

## What the Ford Foundation Could Do for Higher Education

The relative standard of living of scientists and scholars has dropped in the last ten years in America to a dangerously low point. Previously a young man took a calculated risk upon entering into academic life; he knew that the odds were heavily against his being successful in ultimately obtaining a well-paid professorship, but at least he had a chance; and if successful he could count on a standard of living comparable to that of his family and friends. This no longer holds true today.

The fact that the average college professor earns about as much as the average plumber need not disturb us very much. A large fraction of the activity of the colleges and universities is devoted to routine teaching, and the large majority of the professors will of necessity have to be men who are willing to engage in this routine which is not qualitatively different from work on plumbing or carpentering. (I am not sure that this is correct, but it is the best consolation I can offer in the face of the existing situation which cannot be easily remedied.)

There is one aspect of the existing situation, however, which is very detrimental to higher education and requires action. This aspect is the following:

As it becomes more and more apparent to a young man that even if he is successful, he cannot obtain a successful standard of living as a member of a university faculty, many spirited young men who have resourcefulness, imagination, and adventurousness will keep away from a university career as a profession. The number of men affected may be quite small, yet the effect of this selection involved on the character of our universities will be very marked. The faculties of our universities and colleges will become gray and drab due to the fact that not a single member will be truly outstanding in any field of scientific or scholarly activity.

There is quite a large number of universities for which this is true today. They are not bad schools, but they are suffering from the uniform mediocrity of their faculty.

This situation could be remedied as follows:

First one would create a small Advisery Group of distinguished scientists and scholars of national and international standing. Then upon the advice of this group, the Foundation could offer to a number of different universities help by creating for a number of scientists and scholars selected by the Advisery Group Very Distinguished Professorships at salaries between \$15,000 to \$20,000 per year. The Foundation would pay half of these salaries; the other half would have to be paid by the university to which the ~~men~~ is attached. At no instance should the Foundation support more than twenty Very Distinguished Professors at any one university.

The creation of these "professorships" all over the country could bring about a great change in a number of universities which are today suffering from mediocrity. Some of these universities are by and large not bad institutions; the presense of a few distinguished men in their faculty would make all the difference in the world. Their presense would be an inspiration to the student body in general, and the administration of the university, if it is bent on improving the institution, would find it possible to lean heavily on these distinguished men whose position would be greatly strengthened locally by having received national recognition.

Of the private universities, Harvard, Chicago, Columbia, Yale, Princeton, Johns Hopkins, M.I.T., and Cal. Tech. ought to be eligible; and of the state universities Washington, Michigan, Illinois, Colorado, Wisconsin, California, Indiana, and perhaps some others, bringing up the total of eligible universities to perhaps twenty. Assuming that twenty universities with an average of fifteen Very Distinguished Professors each were involved, the total annual expenditure incurred by the Foundation would amount to between \$2,250,000 and \$3,000,000.

There are many state universities where it is impossible to find, of course, any where near fifteen professors on whom one would confer the status of a "Very

Distinguished Professor. Nevertheless these universities would equally benefit because any Very Distinguished Professor at any university would be free to accept a position at any of the eligible universities without losing his status as a Very Distinguished Professor. In this way, universities who could not afford to create highly paid professorships by paying up half the salary of a Very Distinguished Professor could acquire outstanding men serving at other universities who for some reason or other might prefer to make a change, even though no financial inducement for change could be involved.