



ANTIOCH NOTES

The Token Trustee

The announcement that Princeton University would add a graduated senior to its board of trustees gave fresh impetus to the idea that students should serve on governing boards. This concept is not only meager in its potential to meet current demands for "student power" but actually may further erode the principle of lay trusteeship, which even without student membership shows signs of being washed away.

Pressed by campus unrest and public resentment, boards of trustees are being increasingly tempted into actions they are not qualified to take. When the regents of the University of California reversed a faculty appointment, made under academic due process, they assuredly earned some sort of prize for the most

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inappropriate action of the year. Trustees' continued involvement in this kind of management function can only compound already confused college governance and erode what little is left of accepted and understood authority.

Because the student's overriding interest is in the hottest issue of the moment, his presence on the board would almost certainly inject the board precisely into the middle of problems it should avoid.

Even if this classical pitfall could be avoided, it is hard to foresee anything but frustration arising from the figment that any one or two or three students can represent the range of views held by all students. Every troubled campus knows that the focus of student leadership is shifting and difficult to identify. The odds are strongly against the possibility that the student trustee could represent the issues of the moment or that if he tried, fellow students would accept his leadership.

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Perhaps worst of all, the appointment of students as trustees would fool at least some people into thinking that student aspirations are being met by a move that at best is but a token of good intentions. It is far better to make such intentions evident by more practical moves.

It is clearly within the power of trustees to make such moves. Let me suggest a few of them.

The Means to Influence

The academic community has every reason to believe that trustees make or influence decisions that will directly affect them. That most boards make these decisions in isolated privacy is strangely at odds with the essential open quality of a college. Even boards of public universities, which may be required to meet publicly, too often reach decisions in an informal caucus. Except for privileged matters, boards should meet in settings open to the members of the institution, and they should have predetermined ground rules to permit the participation of those attending.

Obviously this practice will create some fermentation, but it is better to ventilate than to bottle up frustrations that will later pop the cork more loudly.

Without judging the wisdom of the Harvard Corporation's decision last spring to vote its General Motors shares with the G.M. management, there is no reason why the President and Fellows of Harvard, at the point of reaching that decision, should have been shielded from the strong dissenting views of a large and concerned portion of the Harvard faculty and of Harvard students.

The Right to Elect

Although the concept of self-selection of members is well established among boards of all kinds of charitable institutions, it is becoming increasingly suspect in higher education. Many college boards have extended to alumni the right to fill a certain number of seats. This principle need only be extended a bit more to give similar rights to students and faculty members.

One way to do so is to designate existing governing bodies, such as faculty senates, educational councils, or student councils, to choose some number of trustees. For example, a fourth of Antioch College's trustees are elected by its Administrative Council, a body composed of faculty, students, and administrators.

The Council's selections have been consistently enlightened, and because its members have different associations from those of the trustees, these selections have given the board diverse talents and attitudes.

Determination of Agenda

Although newspaper reports may suggest that board meetings are devoted to issues of high controversy, the fact is that most trustee transactions are abysmally dull. They consist largely of *pro forma* actions that the president has dressed up to look like decisions. When trustees "determine" a budget, they usually confirm a series of personnel appointments made three months beforehand. The policy issues that most concern the campus community may never make the trustees' agenda.

For example, the old saw that teachers should teach and students should study doesn't cut any more. Students want to rip into the curriculum. So picture as an agenda item for the board the respective roles of students and the faculty in determining curricular policies. If the trustees are wise enough to keep clear of specific issues of content, the outcomes may be highly constructive indeed.

Shared Activity

The luncheon, social evening, or "seminar," which typically represents trustee-student acquaintance, is a sorry device for communication. At best it is a pleasant occasion; at worst, a surly confrontation. Clearly needed are equal participation in situations that deal with problems of common concern. A group of students, faculty members, administrators, and trustees charged with developing the institution's posture *in loco parentis* might well come up with both a sensible policy and a better understanding of each other's concerns in the matter.

These proposals are designed to place the student in a position of influence and participation while preserving the board's essential role as legal trustee. They recognize that the demand for student membership on the board of trustees is only a manifestation of a fundamental change in student attitude.

The idea of the student as a privileged transient is still widely held: "Here are the conditions under which you may enjoy the benefits of our college. When you enroll here, you agree to abide by our conditions. If you find that you don't like them, go some-

where else." That is a comfortable and well-ordered doctrine, but it is ten years out of date.

The contemporary student sees college attendance as a right—indeed, a necessity for entrance into the social-economic structure; and from this point of view he is moved to change whatever he finds objectionable—preferably today. Therefore, the student's needs are not to be denied by mere assertion that his elders know best.

It is sheer fantasy to think that a change as superficial as giving the student a token seat on the board of trustees will satisfy his aspirations for influence, participation, and, above all, some measure of control over his own education.

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