STATEMENT ON EDUCATION

---Dr. Norman Baxter 4/28/79

Evolution, eclectic, and economy -- perhaps these three words, more than any others, pertain to most universities in America today. All institutions of society are collectivities of norms which citizens have devised to satisfy basic needs and interests. As the needs and interests of the larger society change, so must its institutions. Many important modifications have come to higher education as we have moved from a preindustrial society to one which is highly industrialized.

Primarily because of contact with the Middle East during the Crusades, there was an influx of knowledge into Western Europe in medieval times. It was here that the modern concept of higher education emerged. It was here also, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, that the first universities in the modern sense were established.[1] What constituted a university, in addition to the curricular, was "an association of masters and scholars leading the common life of learning."[2] The very essence of those universities was "the consecration of learning."[3]

In 1636, English colonists founded Harvard College in America. William and Mary and Yale were established by the end of the century.[4] Upon the basic structure provided by those early beginnings, there have been three major influences which have shaped the development of higher education in America. The first of these was the English ideal of classical, liberal education oriented toward arts and letters with no intent for practical, specific application. This education, epitomized by Oxford, was restricted almost exclusively to a small elite of upper-class gentlemen.[5]

A second scientific influence evolved with the founding of the University of Berlin in the early nineteenth century. The focus was upon the intellect and had little concern for the students' social status. Academic freedom, governmental support and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, were identifiable characteristics.[6]

The third, and primarily American influence, was concern for the more practical needs of individuals and society. Education was seen

as a vehicle for social mobility, as a provider of skilled employees and a source of economic benefit for the local community. The concern for the humanities and classics by the English and the concern for science by the Germans seemed truly foreign to many Americans.[7]

These obviously opposing influences in the development of our universities may prove to be, in the long view, of lesser magnitude than many vectors which have impinged upon higher education during the past five decades of growth. Size alone has contributed to an increase in bureaucratization and departmentalization which has often had the deleterious effect of alienating faculties. Much of the growth was due to forces aside from mere rapid increase in our population. The federal government became a partner in education through the employment of academicians as consultants; colleges were used extensively during World War II to train thousands of the military, and after the war was over the government financed the college careers of millions of veterans. Perhaps the strongest influence of the federal government upon higher education has been through grants for research, research facilities, equipment, etc.

Those days of rapid growth and expansion are gone. Many sources of extra institutional funding have either been drastically reduced or dried up. The days when recruiting parties all but kidnapped whole graduating classes are only memories. Many college graduates are having to settle for jobs of lesser status and requiring fewer skills than that for which they have been prepared. These are the days of Jarvis-Gann and Proposition 13!

Now, most colleges and universities are experiencing either a period of steady-state, diminution, or at best slow growth. While this may be an accurate overall description of a university, there are probably schools within the university that are experienceing very rapid growth, e.g., Business, Engineering, Health Professions, and possibly others depending upon the particular locale. On the flip side we find such schools as Social Sciences and Humanities with steeply declining enrollments.

With such opposing conditions existing on a campus, how do we solve the routine problems of retention, promotion, and tenure? How do

we distribute among the schools the reduced allocations that our legislatures have voted in response to the demands of their constituency and the ground swell for balanced budgets and reduced taxation? What kind of eclectic balance do we achieve now to incorporate not only the classical, liberal education of England, but the science of Germany, and pragmatism of America? What educational philosophy can we call upon to help us solve our problems? J. Donald Butler says, "Philosophy yields a comprehensive understanding of reality, a world view, which when applied to educational practice lends direction and methodology which are likely to be lacking otherwise."[8]

On the other hand we find Stallknecht and Brumbaugh declaring that, "however else we may describe it, philosophy is an endless pursuit of wisdom, and it presupposes wonder or the love of wisdom----what we today call 'intellectual curiosity' - as its deepest motive. The philosopher pursues wisdom, willingly recognizing that he does not possess it."[9] I would claim that all of these scholars are correct. Philosophy <u>does</u> provide a <u>comprehensive</u> understanding, a whole or total view of reality---- not things as we may wish them to be, not things as we may remember them to have been. This is a new day and possibly a new era for education. We must solve today's problems in the light of today's conditions.

To do this we must continue the endless pursuit of wisdom. We must pursue knowledge for its own sake. But, while it is important that we continue the scientific search for knowledge, and though we must meet the changing demands of society's technology by providing the skilled manpower, we also must forever produce the "educated man."

At the core of all universities there must be that body of required knowledge to prepare our students for the "good" life i. e. the enlightened life. One must experience enough of the classical, liberal education that he arrives at the conclusion that his values transcend self; that it is better to be good than bad, better to contribute to, than to take from, and better to walk in the light of knowledge than stumble in the darkness of ignorance. Though we feel the pressure of economics and professions for special considerations, it is incumbent on the philosopher to maintain a comprehensive understanding of reality, a world view, and

accept the responsibility to provide continuously within the university, the opportunity for the classical, liberal education that fills a need in all societies.

A student ought to emerge from his educational experience with a mind developed and trained by disciplined study and research. Forms and habits of mental processes should have been shaped so that he or she can bring knowledge and skill to bear on a situation or problem at hand. Facing a problem, the well-educated person should be able to marshall mental resources to analyze, dissect, weigh solutions, probe alternatives, compare likely eventualities and ultimate effects. In Woodrow Wilson's phrase, he should be able to walk all around a problem and see through it from many angles. In short, I expect a graduate of a university to have his or her mind honed to the extent native intelligence makes possible.

A second component should be the development in the student of the ability to imagine and create the future. With our current societal problems, the tendency is to flagellate ourselves and bemoan our fate. A necessary component of a quality education is to prepare youth to understand they can renew the world and shape their future by the quality of their lives. There is needed a conviction that they can shape forces and not be shaped by them, that their lives can create something of value and give purpose to our society. In so doing, they preserve the best of the past, renew the present, and become the bearers of the potential of the human spirit.

A third component of a quality education raises the question of values. This college generation has led America to ask value questions. Education ought to provide the historical, moral, and ethical context for such questions. Too often the students have challenged older Americans without having sufficient knowledge of facts and understanding of the complexities of the issues. Nonetheless, their questions have been searching and too often they have been turned away. But values are subjective; they come from the heart, not the mind. Somewhere in the college experience, there should be moments of personal discovery and commitment when one says, "This I can do," or, "This is wrong." When that happens, values are

established. The goal, of course, is for each student to build an inner set of values which will help to stabilize and govern his or her life and decision.

With that value foundation established and the eclectic educational experience of classical, scientific, and practical blend, the young citizen is prepared to take his place in our highly industralized society. He is prepared to cope with the challenges inevitably encountered as he pursues his chosen life-goals. He is prepared to take command of his own destiny.

1. Hastings, Charles H., The Rise of the Universities, Ithaca, New York: Great Seal Books, 1957, p. 24.

2. Ibid, p. 24.

3. Ibid, p. 24.

4. Butts, R. Freeman and Lawrence A. Cremin, A History of Education in American Culture, New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1953, p. 81

5. DeVane, William C., Higher Education in Twentieth Century America, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1965, p. 175-177.

6. Ibid, p. 177-179.

7. Wright, Louis B., Culture on the Moving Frontier, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961, p. 66-67.

8. Pai, Young and Joseph T. Myers, Philosophic Problems and Education, New York: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1967, p. 48

9. Ibid, p. 4.