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SOME REFLECTIONS OF A NEW UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT

Address by  
President David P. Gardner  
University of Utah

Tuesday, September 18, 1973  
Delivered at the Annual Faculty Breakfast  
Olpin Union

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## SOME REFLECTIONS OF A NEW UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT

Members of the State Board of Higher Education and the Institutional Council, honored guests, members of the faculty:

A breakfast is hardly a banquet of the gods as Homer might describe it. And yet, given the distinction of this audience, there is something Olympian about it. I am reminded of William James' remark to his distinguished audience at the dedication of Harvard's Germanic Museum. He said, in effect, that he was impressed by their collective knowledge; it was exceeded only, he felt sure, by their collective ignorance. Take that as a compliment, as a recognition of both the pride and the humility that mark the teaching profession. That pride and that humility will be tested soon enough in the classroom, in the journals, with our colleagues and within ourselves.

Our gathering is well-named a faculty breakfast. I too am a member of the faculty, as new as those of you who are here for the first time. I want to feel free to speak as we would among ourselves, with our visitors as those special friends of the University who are officially charged to oversee its affairs and who are now most warmly invited to overhear and observe. I intend no neglect of them. I know on which side our bread is buttered! But this is the first exposure you and I have really had to each other and I owe you some account of my educational beliefs and how these might relate to the tasks ahead of us. Just don't expect a Gardner Guarantee

that will keep costs down and quality up at the same time on the order of a Parkinson's Law or Peter Prescription.

(Speaking of Gardners, I am delighted at the happy accident which, as someone has quipped, puts two Gardners in the Park. It may make for some confusion at times: Pete Gardner and I run the risk that we may be credited with the other's accomplishments or blamed for the other's failures--a risk, of course, we each willingly take, and, if judiciously managed, one which affords each of us an even chance to minimize our faults and optimize our successes.)

Uppermost in your minds this morning may be the question of how I feel about working within a system of higher education in Utah that has at times proved difficult and has been the object of recent and, may be, continuing controversy. I'll put it simply: I intend to cooperate fully with our sister institutions of higher learning, with the Office of the Commissioner and with all those whose responsibilities link them to the governing system. I intend to lend the weight of this great institution to the upbuilding of our sister institutions within the frame of their respective and diverse missions for I am convinced that if we do not hang together, we shall surely hang separately.

I also intend to pursue what I consider the State Board and the Legislature themselves expect from us: leadership--educational leadership on the part of the State's oldest, largest, and most distinguished university. These are not

incompatible objectives. If there are flaws or ambiguities in the fundamental law under which we operate, I intend to challenge them where they need to be challenged at the appropriate time and within the appropriate arena, but meanwhile to get along with them. As I see it, we serve the system best by being faithful to our standards and to our internal commitments to teach and to advance knowledge through research that opens new subjects to be taught and revitalizes old ones. It's not unlike the old question of the relationship between the self and society: without discrete selves there can be no society; similarly, we have to insist on our integrity as an institution or we shall be of no use to the system, to our students, to the people of Utah or to ourselves.

Our task will be a troublesome one, however, as disquieting for some as it will be indispensable for others. There is loose in the land today a tempting heresy, fashionable and appealing to a good many and yet, if realized, ultimately destructive of free-standing, self-directing, intellectually autonomous institutions of higher learning. It is simply that universities are just another agency of state government subject to essentially the same bureaucratic controls, measures, expectations and efficiencies as any other. Universities, especially state-supported ones, are rapidly becoming what Clark Kerr calls "regulated public utilities" and massive bureaucracies within statewide systems are rising up to do the job.

It is not uncommonly believed that universities' business and financial affairs are poorly managed, that tenure implies

an institutional commitment to protect incompetence whatever the cost, that reform and innovation are blunted by the dead weight of uncaring, insecure faculty and administrators, that their interests are self-interests first and everyone else's last. It is a harsh indictment. And there is, if we are openly honest about it all, some truth in it. But in its scale, scope and intensity--in its broadest outlines and essential form--the charge is ludicrous, untrue and unfair. It is an outrageous caricature, but hurtful, nevertheless.

A university, of course, is an especially vulnerable place, as fragile as truth itself, and as subject to compromise from within as well as from without as the decade just past made amply clear. "The University is an intensely human enterprise," as President Harold Enarson of Ohio State recently said, "and "it is not so much managed as it is led."

