

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 026 961

HE 000 528

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Responsibility and Academic Freedom.

Pub Date 9 Jun 68

Note-12p.; Speech delivered at Commencement Exercises, Adelphi University Garden City, Long Island, New York, June 9, 1968.

EDRS Price MF-\$0.25 HC-\$0.70

Descriptors-*Academic Freedom, Community Responsibility, Educational Change, Educational Finance, *Educational Responsibility, Federal Aid, *Higher Education, Negative Attitudes, *Teacher Role, *University Administration

Negative attitudes concerning university involvement in activities considered as controversial are hampering the effectiveness of and endangering the university's administration of its internal affairs. Governors, state legislators, local politicians, alumni, and parents form some of the groups that provide financial support, often influence university decisions, and sometimes threaten to withdraw support when an institution attempts to move away from the traditional. Although there is an effective working relationship between the federal government and the academic community, federally-funded university research that does not blend in with institutional goals, and federal approaches to campus disorders that differ from those of the university also represent intrusions into university freedom. As components of groups who influence the direction of higher learning, alumni should protect and defend the right of their universities to questions, analyze, and make constructive judgments on internal matters. Faculty and students should be free to investigate and discuss pertinent issues, and faculty should maintain the right to teach and conduct research on what they consider to be important. Continued infringements upon university functions would eventually suffocate academic freedom and deprive the university of its basic responsibility of training tomorrow's leaders and contributing to the future of higher education and society. (WM)

EDU 200,000
HOWE, HAROLD II

RESPONSIBILITY AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM (Speech delivered at Commencement Exercises
Adelphi University, Garden City. L.I., New York)

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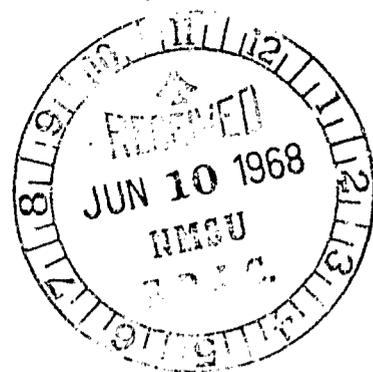
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RESPONSIBILITY AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM*

An Address by Harold Howe II
U.S. Commissioner of Education
Department of Health, Education, and Welfare



Some of you may regard these graduation ceremonies as marking the end of your relationship with this campus and with higher education generally. I hope that this is not so. For it is essential that the person who has had the opportunity for higher education in this country share throughout his life the responsibility for higher education's health and progress.

For two reasons, this university and higher education in general have a claim on you as a constituent for the rest of your days.

The first reason is that even if you have paid all your room, board, and tuition bills, you have not completely paid your way here. Any university, public or private, makes a financial investment in its students far larger than the graduate ever provides the university by paying his bills. Every college student in this country today has a kind of scholarship, even though the registrar may not carry it on his books as such--a scholarship derived from the resources saved by an earlier generation and invested in each of you.

The rest of your life will be more productive, more rewarding, more satisfying in every way because of opportunities offered you in large part through the generosity of someone else. Those opportunities cannot be paid for in cash alone. They demand payment in loyalty to the institution which provided them as well as in concern for its present and future well-being. For without such payment future generations may be denied the experiences you have enjoyed.

*At Commencement exercises, Adelphi University, Garden City, Long Island, New York, Sunday, June 9, 1968, at 2 p.m.

I said there were two reasons for you to maintain your interest in this institution and in higher education generally. The second is by far the more important. It is simply that our colleges and universities are not going to be free institutions--serving our Nation in the unique fashion that the freedom of the academic setting makes possible--unless those who are and have been members of them are willing and alert to protect that freedom.

The freedom of our universities today is assailed from many quarters. Implicit in at least some of these threats is the notion of transforming our universities--of denying them their role as institutions engaged in an open and uninhibited examination of man and his universe, of imposing on these institutions lower horizons and meaner purposes.

The Federal Government itself is not exempt from criticism for interfering--even if inadvertently--with the affairs of our colleges and universities. Federal funds have caused a great flowering of higher education for the benefit of many citizens and indeed enhanced the prestige and effectiveness of most of our institutions of higher education. Nevertheless, there are some dark corners in the relationship between the Federal Government and the universities.

One corner in which there is at least a shadow is that which embraces the multiple research programs sponsored by the Federal Government. No blanket criticism of these programs would be justified. The great majority of them serve useful and significant ends. At the same time it would be less than candid not to suggest that some of the research efforts sponsored by departments of the Government tend to reduce the universities to the

status of service stations for public enterprises without regard to the institution's particular goals of teaching and discovery or such important attributes as diversity, excellence, and nonconformity.

