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The University of Pennsylvania Faculty: A Study in American Higher Education

Richard H. Shryock
Johns Hopkins University

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The University of Pennsylvania Faculty: A Study in American Higher Education

Abstract
Excellence in the University of Pennsylvania, as in other universities, exists or can be attained only by virtue of excellence in its faculties. Policies and procedures which improve the quality of the faculties are therefore vital to the well-being of the institution; and this conclusion - though a seeming truism - must be central to all thinking about the University's future.

The present study deals with this essential theme, which for the sake of brevity may be termed the faculty program. The subject relates to all the major purposes of the University, since these must be carried out - ultimately - by the academic staff. Moreover, it transcends the interests of particular schools or areas of learning, and cuts across the resulting boundaries of institutional structures and functions. Under these circumstances, a faculty program may seem so all-embracing as to be almost the equivalent of university policy as a whole.

Yet faculties must admit, with becoming modesty, that they alone do not constitute the University of Pennsylvania. Studies of other essential elements in this or any similar institution - as of administrators or of students - will also ramify in all directions. Delimitation of themes here is a matter of focus and emphasis. The present study concentrates on the academic staff and considers other categories only in so far as they enter the resulting picture.

Comments
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The University of Pennsylvania Faculty

A Study in American Higher Education

by

RICHARD H. SHRYOCK

Director, Institute of the History of Medicine
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Introduction

Excellence in the University of Pennsylvania, as in other universities, exists or can be attained only by virtue of excellence in its faculties. Policies and procedures which improve the quality of the faculties are therefore vital to the well-being of the institution; and this conclusion—though a seeming truism—must be central to all thinking about the University's future.

The present study deals with this essential theme, which for the sake of brevity may be termed the faculty program. The subject relates to all the major purposes of the University, since these must be carried out—ultimately—by the academic staff. Moreover, it transcends the interests of particular schools or areas of learning, and cuts across the resulting boundaries of institutional structures and functions. Under these circumstances, a faculty program may seem so all-embracing as to be almost the equivalent of university policy as a whole.

Yet faculties must admit, with becoming modesty, that they alone do not constitute the University of Pennsylvania. Studies of other essential elements in this or any similar institution—as of administrators or of students—will also ramify in all directions. Delimitation of themes here is a matter of focus and emphasis. The present study concentrates on the academic staff and considers other categories only in so far as they enter the resulting picture.

Problems and policies relating to university faculties are complex; indeed, they display a disconcerting tendency to appear more so the more one studies them. This complexity must be broken down into certain topics for purposes of

analysis, even though these interrelate at many points. The order of presentation need not be entirely arbitrary, since it may correspond in some degree to the several stages of an academic career. Such a career begins with appointment and ends in retirement; while in midstream, so to speak, it involves important matters which have simultaneous pertinence. Among the latter are such items—speaking of faculties as a whole—as ranks and tenure, salaries and budgets, and teaching, research, and other functions. All these, as well as certain extraneous factors, bear upon that elusive something known as "faculty morale"—the state of which is the final test of a faculty program.

One must do more, of course, than simply to discuss each of these matters in relation to the University of Pennsylvania. What exists or occurs here can be interpreted only against the background of what goes on in other American universities—with particular reference to those of a comparable nature. No claim is made that other institutions have been thoroughly looked into, and the variations among them are such that many pertinent comparisons have doubtless escaped us. Yet interviews and correspondence with administrators and faculty members at a number of outstanding universities, combined with the use of a growing literature on higher education, have probably brought to our attention most of the major problems and many proposed solutions which are current on the American scene.

It will also be well to compare the universities of this country—including Pennsylvania—with those abroad. Our awareness of this larger background is less complete than is our knowledge of the national setting; yet to ignore the former completely would be to share the provincialism which has characterized much of the literature on higher education in this country. Serious problems arise from cer-

tain peculiarities in the structures and functions—in the anatomy and physiology—of American universities. Whether these variations are pathologic or not is a matter of opinion. But they must, in any case, be brought into the open and this can be done only by viewing them from an international perspective.

No detailed knowledge of foreign universities is needed for this purpose, since reference to their more general features will bring out meaningful contrasts. In order to refresh our impressions, however, we indulged in limited correspondence with European professors, and interviewed a number of university men in London and in Paris.

