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Comment

COMMENT

BY PAUL H. CASHMAN*

I FIND the paper by Dean McKay incisive and helpful, and I think my comments will be in the nature of a supplementary rather than a differing point of view.

It seems clear that the conflict between the rights of the student as a private person and the expectations of him in his student role by the institution are often at the heart of a campus crisis. Dean McKay correctly suggests the central question: What is the extent to which the university should treat its students as private citizens? My own view is that we need to examine some of the assumptions underlying the decision to treat the student as a student or as a private citizen. Some of those assumptions are expressed directly by Dean McKay, and some are implied.

One common assumption is that the university has a stake in behavior when its "public image" is involved. Note that this is one of the bases for off-campus behavior control suggested by Dean McKay. I have serious reservations about judgments based on a public relations concept of the university. What is *good* public relations today is *bad* public relations tomorrow. A decision to protect the public image can be based on a rather foggy notion of public response. Even at best, such decisions sometimes appear to violate sound educational judgment.

An example of a public image decision is the tendency of some institutions to disapprove the appearance of certain speakers on the campus. The free speech of a democratic society is critical to its existence and should not yield to public pressures. A second example is the off-campus rally which attracts negative attention in the downtown community. In both of these cases, and in many others, it would be far better to make the decision on educational grounds and to face the public relations problems as a separate matter. In fact, we university administrators ought to recognize that we are spending more time worrying about our public image than interpreting our point of view to our constituency. We need to educate the community to our goals and methods — not to alter those methods and goals in order to preserve an ethereal image.

A second assumption made by universities is that there is a clearcut distinction between on-campus and off-campus behavior. I am convinced that such a sharp delineation cannot be made

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geographically. To be sure, there is more latitude for judgment about what does or does not constitute disruption and disturbance on the campus than sometimes is possible off the campus. I am equally certain that Dean McKay is quite right in arguing that the student should not enter a sanctuary from consequences for civil wrongs when he enters the university.

Clearly, the student should not be free of community sanctions simply because he is a student. There may, however, be room for some latitude in timing or method. The reluctance on the part of police to enter a classroom and arrest a student is an excellent example. But, despite some room for flexibility in application, both campus and community must exist under the same laws.

What becomes more difficult is the application (or nonapplication) of university expectations off the campus. For instance, universities often formulate rules about hours for students living on campus which do not equally apply to students living off campus. What we university administrators appear to do in some cases is to assume a much stronger role with on-campus students than with those off-campus, as if the role of student is a mantle which he dons and doffs at the gate. Where we cannot employ a strong role with off-campus behavior, we sometimes seem to employ the fiction that we are applying standards equally by announcing that all our policies are also applicable off-campus. In my judgment, what is expected of the student in terms of behavior on the campus should also be expected away from campus. Conversely, standards which cannot or should not be applied by the university to off-campus behavior should not be regulated on-campus. The fictions which are employed may protect us from the public relations consequences of applying this distinction, but the practice nevertheless appears to be of questionable educational policy.

There are two criteria which should apply to any suggestion that the student be subject to special expectations beyond those he accepts as a citizen. First, is this expectation necessary to the educational community of which he is a part? Second, is this expectation one which is consistent with the basic rights of any citizen? In general, institutions have not agreed on special expectations of students by virtue of their membership in the educational community. We have some broad generalized statements, but too few of them have been reduced to concrete policy. In this sense, Dean McKay's suggestions about tolerance of dissent are helpful, and in my opinion should apply on and off the campus. It may well be that faculty members in some professional areas will want to assert some specific expectations. Indeed, some colleges and departments do so. My point is that such expectations, when developed, should apply to the

student in whatever context he finds himself. My impression is that we have too many special expectations that cannot stand the test of the first criterion above, and that we apply those expectations on a geographical basis to the detriment of whatever principle is involved.

A third assumption which requires attention is that orderly behavior is a primary goal of university policies. While I should not like to be described as one advocating disorder as a university goal, I urge that an orderly campus not be made too great a consideration in working with students. A university education is, or should be, an unsettling experience. With that instability ought to come some changes in the order of things. Thus, a stable campus should give cause for uneasiness.

Order for its own sake is not desirable. Business office procedures may be orderly, but they may not necessarily produce the best educational results. We need to stimulate a certain amount of new procedures and new tensions. I have watched Edmund Williamson, Dean of Students at the University of Minnesota, do this repeatedly over the years with gratifying results. I hope our focus on the question of private rights and students' rights will not cause us to try to develop an orderly arrangement which hides the educational issues. For example, the argument about whether or not institutions ought to have any expectations for students beyond those of the society outside the university can be resolved by an easy formula, yet the argument itself hides one of the most significant philosophical questions in higher education, deserving solemn consideration beyond the cursory solution.

A fourth assumption upon which universities often proceed is that considerable flexibility must be maintained in dealing with violations of some university policies, particularly in those areas where essential university activities are involved. I was glad to see Dean McKay stress the "overstepping of bounds" allowable in the academic community. A university ought to be a place where mistakes are possible — and where a new point of departure can be set. Normally, regulations do not approach the final truth in this world, and we need to recognize their imperfections. If a university rule prohibits "disruption of campus events," we need to interpret the word "disruption" with as much generosity as possible, and we need to give one who disrupts within the meaning of the term an opportunity to learn he has done so. I strongly support the assumption that flexibility of interpretation must be maintained; failing to do so results in a harsh, regulation bound climate in which little true dialogue can be established among members of the university community.

I do not wish to end my response to Dean McKay's paper with-

out a consideration of the role of campus police. Historically, the policeman on the campus was an arm of the university administration, usually the business office, who performed certain administrative functions. Many campus police departments developed out of an arrangement where one custodian on the night crew was asked to watch the buildings. Gradually, he did not do any custodial work, and he received a badge, a uniform, and perhaps a gun. His function was to protect the buildings, and he continued to be an arm of plant services.

This is no longer the case with campus police. More commonly, good departments see their function as one of serving students by helping to maintain an educational environment on the campus. They work to protect dissenters from nondissenters; to keep the public from intruding into campus events and disrupting them; to help maintain efficient campus events, and so on. Less than formerly, they try to protect individual students from the law of the community, although they may enforce law on the campus or community in order to prevent two sets of police from appearing at the university.

This is the basic role I see for police — the support of a productive educational environment. This requires special training and special attitudes. It requires an attention to educational interaction rather than the protection of property alone. I see signs indicating that some departments have moved in this direction. What is needed is educational direction, and such direction will, of itself, end the notion that campus police are either the special pleader of students or the arm of the local police on the campus.

Dean McKay has identified in his paper some important insights on the student as a private citizen. My own view is that he implies — and I think quite correctly — that the university should set up as few special exceptions as possible for the student. To the extent allowable in the academic community, the student should be regarded as a private citizen, and any additional responsibilities clearly should be identified as necessary for educational considerations. In this way, higher education can maintain a proper role for its students.