The U.S. House of Representatives recently provided a telling example of the kind of thinking that can lead to undue intrusion into the affairs of universities by the Federal Government. The House passed in mid-May a series of amendments to the Higher Education Act providing penalties for students who have been convicted of disrupting the campus or engaging in riots, or who are found wilfully disobedient of university regulations. These amendments would take from such students the privilege of Federal loans, grants, or work-study funds, creating a permanent disqualification for the individual. In effect, these amendments would require the institution to deny him the support of Federal funds even if the institution itself preferred to take a different approach.

Such proposed penalties would be extremely unwise even though they may have stemmed from the hope of doing something constructive about irresponsible and highly visible student actions on some campuses. On a blanket basis, they would intrude the long arm of the Federal Government into the internal affairs of colleges and universities, setting up an arrangement that would be a nightmare to administer and implying that institutions of higher education are unable to govern themselves.

Clearly there must be an effective working relationship between the Federal Government and the world of higher education, but such a relationship just as clearly requires the Government to exercise the kind of restraint which grows from an informed awareness of the traditions of

universities and the nature of academic freedom--the kind of restraint, in short, that the framers of the House bill seek among students.

But the Federal Government is only one among many constituencies of the universities with power to influence them for good or ill. Governors and State legislatures, local political authorities, parents, alumni bodies, private interests of a variety of kinds with some sort of purse-string relationship to the university, all seek to have their say in its councils. Among at least some of these constituencies there is considerable antagonism toward those given to rocking the boat.

This kind of rigidity can lead the constituencies of the university down some unfortunate paths. Recently a reunion class of a major private institution informed the administration that it would withhold a contemplated financial contribution until it had been assured that the university will deal forcefully with student violence. I gather that alumni and other groups in a variety of institutions of higher learning have taken similar positions.

The immediate harm of such action is that it entails usurpation of the university's ability to deal with its needs and problems in an objective and effective manner. It inhibits the administration, the faculty, and the student body in working out together procedures, standards, and regulations which, having been commonly developed, will be commonly accepted and followed. The long-range harm is that the threat to withhold support seeks to stifle all dissenters, whatever the merit of their cause, and thereby to induce the campus community to be uninvolved, uncontroversial, unquestioning, and uninspiring.

Yet any university that is alive and moving forward today has a deep concern and involvement in current problems and issues of just about every shade and kind. It sometimes has unpopular speakers on its campus. Its students take positions in ways that some people find obnoxious or excessively dramatic. Occasionally a portion of them engage in illegal and destructive acts which cannot be condoned. Its faculty members are connected with a variety of groups seeking to influence political issues, or they are discovering ideas that seem to threaten the economic, political, and social status quo. More and more the university finds itself, through the activities of its students and faculty, confronting the significant social, economic, political, and international crises of the times.

At the same time, however, there has been an accompanying tendency to challenge university operations and to question the university's right to conduct free debate and investigation. I would argue that we limit that freedom at the peril of our society. And I would add that I feel just as strongly about protecting that freedom from student groups who would deny it through extra-legal actions as I would about protecting it from the alumni, the State legislature, or the self appointed saviors of the right who appear from time to time.

Just as some students may object to any university connection with problems of defense and war, other constituents of the university can insist that it steer clear of racial problems or of controversial issues concerning poor people. Academic freedom is not divisible. You can't have just a comfortable proportion of it or the part of it which produces the ideas you happen to like. You have to keep it whole and complete

without compromise, or you don't have it at all. Like virginity, once lost it is hard to reestablish.

Specifically I would cite four areas in which freedom is essential to the members of any viable institution of higher learning:

-- Members of the university should be free to teach what they think is important and prepared to defend that importance in the open market of ideas.

-- Members of the university should be free to conduct the research they consider to be significant while at the same time acknowledging that their search for new truth must be open to questioning and to evidence from every source.

-- They should be free to carry on the public service enterprises they think are desirable with the limitation that public service activities not interfere unduly with teaching and research.

-- Above all, they should be free to criticize on the basis of responsible knowledge.

Time was when the university had an intellectual wall around it. It sought to steer clear of the everyday world, on the theory that involvement with that world would diminish the clarity of its vision. It tended to look either to the past or far into the future. That wall has been breached.

Today the university is an integral part of the everyday world, as is evidenced by the concern on the campus with urban problems, rural decay, and social inequities, and by the parade of university presidents and professors whose concerns and assignments take them to State capitals and to Washington.

The university is squarely in the center of some of the most controversial issues of our time. That is as it should be, and the university must remain free to examine those issues and to weigh and criticize what it finds. More properly: the faculty and students who constitute the higher education community must be free to explore and challenge; and the university--the institution--must see to it that they can conduct their investigations without harrassment.

The university community must be free to analyze any facet of our society, its government, its mores and morals, its industrial system, its educational system, the way it levies taxes, the way it treats its poor people, the way it builds its cities, and the way it conserves its open spaces and wildlife.

