

# UC Office of the President

## Working with University Constituencies, Within and Without

### Title

“Universities in Our Age: Strategies for Change,” Inaugural Address, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/57s6541p>

### Author

Herd, Christina

### Publication Date

1973-11-01

### Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

UNIVERSITIES  
IN OUR AGE:  
STRATEGIES  
FOR CHANGE

Inaugural address by  
President David P. Gardner

Monday, November 19, 1973

Governor Rampton, Chairman Holbrook, Chairman Clyde, Commissioner Durham, distinguished guests, members of the faculty, students, alumni, ladies and gentlemen — friends all of this university whose graduates for over one hundred and twenty years have contributed to the upbuilding of our state and to the strengthening of our nation, whose faculty has brought honor to Utah and knowledge to her young, and whose presence in this beautiful valley has so enriched our lives and enlarged our understanding.

We celebrate today more the accomplishments of a major American university than the inauguration of her tenth president whose privilege and honor it is to serve and minister to her needs.

My address today is the fourth and final in a series begun a fortnight ago by Yale University's distinguished professor of philosophy, Brand Blanshard, on the role of universities in the contemporary world. I have learned much from the lectures of our eminent visitors; I do earnestly hope that my brief remarks this morning will be deserving of your presence, worthy of my office, and in the university's service.

"Our *life*," Emerson once said, "is not so much threatened as our *perception*." In an age not unlike our own in its introspection, he asked, "Where do we find ourselves?"; and he answered, "In a series of which we

do not know the extremes . . . we wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight . . . all things swim and glitter."

Emerson sought perspective, as do we, as does every generation standing on that stairway of time. So too does the American university which is only now recovering from the "alarming disintegration of consensus about purpose" which Lord Eric Ashby described in 1971. *Without* perspective, *conceptual* perspective, perception is threatened, and even higher learning may be little more than toying with the shards of the past and the broken fragments of the present. *With* perspective, we can with these same shards and fragments, shape visions. How, then, may we understand the modern American university, to interpret its past and chart its future?

In the old Thomas Library, now the Utah Museum of Natural History, one will find the following quotation from Milton inscribed in marble: "What in me is dark, illumine, what is low raise and support." Thus expressed is the university's essential purpose, starkly, beautifully simple, yet enduring and fixed as the marble in which it is inscribed. It is a motto, a means, an end, inclusive of our essence, tarnished in practice, but elevating in concept.

My view of the university's mission is avowedly traditional. I believe that the function of the university is to seek and transmit knowledge and to train students in the processes whereby truth may be made known. I believe that ideas are to be tested in the marketplace, not suppressed, and that truth can be relied upon to combat error. I believe that our obligation in the university is to assure the conditions under which learning will occur, where a respect for others and a tolerance of competing ideas can be developed and issues examined with a clear edge given to intellect rather than to passion. I believe that the underlying values of academic life include what Martin Trow has called "patient inquiry, the sequential development of ideas, the emphasis on reasonable discussion and criticism, (and) the continued reference to evidence."

"There is only one good, namely knowledge and one evil, namely ignorance." So reads another inscription on this campus — this one on Kingsbury Hall. But "knowledge without responsibility is more dangerous," as Bruce Clark reminds us. Events of the last year at the heart of our nation's public service have brought home the chilling truth of Theodore Roosevelt's words: "To educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society." And one may also ask "when was public virtue to be found when private was not?"

The present malaise afflicting America will lift in time because of the essential strength of her institutions, her form of government and the bed rock ability of her people to discern right from wrong. But I am uneasy with the knowledge that the corruption in government about which we read daily is mostly perpetrated by university graduates, alumni of the nation's most eminent institutions; and it is no answer to be reminded that those fighting such scandal are graduates as well.

"What in me is dark, illumine, what is low raise and support." Knowledge and truth illumine, but what raises and supports? Knowledge and truth. But do not honesty, compassion, charity, humility, respect, tolerance, courage, generosity, virtue and love also raise and support? And can we not foster these attributes in our relations one with another, in and out of the classroom, and in ourselves, not merely to lift the level of civility and taste on the campus but to impart a sense of moral responsibility to those who come here to study and to learn and to prepare for their place in our society? For, to quote William Penn, "If men be good, government cannot be bad"; and our universities cannot avoid their responsibilities in the matter without in the end compromising their own souls.

