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The College on Elmwood Avenue (Speech)

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THE COLLEGE ON ELMWOOD AVENUE

Katheryne T. Whittemore
Director

Remarks made at a meeting
of the Division of Arts and Sciences
State University College at Buffalo

May 17, 1962

When I prepared the agenda sheet, I didn't know quite what to call this item of the program. Perhaps it should have been entitled, "Remarks by the Director". Anyway, as all the talk about the future of the college swirled around the campus, a few currents seem to me to be strong enough to carry our raft toward a distant - and we might even say - a distant shining shore. So I decided that I would like to comment on some of the characteristics of the college that are important and that may give direction to our craft.

Last year, at the final division meeting of the year, each chairman gave us briefly a summary of the year for his department in terms of one accomplishment, one problem, one dream. This year I wish to do this focusing attention not on a department, or on the division, but on the college.

This college on Elmwood Avenue has been known by many names. It was once a normal school, then New York State Teachers College, New York State College for Teachers, State University College for Teachers at Buffalo, State University College of Education and now, for who knows how long, State University College. Many people in the community and some who belong to the college have trouble remembering its name and just go on calling it State Teachers.

As I come to work each morning I turn onto Elmwood and toward a broad view of the college. There are the familiar old red brick buildings with their white trim and blue doors, and stretching off to the northwest and west the squares and rectangles of the new buildings.

For many people, this view of the buildings from Elmwood Avenue forms the total image of the college. Of the life of the college, the activities of the campus and classrooms they have little idea.

I had
raft but
really didn't
want to
suggest
a shipwreck

craft

spread before me

of the

old buildings

It is a physical place - buildings & grounds -

*This is a
good word a
name*

It is, of course, difficult even for us who know the college well to describe its image. It is an interesting exercise; perhaps you have already tried it. It may be most difficult for those of us who have been here the longest.

*all add up
to the
character of
the college -*

I suppose a complete image would be described in terms of the people who make up the college - the faculty, the students, and the administrators, their attitudes and behaviors. This I am not going to attempt. In fact, I suspect that 37 years in one college makes it impossible for one to have a clear image of the place.

I am, however, going to comment on some of the things about this college that seem to me to be especially important and to set it apart from other colleges. *These may point the way ahead -*

For one thing, this college pioneered in faculty participation in the governance of the college. When, about 10 years ago, we were working on the first Plan of Governance, we found few colleges to which we could turn for suggestions and help. The Plan of Governance was the first to be written among the colleges that now form the State University of New York, and there are a number of these colleges that do not yet have a faculty constitution or a set of by-laws.

This I believe to be a valuable heritage that some of the older members of the faculty are passing on to you. Its value to us may be enhanced because of the early struggles to secure recognition of A.A.U.P., to establish the Branch Association, and finally to evolve the Plan of Governance and the By-laws.

It must be difficult for many of you to imagine that I was ever a young radical faculty member. Nearly 50% ^{you} of the members of the division have never known me in any role other than that of an administrator. I remind you that I was a teaching member of the faculty for 32 out of my

37 years; that I taught ^{carried a load of} 15 hours even when chairman of the department, and was on numerous committees; had as many as four preparations some semesters and in many semesters more than 150 students. Also, in my first year as Director I taught 9 hours, or more than half the time. I have been honored by election to the Chairmanship of the Branch Association and to the Presidency of the college chapter of A.A.U.P.

From this background of participation in college affairs, I urge you not only to value the tradition of faculty participation in college affairs but to work to improve and strengthen this facet of college life.

The participation of the faculty in policy-making and in the governance of the college is one of the special and fine things about the college. At the same time, it is responsible for ^{several} problems that must be faced.

For one thing - time. ^{The mid} One pays for democratic institutions with time and toil, and time is something that few of us on this campus have to spare. It may be ^{that} there are ways that the faculty can operate democratically without the expenditure of so much time and there is no reason why ^{some} responsibilities, once defined and established, cannot be delegated to one person rather than to a committee. ^{even perhaps to an administrator} There certainly is room for increased efficiency in the operation of the By-laws.

Other problems result from the fact that so many of you have come so recently. If all of the members of the division are here there would be 87 of you. Thirty-six of you (41%) have been here 5 years or less. Twenty-one (24%) - nearly 1/4) of you have been on the faculty for two years or less.

I doubt that any of us who worked so many years ago on the first plan of governance actually foresaw the rapid expansion of the college and its faculty, a growth which means that the power of decision ⁱⁿ of many matters

This division has always been active & shown leadership -

rests in the hands of those who are relatively newcomers to the faculty of the college.

