

'Compress Learning,' Jones Warns

(Editor's Note: This is the text of Jenkin Lloyd Jones' address at the Century Study Forecast Conference Thursday night.)

President Rudder has asked me to give my estimate of the proper function of this great American college 15 years hence. How should it perform its duty in what, to borrow the grandfather of all cliches, we call a fast-changing world?

There are a few big IFs, of course. In the next 15 years we are almost certain to collide in a climactic struggle with the rampant forces of international communism. I do not anticipate that humankind will be wiped off the face of the earth, although the present population problem may be solved in the crudest and most stupid manner. But in the event our enemies should win, the function of this institution and all others like it in this country will bear little relation to their present aims.

For in that case, while such colleges as this might pursue and even intensify the job of producing a technically-skilled elite, the search for abstract truth would most certainly end. Under the watchful eye of Big Brother the job would then be to turn the young student into a useful but docile servant of the super-state, welded psychologically to a pre-fabricated philosophy, and adequately brainwashed so that any serious questioning of the omniscience of his leaders will never be expressed.

This is not exactly what any of us have in mind for A&M of 1976. It is what, I hope, we will resist and resist successfully. But the present stalemate will not continue very long. Within 15 years the areas of free inquiry and free expression will have either vanished in this world, or they will be substantially more widespread than they are today. It is only with the latter assumption that there would be any sense in my making any remarks at all about how A&M might better serve her future students.

So, assuming that government of the people, by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth, and that the march of scientific and technical discoveries remains in as close or closer

order than it is today, how should your college of 1976 differ from your college of today?

I think it should do one thing above all. I think it should learn to compress learning.

I think if we don't develop methods of compressing learning we will fall farther and farther behind in the job of turning out with bachelor's degrees students who will not only be immediately useful in an increasingly specialized society, but who will also have the philosophical background that will keep that society free.

I was impressed with the letter I received from your president concerning this speech. He was obviously worried, as are all people who have rashly invited an unknown speaker, about how to keep the orator on the rails. So he slyly slipped in a suggested outline for my speech. This I will pay no attention to. But he ended with one glorious sentence.

"We would further ask," he said, "that you emphasize the requirements in terms of American citizenship which will confront these graduates."

This would be a happier and sounder nation if more presidents of distinguished technical and scientific schools were more concerned over the citizenship of their products.

For, as science has become more difficult, scientific educations have become more intensive and time-consuming. And harried students, anxious to get on the pension escalator of General Electric, DuPont and Texaco, have shown increased impatience at such so-called time-wasting courses as history, philosophy, political science—yes, and even English.

Thus, along with the man in the gray flannel suit, and the organization man, we have become increasingly aware of the lop-sided man. He is the scientific whiz who doesn't have the faintest idea of the anatomy of free institutions. He is the human calculator who has no sense of history. He is the peculiar phenomenon who worships cold logic in the laboratory, but who remains a sucker for the most outrageous brands of economic and political snake-oil.

Educated boobery is far more dangerous to a republic than illiterate boobery. For the illiterate

is usually a little humble. But not the Ph.D. Therefore, one of the most exacting tasks that this institution and others must face is this: How do you intensify a scientific or technical education and at the same time broaden it with the humanities? I think it can be done.

It can be done by perfecting techniques for pouring more information and more skills into young human beings in less time than ever before. Many of these techniques are already well-proven. Others are still in the laboratory. The success of our educational system in the years coming on will be measured by how quickly we can put new and more effective teaching methods into general use.

We must begin by re-stating an un-arguable proposition. Human minds differ in two important respects: capacity to learn and ambition to learn. Yet immense damage has been done to American teaching by the zany theory preached by the progressive educators that these differences must not be admitted.

We have seen the wreckage of school systems based on togetherness. We have seen the erosion of ambition caused by the principle that everybody passes. We have seen the devastating effect of the hypocrisy that gives the kid with little mental capacity good grades for generally wrong answers on the theory that this will spare him from the trauma of failure. Even the dumb kids were rarely fooled and the bright ones decided that sloppy work must be socially acceptable.

It is high time that we stopped letting the dim-bulbs and the goof-offs slow the able to a stroll. We will have to go to multiple track systems in our public schools. We will always owe it to the slow to give them the best training they can or wish to absorb. In any multi-track system we must have plenty of switches and cross-overs so that the late starters or the narrowly-gifted are given the opportunity to shine when and where they can.

