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The Erosion of Professional Schools: The Right Blend in a Time of Decline

“Schools of Art, Education and Natural Resources to be reviewed!” read the headlines in *Michigan Daily*, soon to be followed by smaller but equally as serious headlines in the *Ann Arbor News*, *The Detroit Free Press* and, yes, even the *New York Times*. What followed was two years of agonizing effort by the students, faculty and administration of a major, Big Ten University to grapple with the perceptions, hopes and reality of a review that would leave in its wake a demoralized faculty and reduced enrollment. The School of Education, rated number one in the United States by at least one outside reviewer, was being challenged by the spectre of closure. Closure of a school of education in a university noted for having the first permanent chair, in 1879, devoted exclusively to the training of secondary school teachers and administrators; closure of school noted for having John Dewey so involved in teaching and research that he forgot and left the perambulator containing his baby in front of the Ann Arbor post office one sunny day; closure of a School of Education rated in 1977 as having the best undergraduate teacher education program and in 1983 the best graduate teacher preparation program. The fact of review sank in slowly for the faculty and students and is *still* sinking in. With relief, we can say that the recent reports of our demise have been greatly exaggerated. The fact is not that the School of Education is headed for closure but that the School of Education at The University of Michigan will take a 40% budget cut over the next five years.

I was asked to respond to the following questions at this conference. “Was and is the existence of our Faculty threatened?” “What were the elements of Faculty of Education which tend to encourage thinking of some sectors on the irrelevancy or non-necessity of the existence of Faculty of Education?” “What is the status of the Faculty in the University?” “What can be done?” Perhaps the experience at The University of Michigan can be used to help put these elements in perspective.

Surprisingly, the existence of Faculty of Education was reaffirmed at each step of the review process. That process consisted of review by a select team of colleagues representing all aspects of the campus community; a budget priority committee reporting directly to the provost; executive officers including president, provost and several vice presidents and finally the Regents of the University. At each step of a two year long review process the existence of the Faculty of Education was evaluated and assured even though the original charge for reviewing all three schools included the possibility of closure. If the School of Education was not to be closed, why was the School even under review? Many factors led to the decision to review. They included: inadequate enrollment, isolation, insulation, imitation, information and innovation. Each of these six “i” elements will be examined using the School of Education as a case study. In some you may detect that it was an unfounded perception; in others painfully well founded. I hope you will see similar perceptions at your schools and from these common perceptions infer that, yes, our Faculty is threatened, not with extinction but with change.

INADEQUATE ENROLLMENT. Perhaps the most difficult realization of a damaging perception was that of inadequate enrollment. Coming out of the years of plenty we had not considered

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the need to recruit students. Our feeling was that we were finally moving toward a student/faculty ratio similar to that of our colleagues elsewhere in the University and we would be able to use the adjusted enrollments to help us carry out more research. (A haunting cry that you will hear more of later in this paper . . . *MORE RESEARCH . . . MORE RESEARCH . . . More Research . . . more research.*) We realized too late that our enrollment pattern must not compare with the average of the University, but with other schools that have the highest student/faculty ratios. Only now are we committing significant resources to providing support to incoming students. Only now do we realize that, as other schools, we must compete with dollars as well as excellence. Only now are we committing faculty time to carry out recruitment. Engineering and law school experiences are helping us to understand that competition is as important in education as it is in industry and business, that we must be hard-nosed and go after a disproportionate share of top quality students if we are to change the perceptions of our colleagues across campus. Yes, this from a School that prided itself on having its best students compete successfully with the best from other schools within The University of Michigan. What, you should ask yourselves, about the worst of our students? Do they compare well with the worst of other schools in the University? We found we could no longer afford to enroll students who do not meet the top criterion of quality.

ISOLATION. Another perception we later realized was true was a perception by colleagues that the School of Education was isolated. Research centers and service units as well as instructional sections across campus had few faculty members from the School of Education. We had a tradition of not rewarding those faculty members who engaged in joint appointments or in assignments in research centers not within the School and which did not receive direct support from the School. Our service on doctoral committees of students across campus was low and faculty members from other unit often commented that the School of Education had few members on service committees across campus. We were confident, however, that the high commitment we had to school education in the field would be a valuable resource for the University, and that our own research, practically oriented would be well recognized by all. A review of our doctoral dissertations by the graduate school indicated that our best dissertations could be compared to the best anywhere in the University. Nonetheless, we had many dissertations that dealt with surveys and questionnaires which involved low-level or statistical analyses with limited samples of particular schools that allowed even more limited generalization. Further, our research was not coordinated — each faculty member, during the 70's, had developed a unique research agenda. While we had started a series of research collaboratives, they had not yet emerged to a point where concentrated effort by several faculty had reached the publishing stage. Small wonder the School of Education was viewed as isolated and fragmented. Notable exceptions to the isolation phenomenon occurred in the Center for the Study of Higher Education. Integrated with the University's administration, the Institute for Social Research, and other academic units on campus the Center was viewed as part of an integrated whole.

That isolation was an important element in the decision to review can be underscored by the fact that while the mission of the School of Education is the improvement of K-12 education through excellent teaching, research and service, the final review report recommended that the Center for the Study of Higher Education remain in the School of Education as an example of excellence.