It has always been the practice at this college for newcomers, as well as older members of the faculty, to participate in departmental, divisional, and faculty voting. This increases the responsibility for all of you. The older members of the faculty, especially those who are serving in responsible positions and faculty organizations, need to help newer faculty members become familiar with the pattern of operation on this campus and with the issues under discussion.

It is clear that the effectiveness of the by-laws and of the departmental operation demands that newcomers become quickly ^{informed about and} involved in college affairs. It means attendance at meetings where college affairs are discussed and ^{it means} intelligent participation in elections.

It seems to me, for example, that one of the reasons we had difficulty last spring in election was that most of us on the faculty know only a relatively-small group and there was a tendency for one to vote for some member of his department or someone with whom he bowled because he knew this person and knew little about others up for the same office. It is only through somewhat broad participation, membership on committees, involvement in A.A.U.P. and the Branch Association, that you begin to know who among you are especially qualified for special jobs, who ^{are} those with sound judgment, firm convictions, and high integrity ^{and} who can be entrusted to represent you at the higher policy-making levels.

As the campus and the faculty grow and separate buildings house ~~separate~~ divisions and departments, it will be even more important for you to maintain collegewide relationships and contacts. It will be easy for you to decide that it takes too much time and is too far to walk to the faculty dining room for lunch. Attendance at A.A.U.P., the Branch,

faculty meetings, participation in bowling, committees, and other college-wide activities will help you become a member of the college faculty and not just a member of the Foreign Language or Science Department.

Please do not think that I am recommending gregariousness for its own sake or so that a faculty member may be rated high for social competence, or perhaps we can use competence in a broad sense to mean the effectiveness of an individual as a member of the society in which he operates. For example, in this case, as a member of the college faculty.

If we are to operate effectively under democratic procedures it is essential that each of us be as well informed as possible on current issues and that we gain a sense of the college wide problems and solutions that are good for everyone. In other words, you must vote from informed opinion.

During this year the Liberal Arts Committee tried to keep you informed of its thinking and to encourage you to do some thinking and discussing yourself on the problems of the Liberal Arts curriculum so that you would vote intelligently. We were pleased that some of you actually formed study groups to consider the problem of Liberal Arts curriculum. But when you voted on the inclusion of the General Studies program within the Liberal Arts requirements, I must confess that I wondered whether or not those of you who voted against its requirement in the Liberal Arts program were voting because of disagreement with the basic philosophy upon which the General Studies program was established, or because of your opinion about the courses, and, if the latter, how ~~much~~ well informed you are about them.

At some of the A.A.U.P. and Branch meetings held within recent years, I have felt that the comments and discussions revealed a considerable amount of misinformation and that there should be more attempt to secure facts and to educate the membership before asking them to vote.

This leads me on to something I would offer for your serious consideration. The development of the *Plan of g* governance and the by-laws under which we now operate gives the faculty a great deal of responsibility, not only in policy-making, but actually in the operation of the college. Added to this are the democratic practices which have developed in many of the departments and divisions of our college. As a result, faculty members sit in judgment on their peers ~~as members of the Promotions Committee and as members of Personnel committees within departments and divisions.~~ Faculty members assist in interviewing candidates, in recommending people for promotion, *and also* on such committees as the Academic Freedom Committee, and the new Grievance Committee, *and the Promotions Committee.*

Privileges of this kind carry with them not only grave responsibilities but requirements for high professional and ethical standards. I have read with care and with great interest the report of the A.A.U.P. Committee on "Reappointment of Faculty and Giving or not Giving Tenure".

I wish that a committee of A.A.U.P., or of the Faculty would develop a code of conduct for faculty members who accept responsibilities of this kind. This means making the utmost effort to keep their judgments objective and based on the best available evidence. It also demands a respect for the confidential nature of many discussions. We would agree, I believe, that people serving on the Promotions Committee should not reveal the names of those who are recommended for promotion before official announcements are made. But in addition, it is not cricket for members of the faculty to ask members of the Promotions Committee to reveal confidential information.

The recommendations in the A.A.U.P. report that administrators judge faculty members on the basis of evidence and not heresay leads me to urge that faculty members also refrain from making judgments on the basis of gossip and heresay.

To summarize let me say that the large degree of faculty participation in department, division, and college affairs is one claim to excellence that this college can make; that if it is to continue and to improve in quality it demands that every faculty member feel concern and responsibility for the college, that he make an effort to act on informed opinion, and that he live up to extremely high standards of professional and ethical conduct.