But we must apply spurs to the quick. We must give incentives to superior young minds. We must give challenge to those who can respond to challenge. This is what our enemies are doing. In the

Russian school yards the youngsters didn't show me their yo-yos. They rushed up to show me their medals. We are not long for this race if we cling to the easy old standards.

And, believe me, we cling. My youngsters in high school got their language training just about as I got it. I could detect in text or method little difference from the manner in which I spent three years not learning French. And they spent three years not learning Spanish.

At the end of approximately 500 hours of instruction, plus homework, neither they nor I could even remotely handle a living language as a living language. And I think we all made a reasonable try.

Yet during the war I watched the armed services, desperate for Japanese interpreters, turn out skilled journeymen in 90 days. Of course, the training was intensive. Every audio and visual device was used. The students lived with the language. There were no girls to talk to in the corridors, no pep meetings to attend, no football games. But the results were tremendous.

We are low on the inspiration factor. In Oklahoma last year the majority of young graduates of teachers colleges who decided to go into teaching school stood in the lower half of their graduating classes. This may be an indictment of our economic system. Private industry was siphoning off the ablest of our potential teachers for its own profit, and thus, in effect, was eating the seed corn. I don't know how this can be prevented short of raising teachers' salaries above the level that the communities will support. But modern technology should permit us to give less gifted teachers immense and potent aids.

Here is the young lady who has no sense of poetry—who reads it miserably—who would, if left to her own devices dry up any inherent love of poetry among her pupils. Have you been in her classroom? I have. The flat monotone. The ludicrous efforts at dramatics that brings yaks to a rendition of "The Raven" or "The Bells."

Well, we have tapes. We have Frost reading Frost, and Sandburg reading Sandburg, and Lindsay reading Lindsay. We have at our

disposal the finest actors who could recite poetry with impact and thrill. In half a semester we could sell English poetry instead of spending a year or more killing it. One should only measure time in education by results. Pages from the calendar don't educate. Only that which draws a response educates. Poor teaching methods produce yawning classes. And yawning classes are wasting time.

All over Texas and Oklahoma and the other 50 states we have starving little high schools, jealously protected from overdue consolidation by the pressure of local merchants, ensconced principals, and those who enjoy the football and basketball games. And each has a science course.

You can see it now. The gloomy basement laboratory. Three busan burners and a rack of bland acids and bases. The dusty plaster models of brachiopods on the shelf and the cluttered samples of bauxite, hematite and fool's gold. Oh, yes, and taught by a young man who doubles as the football coach and who had damn well better win most of his games or there'll be another science teacher next year.

This, in the rushing atomic age! And yet even this harried, under-equipped and under-trained young man could do a pretty fair job if he could flash on the screen a motion picture of a brilliant university lecturer in a splendidly-equipped laboratory going through the basic experiments with plenty of animated diagrams, and finally showing, by pictures of our major industries, their application to our modern life.

These devices have been at our disposal ever since talking motion pictures began 34 years ago. In time of war when the survival of the nation depends on making navigators out of farm boys and gunners out of bank clerks we use them with immense effectiveness. When will we make a really serious effort to start putting them into our schools? For, gentlemen, we are at war now.

Finally, there is the English language. It is a good, serviceable language. It is our only method of communication. I don't have to tell the faculty of this college or any other college how miserably unacquainted with the English language most of their incoming freshmen are. You know too well. You know what a tiny percentage of your classes can write succinct, logical, properly-spelled and prop-

erly-punctuated sentences, laced with an adequate number of polysyllabic or Latin-root words. Well, there a lot of factors at fault. It's hard to expect much from a generation that, instead of reading Dickens or even Steven- (See SPEECH on Page 4)

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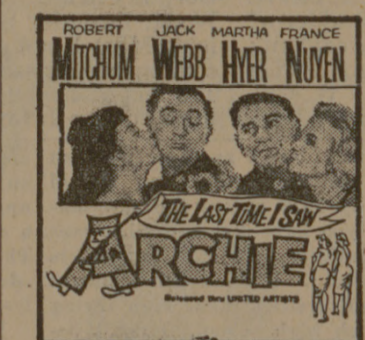
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