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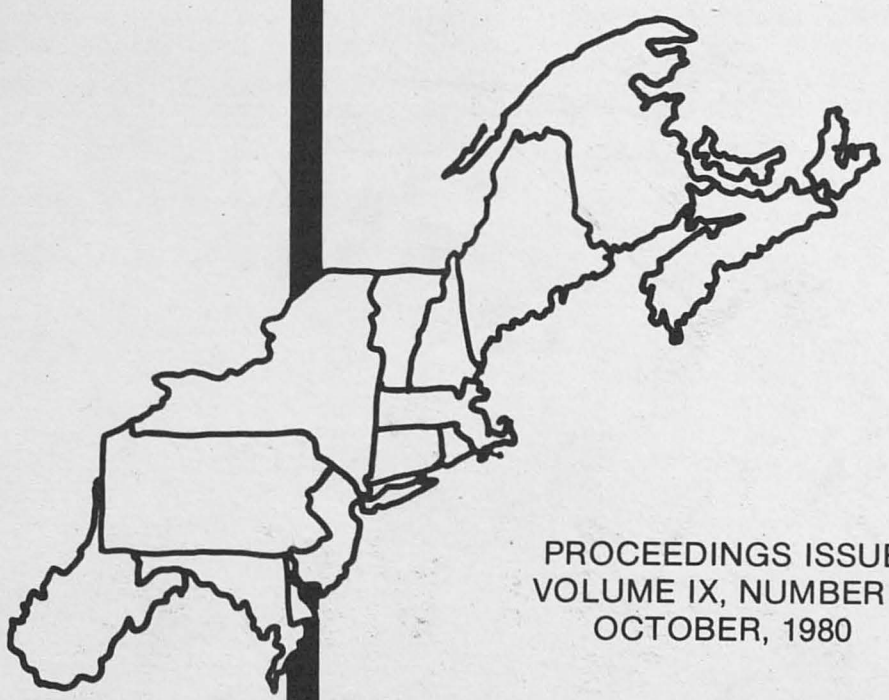

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NEW DIRECTIONS FOR THE EIGHTIES

John DiBiaggio

I am honored by the invitation to address this group, whose members and their institutions represent such a significant portion of the unique mission of land-grant institutions in the region.

It has been suggested that I speak briefly about "New Directions for the '80's." I hope that my somewhat subjective impressions on this general topic will have some regional relevance. Although I will occasionally make reference to this University, it is my intention to use Connecticut only as a specific example of trends and needs which I see emerging throughout the region—and, indeed, throughout the nation.

Our land-grant universities today bear relatively little resemblance to the small agricultural schools begun in the last century. However, I believe it is critically important that each of these universities never lose sight of the basic commitment to agricultural teaching, research, and service which distinguishes them from all other post-secondary institutions. I shall speak more to this point in a moment; first, allow me to review several variables which will impact upon the national economy. They might include the following:

1. Inflation will certainly continue, and may even become worse. While we might predict that there will be periods of plateauing in our inflationary spiral, there is no doubt that inflation is here to stay. While this is shocking to us Americans, our foreign visitors are equally amazed at the modest inflationary rates that we have experienced in the past few years. Obviously, the impact of inflation upon all of us is enormous, and we must clearly begin to respond, as have other peoples throughout the world. That is, we must begin to live much more conservatively, to better preserve our resources, and to share in a cooperative fashion our available manpower and facilities.
2. Energy will continue to be scarce and, therefore, will be even more expensive. Of course, we in academia appreciate that the tragedy in this instance is that while we are told that we possess 25% of the world's energy resources, the OPEC nations having only 5% of those resources, we still remain at the mercy of the OPEC countries. The reason for this, to me, is quite obvious. We did not take the necessary steps in research and development which could have made those resources available to us before we were faced with a crisis. Hopefully, we will be able to convince our federal leaders that we need to be better prepared for future crises, including one which will almost certainly develop in the area of food.
3. Government will undoubtedly remain unpopular through the next decade. The public simply does not trust its elected officials, its appointed officials, or any of its governmental agencies, including higher education. Proposition 13 mentality has swept the nation, and, in some instances, for rather inappropriate reasons, in essence, we have now entered an age of consumerism in which some of our very fundamental institutions are under severe scrutiny, including the corporate community, unions, and all institutions of higher learning.
4. Foreign relations will probably continue to deteriorate. From my prejudiced view, this is due, in great part, to our loss of technologic leadership in the world which, in turn, is due to reduced funding for basic research. Altering this situation will require a much greater commitment to supporting research than has been reflected in the federal budget over the last few years. Quite frankly, I don't see that happening.
5. Governmental bureaucracy will continue to grow. There are those who firmly believe that centralization is a cure for all of our societal ills and is the only vehicle through which we can achieve efficiency and effectiveness. What bureaucracy means, of course, to our colleges and universities is an endless stream of paperwork, the need to employ individuals to interface with their counterparts within the overseeing agencies.
6. Finally, our population mix will continue to change. In effect, we are becoming an older nation. This is in part due to a lower birth rate and the fact that we are keeping many people alive to a much older age.

The continuation of high inflation, coupled with a deepening recession drift and decreased public spending, will threaten all public agency operations and budgets and will ultimately impact on all institutions which receive any funding from government sources. Spending limits, wage controls, and increased unemployment seem to be on the horizon, although the 1980 election year prose and dramatics may contain or cloak the bad news until late in the year.

All of these factors make for interesting times in higher education. We are told there will be a precipitous drop in college bound eighteen-year-olds in the next decade, which is not the least bit surprising, since there was a decline in the birth rate which began approximately eighteen years ago. What is disturbing to us is the immediate conclusion that is drawn from those studies; that the decrease in eighteen-year-olds implies a concurrent dramatic decline in student population in our institutions. Of course, such a conclusion must assume that no change will occur in the character of our student body. However, other reports suggest a clear growth in the number of adult learners—both those who wish to advance or update their education and those who have decided to attend college after some other life experience. Data on the potential numbers of those students are not as easily collected or predictable as is the absolute number of eighteen-year-olds.

Furthermore, the predicted decline in the student population disregards the growing need for higher education in a highly technologic society. The growth of technology has been truly dramatic in the past few decades and it becomes more and more apparent that the only way to truly manage technology is through the development of more technology. Thus, individuals with the skills to both handle and develop technology will be in increasing demand. Obviously, this has real implications for institutions of higher education in preparing individuals with those skills.

In addition, the conclusions regarding enrollments are totally insensitive to the long established precedents of adaptability and endurance that have marked higher educational institutions. Colleges and universities have survived under the most adverse circumstances because of their willingness to reduce cost and to endure personal sacrifice.

The growth in faculty unrest which marked the 1970's will most likely continue into the 1980's. However, the anticipation that faculty will become as activist as did students in the 1960's does not appear likely to me. While there has been some growth in unionism among faculty (some 20% are organized nationally, with the percentage in Connecticut somewhat larger) the union movement

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in higher education—at least in terms of faculty—seems to have lost some of its initial impetus. While one outcome of this process has been the development of grievance procedures which continue to consume huge forces of administrative and faculty time, I believe that is has also become more clearly perceived that considerable authority must rest in the hands of university administrators; many faculty appear to have accepted the fact that strong administration is necessary for institutional survival, if nothing else.

The steady decline in SAT scores has often been cited as an indicator of a decrease in the quality of students currently being admitted. And yet, little attention is given to the fact that our applicant pools have been expanded to include many students who would not have considered pursuing higher education in the past. Many of these students come from disadvantaged backgrounds and predictably, not being "test-wise," score lower on standardized examinations. Thus, the overall average ends up somewhat lower, although there are still students who continue to score at the very top levels.