INSULATION. It might be easy for you to wonder why we did not realize the isolation that was occurring. Part of the reason was our perception — a very real one — of insulation. Our work with schools, colleges and universities, strong national research grants with NSF, NIE, Down Chemical and others had the strong effect of encouraging us to believe that we were working in a highly,

visible manner. Our clients were pleased with the work we were doing. For example, we received three renewals of a state grant for the development of teaching competencies — the only institution in the state to have three consecutive grants renewed. The production of our work was directed toward our clients. We accredited and certified school districts through our Bureau of School Services. Our final reports to agencies and grantors were excellent, but throughout the process few of our professors, compared to others in the University, produced hard data-based research that could be found in refereed journals such as the *Journal of Research and Science Teaching*. An examination of faculty vitae showed a large preponderance of service-oriented production, research that had direct implications for our own curriculum or the products of our clients. Small wonder that we received high marks for having a top-notch undergraduate teacher education program in 1977. Perhaps such top marks were not all that valuable in a research-oriented university such as The University of Michigan. Yet we were insulated. The feedback we chose to hear indicated that our research and service were of top caliber.

IMITATION. Our research suffered from two problems that plague most educational research. First, our research techniques are patterned after those techniques in other disciplines. Often, we select an excellent and appropriate research method but fail to carry it out with the rigor that specialists in other fields use. Thus, on examination, our work appears to be a pale imitation of the research in other areas. We must become diligent and make sure that when we may use new techniques, we apply them with the rigor of our colleagues across campus. Second, we were bothered by the result of education not being a discipline. That is, that we in education have not accumulated a body of theory that can be used to test new practice. We have not been able to show that with years of effort the professionals we train and are in the field have techniques that are better than the folk myths of teaching. We must start to be able to answer the questions that will move the education profession forward and not appear to be a collection of interesting research findings that have little chance of improving K-12 education.

INFORMATION. Coupled with the kind of research reporting we were doing in the School of Education, we developed what I believe to be an information gap. That is, while our research was broadly based — research we could use to expand our ideas and generalize to a wider population — we often neglected to make the best presentation of that research to our colleagues across campus. One notable exception was a research conference sponsored by the School of Education with faculty members from the School of Education presenting results of their research projects. So successful was the conference that the Division of Research Administration of the University decided to publish a special an issue of “Research News” including the coordinated research efforts of our faculty. This edition entitled, “Bringing Women to Science,” featured School of Education faculty members who had coordinated research projects. That issue of *Research News* has enjoyed the greatest demand of all those published in the last five years. We believe it is no coincidence that the final review report indicated that science and mathematics education should remain in the School and be emphasized even more.

INNOVATION. By now the pattern should be clear. We were able to use the review reports and recommendations of the Regents on the reduction of the School of Education as a way of identifying the perceptions of our colleagues on how faculties of education are viewed. For example, we realized, after analyzing the review documents that our colleagues and the administration valued innovation in the School of Education. Our innovative program in Education and Psychology, which we knew had problems, was praised in the review document. We knew that innovation was prized. Therefore, we have tried to develop a School of Education, that while

smaller, is innovative. We have responded to the review document by accepting the demanded 40% budget cut, but by doing so we have reduced programs drastically. Where 80 professors were once involved in thirteen programs (approximately six professors per program), we now have approximately 45 professors in four programs (approximately 11 professors per program). The four programs are:

Curriculum and Teaching;
Educational Foundations, Policy and Analysis;
Higher, and Adult Continuing Education;
Speech and Language Pathology.

We have decided that we cannot be all things to all people and have chosen carefully on the basis of knowledge of the field and, just as important, on the basis of the perceptions of our colleagues, those programs which we believe can be excellent. We have incorporated three research and outreach centers to coordinate our research efforts, to integrate those research efforts with our curricular programs and to cross the boundaries of the University. They are:

The Center for Research on Learning in the Schools;
The Center for the Study of Higher and Postsecondary Education;
The Bureau for School Improvement and Standards.

These latter two research and outreach centers build on the excellent research efforts of the present Center for the Study of Higher Education and The Bureau of School Services. In developing these curriculum and research areas, we realize that we must maintain the innovative programs we now have and develop new ones for the future. We must get smaller and better. We must maintain our balance of research and service.

What has been the response of the center administration to our plans? I wish I could say that the expanded role of assistance to K-12 education by the University was the result of our clear and lucid plans for a brilliant School of Education. While that may be true, it certainly did not hurt to have a national crisis identified in education and an enlightened University president, Harold Shapiro, who recognized that if there are problems in faculties of education they are university-wide problems. He also recognized that the basis of strength in a university lies in the excellence of the education students receive prior to their university experience, and that a university must be committed to assist with the excellence of the K-12 education.

Now to answer the direct questions posed: "Was and is the existence of our Faculty threatened?"

From the experience at The University of Michigan we think not.
While our existence was not removed we certainly will change.

"What were the elements of Faculty of Education which tend to encourage thinking of some sectors on the irrelevancy or non-necessity of the existence of Faculty of Education?"

The elements of a Faculty of Education which tend to encourage others to believe that education is irrelevant are the four "i's" of isolation, insulation, imitation and inadequate enrollment. Elements that foster relevance are the three "i's" of information, innovation and increased enrollments.

"What can be done?"

We must maintain a balance of research, teaching and service. If we carry out action-oriented research firmly committed to solving real problems in the field, (and I am convinced that we must) we must make sure that such research is firmly grounded in theory and can be used to test models

and paradigms. We must make certain that the results of our research reach three audiences: our clients in the field, through improved educational practices; our colleagues in the profession, through research reports in respected journals; and our administration, through a commitment to demonstrating our ability to balance excellent teaching, research and service.

“What is the status of the Faculty in the University?”

That question must be addressed with a final “i” involvement. If we are perceived as having less ability than our colleagues, let us involve them and improve our skills. If we are perceived as being too service oriented, let us involve our colleagues in the challenge of the improvement of education in the real world. For it is through such involvement that we can improve the status of the education faculty in all universities.