Reputation and Morale of the Pennsylvania Faculties

The general reputation of the University, as stated, does not seem to have changed in any marked fashion over the last thirty or forty years. The same statement holds true if one limits the denotation of "general" to the "reputation of its faculties"—leaving to others the ups and downs in public relations, in the quality of students, and in the fame of "varsity" teams.

Even faculty reputation is too vague a concept to be employed without qualification. Do we have in mind the staffs of undergraduate or of advanced professional schools? Are we thinking of the University's standing in teaching, or in research, or in community services? It is doubtful if any scale can be devised which would cover all these variables and still provide meaningful averages.

The Chicago Tribune, nevertheless, attempted such an over-all rating of American universities during the current year (1957), basing its estimates on those of "thirty-three distinguished [but unidentified] consultants."¹ The outcome was a list, in order of standing, of what were viewed as the ten leading institutions.² Pennsylvania was not included; but

¹ April 21, 1952.
² Listed were Harvard, Yale, California, Chicago, Columbia, Princeton, Michigan, Cornell, Wisconsin, and Stanford. This group awards about 35 percent of all American doctorates. But some 150 other institutions give the degree; see Higher Ed. and Nat. Affairs, A.C.E., VI, No. 29, Nov. 12, 1957.
other rating schemes, noted below, suggest that the cutting point of ten may have been just high enough to exclude it.

Faculties as a whole are sometimes compared in terms of the number or proportion of their members who have been admitted to certain selective publications or learned bodies. It is doubtful if the number included in *Who's Who in America*, or in other biographical dictionaries, is of much significance. In the cases of the two national academies which elect members from all scholarly fields, Pennsylvania has a large representation in the American Philosophical Society (Philadelphia), but only a small number in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences (Boston). Pennsylvania membership in the National Academy of Science (10) is entirely respectable, but still is relatively low when compared with that of other outstanding universities. The number of Pennsylvania members, moreover, would fall almost to the vanishing point if the faculty of one college (medicine) were excluded.

The reputation of particular colleges is, of course, more tangible than is that of the University as a whole. A possible criterion for the latter, indeed, may be the number of its colleges which are outstanding in the sense of being included within the first ten or the first fifteen in their respective fields. In the Chicago *Tribune* survey, the medical school was the one college at Pennsylvania which was included within the first ten, and estimates made elsewhere would probably place it in that category. Other professional colleges in the University, notably the schools of Law and of Dentistry, have long enjoyed an excellent reputation in the Philadelphia area, and the former's national rating is favorably interpreted by Professor Lon Fuller of Harvard for the current Educational

---

3 Proximity seems to be a factor here. Four northeastern universities (Harvard, Columbia, Princeton, and Pennsylvania) account for more than 50 percent of total membership.
Survey. But systematic estimates of the standing of these professional schools have not been available.

Estimates of the standing of arts colleges or of other non-technical undergraduate schools are also difficult to come by. The chief function of such schools is teaching; and no adequate scales are available for measuring the teaching ability of individuals—to say nothing of such an abstraction as the average ability of an entire faculty.

Efforts are therefore made to evaluate faculties indirectly, but these either involve unproved assumptions or have very limited implications. If one assumes, for example, that a strong graduate faculty must also be an effective teaching staff, then the arts college rating may be read into that of the graduate school. Somewhat more convincing are assays based on the record of students subsequent to graduation, but here also there is much uncertainty because so many variables enter into these outcomes.

One or two illustrations of such attempts can be noted, however, for what they may be worth. A recent study sought to throw light on the quality of undergraduate colleges by noting the ratio of their graduates who subsequently received fellowships or Ph.D. degrees. Based on the record of some 7,000 students, this revealed that Haverford could boast a ratio of 39.5 per thousand; Yale, of 27.2; Cornell, of 19.5; Pennsylvania, of 10.7 (48th in the list of institutions!); and Dartmouth, of 10.6. If women were segregated, Pennsylvania made a better showing; with a ratio of 15.6 and a standing of sixth in the list.4 Such a study may conceivably have some bearing on the quality of undergraduate instruction (whether it inspires students “to go on”); but there can be other explanations as well.