Regulation of the sort now characterizing some state systems of higher education, and I do not include Utah in the sample, is giving rise to standardized course offerings for lower division work; a standard academic calendar; a mandated, uniform teaching load; a common salary schedule for faculty; and a standard formula for space utilization and the acquisition of books for the library as though there were no distinctions <sup>in</sup> between institutions within these systems: in the quality of their work, in their respective missions, in their learning environment, in the desires and abilities of their student bodies, in their basic character, in their inner selves.

"We talk a lot about pluralism," President Richard Lyman

of Stanford recently noted, "but we are in fact in danger of becoming standardized, and on a basis that would make the survival of great universities impossible." High aspirations, intense effort and rigorous standards are all under attack today, to a degree that would have been unthinkable ten years ago. We must recommit ourselves to excellence and to do so within the purposes of our respective missions, coupled with a willingness to change and challenge familiar and comfortable patterns of work.

Universities, of course, are labor-intensive in that savings by technological changes are difficult to achieve. Education at the most advanced levels is expensive, and highly qualified faculty are generally paid more than the less qualified. Universities must build, maintain and operate expensive facilities, libraries, computers, and laboratories for these "are essential instruments on the frontiers of new knowledge, where universities must live if they are to live at all."

I shall be committed, therefore, within the Utah system of higher education, to represent the University's needs as capably, as persuasively, as openly and as honestly as is within my power to do and to press hard for their realization.

Now let me come back to the nature of this occasion. This campus, high on the bench, is stunning. If this is my honeymoon as first days in office are supposed to be, and I am the groom in this metaphor, I can only say that the bride, the University and the community which makes it possible, has brought a magnificent dowry to the marriage. It is the work of some of the ablest sons and daughters of this great

state, native born and adopted, of thousands of dedicated men and women and of several administrations. And it is above all a living tribute to the people of Utah whose treasure, goodwill and respect have sustained it for 123 years. A campus is a curious kind of sanctuary, less a retreat than a preserve where students can simulate the larger world without its buffetings. For us--the faculty--the campus is also a special world--one in which we fulfill our responsibilities of making imaginative connections between life and learning. What more I have to say this morning will have to do with our freedoms in the exercise of our primary function as teachers, our power and influence in that role, and the restraints and responsibilities that attend it.

Complex as our mission is, there is a common center in all that we are asked to do. We teach! We stimulate students to learn. And we ourselves continue to learn through research, through the literature, through association with colleagues, and, yes, through our work with students. A university's primary and enduring purpose is to teach, or, if you prefer, to learn, or if you wish, to understand.

The fact that we are fundamentally a teaching institution puts the authority of the faculty at the heart of academic governance. This authority is rooted in knowledge and an understanding of the processes through which truth may be made known--the mastery of a subject.



Your role in the University is a creative one, as original and significant as the knowledge of your subject and your skill in presenting it permit you to be. Your competence in the aggregate is the critical mass which maintains the University's reputation, draws students to her from throughout the world, pulls colleagues from elsewhere and attracts the outside support which makes so many of her programs possible. The State, of course, provides the basic support which maintains the critical mass upon which all else rests. I would call your knowledge, your mastery of a subject, a kind of primary authority; your skill in presenting it a kind of personal authority. Wherever else you may find yourselves in the campus hierarchy--as members of advisory, executive, or review committees and councils--your lasting value to the University is in your particular discipline, one which society finds valuable enough to secure and shelter by assuring your freedom impartially to teach, inquire and report your findings free of negative sanctions that might otherwise be institutionally imposed. This academic freedom, as it is commonly called, is a protection of ideas more than of persons, or, put another way, of persons because of ideas. It must be safeguarded, and as occasion may require it, I shall do so unflinchingly because it makes possible our dedication to truth freely sought; and all that we do depends on that. But, as with all rights in this world, there are corresponding restraints and reciprocal obligations on the part of those whose rights are thusly secured; and I

wish now to make a significant distinction between our rights and responsibilities as members of a profession, and our rights and responsibilities as citizens.

As teachers, we enjoy the special sanctuary of academic freedom; as citizens we enjoy the civil guarantees of free speech which are intended to protect everyone in our society equally. But as teachers we bind ourselves, in the classroom and out, by the decorum of our profession, by its code of ethics and conduct, by its tradition and essential character. Precisely because we are members of an honored profession we have the special obligation in our public utterances (1) to be accurate, (2) to exercise appropriate restraint, (3) to show respect for the opinions of others, and (4) to make every effort to indicate that we are not institutional spokesmen unless one of the burdens we carry compels us to be such. In other words, the society has the right to expect and the profession has the obligation to secure adherence by its members to professional standards of accuracy, respect, restraint and general decorum. This may seem to be a hard line on a subtle distinction but only by such constraints will academic freedom itself be left free and our professional lives unencumbered.