Universities in their long history have in fact been more responsive to both real and

ideal demands than their critics in the sixties would have had us believe. Universities are today and always have been in transition, not so much with respect to their underlying purposes as with respect to those whom they serve, when, where and how they serve them and under what conditions.

Universities are, in fact, like living organisms. As in all living organisms, change is ongoing, itself a kind of constant, and it proceeds in the main as steadily and quietly as cellular division, though sometimes very visibly, like teenagers suddenly grown out of their sleeves. The university's metabolism is the sum of those social forces and those processes of discussion and decision-making by which change, whether gradual or dramatic, takes place, and which maintain the university and the society which nurtures it in healthy symbiosis. Continuity is as important as change. We forget that at our peril. Deliberate and considered response to crisis keeps the fever down while searching for the cure. Overnight creation of programs to meet shrill popular demands may prove to be quack prescriptions, hazardous to the health of both the institution and society.

Some of the recent turbulence in academia has been superficial, like street traffic, and the response frenetic and faddish, no more fundamental than the yearly changes in new car models. But there have been

seismographic shocks, registering deep in the interiors of university governance, funding and purpose. The curriculum and the relations among faculty, students and the community have been rudely shaken.

Universities in the United States departed fundamentally from their British and continental models and adapted, especially in the nineteenth century, to democratic conditions. They proved in a remarkable way that practical and humane learning could be joined, that excellence need not be sacrificed to numbers, at least those numbers the colleges and universities then faced. The adoption of the elective system in undergraduate education and the massive infusion of the discipline of the German seminar in graduate work were momentous. The American university has in turn inspired its academic progenitors abroad, who are in this century broadening their own base of higher education in two directions: in serving larger numbers and in relating learning to everyday life.

In the United States the combination worked well, far into our own century. By the 1950's however, before the student unrest of the 1960's, there were signs that the system was beginning to unravel. Numbers and needs had outrun our readiness to deal with them. The shortcoming was not only in our material resources. The shortcoming was in our imagination. Our perceptions

were faulty. We had locked ourselves into familiar concepts of what colleges and universities should be and the schedules and procedures they should follow. Our system, though still young when measured against its European heritage, was prematurely arthritic, stiff in the joints.

Change had to come, whether by *persuasion*, by *subversion*, by *evasion*, or by *external decision*, the four ways Clark Kerr enumerates by which change may come to and in the university. Each of these means has consequences for the ends sought, and we shall have to take account of them as we consider the specific needs of our time and possible strategies for meeting them. But first something about the ends themselves, the purposes we conceive higher education to serve under today's greatly broadened mandate.

The most searching questions of our time touch, not only on the social, economic and political structure, our energy and environment, but upon life itself, as we contemplate the awesome possibilities of a conditioned or chemically altered man. The moral spectres we face, such as the question of genetic control, could not have been imagined a generation ago. Future shock is present fact.

The implication for the university is that both individual and social responsibility and freedom are entangled as never before. In a complex world, where fact and value shift.

relations with flashing swiftness, we urgently require nothing short of *lifelong education*, what the Europeans call *recurrent education*. We need what will enable us to expand the self in an endless process of self-realization as opposed to what contracts it.

Man has been called "pre-eminently an innovating creature," free, as Christian Bay maintains, "to the extent that he has the *capacity*, the *opportunity*, and the *incentive* to give expression to what is in him and to develop his potentialities." Man reaching for the tree of life by way of the tree of knowledge is an old picture but newly framed.

Capacity, opportunity, incentive. The universities can assist in providing all three conditions of freedom and in educating us into what we are to be free *for*. Such a hope for the university depends on no political or religious creed; all faiths and persuasions may live at peace with it, because it emphasizes pluralism.

There should be room on every campus for any school of thought, for any program that multiplies our options and enlarges our capacity to exercise them. Believer or agnostic, behaviorist, idealist, pragmatist, existentialist — whatever our persuasion (except cynicism) — we must continue, as the best minds of every age have always done, to grapple with the nature of man, to take his measure, and make possible an

education that enables that measure to be fulfilled.

To translate that principle into programs will involve some practicalities. Change in many instances is growth in disguise and is already underway, needing only continuing support and encouragement. Some change will have to be initiated.