We also hear concerns regarding the ability of college students to read and write and even to do simple mathematics. Truthfully, there may be some validity in that accusation. However, I must admit that I am often appalled at the letters and reports which I receive from my own contemporaries—most of whom are products of a more traditional, earlier system. Nonetheless, this problem must be addressed by our universities and colleges, and many are attempting to do exactly that at this time.

Finally, it has been pointed out that the great societal advances that were predicted as the ultimate result of expanded higher education opportunity have not been achieved. Again, this is a perception that is at least half true. Perhaps in our enthusiasm, we did tend to oversell our product. In retrospect, we may have held out the hope that through higher education alone, poverty, hunger, prejudice, and even the common cold could somehow be eliminated. Well, higher education didn't and—let's face it, couldn't—do it all.

But higher education did, in my opinion, contribute to the creation of a more aware and inquisitive society—a society unwilling to accept, on face value alone, what it was told by its political leaders, its advertising agents, and even its health professionals. Thus, if we have achieved a more aware and perceptive populace, our efforts have been well worth the support they have received.

We have also produced (in fact, in some cases, overproduced) the manpower critically needed by society in attempting to fulfill its mission of a better life for all of our citizens. Higher education has responded to the critical needs of individuals trained in specific disciplines. At times, this has been somewhat difficult, since certain colleges have had to demonstrate considerable flexibility in planning and staffing of programs.

Most importantly, higher education has played a significant role in increasing our knowledge base. Our universities and colleges have been the bastions of investigation; the research efforts of our institution have been monumental and have served to change the face of the world in which we live. In fact, the vast majority of the great discoveries of the past fifty years have been the product of research laboratories located in our universities. At the University of Connecticut, our land-grant heritage and agricultural history provided the institutional model. The Storrs Agricultural Experiment Station was established in 1887, and some of the earliest research conducted under its aegis still stands among the most significant scholarly contributions of our institution.

The concerns regarding higher education have precipitated certain activities which will certainly impact on us significantly in the decade ahead. While it is impossible to make clearcut predictions as to what will occur in that period, it is possible to project a matrix about which changes might occur. First, it is now clear that funds for higher education will not only continue to be in short supply, but could even diminish below current levels in actual dollars. Unfortunately, in what is a very shortsighted view, priorities are now being placed on other societal concerns. The ultimate outcome of such reduced support will be to waste our most precious natural resource: the minds of our young people. Without those minds, we will be unable to develop the technology that will be needed to help us to survive, when all of our current available natural resources no longer exist. In this atmosphere, it is clear that some institutions will not survive. Predictably, these will be the weaker institutions which are marginal in quality or proprietary in nature. However, those that do survive, outside of those that are highly prestigious or heavily endowed, will do so through the ability to develop creative programs so unique in character that they engender support from funding sources not available to the higher education community in the past.

Students will continue the current trends toward more traditional behavior, but they also may begin to wield much greater power in academe. The basis of that power will be the process of direct student loans and grants, which will allow the student to be highly selective in choosing the institution he wishes to attend. Thus, students may not only ultimately decide which institutions will survive, but they will also have a much greater say in curricular matters. I note that many students now have begun to endorse a return to fundamentals themselves.

The pool of adult learners will grow substantially, which will cause some real problems for all of our institutions—scheduling, awarding of credit, and even procedures such as registration will have to be modified to serve this new community. Higher education institutions will need to be much more imaginative in programming and much more flexible in establishing requirements. Fortunately, those of us at Land Grant institutions have a model which can help us immeasurably in this effort; the Cooperative Extension Service. For thousands of families, C.E.S. *is* their state university, and has been since the inception of the Extension Service program.

Reward systems will have to be modified to recognize public service activities of faculty, as well as the traditional academic criteria for promotion. If such modifications are not made, the faculty may tend to isolate themselves on what may become decaying central campuses.

