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David P. Gardner, Ph.D.

Fourth Annual Lecturer
Wednesday, October 11, 2000

**The Governance and Management of
American Universities:**
*Changing Times, Changing Students, Changing
Purposes*

Rocco, thank you kindly for that very warm and overly generous set of remarks regarding my background, having clearly omitted other interesting aspects of it.

I have always found that the University of Utah knows how to keep you quite humble. I have told this story more than once; R.J. and Marilyn Snow will certainly know it, as will others. I had only been here about three weeks in August of 1973, when Lillian Ence, known to many of you, as Jim Fletcher's and Alfred Emery's secretary, informed me that one of my responsibilities was to visit the football team during fall practice. I said, "fine, get me the program and I will read it over and review it, and then visit the team." I did so within a week or two. I had done my homework, and I went up to the field where the team was practicing. I observed from the sidelines for a period of time, becoming increasingly apprehensive about the upcoming season. I introduced myself to the coach. He whistled in the team, and the first young man in, who was much faster than anybody else (he later played for the Green Bay Packers), was Steve Odom. Some of you may remember him. He and I were just standing

there looking at one another, but I recognized him from my homework. I said, "good morning, you are Steve Odom, aren't you?" "Well yes," he said. And I said, "And you are a graduate of Berkeley High School." That's why I remembered him. And he said, "Well yes." And I said, "Great. So am I!" And he said, "Oh. Well, who the hell are you?" Where was Rocco to introduce me when I needed him in 1973?

It is very nice to see so many friends out here, so many friends of Rocco's, Marion's and their family. I do hope that my remarks today will be worthy of your attendance, and I look forward to the conversation following these more prepared remarks. I am happy to be here. The University of Utah is a very special place, a wonderful place, and it enjoys a superb reputation around the country. I have always been proud of being able to serve here for ten years.

This is a wonderful forum. I am following three splendid forum lecturers. The title of my remarks, *The Governance and Management of American Universities: Changing Times, Changing Students, Changing Purposes*, appears to fit the objectives of the forum.

Our universities are in a time of marked transition. I know that may sound somewhat commonplace, but I really believe it to be true. This transition is comparable in scale and significance to that of the late 19th Century when the modern American university was formed by the convergence of three broad forces: the British undergraduate liberal arts tradition; the German university with its emphasis on graduate studies, research, and empiricism; and the American commitment to a broadened and more applied curriculum, a more diverse student body, and public service, embodied in the Morrill Act of 1862 at the federal level. Thus, one hundred years ago, we were coming out of a major 25-35 year transitional period in American higher education.

What are today's issues? And what implications do they carry for our nation's institutions of higher learning? These questions are not easily answered in

the abstract. Nor can the answers be overly generalized, owing to the diverse nature of American higher education, a brief profile of which is worth recalling.

In sharp contrast to most of the rest of the world, American higher education is not so much a system as a collection of roughly 3,600 colleges and universities enrolling more than 10 million full-time students and over 5 million part-time students. These institutions, founded mostly in response to changing conditions and distinctive local needs, are unusually diverse. There are medium size and large research universities (such as the University of Utah), small liberal arts colleges (such as Westminster), church-affiliated institutions (such as BYU), vocational schools, professional schools (some aligned with the university and others not), two-year community colleges, some publicly supported, others privately supported, some supported both publicly and privately. Their missions, while overlapping, are as distinguishable as their respective cultures and traditions.

It is hard to generalize about this enterprise. Ours is an extremely large, highly diverse patchwork of institutions, with a strong tradition of local control and individual initiative. They differ greatly in quality, in character and purpose, in size and complexity, in fiscal stability, in patterns of funding, and in the profiles of their students and faculty. It is a non-system that by custom and public expectation is dedicated to the principle of broad student access and to the idea that higher education serves not only the private needs of students, but also the larger goals of the nation. It serves the differing needs of students in our highly pluralistic, large-scale, mobile, decentralized and geographically dispersed society uncommonly well. No one could ever have planned it; it simply grew with the country. Keeping in mind the difficulty of generalizing about higher education, please bear with me as I now do so.