American higher education is presently subject to a number of stimuli which are markedly influencing the educational process. We must be flexible, open to alternatives.

It seems quite likely that the uncritical expansion of our institutions of higher education along established and familiar lines is, for the most part, a thing of the past. "Hardly anywhere," as Roy Niblett has observed, "is it generally believed that the recipe for meeting the next twenty years is to continue to do, only better, what has been done in the last twenty." The more likely prospect is that higher education in this decade and the next can be expected to assimilate or at least accommodate a variety of alternative, experimental and unconventional educational forms and structures. This will be so for a number of reasons:

1. The unrelieved push for greater access to higher education and more equal educational opportunity.

The most evident and consistent pressure for expansion in recent years has come from the poor, the educationally disadvantaged and ethnic minorities, primarily black, brown and American Indian, for whom higher education until now has not been a real option; and from the federal government, politically attuned to the demand and generally supportive of such educational aspirations and stirrings.

2. The desire of government to reduce the unit costs of instruction in America's colleges and universities.

These pressures have translated into institutional budgets inadequate to maintain, much less to strengthen, existing programs and practices or to permit growth within the conventional context. It should be evident that under present conditions any significant expansion of the system along familiar lines must anticipate some wearing away of standards and capability.

3. *The unmistakable preference of some full-time students to mix part-time study with work, and the growing desire of the fully employed to combine work on the job or at home with periodic full-time or part-time study.* Pressure on the higher learning system to expand and accommodate the educational needs of adult students wishing to study part-time, and the desire of some full-time students of college age to opt for part-time study is a relatively new phenome-

non but one quite likely, in the long run, to effect significant changes in the form and structure of American higher education. We must clear away the assumption, as Lord Ashby has put it, "that full-time education should be digested all in one gulp, from age five to age twenty-two"; and

4. *The irresistible influence of communication technology on the typical time and space requirements of the conventional learning process — what a recent Carnegie Commission Report calls the "first great technological revolution in five centuries."*

Of the revolutions taking place in our time, one of the most significant and exciting, from the viewpoint of educators, must surely be the one in telecommunications and educational technology.

Future generations of students will surely be less campus bound than have been those of the past, while at the same time the campus will become an even more central link between the present condition of society and the future. By the turn of the century, technology in various forms may well have transformed the campus from a center of learning into a learning center — one which houses a highly mobile population of students and scholars, a small resident population for study primarily at the most advance levels, a panoply of laboratories for residential research and an integrated network of libraries, computers, television and

other teaching resources designed as much for residential as for off-campus study and research; in short, a network of associations, arrangements and resources that will permit the student to have the university or college with him at home, at work and at his leisure throughout his lifetime.

Our age in retrospect may be remembered as an ambivalent one, an age of anxiety and equally an age of aspiration. History is sometimes a form of prophecy, and I close with an entry from the annals in J. R. Green's *Short History of the English People*. The year is 1648, more than 300 years ago. In that year we are in the midst of the Puritan revolution, of civil war in England, and we read of the outbreak of the Royalist revolt in February, the revolt of The Fleet and of Kent in May, of the campaigns of Fairfax and Cromwell in Essex and Wales in June and July, of the Battle of Preston and the surrender of Colchester in August, and of Pride's purge in December. And at the end of a gloomy, bloody, recital, we come to this entry in italics: *Royal Society begins at Oxford.*

In the midst of all that is transitory in our age, we may yet discern something permanent, something that will outshine and outlast all the violence in contemporary struggles for power. Not dominion over other lives and lands but over ourselves through learning. God willing, at the University of

Utah, in the years ahead, in the midst of these worst and best of times, we may do something later chroniclers will memorialize in italics.

And to you students of the university, I address the final paragraph of my remarks this morning. One of this century's great university presidents was Benjamin Ide Wheeler, president of the University of California from 1900-1918. In his first speech as president, Dr. Wheeler spoke words that describe my own feelings about a university and I share them with you this morning:

It does a man good to love noble things, to attach his life to noble allegiances. It is a good thing to love the church, it is a good thing to love the state, it is a good thing to love one's home, it is a good thing to be loyal to one's father and mother, and after the same sort it is good to be loyal to the university, which stands in life for the purest things and the cleanest, loftiest ideals. Cheer for her, it will do your lungs good. Love her; it will do your heart and life good.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you.