4 A study by R. H. Knapp and J. J. Greenbaum, cited by the Chicago Tribune, June 9, 1957.
Similar head-counting has been done for awards of national scholarships, and—more inclusively—for the number of "college graduates" who gain admittance to Who's Who. In the latter category (1956-57), Pennsylvania was not among the first ten institutions in proportion to enrollments but stood sixth in absolute numbers. Here, of course, the weight of professional graduates is evident, and the findings have no necessary bearing on the standing of undergraduate colleges.

More significant evidence and interpretation of the quality of undergraduate (non-technical) faculties at Pennsylvania will become available in the intensive studies made for the Educational Survey. Pertinent, in this connection, will be those made on the Wharton School, on the Arts College, and on their quadrants of instruction (natural sciences, biological sciences, social sciences, and humanities).

The standing of the Graduate School is more meaningful than that of any other single college, since the interests of its faculty extend across many scholarly fields. Here are centered the creative activities of most of the University staff; and it is the quality of such activities which largely determines, within the academic world, the general standing of an institution.

Several investigations have been made, over the past thirty-five years, of the national standing of graduate schools. These studies, it is true, have obvious limitations. They begin with a selection of those scholars who are to be asked for opinions; and the latter, in turn, give their personal views of the standing of various departments and schools. There is, meanwhile, an element of time-lag in most judgments. Nevertheless, subjectivity tends to be "ironed out" if a reasonable

5 Ibid. See also Lovejoy's College Guide, New York, for 1953-54 and ensuing years.
number of authorities are consulted, and the resulting analyses are the nearest thing we have to objective appraisals.

A well-known Study of the Graduate Schools of America by R. M. Hughes (1925), placed Pennsylvania in twelfth place in national standing. This (and similar ratings in other studies) was based on preceding evaluations of departments, which were then averaged for schools as a whole. Some twenty years later (1946), the Association of American Universities made a self-rating study (among some twenty-five member institutions) and is said to have assigned the University to ninth place. And in 1957, after another decade had passed, Dr. Hayward Keniston’s study for The Educational Survey listed Pennsylvania as eleventh in the national standing.6

In each of these reports, several graduate schools—those of Harvard, Yale, Columbia—appeared among “the first five.” Equally stable was the reputation of Pennsylvania on the level of positions 9-11-12. Certain other universities, in contrast, moved sharply up or down in the scale. Thus, California rose, between the ratings of 1925 and 1957, from ninth to second place; while another well-known institution fell from second to sixth, and a third from seventh to sixteenth.7

These place values are quite abstract averages, and the standing of particular quadrants of learning comes closer to realities. A comparison of the 1925 and 1957 ratings for the social sciences, for example, shows that Pennsylvania fell slightly from twelfth to fourteenth place; while its physical science departments moved from fourteenth to the fifteenth position. On the other hand, the University’s standing in bio-

6 The Hughes study was published by Miami University, Ohio. Dr. Keniston’s data appear in his Survey reports on the Humanities and on the Graduate School.
7 These are Dr. Keniston’s ratings for 1957. The Chicago Tribune’s report varies in certain cases.
logical sciences rose from the -15 limbo to ninth place; and, in the humanities, from tenth to eighth.

Still more tangible comparisons can be made of the reputation of particular departments, and these will doubtless be noted in the other Survey reports mentioned. Suffice it to say here that such comparisons show the same balance of ups and downs within each quadrant. Among the humanities, for example, the University’s departments of English and of History fell slightly (from 9 to tie for 11, and from 8 to 10, respectively), while the Romance Language department rose from position 7 to 4. The first two of these units may therefore be thought of as typical “Penn” departments, in that their recent ratings are about the same as those of the Graduate School as a whole.