In my view, we are living in a time of acute modernity. What do I mean by that?: the rise of urbanization, the mass dislocation and migration of peoples, the specialization of knowledge, the industrialization

of labor, the technological revolution and modern science, leading to now familiar systems of universal and instantaneous communications of one kind or another and international travel; the instantaneous movement of capital; the globalization of business; the new economy and the re-invigoration of the old one; the transformation of employment and what it means to have a job; the spread of American pop culture; and the extension of the English language across the world.

These, and related forces and pressures, carry profound implications for our world and, of course, for our country. They also implicate our colleges and universities directly and in fundamental ways. For example, they influence the nature and character of what is taught (the curriculum), the selection of those who comprise the student body (who gets in and who doesn't), the pedagogy (the means of teaching), the criteria for the appointment and advancement of faculty members (who at the very core are the university), and the choice of those who lead our institutions of higher learning, such as Bernie Machen.

So the forces of modernity are mainly centrifugal (that is, pulling apart) rather than centripetal (coming together) in their effect: they tend to subordinate the more human aspects of daily life to the more instrumental, mechanistic, and bureaucratic ones. They seem to cultivate an especially debilitating form of moral relativism in people's lives and an insidious cultural nihilism in the larger society. They tend to decouple the beliefs and actions of individuals and groups from the consequences such beliefs and actions carry for others—they are too remote, too distant to carry the responsibility for what, in fact, happens as a result of one's actions, thus shrinking one's sense of individual compassion, humaneness, and personal responsibility. They appear to supplant the more transcendent, even spiritual, principles and values with the more common and utilitarian ones, and they tend to spread a generalized sense of indifference, masquerading as tolerance, towards acts and utterances that fundamentally undermine the self-restraint, good will, generosity of means and spirit,

and common sense that are such vital aspects of a civil society, especially in a diverse and pluralistic America.

Does this overstate the problem? I think not. In any event it surely does not understate it. For example, one need only to reflect upon the myriad of social problems our own nation confronts, many of which derive from these previously referred to macro forces: the decline and dispersal of our families; the rise of big government and the concomitant shrinkage in our private lives, endeavors, and impulses; the bureaucratization of our institutions; the centralization of governmental power and authority; the level of crime and the rise of the underclass; the widespread use of drugs; the condition of our schools; the debasement of our literature, language, and public entertainment; the ordinariness of the media; the trivializing of our public life and political discourse; the coarsening of relations among the races; and the mean spiritedness so often experienced in daily life (taking, for example, a quick ride on the freeway).

There is widespread belief that as a society we have lost our grip, that the familiar and steady moorings no longer secure the ship of state; that we are morally at sea, rudderless, and, thus, unclear about our destination, confused about our values, unconfident about our priorities, unsure of ourselves and others. We feel threatened. Ours is a diminished spirit struggling for meaning, seeking context, and troubled even in this time of nearly unprecedented prosperity.

People hold an array of perceptions and criticisms of our colleges and universities as well, and neither they nor the criticisms will simply disappear; for example, racial preferences, "unfair admissions policies," faculty teaching loads, an excessive and overcompensated bureaucracy, and so forth. These are not my allegations. I am observing the criticisms that are offered by others. I might share some of them, but I am merely making clear what others are saying. It is true, of course, that the perceptions and criticisms are not always fair or accurate. They are often exaggerated or over-generalized and often uninformed and

inconsistent. Moreover, our colleges, universities, and schools are finding solutions to many of these problems more often than is recognized. Finally, each of these institutions is not afflicted with all of these problems and may, in individual instances, not be contending with any significant number of them.

