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Letter and Supplemental Material

Academic Senate
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June 6, 1972

TO:       Dr. Charles Edwards  
Chairman, Academic Senate  

FROM:    F. B. Belshe

As I mentioned to you in a recent telephone conversation, a number of Jewish students and faculty members have raised questions about the opening of school on September 18, 1972. This year that date is Yom Kippur, frequently indicated as the holiest day in the Jewish year.

As you may recall, the Academic Senate last fall approved the shortening of the registration period and the consequent opening of classes on Monday rather than on Friday as the tradition has been. Obviously at this time the calendar has been widely distributed in such publications as the graduate and undergraduate catalogs and in the class schedule bulletins. Any change of the opening day for fall classes will require a massive mailing and use of communication media to notify the students and faculty.

It does seem that some adjustment in the calendar or in our plans for September 18 is in order to accommodate those who would apparently be unable to attend classes on September 18. Two alternatives seem worthy of consideration:

1. Publicize the conflict on September 18 to students and faculty allowing those Jewish students and faculty to absent themselves from attendance on that day and asking all faculty members to cooperate with students who observe the religious holiday, providing to them any information and materials given out on the first day of classes.

2. Adjust the University calendar in one of several ways:
   a. Scheduling those classes which ordinarily would meet on Monday, September 18 to meet on Saturday, September 16.
b. Move registration to Wednesday and Thursday, September 13 and 14, instead of Thursday and Friday, September 14 and 15. Begin classes on Friday, September 15.

c. Postpone the first day of classes until Tuesday, September 19. I understand that the Senate at the University of Illinois in Urbana has recommended that classes there be postponed from September 18 to September 19.

(Any calendar change information would need to be widely disseminated and still would probably not reach all persons.)

We would appreciate the advice of the Academic Senate or its Executive Committee on this matter.
After meeting to review and discuss the Report of the Study Group on Instructional Innovation, the Academic Affairs Committee felt that it was in no position to make specific recommendations on it. The issues in the report are so fundamental, so disparate, so wide-ranging, and so crucial to the future of the University that the Committee felt that more time is needed for close and careful consideration. Furthermore, the Committee found that, probably due to the timing of the report's release right at the busiest time of the semester, the report has so far received very little reaction from faculty and students. The Committee would like to see extensive reaction from various interests throughout the university before formulating any final position on the recommendations of the report.

The discussion in the Committee, however, did bring out some important questions that require serious consideration and some sort of resolution before final action is taken on the Study Group's recommendations. These questions grouped themselves around the following issues.

I. Matters of definition and the general policy questions inherent in them.

a. Innovation. As a report on Instructional Innovation, the Study Group's document defines instruction, but it nowhere attempts to define innovation. This failure to define what is the central concept of the whole report leaves the basic thrust and import of the report unclear. One of the points, for example, that is left unclear is how this report will affect the work of teachers who are presently doing an outstanding job using more or less traditional techniques. Presumably innovation implies a departure from that which is current or traditional. But if so, is it the intent of the report that teachers who are now successful and effective in teaching their courses, and who are recognized as such by their students who so certify on their course evaluation forms, should be encouraged to abandon their successful methods for new ones that are untried and may prove a failure? And if they don't do this, are they then to be regarded as poor teachers lacking merit? If this is the intent of the report, it implies that neither our good faculty nor the students who acclaim them as such know enough to recognize a really good thing. Representatives of the Study Group assured the Committee that this was not the intent of the report, but that the report sought only to suggest procedures and conditions that would encourage effective teaching regardless of whether traditional or new methods of instruction are used. But if this is the case, one wonders whether the term "innovation" hasn't been evacuated of its proper meaning and whether the report wouldn't be more accurately titled "Report on Effective (or Good) Instruction" rather than "Report on Innovative Instruction."

Related to this matter is the worry about how the university's reward structure is to be tied in. If innovation is taken to mean the development of entirely and startlingly new programs or methods and if the university's reward system is arranged to reward innovation and penalize the lack thereof, one result will be that it is those faculty and those departments who are presently the best who are likely to suffer the most. These faculty and departments will then be faced with the
harsh choice of either abandoning effective and successful techniques and programs or accepting financial sacrifice for continuing to work with a proven thing.

One final matter related to the meaning of the term "innovation." The Academic Affairs Committee recognizes that in a world in which conditions and knowledge undergo rapid changes, change is an indispensable feature of any successful teaching effort that goes on over a period of time. Hence it is not adverse to the effort to provide direction and encouragement to bring about changes in the university which are educationally significant and productive. Nevertheless, it believes that it would be a mistake to think that is simply impossible for such changes to occur within an instructional framework that is broadly traditional in nature. In the opinion of the committee, therefore, it would be a mistake to define innovation in such a way as to imply that teachers cannot meet the new requirements of our time if they continue to work within broadly traditional moulds. A good teacher changes with the changing times, regardless of what method he uses. The implication, then, that anyone who continues to employ more or less traditional methods simply is not meeting the demands of the hour should, in the opinion of the Committee, be avoided.

b. Instruction. There was some unhappiness expressed in the Committee with the concept of instruction contained in the report. The objections concerned the strong behavioral emphasis in that concept and also the identification of one of the goals of instruction as the personal growth of the student. There is some strong sentiment that the only dimension of personal growth for which the university should assume responsibility is intellectual growth, and that other matters of personal growth and of behavior are the student's business. The suggestion that it should be "the function of instruction" in a state institution to help bring student behavior under some sort of control, as the report states on p. 3, seems to many to be repugnant to the ideal of individual freedom and choice.

2. Questions regarding the range of recommendations. The report contains a great many recommendations. They are disparate in nature and wide-ranging. Some of them would require for implementation policy changes that need Board approval and perhaps even changes of policy on the part of the Higher Board. A suggestion was made in the Committee that the recommendations be ordered in such a way as to show clearly what things could be implemented in the relatively near future if they were to be accepted as policy and what things would have to be left for longer range action.

3. Questions of Finance. Some of the suggestions of the Study Group, e.g. those involving greater individualization of instruction, greater variability and flexibility of program, etc., appear to be more costly than the programs now being run. The question, then, is whether the university can realistically expect to have the funds available for the implementation of this report.

4. Questions of mechanics. The same recommendations lead also to enormous problems of mechanics. For example, how are faculty loads to be calculated if faculty are extensively involved in individualized instruction, programs of variable credit, multi-disciplinary programs in co-operation with other faculty, etc.? These need to be worked out before the Study Group recommendations can be put into operation.
5. Questions regarding credit for students. The report seems to suggest that the credit-no credit option be expanded. The Committee has reservations about the advisability of this and strongly urges that before such a move is made the proposal be considered very carefully.

6. Question of administration. The Study Group report suggests that it might be desirable to organize General Education as a separate program with its own administrative leadership. Some objection was made to the apparent proliferation of administrators that is being recommended by the various group reports. Question was raised whether after all the reports are in we won't have just as large an administrative unit on campus as there was before the general reorganization that was designed ostensibly to slim down and to streamline administrative operation. A problem, then, is that some of the later task force reports seem to be working at cross-purposes with the Hubbard Report on the reorganization of the university.