Discussion of contrasts between European and American universities brings one close to the central problems encountered in this country and will provide opportunity for arriving at general principles. Lacking such principles, we should have before us only a series of more or less disparate topics to be considered in and of themselves. In so far as principles can be formulated, on the other hand, we will have attained what may be loosely called the philosophy of a faculty program. No doubt some will not accept this "philosophy," but in that case it may at least provide a point of departure.

In view of these considerations, it seems best to begin the report with a general discussion of the American scene —with particular reference to the problems and role of faculties in higher education. Such principles as can be accepted will then be applicable, subsequently, to each aspect of the faculty program at Pennsylvania. The outline of the report—and it is surely orthodox to present an outline—will therefore take the form given in the table of contents.

Brief explanations may be added here concerning the

procedures and forms which have been employed. Time was not available for an intensive study of the faculties of each of the nineteen colleges of the University; and in any case, such a study would have involved needless duplication of the separate reports made on these colleges—or on subject-matter areas—for the Educational Survey. Materials in other reports *re* faculties were grist to our mill. We are particularly indebted to certain of the studies, such as that of Professor Keniston on the Humanities and that of Professor Fisher on the Wharton School. Other University documents were also helpful and were made readily available by administrative officers.

In order to supplement formal information, we conducted personal interviews with some twenty-five percent of the Arts College faculty—selected on a basis of random sampling with due regard to ranks. This provided some sense of the attitudes of that staff, and like information was available on the faculty of another large undergraduate college in the Wharton School reports. The cooperation accorded us by busy faculty members, some of whom had been bedeviled by more than one Survey inquiry, was remarkable. In only one instance was an interview refused, and the great majority welcomed us or gave every appearance of so doing.

We regret that time did not permit of similar studies in all the colleges, but it seems likely that in the matter of attitudes, such further investigation would have brought diminishing returns. The possibility that striking differences might obtain within particular colleges was guarded against by interviewing selected individuals therein.

A report on faculty policies necessarily involves matters on which there are marked differences of opinion. Theoretically, one might picture these policies without reference to their merits or limitations. Such detachment would be diffi-

cult in practice, however, for the very selection of data is influenced by subjective viewpoints. And even if complete objectivity were possible, it would probably be pointless. Those who assemble the data also have their reactions thereto, and those who read will wish to know what these reactions are. Hence we shall often employ such normative terms as "ought" or "should," but this usage simply implies that a given policy is desirable "in our opinion."

A final word is in order, concerning terminology. As in any inexact subject, the words employed in the literature on higher education are at times ambiguous. Certain of these ambiguities—such as the different meanings of "college," "undergraduate" or "professor"—are innocent enough, since distinct connotations are well understood in distinct settings. More serious is the appearance of divergent meanings within the same context. The term "scholar," for example, is applied both to the "productive" professor and to one who seeks recognition *sans* productivity. Confusion may be worse confounded if, in the second case, it is held that teaching really is "publication" and should be viewed as such.

No fixed or final definitions are offered here. For the sake of consistency, however, certain usages will be arbitrarily adopted. We shall employ "colleges" as synonymous with "schools" on the level of higher education (law, medicine, etc.)—of which the arts college is only one. We may then speak of "university" arts or medical colleges and of "independent" arts or medical colleges, depending on whether or not such units are parts of larger organizations. By "universities" we mean institutions which not only include a number of colleges, but which are also devoted to creative functions (research, etc.) as well as to the transmission of knowledge. The importance of the first of these functions is obscured, in recent educational literature, by references to

university faculties simply as "college teachers." The latter term will therefore be used only with due qualifications, and the same holds true for such a vague appellation as "scholars."

Such words as "professor" or "instructor" will designate only ranks. "Faculties" or "academic staff" will refer to those whose primary functions are teaching and/or research, in distinction to those whose primary functions are administrative in nature. The word "research" itself, incidentally, is used in the scientific sense, but will be frequently coupled here with other creative activities in such fields as law, literature, and the fine arts. In spite of these usages, some ambiguities may creep in, but a conscious effort will be made to keep the meanings clear.

The writer wishes to acknowledge, finally, his indebtedness to Professor Otto Pollak for valuable aid in preparing certain of the materials essential to this study. Dr. Pollak compiled the data and charts concerning salaries, and also planned and participated in the interviews conducted with members of the Arts College faculty.

RICHARD H. SHRYOCK

Baltimore, March, 1958

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