is reasonable, since non-senate faculty members are not subject to the publishing demands placed on regular faculty members. In other cases,

however, full-time loads for lecturers have been nearly double those for regular faculty members. This is not only unreasonable, it is also exploitative and shameful.

Problems with excessive course loads developed in part because part-time and temporary faculty members have had no voice within the bureaucratic structure of the university. Consequently, their concerns have seldom been seriously discussed, let alone adequately addressed. It seems ironic in light of this that the Carnegie Foundation report calls for drawing undergraduates into university governance; a large segment of the faculty ought to be included in governance first.

Because of these problems, this group of faculty members—collectively known as "non-senate" faculty because of exclusion from the academic senate—has organized to bargain collectively with the university on a systemwide basis. Last spring, after two years of talks, the University Council-American Federation of Teachers and the University of California administration signed the first faculty labor contract in the history of the UC system.

The agreement represents the first concrete step taken in the UC system to solve problems of non-senate faculty members. It provides for job security thorough evaluations of teaching performance and limitations on course loads. And in an informal addendum to the contract the university has agreed to establish committees to ensure non-senate faculty members a voice in policy-making on each UC campus.

University administrators, department heads and regular faculty members should heed that voice now. To make proposals for improving the quality of undergraduate education without considering the special problems of non-senate faculty members is unrealistic. It is just as unrealistic, and ultimately unproductive, to do as some administrators would like—deny the role of the union in resolving these problems.

Significant improvements in the quality of undergraduate education may now depend more on what occurs at the bargaining table than in the ivied towers occupied by the faculty elites who are appointed to study commissions. What will be most important is the university's instruction by improving the working conditions of those who are deeply committed to doing it.

Michael Schwalbe is publications editor for the University Council-American Federation of Teachers. He has worked as a lecturer in the University of California system.