

## Personal Thoughts and Recollections:

### HUMBOLDT STATE — PART 7

#### The Era of the Siemens Administration (3):

by

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#### General Education at Humboldt

The concept of general education, in the sense that it aims to develop "the man in man," as Plato put it, is as old as classical times; and such was the purpose of the old European and American universities that placed emphasis on the humanities. It is designed to ensure individual self-realization, that is, the fullest development in each person his or her intellectual and emotional potential contrasted with the development of specific skills for the accomplishment of a practical end.

In the United States, General Education (capitalized) as an integral part of any degree curriculum, regardless of occupational objective, gained broad acceptance following World War II though there were no typical patterns of courses for the implementation of the program in American colleges and universities.

In California some evidence of the recognition of General Education as important in the training of teachers is found in an early Title 5 of the Education Code which prescribed, among other things, twelve units of social science, twelve units of natural science, and six units of English.

At Humboldt, liberal arts courses were introduced as early as 1945. However, there was no defined philosophy of General Education or a pattern of courses designed to meet General Education objectives until the mid-1950's, when the Committee on General Education was organized.

Personally, perhaps because of my classical background, I have always considered General

Education to be the core of the instructional program. In fact, I have always considered a truly educated man to be superior to the technician. *I believe that many of the evils of our present society can be traced to the scarcity of educated men and women and to the plethora of technicians.* It saddens me, therefore, to note the recent trend among the administrative circles in The California State University and College system to place greater emphasis on training leading to employment and creating the impression that a job is the end product of a college education.

Soon after I assumed the position of Dean of Instruction I undertook to give momentum to the General Education movement already espoused by many institutions in the country. I felt from the beginning, however, that if a program of General Education was to succeed it should be the product of many minds working together and of still more subscribing to it. Primary credit is due to Dr. John Pauley and Dr. Joseph Trainor, Associate Deans who played a significant role in the development of a General Education program at Humboldt. Credit is also due to the members of the two Committees, discussed below, and to the members of the Academic Council for approval and implementation of the program.

#### *Evaluation of the General Education Program at Humboldt*

On February 1, 1955 in a memorandum to the Faculty, the Dean of Instruction announced the

constitution of the Committee on General Education, charged with the responsibility of developing a philosophy of General Education, formulating general objectives, and objectives for each area of instruction, and the necessary course pattern to carry out the intent of these objectives. This Committee was headed by Dr. Trainor, and it worked on this project for a year and one-half.

From the beginning it was recognized that the General Education program should not be "cast in cement;" but it should be subject to revision and improvement following a process of evaluation in the light of experience. This job was assigned to the Committee on Development and Evaluation of General Education (later designated by the shorter title of General Education Committee) instituted on May 4, 1956. There was no student representation on either committee, but student opinion was considered. This committee was also chaired by Dr. Trainor.

In December 1958 the Committee on Development and Evaluation of General Education—hereafter referred to as the General Education Committee—responding to requests for greater flexibility, attempted to assess, by means of a questionnaire, faculty opinion regarding a variety of issues and facets of the program. To some extent, student opinion was also canvassed and utilized. The results of these inquiries indicated the need for further study in specific areas, especially in the area of Personal Adjustment; and it was agreed that members of the Committee would be available to discuss the program with the Division faculties.

It was recognized that in special instances an alternative choice pattern could fulfill the General Education requirements. For example, a student who took a variety of courses required for a science major could derive from those courses sufficient knowledge and attitude in the direction of the General Education objective in Science, without completing those courses especially designed to help the general student reach that objective. The principle of equivalent substitution was also recognized in the evaluation of transcripts of transfers from junior colleges.

However, it was also observed that, in certain instances, the call for alternative patterns was motivated by a desire from a certain department to have a share in the General Education required pattern. To this end, for example, the Department of Home Economics recommended that Nutrition be included in the General Education course pattern. Again, in the case of the Engineering curriculum,

that major was so crowded with specific requirements that no room was left in the student's program for General Education courses. In the latter case, the problem was partly solved by extending the period of Engineering training beyond the regular four years of study.