My own view, however salient as the criticisms to which I refer may be, is that the critics have missed the real target. I do not mean that these criticisms are without merit, that these issues are not real, or that they do not require serious study and corrective action by those in positions of responsibility. I do mean, however, that the sources of the public's disquietude about our colleges, universities, and schools arise less from an objective appraisal of their more publicized and popularized shortcomings than from an unarticulated apprehension about modern life in general that looks mostly, in vain, to the colleges and universities for explanation, discernment, insight and acknowledgement. By focusing mistakenly on the more ephemeral or popularized issues of the hour, the critics fail to see that the most profound and least apprehended challenge confronting our colleges, universities, and schools is the need for them to infuse their curricula with more coherent meaning and discernible significance; to connect their coursework to authentic and comprehensible educational objectives; to clarify the link between their standards for admission and advancement and what will be expected of students by their employers, or colleges and universities for their further graduate work or professional studies; to take more explicit curricular account of the nature and character of modern society and the forces that help form our present condition; and to compare and contrast these with other peoples and cultures for the insights such studies always afford.

What we have instead, and I am now generalizing particularly at the university and college level, is a curriculum that is mostly an extension of the specialized work undertaken at the upper division and the graduate levels, driven by the academic values and valuing of academic work in our system of rewards, and molded by the perceived exigencies of our disciplinary and departmental structures. (We should have

a lively discussion of this among faculty members who may be here today—after my remarks.) It is not driven by the needs of the students, by and large, whose curricular appetites during their first two years of college life, for example, lack discernment, if I may understate it. Our “breadth and depth” requirements (a cafeteria of courses, where the main course and the dessert are easily confused) by and large reflect compromises and trade-offs among and between the academic disciplines whose interests reflect not so much the needs of students, in terms of the coherence of what we are asking them to study, as those of their professors whose careers are much impacted by the proportion of time devoted to teaching and research and whose inclinations to advance the latter rather than commit to the former come to subordinate the needs of students to those of the academic profession. I differentiate here between the curriculum, which should be the object of scrutiny and change, and the actual quality of classroom teaching, which in my view is much better than the public supposes and even better than many of the students deserve.

While our colleges and universities have been weakened by criticism from without and by contention from within in recent years, they are, nevertheless, less weakened than all but a handful of institutions in our society; and, of those, they remain the ones best able to help us through the transition from where we have been to wherever we are headed.

They will be able to do so, however, only by refocusing their programs, reordering their priorities, realigning their resources, and recommitting themselves to their most fundamental of purposes, namely, transmitting the culture from one generation to the next, not in sterile or unconsidered ways or by means excessively dependent on memorization or cant, but in a thoughtful, critical, deeply knowledgeable and challenging fashion, helping students to connect the past with their present and with the changing world they will inherit. This is not to set aside the role of research where members of the faculty not only inform themselves but also share what they know with their colleagues and with their stu-

dents; but it is going to be very hard to argue for the research function if there is an unreasonable level of discomfort or disquietude with the teaching function.

I am focusing on the lower division curriculum more than on the level of junior and senior studies because it, more than any other variable, gives expression to the collective sense of what is worth learning during the non-specialized years of university and college life. It also takes account of who is studying at any given college and university, what kinds of students are there, how prepared they were when enrolling, how interested they are in their studies, and how much time they devote to them, the relevance education bears to the hopes and aspirations of the students themselves, the way in which we undertake to teach them, and the connectedness of these first two years of college and university life to K-12 on the one hand and to advanced studies on the other.

These are formidable tasks. They are the arenas, indeed increasingly the battleground, where contending forces—the academic disciplines and the departments, various ideologies and academic politics—interact and important decisions are made.

It is this arena in which the issues of admission standards, teaching loads, demographic and social changes in the larger society as reflected in the new students enrolling each year, institutional costs, educational policy, pedagogy, courses to be offered, and political correctness converge. This is the one issue that will and should engage the time and attention of these institutions and those responsible for and interested in them. I am not saying that this doesn't happen, but it doesn't happen generally. You may get a few individuals to look at this problem, but it is hard to get the faculty as a whole to look at it comprehensively, although this does happen from time to time and from place to place, but not like what is really needed.