The present position of the Graduate faculty may be said, in the light of these reports, to be about eleventh in order of standing in the United States. In a country of this size with its many institutions, such standing is certainly respectable: there is no need here to “view with alarm.” Indeed, in terms of academic competition, Pennsylvania’s success in maintaining its position may be claimed as something of an achievement. The faculty must have kept moving at quite a pace, just in order to stand still in these ratings.

By the same token, however, there is no occasion for complacency—no reason to “point with pride”—in view of the failure to improve the University’s standing. In contrast, between 1925 and 1957, several other institutions moved up in rather dramatic fashion. It is true that the most conspicuous examples here, California, Michigan, and Indiana, were state institutions blessed with large funds. But imaginative leadership must also have been involved in the outcomes.

In the opinion of some critics, both within and without the faculties, such leadership has been lacking at Pennsylvania.
over the greater part of the last fifty years. And since administrators played the chief role in determining policies, responsibility for the record has been laid at their doors. They are said to have been unimaginative and unduly cautious—following the trends of the time as initiated by other institutions. It is also said that when decisions had to be made, they were reached hurriedly and without real consultation with the faculties.\(^8\)

Negative evidence seems to support such criticisms, in that there were few if any instances in which the University engaged in major experiments or pioneered in new programs above the departmental level.

Ultimate responsibility for the record, however, need not be placed entirely on administrators. The latter were certainly handicapped by lack of funds, and some would blame this on the failure of private wealth—especially in Philadelphia—to provide adequate support for the University. One need not speculate here about how far such failure was the fault of the University itself, or how far it could be blamed on social or other factors beyond institutional control.

Quite apart from all this, the cautious record of the University is ascribed by some to the general conservatism of the Philadelphia environment. This has presumably been reflected in the attitudes of trustees as well as of administrators, since a large proportion of the former have been local men.

What, meantime, of the faculties? A considerable number of the staff have a Philadelphia background, while a still larger percentage were trained at the University. And even members who were trained elsewhere might be expected, after decades of residence, to take on some protective color-

---

\(^8\) Professors who have expressed such criticisms are able men who have had successful careers within and outside the University.

111
ing adapted to the local scene. Have the faculties, as well as other elements in the University, lacked a spirit of adventure? Are they inclined, by and large, to "play safe" and to be content with things as they are?

An affirmative answer is given by a few staff critics, who make up in ability what they lack in numbers. These men declare, on their own initiative, that faculty morale at Pennsylvania is "too good"—that it amounts to complacency. Apparent support of this view, one may add, is found in the fact that some senior men in the arts college rate their own departments much more highly than do the national studies cited above. In any case, the general indictment is summed up in the late Professor Edwin E. Aubrey’s report to the Survey. He there stated that a newcomer to the University could recognize at once all the stigmata of which old-timers were unaware. Staff members, he found, resisted change, were distrustful of experiments performed elsewhere, and viewed critics as disgruntled or disloyal. They cherished vested interests and emotional prejudices, and—in short—saw in Pennsylvania the best possible of all academic worlds.

There is, in our opinion, some truth in this indictment but it is not the whole truth. For one thing, the attitudes of staff members vary over a wide range—from the complacency mentioned to downright cynicism or bitterness. Individuals of senior rank, whose own promotions are not at stake, sharply criticize administration on all levels. It is said, for example, that a department exploits its junior members; that a Dean fails to present the needs of his faculty with sufficient force; and that upper administrative offices have proliferated unnecessarily and at excessive cost to the University. Whether such criticisms are valid or not, the men who make