Direct Federal support to institutions may well decrease, but indirect support such as grants for basic and targeted research continue to grow, even if at a modest pace. Thus, faculties which remain competitive in the scholarly arena will still be able to attract funds for purposes of investigation and innovation. The President has made a clear commitment to basic research in many of his statements, although subsequent response in terms of increased funding has not been nearly so dramatic. I do have some concern that funding appears increasingly to be drifting away from basic scientific work to more mission-oriented projects. This is deemed to be a way to increase the responsiveness of a land-grant university, but it does not fully address two needs. First is the need to maintain crucial lines of basic scientific inquiry on which long-range food production depends. Second is the need for new lines of applied research, such as more social science understanding of the effects of increasing productivity and concentration in agriculture.

Finally, dependence on other sources of funding will continue to grow. Institutions will need to appeal more effectively to the corporate community, alumni, and various foundations. Again, this will depend heavily upon the imagination and creativity of the faculty and upon its responsiveness to societal interest. Funds will not be attracted through the use of slick brochures or smiling

administrators. Rather, they will be generated because of the establishment of certain *quid pro quo's*, such as consultative services, research, and the offering of programs in local environments.

The reemergence of this close alliance between the teachers and researchers and the citizens they serve is, of course, the Cooperative Extension Service model. It is a model that has worked with resounding success for a hundred years, and you and I know that. It pleases me very much that this system is being rediscovered, and reaffirmed by components of the higher education system which had previously paid little attention to this concept of programming at the "grass-roots" level.

It seems to me that this highly successful model of county offices, local agents, and broadly based volunteer groups offers great potential as a means of informing the citizens of the state about the activities of their state university and of securing support for the university's needs in order to maintain its programs.

A very real need exists for an effective and continuing information program for the region's Congressional delegation and state legislators. I suspect that some of us are guilty of having paid too little attention to keeping them informed, for example, about their state's agriculture and the food industry. The record suggests that they are most responsive to its needs once they understand the problem or the opportunity.

As an example, Dean Brand recently shared with me a report from the University of Georgia which struck me as a most persuasive argument:

"Drs. Bill R. Miller and Fred C. White, economists with the College of Agriculture at the University of Georgia, recently suggested that agriculture is now an underdeveloped sector of the U.S. economy. And although many other economists theorize that industrialization brings the greatest return for dollars invested, Miller and White find that agriculture has been overlooked as an industry which can bring as great or greater returns for each dollar invested.

"Miller and White developed a model to illustrate the impact of capital investment in agriculture based on a factor called a 'personal income multiplier.' This multiplier simply reflects a one dollar change in value added for a selected industry—in this case either in manufacturing or in agriculture.

"Overall, they found that the dollar value added to agriculture would bring greater capital gains than a dollar value added to manufacturing nationwide, to a greater or lesser degree.

"When the economists struck the average of the 48 contiguous states' personal income multipliers, they found that agriculture averaged a $1.30 return for each one dollar invested (For Connecticut, the figure was $1.26 for agriculture, contrasted with a theoretical return of 52 cents per dollar invested in other industry.)

"The authors conclude by suggesting that, at this time, the United States is over-industrialized and under-developed in agriculture. The number of backward and forward linkages (the interrelationships between basic and service industries and agriculture) is so great that a one dollar increase in the value added in agriculture generally is more important in increasing personal income than a one dollar increase in value added in other basic industry.

"The policy implications of this conclusion are significant. Not only would the general level of personal income be enhanced by increased emphasis on investment in agricultural output, but food prices could fall. And, because of important linkage and multiplier effects, employment could rise."

I believe that accurate information, coupled with a description of the University's program needs in agriculture and related fields, can produce a very positive response from the citizens and leaders of the Northeast region. I am very proud of the land-grant universities in the Northeast and of their rich heritage. By continuing our joint efforts, I am confident that we can maintain and expand that heritage.