

# *The Graduate School and the University*

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**In this age of educational mediocrity, the author says the Graduate School should remain a citadel of intellectual competence and quality. By so doing, the Graduate School might help pull the whole educational system forward.**

According to government ruling a school can become a university only when it offers graduate work in addition to at least three different colleges in its curriculum; in other words, it would thus appear that from the official point of view, it is finally the graduate school that makes for university status. Quite often because the word "university" is more impressive than either "school" or "college," some president of a college, who usually owns the place, lock, stock, and barrel, indulges in some clever mathematical black magic, and creates a graduate school by hiring, if he can, just one holder of a doctorate degree, in this way justifying the creation of a graduate school in his college. Consequently, the Philippines has earned a rather uncomfortable distinction, a country which has the most number of universities in the world in proportion to population. I suspect that not too many years from now every province in this country would have at least one or two universities to its discredit. In the Visayas alone we have two in Negros Oriental, one in Negros Occidental, three in Iloilo, four in Cebu, one in Bohol, one in Leyte, and one in Samar. These do not include the schools and colleges and institutes which in time will assume the name of university. We should perhaps be happier if many of these should become first-class technical schools instead.

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What has abetted the mushroom growth of our colleges and universities? One obvious reason is the general attitude among our people that college education is for all; that is to say, for all those who can pay their tuition fees, and literally buy their way out with a university diploma. As a result our country has earned the additional honor of establishing another world record; we are said to produce more college and university graduates, per capita, than any other country in the world. For example, we manufacture every year 60,000 college-trained high school and elementary school teachers, when our total school system can accommodate only 15,000. In short, our colleges and universities are producing misfits in our society—or you may call them “non-fits”—since they have no work, and they are creating a terrifying unemployment problem that gets worse and worse after every commencement exercise. And in the unsettled times in which we find ourselves these hundreds of thousands of unemployed degree-holders could join the forces that are in a hurry to bring about a violent revolution.

Hand in hand with the belief that the college or university should open its doors to all those who can pay the school fees is a certain attitude that has become an acceptable pattern in our society, and this is the stress on agility rather than on ability, on cleverness rather than merit. It is an attitude that stems from the *padrino* system that has pervaded our national life, a system of political handouts that undermines talent and fitness. The “scratch-my-back-I-scratch-yours” attitude has invaded our school system, too. To be sure this is not merely a local phenomenon. C. Wright Mills, in an essay entitled “The Educational Elevator,” writes about the emphasis in the American scene on what he terms as “getting along”: “Getting along” is the individual’s procedure of taking short-cuts, in the context of associates, superiors, and established rules. There is a stress on “getting along” rather than on “getting ahead across an open market; there is a stress on whom you know rather than what you know; on techniques of self-display and the knack of handling people, rather than on ethical integrity and substantial academic and personal accomplishments, and solidity of character. In the procedure of getting along the measure is the style of the executive rather than the drive of the entrepreneur.” The gentle slap on the back, the firm handclasp, the modulated voice that’s never raised in irritation or anger, the smile that’s flashed often and sincerely, courtesy, gentlemanly demeanor, *pakikisama*—these are cultivated as the necessary ingredients for the man who wants to shoot to the top; these are the necessary equipment of the mayor or congressman or senator who quite often, except for the capabilities of vote-buying, has nothing else to show.



In the face of these pervasive elements in our society, what then is the respectable university to do? Even large universities, with enrollments above 50,000, advertise in the papers about their so-called entrance examinations which are often a pretty facade for respectability. We at Silliman preach the strange doctrine that a college education is for all those who are fit to tackle college work, yet even Silliman compromises with mediocrity. For there is the budget to be balanced, the faculty—in the midst of the floating peso—must be made to float, too, by some increase, no matter how token it might be. It seems, therefore, that one of the last citadels of intellectual competence could be the Graduate School which, by government mandate, must require a "B" average not only for admission but also for passing the course at all.

But even this citadel is wide open to assault and invasion. For after all, what does the grade "B" mean? For most schools that are interested in numbers, in quantity more than quality, a "C" grade or even a "P" can be stretched to a "B", or even an "A" if the need for more stretching is imperative. The WAPCO, a way of promoting public school teachers by encouraging them to take graduate courses, has become a fraudulent instrument because accreditation is measured by how many units a teacher accumulates, no matter from what school he gets them, without consideration of the quality of the units. Sometimes we cannot blame school administrators for laxity because the miserably underpaid teachers do need salary increases. And so our schools, our graduate schools, are forced to compromise.