9 Humanistic Training and the Place of Ethical and Religious Values in Higher Education, 1956, 34.
them are not complacent about the state of the institution. The conservatism of the local environment, moreover, is not the only factor which influences faculty attitudes. At any given time, these attitudes are more responsive to the direct impact of conditions within the University itself. There is much evidence that faculty morale was low during the late 1940's and early '50's—especially in the undergraduate colleges. One need only cite, in this connection, the staff-inspired drive to organize the Senate. Behind this, apparently, lay dissatisfaction with salary scales—with declining real income—and a related conviction that remedies could be found only in a greater degree of faculty participation in University affairs.\(^{10}\)

Since the advent of the present administration, advances in salary have been secured and a “consultative program” has been introduced into faculty-administrator relationships. As was doubtless anticipated, a rather rapid improvement in faculty morale has ensued. The majority of staff interviewed in the Arts College,\(^{11}\) and of those replying to questionnaires in the Wharton School,\(^{12}\) declared that the morale of their respective departments had risen and was now satisfactory or better. There was some hesitation about judging the state of mind of an entire college, and even more when it came to assaying that of the University as a whole. Yet, as far as members attempted these latter estimates, the opinions were much the same.

Evidence obtained from interviews and questionnaires indicates, nevertheless, that various factors continue to exert

---

\(^{10}\) These two factors were those reported by the President’s Comm. on Higher Ed. (1948) as chiefly conducive to low morale throughout the country.

\(^{11}\) Of 40 Arts men of all ranks, chosen by random sample, 11 thought departmental morale was good to excellent, 18 thought it “satisfactory,” and 11 considered it poor.

an adverse influence on morale. A few of these relate to a large proportion of the faculty; for example, there is a general conviction that still higher salaries are essential. There is, again, wide concern about the inadequacy of the University Library building among those who use it, though this feeling is lessened by the prospects for a new structure.

Professor Aubrey believed that the delay in building a Library was symbolic of attitudes toward the humanities, at a time of growing concern about teaching and research in natural science. One may view the Library as the "laboratory" of humanists—and, in lesser degree, of social scientists—and it is clear enough that its needs have not been as well met as have those in some natural science departments. Dr. Aubrey concluded that such contrasts were demoralizing to the humanities staff.

The problem here is not peculiar to Pennsylvania. If one quadrant is suffering relative neglect as compared to another, we might expect a reflection of the contrast in minor as well as in major facilities. Is the natural science staff, for example, provided with superior office facilities and more effective secretarial aid? Or, for that matter, with higher salaries? Here we found no general rule. Certain departments or professional schools enjoy higher salaries than others, but the distinctions do not seem to run along the traditional line dividing natural science and the humanities.

A few humanists protested against their cramped quarters and the lack of secretarial aid, but the same criticisms have been made, for example, of facilities in Psychology and in Veterinary Medicine.¹³ Humanists, like some other Arts staff, are apt to find themselves in old and crowded surroundings; but this usually seems to be more a result of historical

¹³ A Study of the School of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Pennsylvania by Henrik J. Stafseth, 1957, 47.
circumstances than of conscious discrimination. Their prototypes were there first, and their need for new facilities did not seem as pressing as was that of the laboratory scientists.

The condition of the "drab, dark and crowded" Library has certainly been discouraging; but we found little evidence that humanists, as such, were generally demoralized by this or other limiting conditions. They have made the best of existing circumstances and, as noted, enjoy the highest national rating achieved by any of the quadrants at Pennsylvania. That they have done so well is, of course, no reason for assuming that they will continue to thrive regardless of facilities made available to them.

Faculty morale may vary with place, as well as with time, or with areas of scholarship. In other words, it may be simultaneously high in one college and low in another. General impressions suggest, for example, that average morale has been excellent in the Law School, from fair to good in the Arts College, the Wharton School, and the School of Medicine; but (until recently) poor in the School of Education and rather uncertain in one or two of the small professional colleges. The Educational Survey studies of the various schools may provide more definite assays for each of these units.