The authority of knowledge is higher education's bedrock; all else is superstructure. It is primary and original, where

other kinds of authority affecting education are secondary and instrumental. This does not diminish the power of secondary forms, such as civil, institutional and bureaucratic authority. They can be instruments of a profession's life or death. I want only to point out the basic nature of the authority faculty members enjoy.

Knowledge is one kind of authority with its attendant freedom and power. As faculty you wield another and related kind of authority which I have called personal, a power and influence measured by performance. The authority of the charismatic teacher who can impart knowledge as one live coal imparts its glow to another, is far-reaching and long-lasting. Remember the effectiveness of the teach-ins of the Sixties? Such personal powers, of course, can be abused, making for demagoguery in the classroom, or cloaking opinions on matters outside one's competence with an equal show of authority. And such ought to concern each of us, even more so than it does others.

There are the Pied Pipers of learning as well as the pedants, those on the one hand who lead by glittering means to uncertain ends, and those on the other by dull means to dead ends. These are caricatures. These are marginal. These are uncharacteristic--clear exceptions to a noble profession peopled by honorable men and women dedicated to enriching the lives of the young with understanding and compassion as they are committed to the pursuit of truth freely sought.

In the best tradition, renowned scholars and gifted teachers attract students and give tone to an institution, here and elsewhere, as they have always done.

While we as faculty enjoy these freedoms and powers, our students enjoy them by association. They too have the freedom of the classroom, the right to learn without prejudice. In our desire to encourage their own sense of choice and responsibility for their choices, we may lean so far in the direction of experimentation and unstructured education that college becomes Camelot.

Education, so the argument goes, should be "student-centered." But if the authority of knowledge means anything, should education not be "subject-centered," and then "student-related?" A "student-centered" emphasis can be aimless without the discipline of a subject matter which a university is obligated to secure. Of course, we must not lose sight of the person being taught, but we must not confuse student wants with student needs and make merchandisers of ourselves, concerned only with supplying desired goods. We should be more like physicians, able, by virtue of long training and experience, to prescribe not for what the patient thinks ails him but what in fact does ail him. That may be an unfortunate analogy. Students are not ailing patients, and knowledge is a process of discovery as well as transmission, in which the unconditioned vision of the young often yields fresh insights. Although the professional content of what we teach can only

be judged by professional standards and not by popular vote, the layman, the student, still has the right, indeed in this University we invite and expect him to ask <sup>about</sup> its value, question the answers, and appraise its application.

This confusion of wants and needs is related to another confusion that has spelled disaster for a number of experimental programs, the confusion of personal growth and academic progress when it comes to evaluating students. Academic progress can and must be measured by standards appropriate to the discipline: faulty mathematics will not build good bridges, faulty medicine will not save lives, faulty history will not enlighten us about the past, faulty English will ultimately corrupt us. These are disciplines to be taught and the effectiveness of the learning tested in the interest of our culture and in the lives of our students. Personal growth, the "inward journey," is beautiful and necessary and, let us hope, is the inevitable accompaniment of a liberal education, but it is immeasurable and largely ineffable. We do not apply letter grades to character and deportment and we must not, in turn, make character and deportment the measure of academic performance. We want personal growth, academic progress, and professional competence. We want compassion and humanity in our students and in ourselves, but no supply of it from us toward them or from them toward themselves or us will take the place of knowledge--anymore than that knowledge, once mastered, can save us without wisdom and compassion in the use of it. This brings us back to the primacy of our professional role and the need to be uncompromising in maintaining our standards.

As I said last week at the Utah Conference of Higher Education at Snow College, it is an exhilarating and at the same time sobering thought that knowledge is our business, students and ideas our life. I know, as do you, the implications of zero growth, of a "decade of decline" as it is being predicted, and of our vulnerability in terms of outside support for important programs that somehow must find the means to survive. But knowledge knows not these contingencies. It grows in the night while we sleep. We wake to find ourselves already behind. This is the anxiety, the deep inward drive I know each of you, as a professional feels. That, more than the shifting sands of budgets, is our ultimate concern.

In that concern you have my support. I hope I shall not prove to be pennywise and pound-foolish, or, conversely, to do well in the big issues and fail in the little ones.

We will meet again on numerous occasions as we strive in common to build upon the strengths of this great University. Let me simply say now that I'm honored to be here. I am proud to be joined with you in enhancing the University we are together privileged to serve through the full and honest exercise of our trust.