The next point is the need to identify, select, and nurture those chosen to lead these institutions. And as you well know, these positions are increasingly difficult to fill. The reasons should not be surprising:

- First, the diffusion of authority within the institution is growing, spreading authority wider and wider, and deeper and deeper, while accountability becomes increasingly centralized;
- The labored nature of decision-making in these institutions, which is both a burden and a strength;
- The size and complexity of the enterprise;
- The changing nature and character of the student body and the professorate, and they don't change at the same speeds;
- The increasing willingness of elected officials to take account of these institutions when giving expression to their political views and when contemplating and planning their political futures (I hope that was delicately expressed);
- The dysfunctional structure of management that so typifies these institutions;
- The diminished sense of institutional citizenship on the part of the faculty. They have a difficult time doing everything people expect them to do, and one of the things that goes first is participation in the life of the university itself—in the administration and the governance of it;
- The shrunken sense of belonging and affinity on the part of students;
- The dramatic loss of public regard and respect for the positions of leadership within these institutions; and
- The growing intrusiveness of government into the inner workings of these institutions. This is occurring everywhere, and if it is not direct, then it is in the form of persons appointed to the governing boards who serve as surrogates for the legislature or the governor. Thus, this is a difficult problem.

Our colleges and universities are not isolated, simple, straight-forward, comfortable ivory towers, inhabited by persons of leisure or affluence, unburdened or unencumbered by the vicissitudes of modern life, as so many choose to believe. That is a 150-year old view of the place.

On the contrary, these institutions are dynamic, changing, vibrant communities where the old and the new contend, and the unthinkable is thought. They are restless places, intellectually unsettling, where values and ideas clash. They are rather strange places actually, or should I say "uncommon," full of hope and youthful in their outlook, and yet steeped in their own traditions and eccentricities as well. The world blows through these places like none other, and it is a real ride for any president who tries to bring order and direction to a place as inherently disordered and multi-faceted as modern universities tend to be. Such people are hard to find and even harder to recruit. More understanding and supportive governors, legislatures, alumni, and trustees would help, as would the press were it to be more concerned with context and substance than with trivia and sensationalism.

Next, our colleges and universities will be contending with a fiscal base that for the most part will be shrinking in real terms per student for the foreseeable future, given the demographics of our country (that is, with the projected enrollment increases that are anticipated on the one hand and the competition for public funds at all levels of government on the other). For the private and independent sector universities, the tuition levels are increasingly inelastic, except at a handful of the most sought after and prestigious research universities and the leading liberal arts colleges; and it is to student tuition and fees that these institutions look for most of their basic instructional costs. These institutions are deeply concerned about their futures, especially as state governments fail to keep up with programs of financial aid that are intended to help students meet the cost of attending private colleges and universities. The federal government's intentions are even less clear in this respect. What is clear, however, is that the federal programs of student financial aid have come to rely increasingly on loans rather than on grants.

As for our public colleges and universities, it is going to be difficult in the extreme, at least for most of them. From 1989 onward, it has been mostly a losing fight for the nation's public institutions of

higher learning in fiscal terms, although it has been more encouraging in recent years than in the early 1990s. The country's economy, the rising demand for welfare and medical care on the part of a growing share of the population, large-scale legal and illegal immigration, the levels of crime, the numbers of persons incarcerated in the federal and state penitentiaries, and the dramatic growth in K-12 enrollments all combine to shrink the share of state funds for higher education.

The consequences of this trend have been steadily rising tuition and fees (a matter that I understand is of immediate interest on this campus), rising costs for room and board, less competitive salaries for faculty and staff, program reductions and eliminations, deferred maintenance, cancelled courses, crowded classes, and so forth.

Given the nation's economy, tax structure, budgetary priorities, and politics, there is little reason to expect that public funds will soon alleviate these problems. The answer relies on improving the efficiency and productivity of these institutions, and I do not mean trading off their quality and capability in order to yield improvements in productivity.