For these reasons the Committee recommended: "We consider that alternative choice pattern should be built into the program only after their value in the light of the objectives of General Education have been carefully considered. We suggest that the proposed flexibility might best be introduced gradually. Indeed, the careful study which is implied in determining the value of the various proposals will, perhaps, insure their limited number." So while certain courses were accepted in substitution, and others were modified, the philosophy of General Education, the objectives, and the overall pattern remained basically the same. They were expressed in a bulletin to students which outlined the whole program and concluded with the statement: "*The General Education program at Humboldt State College provides education experiences designed to prepare, for the society in which they are to function, individuals capable of living a more abundant life, and of contributing more fully toward a stronger and freer social order.*"

As shown in the Committee reports, the General Education pattern of courses covered the areas of (1) Communications; (2) Natural Sciences; (3) Social Sciences; (4) Humanities; and (5) Personal Adjustment. The faculty did not rely, however, entirely on courses patterns to meet the General Education objectives. The entire program had to be "sold" to the entire faculty, since it was recognized that every teacher regardless of his field had the opportunity in his class to contribute to the student's personal growth.

Special General Education advisors in each Division were also assigned the responsibility of counseling students in the light of their previous cultural background and helping them to correct deficiencies. It was also recognized that the total life of the student, both inside and outside of class, contributed to his becoming a truly educated person. The Office of the Dean of Students, conscious of this need, undertook therefore to provide extra-curricular activities that would be conducive to the attainment of the same goal.

It was admitted that in directing our efforts toward the implementation of the approved General Education pattern of courses and toward

meeting the needs of a rapidly increasing student enrollment, we had neglected our responsibility of providing educational opportunities especially designed to benefit the gifted student.

To this end, in April 1958, the Dean of Instruction appointed a Committee on the Superior Student, headed by Dr. Archie Jones. One year later this Committee submitted a report in which the purpose of the Honors program was stated: "to discover those students who possess superior intellectual ability and so to challenge and stimulate them that they will form the core of campus tradition of high scholarship. We hope to develop in these students a vital sense of the value of independent thought, an integrated understanding of the various areas of academic endeavor, and an urgent desire to assume the burdens incumbent upon the intellectually responsible members of our civilization."

The Committee recommended two types of honors programs, completion of which would be evidenced by the successful passing of terminal examinations. (1) General Honors, administered by the Honors Council, representative of all the Divisions; and (2) Honors in the Major to be administered by the appropriate Division.

Two types of colloquia, upper and lower division, were to be established. They were to be reading and discussion courses, interdisciplinary in nature, each staffed by three faculty members drawn from the areas of the Humanities, Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences. The program for Honors in the Major was to be developed by the appropriate Division, utilizing the Division faculty. Certain tests were devised to determine eligibility for these programs.

This program was in the process of implementation at the time I retired. In later years the Goals Committee undertook to devise the Cluster Program to serve the same purpose. However, the lack of selectivity for this program and difficulties of staffing and evaluating, seriously compromised the objectives and standards of the Honors Program as recommended by the 1958 Committee. It is my understanding that Professor Rodney M. Dievers of the History Department is presently spearheading an effort to revive the idea of an Honors program.

### *Free Electives*

Provision was also made for a sufficiently rich offering of courses to enable the student to enroll in "free electives." It had been our philosophy that in this area the student's choice should remain his or hers; and, ideally, it should be a choice based upon the best self-analysis which the student could make of his or her own educational needs. However, the advisor was to also help the individual to use sound and educationally wise reasoning in reaching a decision.

### *Conclusion*

Such was the General Education Program at Humboldt. In developing it, we endeavored: (1) To analyze the traits of the educated man; (2) to translate these traits into general and specific educational objectives; (3) to organize course patterns, outside of the major, designed to serve these objectives; and (4) to provide an area of freedom where the student could exercise his or her judgment in choosing courses that would best serve his or her individual interests.

The current program of General Education at Humboldt, formulated by the Curriculum Committee of representatives from subject-matter fields, appears in the University Catalogue. Regardless of the introductory rhetoric, it seems to me—and I hope I am not unfair or biased—that the current program reflects more the result of departmental bargaining, and less the result of philosophical analysis of what makes *the educated man*. The problem is compounded by the delegation of decision making, often to the computer. It is pitiful during the registration period to see student—no matter how small a minority—shopping around for whatever courses would complete their schedule of units because the computer has failed to assign them to courses of their first or second choice. I am a strong believer in pre-registration and student program advising for every student. The course schedule should be subservient to student needs, not the student to the schedule; and this can be accomplished only by ascertaining, in advance, what these needs are through pre-registration.