It is this very compromise with incompetence and inadequacy that has cast a dark, long shadow upon our educational system, upon our politics, upon our relationships, upon almost every aspect of our life as a nation and as individuals. I submit that the graduate school ought to be a reinforced bastion of academic integrity. And we can make it a bastion because we do have a restrictive rule about quality. If our undergraduate colleges have faltered in grappling with the problem of proper standards for a college degree, the graduate school could be the conscience to restore the values and the true objectives of university education.

There are two observations I'd like to make regarding the demands of graduate teaching. One is the passion for work. Quite often a student chooses a teacher not because of academic competence but because he is easy, he does not demand too much work. To get an "A" from Mr. X is not too difficult, whereas Mrs. Y makes you sweat for a miserable grade



of "B". Allergy to work seems to be an interesting illness of our time. Instead, making shortcuts is standard procedure. We can, of course, justify any time-saving or effort-saving device. In magazines, for instance, there is advertised an escalator chair which enables a man to just sit in a chair and he is conveyed up to the second floor. The paradox in the situation is that while the middle-aged man is supposed to avoid coronary thrombosis by not using his legs on stairs, yet it is this very avoidance of stairs that can cause hardening of the arteries—and the blockage of the arterial passages from lack of exercise can cause the fatal stroke. So a wise student should avoid the easy teacher to avoid a hardening of the brain from lack of exercising it. At this point I'd like to quote a statement by Jacques Barzun, provost of Columbia University and head of its Graduate Division, in the matter of work:

Periodically the faculty utters the wish that students would "read more on their own" and were "capable of independent work," but they do not enforce their will. Taking notes on lectures that duplicate the text, or reading the text, or last-minute cramming from so-called review books suffices for most courses. But is not this work? No, it is at best industry, a virtue not to be despised, but lacking the essential element of work. It is passion in work that gives it its dramatic quality, that makes the outcome a possession of the worker that becomes habit-forming and indeed obsessional. Of all the deprivations that modern life imposes on intellectual man, the abandonment of work is the cruelest, for all other occupations kill time and drain the spirit, whereas work fills both, and in the doing satisfies at once love and aggression. That is the sense in which work is "fun," with an irresistible appeal to man's love of difficulty conquered—a pleasure altogether different from that for which educators have turned school subjects into activities and play. . . . No man who works in the sense I mean can despise himself, even if the work is below his deserts, or its perfection short of his ideal.

The second observation I'd like to make aside from the passion for work is the belief that a university education must chiefly be directed to inculcating the intellectual virtues, and these are the product of rigorous effort. Robert Maynard Hutchins, former chancellor of the University of Chicago, in an essay entitled "The Higher Learning," makes a startling statement about what he calls the worst words in use in connection with education; these words are "character," "personality," and "facts." "Facts," he says, "are the core of an anti-intellectual curriculum. Per-



sonality is the qualification we look for in an anti-intellectual teacher. Character is what we expect to produce in the student by a combination of a teacher of personality and a curriculum of facts. How this result can emerge from the mixture of these elements is a mystery to me. Apparently we insist on personality in the teacher because we cannot insist on intellect. . . . We talk of character as the end of education because an anti-intellectual world will not accept intelligence as its proper aim." . . . Hutchins is really saying that personality by itself cannot substitute for intellectual virtues, nor can a curriculum that stresses facts guarantee a true education. But he does mean that intellectual virtues could reside in a man with character and personality; we may even go further by saying that Hutchins would assume that personality and character are already posited in the pursuit of ideas.

In the choice of a teacher it would be wrong to excuse intellectual incompetence just because he is a model of Christian conduct or because he is a man with a pleasing personality. Or just because he is prompt in submitting reports, or he manages a class with smoothness and precision, or is active in co-curricular activities. And just because he could win a popularity contest is no reason to forgive, for instance, a literature and composition teacher who fails to discuss the refinements of the structure of a paragraph or the poetic architecture of "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