One obvious option is to shrink the number of students eligible to enroll in our colleges and universities. That would reduce the cost in terms with the direct instructional costs but increases the costs per student for maintaining all of the indirect supporting costs, e.g. libraries, buildings, housing, and so forth. While this limitation on access could be a partial answer to the cost considerations, it is not a solution to the larger needs of our society and country.

Much of what could be done to reduce the bureaucracy, to reorganize, to consolidate, and to otherwise restructure these places, has already been done. It was done in the early 1990s. The hard part will begin now. Some part of the answer will surely come to depend on the more serious and more expansive uses of modern technology, but I am unsure how much. I do not suggest this as the solution, as I will make

clear. I know that much has already been done with modern technology, but everyone knows how much more can, and I believe, will be done in the coming years. These prospects are exciting to contemplate, and the coming generation of students will be ready for it.

Little systematic account is taken by faculty members, university administrators, or governing boards, of how today's undergraduate students prefer to learn. Thus, there is a disconnect between students who come to a university steeped in technological, electronic and other visually-based methods of learning, and a university pedagogy that is generally, but not always rooted more in the past than planted in the future – at least in the lower division or pre-specialized programs and majors. This is less applicable to graduate work, and even the majors and various disciplines, as a generalization. Moreover, there has been an explicable, but barely defensible, institutional hesitancy in responding to distance learning possibilities and related issues, bearing on the time, manner, and place of the teaching function, including the age and other changing characteristics of the student body.

In the classrooms and in the labs on any given campus, among and between campuses of multi-campus universities, among and between public and private universities and colleges, in the work place, and at home, the use of technology will slowly and over time have an even more dramatic effect than is true today on where learning takes place, who learns, who teaches, and how teaching is done. The computer, electronic libraries, the internet, CD ROMs, and the whole array of tools now available to students and scholars alike, hold the most proximate and promising prospects for improving not only the efficiency and productivity of our teaching and research but also the processes of learning. The promise of this technology, however, should not be over generalized or exaggerated, and its limitations should be made clear as well. What can be done with what we already have, with what we could reasonably hope to

get, and with what is already evident in the discernable future, should stimulate us to think in more expansive and hopeful ways about effecting changes in our institutions. It will help preserve, indeed even enhance, their quality and overall capability. False starts in this arena are to be as avoided as indifference.

Another means of reducing the unit cost of instruction – not the overall cost, however, if access is to be retained – is to differentiate the admission standards and missions among and between the colleges and universities within state systems as a whole, by increasing the proportion of high school graduates enrolling in the community colleges. This would be accomplished by increasing the standards for admission at the four-year institutions, and even further by differentiating between the comprehensive universities (teaching universities such as Weber State and Southern Utah University) on the one hand and the research universities (Utah State and the University of Utah) on the other.

This differentiation would also accord with the real world of teaching that marks the historical and more recently enacted policies regarding differentiated missions for dissimilar institutions. This arrangement would provide for the movement of students across institutions when they are ready and eligible, especially at the junior level when moving into one's major and specialty. (These following remarks were not suggested to me by anybody. These are my thoughts; no one else is implicated, and they are offered in consideration of some of the issues that the state of Utah is confronting now. It is a good deal easier for me to speak on this matter than if I were still serving, especially with the commissioner and some others sitting here.)

Cascading students down from the four-year institutions to community colleges would reduce the state's average cost of educating students enrolled in public colleges and universities, as the cost of educating them at the community college is less than at the

comprehensive teaching universities, just as it is less there than at the research universities. Expenditures for capital costs (that is, for buildings) would be similarly reduced—the least cost for the community colleges, and the most for the research universities, with the comprehensive teaching universities in between, in terms of the capital outlay required to make these places work within their assigned but differentiated missions.

I am well aware of the politics of pursuing such a line of thought given the incessant tendencies of our colleges and universities to heighten their prestige and to broaden their missions. Nevertheless, it has been done elsewhere; and for Utah with its large families, modest levels of family income, political conservatism, and high educational and life aspirations for its children, such an arrangement or some variation of it would seem to commend itself.

