

IN PERSPECTIVE

EX UNO PLURES

E Pluribus Unum — one out of many — has been a slogan and a goal of a group of states that called themselves united almost 200 years ago. While my Latin is very rusty, I suggest that *Ex Uno Plures* — many out of one — could have been a slogan of those concerned with discovering and teaching knowledge over a much longer time.

Let's start with the Greeks who had a word for it. *Philosophia*, at one time, was equated with *all knowledge*. The philosopher, knowing all things, was able to view life in its wholeness. But with the expansion of things known, specialization in learning began to appear as a matter of necessity. Individuals became specialists in knowing more and more about less and less. The ultimate, according to an ancient gag, was when a person "knew everything about nothing." In the universities specialization led to academic departments, each one of which tried to devote itself to a discipline in its own right.

Within church-related institutions, philosophy was frequently close to theology and, in some circles, came to be known as "the handmaiden of theology." In those times, a handmaiden was subservient to her mistress. To the theologians it was clear that theology, a divine specialty, was superior to philosophy, a human intellectual pursuit.

As departmentalization of disciplines in universities grew, communities of scholars began to develop norms, whereby they could identify what qualified a specialty to be called a "discipline in its own right." This gave the philosophers the opportunity to qualify their activities as a respectable discipline and thus liberate themselves from handmaidenship.

So the philosophers began to run their departments like other respected departments, such as classics, natural sciences, history, or literature. They selected members of their department with great care, weighing and measuring publications especially in reputable journals refereed by reputable philosophers. They included research as a requirement for promotion. They formed their own societies and established their own doctoral programs.

I once had very personal exposure to the effects of the philosophers' successful liberation. A faculty of a professional school was trying to design an educational experience which would to some extent fulfill the commitment to educate the whole person¹ and help each arrive at a Philosophy of Life, and some philosophy for his own life and profession.

The faculty instinctively turned to the Philosophy Department and, because the school was church-related, to the Theology Department for help. The faculty presumed that these departments, together, could help students relate their special professional

expertise, department-offered courses, and department-supervised fields of concentration to each other and to life. But the professional faculty was disappointed. It found that the Theology and Philosophy Departments could not or would not work together.

The philosophers — having made great strides in demonstrating the validity of their claim that philosophy was a discipline in its own right — were not about to be seduced back into the role of handmaiden. Similarly, the theologians — having recently succeeded in changing the name of their department from Religion to Theology — had a new evidence that their field, too, was an academic discipline and that their job was not merely that of running a collegiate parish or being God's reporter of the Good news.

Neither department wanted to risk these hard-won academic gains by cooperating with each other, especially for a nonscholarly professional school, or by engaging in activities which would interfere with their own scholarly research. Each department, by proving and by devoting itself to continued demonstration that it was academically as good as other departments, had become accepted as an equal in the family of disciplines. By becoming *equal* they forfeited any right to be *above*. Any claim they made to a role of interpreting the relationship of specialties to a whole life had no more validity than that of any other department.

As a result of this experience I began to feel that the stated objectives of many universities to educate the whole man (woman) had become an advertising puffery or an obsolete carryover from a previous era. To the extent that a university tries to live up to the "whole person" objective it is asking a student to be what almost no faculty member is (and what every nontenured faculty member is striving *not* to become).

The relationship of specialist and specialized departments to the overall unity of an organization is, in part, a question of numbers. As such it is not limited to schools. For instance, businesses, other than the smallest, bring in specialists (e.g., lawyers, tax advisers, auditors, appraisers): or when they cannot afford to add specialists to the permanent staff, they contract for outside firms to supply such services. But out-of-house or in-house specialists, like their academic counterparts, tend to gather around themselves kindred spirits. In the normal course of events, specialized departments or hired specialists tend to grow. In schools or businesses, and I suspect in other types of organizations, the problem is much the same: before long specialists outnumber generalists.