In talking about the professional schools, Chancellor Hutchins goes on to say that if they were to rise above the level of vocational training, they must restore to their place the concern for ideas in the educational scheme. Very recently our Bureau of Private Schools insisted that our Silliman College of Business Administration and our College of Engineering must include in their curricula Business English and Engineering English, respectively. This is the kind of anti-intellectualism that Hutchins has deplored. Such courses should also contain the general rules of composition, or they fail as courses. For how can one write a business letter if he does not know his syntax and the rules of punctuation in the first place? And what is this animal of the government called Engineering English? This attempt at dichotomizing, at compartmentalization, at fragmentation is the bane of our educational system, and is in a way responsible for the splintering of attitudes, the development of a schizophrenic view of life. Our effort should be toward unification of diverse knowledge. The engineer who can appreciate the angle of a concrete water spout should also be able to appreciate the angle formed by the wings of a dreaming butterfly. Implied in all this wedding of apparent-



ly divergent elements is the kind of intellectual resiliency that is the mark of the practical man who does not evade the pursuit of ideas.

Chancellor Hutchins concludes by explaining that ideas are the ingredient that unify a group of unrelated facts. He says: "The scholars in a university which is trying to grapple with principles will... seek to establish general propositions under which the facts they gather may be subsumed... They would not cease to gather facts, but would know what facts to look for, what they wanted them for, and what to do with them after they got them. They would not confine themselves to rational analysis and ignore the latest bulletin of the Department of Commerce. But they would understand that without analysis current data remain a meaningless tangle of minute facts. They would realize that without some means of ordering and comprehending their material they would sink deeper and deeper beneath the weight of the information they possessed."

Because undergraduate education in our country seems to have relinquished its prerogative of requiring the passion for scholarship and the passion for work, our whole school system, through the inevitable chain reaction, has sunk in the miasma of mediocrity and inadequacy. In our insistence on the accumulation of facts, abetted by the factual kind of civil examinations that are required in practically all disciplines, in other words in our stress on the what—we have neglected the why of things. The natural, instinctive curiosity of the child is killed, as seen, for instance, in the memorizing of the table of multiplication in the grades. Four times four was sixteen, an automatic answer that became embedded in the brain cells. But why is it 16? We were never told that  $4 \times 4$  really meant four mangoes plus four mangoes plus four mangoes plus four mangoes, a method which could answer the why.

A few months ago Halley's comet appeared in the Philippine sky. This is the comet that the astronomer Halley computed, would appear only once every 60 years. And so in a science class the teacher asks: "What is the comet that appears every 60 years?" Or: "Halley's comet appears every \_\_\_\_\_ years." Perhaps it should occur to the teacher that the more interesting question is why Halley's comet appears every 60 years, how this phenomenon happens. But of course that is the harder question to answer and explain and so he dismisses a most interesting astronomical phenomenon with as much casualness as his asking the class what date Jose Rizal was shot in Bagumbayan.



As a consequence, this refusal to ask **why** has seeped into the very bloodstream of our people. Instead we fill our heads with terminal facts, facts, facts; sometimes the Malacañang propagandists would even give us questionable facts posited as true facts. One example is the news credit given to President Marcos for having saved the life of Pope Paul at the International Airport. According to the report from Malacañang, the President of the Philippines gave the Bolivian would-be assassin the masterful karate punch of a black-belter.

Because from the nursery to college we are filled with the **what** of things, because we have forgotten to ask **why**, **why**, **why**, we may yet become a nation of robots, if, in a sense, we have not yet become a nation of robots; I mean, that come election time the political kingpin of the province, following instructions from Malacañang, and armed with wads and wads of government money as well as armalites shouldered by goons at a respectable distance, tells the mayors thus and so, the mayors tell the barrio captains thus and so. Why do we vote for Marcus Antonius? "Here's five pesos and a ganta of rice. Never mind asking why." What significance lies beyond the five pesos and a ganta of rice? The **why** of that, too, is hardly confronted.

In this depressing millieu, therefore, when undergraduate training has relinquished the demand for the passion for scholarship and the passion for work and the stimulation of curiosity and discovery, the Graduate School must assert this prerogative. It can, and it should. The government has instructed it to exact intellectual competence from its candidates. The Graduate School then can proceed from its vantage position and make a paradoxical move downward, to help pull our educational system forward. It can make this strategic downward move through its graduates, if they are any good, who can be in key positions in colleges and universities, and through a chain of command, they would institute policies upgrading our schools.

The topic of my talk this afternoon therefore should not be the big, pretentious, high-sounding one, "The Graduate School in the University"; it should be, "The Paradox of Moving Forward by Backtracking." For the graduate program's results are mostly measured in the efficiency of its graduates as they perform in the lower brackets of our educational system.