The university community must be willing and able to examine these and other matters in a free-wheeling fashion--bucking up against even the most hallowed tradition; taking issue with the most respected expert; questioning the most accepted opinion; perhaps defying what is popular and trying what is unusual.

The university community then must be free to state its findings and express its judgments. To the extent that it finds established belief to be specious, it must be free to proclaim that finding. To the extent that it finds an unconventional practice potentially beneficial, it must be free to discard convention. And the university must guard the university community's right to do these things.

Why is it so important that the university community, in particular, should be free to challenge and question and criticize? Should not the press, the church, the legislatures, and other elements of our society be

equally free to follow suit? Of course they should. But the university's role is especially important because of the unique function it plays in man's erratic progress toward becoming civilized. In its concern with linking the past to the present and the present to a more satisfactory future--embracing in the process all that has been learned in such seemingly diverse areas as science and the humanities and the array of other disciplines--the university is unlike any other of our society's institutions.

The university is by no means the only source of new ideas and better ways of doing things. But it is probably the most productive source. The university will by no means be the exclusive agent for shaping our Nation's future. But it can have as much or more impact as any other single agent. It can determine in considerable proportion whether that future will be one that we will welcome.

One major reason for the university's influence in shaping our society is its role as teacher of today's youth and tomorrow's teachers. It has the special responsibility of opening the minds of future thinkers and leaders and of training the people who will guide and instruct the next generation's children. As with American life itself, the university's role as teacher is undergoing an evolution and acquiring a new focus. It is becoming less of an instructor and more of a guide. In our rapidly changing times the university itself is as much a student as the newest freshman.

Professors can no longer assume that the values they hold today will be valid tomorrow or that the institutions they know now will, with a few minor adjustments, serve in the future. Indeed, professors may well learn

from their students about some of the changes that they and their universities should make to keep abreast of the world.

While we can make only vague guesses about what life will be like 25 or 50 years hence, we can be sure that it will be a great deal different from anything we have known--demanding not only new skills and new knowledge but new points of view and greater emotional, spiritual, and intellectual stamina if the individual is to preserve himself in the midst of complexity. The university as it now exists may be able to transmit necessary new skills and knowledge; but the overriding question that the university must consider is whether it can satisfy the needs of its students for greater internal stamina. This question seems to me at the heart of much of the discontent found in universities today. In answering it the university may also answer the frustrated student demand for relevance. For if the processes of teaching and learning as well as the nature of life at a university and membership in it are made emotionally rewarding and spiritually uplifting for students, then the institution will inherently have relevance.

We are experiencing a time of searching and frustration on many campuses. Students feel that their education is not addressed to the significant problems which confront them--not just in its content but perhaps even more in the nature of the human relationships it fosters. They seek (in some places they demand) access to the power to change the university--not in general because they want power for its own sake, but rather because of a genuine desire to re-direct the institution to a role of relevance in their lives and in today's world.

This new eruption among students has its negative aspects and its inexcusable excesses. At its extreme it represents an attack on academic freedom as serious as any other. But where it is constructively channeled by students and responded to by faculty, it could constitute the means by which higher education in America shifts its gears to serve the 21st Century.

I have been speaking of the importance of universities in America, of their need for special support in troubled times, and of the many constituencies from which they receive both defense and criticism. You are about to leave one of those constituencies, comprising students, and join another--the alumni. As you make this change I would like to pose the following questions to you: How will you feel about the role of students as they continue to disturb the status quo in the years ahead? How will you react toward your university and toward higher education generally as you become more and more entrenched in the role of alumni? Will you be a champion of the freedom to teach, the freedom to investigate, the freedom to serve the public, and particularly the freedom to criticize--to rock the boat?

President Olmstead tells me that as students he has found you to be eminently constructive constituents--that if you had grievances you would come in and talk them out. I hope that as alumni you will be equally constructive.

In many ways your responsibilities toward this institution and toward the rest of higher education will be much greater than they have been, and in many ways they will be harder to live up to. You will develop

vested interests in business, in politics, in community service, in other endeavors. You will suddenly discover that you are over 30 and that you are parents. The faculty, students, or administration in this university may say some things or follow some courses that you consider against your interests. Defend their right to do so, for in the end their freedom is essential to your own.

Controversies may emerge in the affairs of this or some other university about which you have strong personal feelings. Certainly you should engage in those controversies through the responsible expression of your convictions. But as you do so, I would urge that you always ask yourself whether your solution to a particular problem or your reaction to a particular situation would be likely to advance or retard the academic freedom that is essential to the institution's validity and vitality.

If you and the graduates of every other university defend the freedom of your own institution, the freedom to inquire and to criticize will be everywhere assured. And if this freedom is guarded and enhanced, the legacy you bestow to the future will surpass the one you inherited from the past.

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