In schools the question is how to integrate specialized departments into a concern for the whole person or a whole organization. Many faculties operate on a democratic one-man-one-vote principle. In a showdown, specialists can outvote the generalists. While philosophers (or psychologists) may not agree with or want to work with theologians (or accountants), they

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will cooperate with each other administratively to preserve their right to operate as specialists. But joint efforts on administrative issues do not require joint efforts in academic activities.

Another result of this democracy of specialists is a blockade to change. There are examples of schools where, despite that fact that faculty members almost unanimously agreed that a major readjustment of organization or curricula was desirable, readjustment was almost impossible to achieve. When it came to change, each department was sure that it was doing a good job and that the need for change lay elsewhere.

As was mentioned above, businesses, too, have to live with the fact that specialists (staff, advisers, studiers) outnumber generalists (line, doers). A business does, however, have one important difference: it is not so democratic. One of its most commonly stated objectives is to make money. Unlike the stated reasons for establishing the U.S. Government (establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, secure the blessings of liberty) or a typical university (*veritas* or *lux* or both), the simplistic profit-making objective of business is (or at least is believed to be) measurable. For these reasons a small group of line decision makers can "out-vote" a larger number of specialists in a business more easily than in a government, and in a government more easily than in a university.

These general observations, I believe, can be applied to schools of management. Old-timers like to recall the good old days when a faculty and a unity of purpose centering around helping students develop a facility for making business decisions and implementing them. There were, even in the old days, courses which stressed marketing, or accounting, or production, but there was (or, looking back, seems to have been) a strong common commitment to avoid purveying specialized knowledge. At the Harvard Business School, for instance, the kind of departmental organization typical of most schools was taboo.

But even doers and generalists admit that they would be silly not to use the best available information and technologies, and they acknowledge that these are most highly developed by specialists. Historically, then, the typical business school at some point hired a nonbusiness specialist. Frequently, for a start, it was an economist. But there was always the hope that he would not continue to be "just an economist" and would: (1) become realistic as a result of his exposure to doers, (2) use, in his future research, the real world which would now be available to him, (3) modify his ivory tower theories as a result, and (4) spend some more time on the application of theories to reality (and *vice versa*).

For the most part, this process worked reasonably well, in the opinion of the generalists, so long as the pace of attempted absorption was rather slow. Also, while a generalist might call the process "successful

absorption," the specialist's colleagues probably looked upon it as seduction. But following the economists came statisticians, psychologists, mathematicians, anthropologists, and others. As the ranks of specialists increased, the one-time numerical dominance of faculty members interested chiefly in management was eroded and the ability of specialists to avoid seduction was increased.

At this point, I was about to put in a disclaimer that no value judgment should be imputed to the foregoing statements. Then I realized that such a disclaimer would serve no useful purpose. I *am* one of the old-timers and could be accused of singing about glories that have passed. And the accusation would be at least partially true. But even I, the old-timer, am fully aware of the fact that the world has changed; that the knowledge and power of the specialist has increased; and that generalists would be silly to try to do without specialists. Quite apart from value judgments, however, the question of relationships among specialists and the whole still remains even though the details of the case have changed.

Once again a business counterpart may shed light. There is evidence that in corporate life hard times sometimes do some good — if they are not too hard for too long. They can force reassessment of basic objectives and revaluation of the contributions of staff specialists. As a result there is often a realigning of resources. I am not arguing that the resulting adjustments are ideal; merely that they take place when the money-making process of a business is seriously interrupted. Because of the forces which caused it, such realignment is, to a large extent, directed by the managers. And by "managers" in this situation, I mean roughly the equivalent of line officers, who constitute a minority as compared with the staff specialists.

Many educational institutions today are encountering conditions which resemble corporate hard times. They are facing pressures for review and adjustment. One main difference between business and education lies in the manner in which the adjustments are managed. In terms of managing specialists, educational administrators have much less power than their business counterparts.

How, then — in the light of (1) the fact that specialization is necessary because of the increase in knowledge, (2) the corresponding impossibility of any person or department's being an all-knowledge (*philosophia*) philosopher, and (3) the large numerical excess of specialist over generalists — does a one-man-one-vote faculty operate with both unity of purpose and diversity of opportunity?

E Pluribus Unum, anyone? ■

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