The chief factors, which make for varying morale in different colleges, seem to be salary scales, professional quality, effectiveness of internal management, facilities, and relations with University administration (harmony, support, degree of autonomy, and so on). All these matters are mutually interrelated. Once established, strong faculties tend to develop self-confidence, to achieve esprit de corps, and to inspire respect in administrative circles. But there can be exceptions, at any given time, if one of the variables mentioned gets—so to speak—out of line.
The state of mind of faculty groups may also vary with distinctions which cut across different colleges or fields. Theoretically, each minority element which is represented on the faculties may have its own reactions in terms of what seems to be its own status. Conversely, such staff members may have decided to ignore minority status as not affecting them individually. In any case, the number of persons in most of these categories is so small as to make any attempt to evaluate their relative morale a questionable one.

More meaningful here, therefore, is the correlation of morale with rank. A minority of staff members in the Arts College and in the Wharton School—and doubtless in other colleges—are dissatisfied with such intra-departmental matters as teaching loads, promotion policies and opportunities for participation in decisions; and a similar minority feels strongly about such participation in college or university affairs. But the number of those dissatisfied with intra-departmental conditions is proportionally higher among assistant professors than it is on other rank levels.¹⁴

One surmises that instructors are reasonably pleased just to have made a start, while senior men hold an assured place and feel that they have “arrived.” Assistant professors, for their part, have the advantage of youth, but otherwise face heavy odds. This group has relatively heavy teaching obligations, is most under pressure to “get ahead” through research, and is not yet permitted—despite all this—to take much part in policy decisions. To add to their troubles, assistant professors are usually at an age when they are attempting to maintain young families on low salaries. Here is the critical stage in most academic careers.

¹⁴ Occasionally, one finds similar unhappiness among associate professors who have been late in reaching this rank and who see no prospects for further advancement.
This situation merits serious attention, since the University should expect to make most of its future senior appointments from the assistant professorial level. It bodes ill if able young men feel that they are overloaded, that advancement or salary increases are long delayed, or that they are excluded from departmental affairs. The problems involved can sometimes be solved within departments if chairmen and other senior men are sufficiently concerned, but they should be heeded also by deans and college faculties.

There is, of course, a long list of factors which influence the morale of particular individuals or departments. In addition to such basic items as have been mentioned (salaries, promotions, teaching loads, etc.) are relations between colleagues, relations with students, attitudes toward administrators, and opportunities for research. Several generalizations, chiefly negative ones, can be made on such matters. Few staff members felt that they were denied opportunities for research, and few seemed unhappy about relations with administrators or with students. With regard to the latter, it is not clear how far this implies good relations, and how far it merely suggests relative indifference to teaching.

Interpersonal relations among colleagues are in part unpredictable, and may make all the difference. But they can also be controlled in some degree within departments by the attitude and policies of chairmen or of other senior men. In consequence, one department makes up a “happy family” and another does not.

Specific policies which would seem calculated to improve morale in relation to some of these factors will be noted in ensuing chapters. Meantime, what of the general situation and its implications for the immediate future? By and large, the morale of most of the faculty is now reasonably good except in a few departments. There are, it is true, individuals
who are unhappy or even bitter. And, conversely, there is complacency in certain quarters—particularly among senior men long associated with the city and with the University. Even complacency, however, has its bright side; namely, a real—if rather uncritical—devotion to the institution and its environment.

This attitude is revealed not only in personal statements, but also in the fairly high proportion of senior men who have declined offers to go elsewhere—often at a financial sacrifice. Such men emphasize, among the values they find at Pennsylvania, a sense of freedom in their own work. And the resulting loyalty among many of the staff is one of the University’s most valuable assets.

Much can be built on this loyalty in the future. It can be undermined, of course, if salary advances lag behind those in comparable institutions, or if the faculty is denied a real part in policy decisions. But present prospects are encouraging. The policies of President Harnwell’s administration have elicited from the faculties increasing evidences of moral support and good will.

15 Several men interviewed thought that their research freedom was limited by a chairman’s sense of values, but their number was quite small.