This college on Elmwood Avenue has long had another claim to excellence - its concern for the student. In a recent discussion of student recruitment and admissions Dr. Redden stated that few 17-year old choose colleges because of a deep commitment to a career, or because of the caliber of academic program and faculty. He mentioned as one attraction possessed by this college its reputation of being a warm and friendly place.

Those of us who have been here for sometime know that we were often told by students that faculty were friendly, easy to talk with, and readily available for conference.

I was surprised, therefore, that the preliminary report from the Middle States team commented on the lack of Student-faculty contacts. Since then I have noted as I have searched you out in your offices for one reason or another that I have observed few students in conference with faculty members. The problem of crowded offices has always been named as standing in the way of such conferences but the office situation has been improved in the last few years while at the same time the number of student-faculty conferences seems to have decreased. This, too, is something of special value that I urge you not to lose.

I have tried to account for this change in faculty-student relations and have come to the conclusion that among other reasons, the practice and pattern of class scheduling is involved. There was a time years ago when classes of any one faculty member were spread throughout the week and throughout the day. A change in scheduling practice, much more to the liking of the whole teaching faculty I am sure, permits most of them to group classes so that they are free for part of each day or sometimes even a whole day. This freeing of blocks of time so that faculty members

can find quiet at home or elsewhere for study is good. I know how much I would have appreciated this kind of a schedule when I was teaching full time. I hope, however that this gain does not at the same time mean a loss in faculty-student relations by cutting down the availability of faculty members for student conferences.

This concern for the student shows also in our encouragement of student government, the college policy of small classes rather than large lecture sections, and especially in our beliefs that good teaching is important.

It has been a special advantage for the students of this college that they have had as well-trained faculty members for instructors as freshmen as when seniors. We have had no large lecture classes with the quiz sections entrusted to graduate assistants. Only recently, with the development of some special areas, have faculty members work been permitted to teach advanced classes only and no freshmen classes. This is apparently unavoidable but I wish it were not so. I wish it were possible in every department that senior professors share with younger and newer members of the staff the instruction of freshmen and sophomore classes and, moreover, required subjects at all levels.

Another aspect of the college, one important to me, reflects my geographers' point of view. A large part of the image coming from my consciousness of and the significance of place. For me the college has particular characteristics related to its situation and its site. When I think of my many years of teaching at this college, I think not just of sections and schedules and examinations but of the great pleasure of teaching geography in an area so rich in resources for this particular subject. I believe that for many of you also, teaching in this particular geographical setting has significance.

Elmwood Avenue is a major north-south thoroughfare. Our college stands on the west side of Elmwood about two miles from where the avenue begins near Lake Erie. In that direction lie State Hospital, residential areas, shopping districts, the City Hall, and the harbor. Just to the north the Scajaquada Creek flows from Delaware Lake to the Niagara. The historical society building stands across the bridge. Between Nottingham and Amherst the streets and buildings cover the grounds of the Pan American Exposition. Beyond to the north are the varied industries typical of the Niagara Frontier --factories making spaghetti, chocolate, furniture, and steel castings with radio stations, shops, and houses mixed in.

If we had time to move out ~~of~~ from this location, we would emphasize our setting in a highly-industrialized urbanized area, the built-up section now stretching from Woodlawn along Lake Erie and the Niagara River north to Lewiston. And we should not forget that our expansion to and beyond Reis Street is taking us toward the Niagara River with the shore of Canada in view beyond. Several air views of the campus used in college publicity look across the campus to the west making Canada seem ~~very~~ close indeed.

Last summer a few of our students took part in a kind of "Operations Crossroads" enterprise held in the underprivileged sections of Buffalo. They reported back their concern that their college courses up to that time had not prepared them for the realities they found. They felt that their experience at the college was an "ivory tower" experience and their courses might just as well have been given in Cortland or Genesee.

Are the experiences of the students housed in this group of residence halls any different because the Albright-Knox Gallery stands across Elmwood Avenue and the Historical Building across Scajaguada Creek? Are they richer because of the music, drama, and other cultural opportunities that exist in the city? Are they any more meaningful because they are living in the midst of "megopolis" with its many educational, economic, and social problems?

Those who worked with me on the Liberal Arts Committee and those who have listened to my current enthusiasms know that I cannot pass this point without using as an example the proposal for an interdepartmental major in urban studies. This I propose for an elementary education concentration as well as for a Liberal Arts Major. Urban studies would include courses in such subjects as urban geography, industrial geography, municipal government, sociology, and the history of cities.