The alternative is not difficult to foresee: unrelieved “mission creep” within the higher education system, with corresponding increases in the unit costs of instruction and capital outlay, and ongoing tensions within the system of higher education and between the system and state government.

Utah could negotiate such arrangements within its present governing structure or an altered one if the legislature were to invite the Board of Regents to do so. And, of course, the regents could do so if the commissioner for higher education and the presidents of the colleges and universities were asked to work out such a “treaty” among themselves.

In the late 1950s, in California, new colleges and university campuses were being approved at every legislative session, with one group of legislators trading with another in the usual fashion and in a policy vacuum. If legislators from Stanislaus County wanted a Stanislaus State University there and those up in Chico wanted one also, legislators from Chico got together with those from Stanislaus and they managed to get both of them through. Then we had two, not just one, without regard to anything other than

the fact that they wanted them. The legislators themselves eventually wearied of these pressures and became dismayed with the consequences to the state of this kind of “policy making.” Thus, the higher education leadership of California was asked by the legislature to offer advice and recommendations to deal with the expected doubling of enrollment in California’s colleges and universities in the 1960s.

The upshot of all this was that a small team of the state’s education leaders met, debated, and resolved the outstanding issues and recommended to the legislature what came to be known as the “California Master Plan for Higher Education.” It was enacted in 1960 and has served the state well ever since with modest changes. It is looked to by other states and from abroad as a model system, for it made higher education affordable to the state while keeping the doors open at a modest cost to any student of talent and promise who is eligible and wishes to enroll. It assigned overlapping but differentiated missions or roles to the community college system, the state’s colleges (now the California State University system) and the University of California. It also differentiated the pool of students eligible for admission to each of the three parts of the overall system: an open door for the community colleges, the top one-third of California high school graduates eligible for the state colleges, and the top 12-1/2 percent, or one-eighth, for the University of California. It also arranged for the four-year institutions to accept transfers from the community colleges based on the readiness of students to do work at the senior institutional levels, and it anticipated state budget policies that would differentiate among and between the system’s three parts based upon their respective missions and the pool of eligible students.

I do not mean to propose, nor even to imply, that California’s answer should be Utah’s; but I do mean to suggest that these issues might best be dealt with sooner rather than later. The state’s ability to formulate a sustainable and strategic plan for the future of Utah higher education will shrink with each passing year because interests will be more rooted in.

Believe me, I know how difficult it is to effect change in our institutions of higher learning. It is one of their strengths, but taken to extremes it also can be one of their principal weaknesses. I also know how difficult it is for others to influence the customs and norms of our colleges and universities and how careful and skillful they need to be in doing so whether they be alumni, politicians, donors, or others. But it will, in any event, be no easy task, confronted as we all are with familiar and comfortable ways of working with our own jumble of biases, with vested interests, with the inertia and resistance to change that typifies most of us, and with the sense of being nearly overpowered by the pace of change and the globalization of our world, to which I made earlier reference.

Bill Chace, president of Emory University, in underscoring this prospect wrote not long ago,

The change most important to the academy as a powerful medium by which values in our culture are expressed, modified, or reinforced, is that the "hallowed" or "sacrosanct" idea of the campus is eroding. Where once professors, and what they professed, enjoyed both the prestige and the vulgar scorn of all those matters removed from the everyday nature of American life, they now are more and more a part of that life. They have been "de-sanctified." Each such change can be understood, absorbed, and explained, but the greater cultural landscape now looks different and will feel very different as the next decade approaches. The groves of academe will bear the traffic of the world.

Having been at Berkeley for many years, I can assure you that this is the case.

As was noted in *A Nation at Risk* to which Rocco made reference, "History is not kind to idlers," and thus perhaps it would be a good time and a good thing to look hard and long at both our strengths and vulnerabilities within the context of changing times, changing students, and changing purposes.

Thank you.

(Applause)