But this is not the only example. Can't we re-establish the Niagara Frontier Center for Community Studies? What about greater cooperation with the Historical Society and attention to the approach and study of local history? With our shortage of facilities can't we spill over into the auditoriums, parks, and playgrounds around us. For 3,000 students, and in a few years for the 7,000 forecast, we will need the park and neighboring auditoriums not only for recreation but also for outdoor performances in music and drama.

To make use of opportunities of this kind means of course that learning experiences gain in variety. Along with the textbook, the library, and the lecture, other opportunities and materials outside the classroom take their places.

One day this winter I sat in the Mayor's chambers in the City Hall from 3:30 until 7:30 listening to the presentation of the budgets for the Fire Department and the Police Department. This was a fascinating and enlightening experience. As I sat there, I wondered how many of our students have had the opportunity to see some integral part of our local, state, or national government in action.

All of this - the relation between a college program and the location of the college - had been simmering in my mind for sometime before I listened to a radio program that originated at the Cornell Aeronautical Laboratory. Dr. Flax, Dr. Ross, an engineer from Linde Air, and a Dean from the University of Buffalo School of Engineering were discussing the relation between engineering and science and industry. Each one gave a beforehand about what they were going to say. Each one said that with the changes in the development of industry and the importance of engineering, new industries were looking for locations where there were universities with big research programs, such as in Cambridge and around Stamford. The natural advantages of the Niagara Frontier no longer operated as a locational factor for new industries. The question was asked as to the ~~industrial research~~ present and future role of the University of Buffalo in industrial research and in the subsequent encouragement of industry on the Niagara Frontier. In answer, one of the speakers went so far as to say that when building up the Engineering and Science faculties at the University they should be chosen not for teaching but for research. No voice was raised to question this statement.

This may serve as a guide as we work out the future roles of the University of Buffalo and our College. Here we have always thought that good teaching was important. I hold that the future reputation of the college will rest upon its excellence in teaching. This does not mean that individual faculty members will not do research and write, (this is an exceedingly important component of good teaching) but it ~~now~~ means that we here on this campus should give a great deal of time and thought to the areas that we can best emphasize in our teaching and to the learning experiences that will best contribute to our goals. This college should be adventurous in its curriculum and in its teaching.

No doubt there is a question in all of your minds as to how this can be done with our lack of facilities and our overloads of teaching. I have no real solution but I am sure that with all the brainpower herewith assembled you can find some solutions. Perhaps old traditional courses might be eliminated in favor of the new. Perhaps some of you who prefer to lecture and lecture well would find it even more stimulating to lecture to 200 students as to 30. On such large lecture section makes possible a considerable number of classes small enough for some kinds of guided laboratory experiences.

To come to the end of a semester, to evaluate the results of one's teaching, as one reads examination papers, to begin to wonder how one can change one's methods so as to do a better job the next semester, these are experiences common to all of us. To evaluate a course, to revise notes, contents, and approaches is a part of the experiences that makes teaching the exciting profession it is. This is an individual experience, it can also be one that is common among those who are working in a discipline. The

adventurous and daring spirit in teaching is not necessarily a property of the young instructor, in fact, I believe that he is too close to the tradition of his graduate school and that it is a more mature teacher who has discovered that there are many ways of teaching.

Good teaching has always been a matter of pride at this college. Its future reputation can and probably should lie in its excellence of teaching.

I propose that as we look ahead to the future and seek to find our special place among the institutions of higher education in Western New York that first, we select as our special forte excellence in teaching.

Second, that one of the ways to work toward excellence in teaching is to select certain areas for emphasis and not to attempt to spread ourselves too far among the ever-broadening fields of human knowledge.

Third, that in seeking out these special areas for emphasis, we remember that we are a college in an urbanized industrial area on the Niagara Frontier

I haven't said much about the Division - I must say that I have always found you an inspiring sight. You are a very capable group - brainy, I might say, as well as hardworking, earnest. I honestly think you can do almost anything if you want to put your minds to it.

Probably the division has come closer to working as a unit when you worked on liberal arts, along with the committee. There remains much to do and I hope that you keep on working as a division on this continuing problem.

I thank you for your cooperation. It has always been stimulating working with you.

As for your future in the college - there is one thing true - life never gets in a rut at this college. There is never a dull moment. Who knows - all our dreams may come true.