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THE INNOVATOR

NEWSLETTER OF THE CENTER FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

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NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
Chicago, Illinois 60625

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1978

THE WAY WE WERE: THE SEARCH FOR A USABLE INSTITUTIONAL PAST

"It was the best of times. It was the worst of times." The year was 1970. The Summary Statement of the "Ten Year Plan for the Development of Northeastern Illinois State College" read in part as follows:

Since it was founded and began operation in 1961, Northeastern Illinois State College has placed strong emphasis on teacher training. Initially, as Chicago Teachers College-North, the single purpose was the preparation of elementary teachers for the Chicago public school system. Basic in such preparation were a strong foundation in the liberal arts and an emphasis on innovation and experimentation in approaches and methods.

In July, 1965, ownership and control of the College was transferred from the Chicago Board of Education to the State of Illinois with governance by the Board of Governors of State Colleges and Universities. By 1967, Northeastern had become a multipurpose institution. The College has retained a strong emphasis on teacher preparation, both elementary and secondary, and is developing an emphasis on undergraduate and junior college teacher preparation. In addition, liberal arts degree programs have been developed, and pre-professional programs are being developed.

Due to its location in the largest urban center of the state, most of its students come to Northeastern from the urban center and return to it, during and after college, to live and work. Northeastern's primary interest, therefore, is in educating such students for their life in the urban center. It is this emphasis which best characterizes Northeastern's uniqueness and diversity--the uniqueness and diversity encouraged for each college by the Master Plan for Higher Education in Illinois.

Northeastern will continue to stress a quality general education in a scholarly atmosphere. In so doing, it will also continue to develop educational models especially appropriate for an urban commuter institution of higher learning.

*Summary Statement, Long Range Plan, 1969-1979, Northeastern Illinois State College, Chicago, 1970, pp. 1-2.

In September, 1956, a certain Duke Frederick--World War II veteran, University of Chicago graduate, and Civil War buff--left General Beadle State Teachers College, Madison, South Dakota, to join the faculty at the Sabin branch of Chicago Teachers College. Not quite twenty-one years later, the same Duke Frederick, now Professor of History, presented Ronald Williams, third president of the university Sabin had become, with Early Times at Northeastern: A Memoir. Duke's purpose was to honor UNI's new chief executive on the occasion of his inauguration; our purpose is to honor Duke by presenting the INNOVATOR readership with a taste of what he has written.

I am careful to say "taste," since the entire manuscript is currently being printed for wider distribution in the spring. The forthcoming paperback, to be available at UNI's Book Nook as well as by mail, will have a cover especially designed by Professor Leo Segedin, fellow UNI old-timer, whose verbal reaction to Duke's Memoir is included in this INNOVATOR. In addition, the complete work will feature a Foreword by Jerome Sachs, UNI first president.

I mentioned Leo Segedin's reaction. Actually, both Segedin and Professor Bill Howenstine responded not only to Duke's Early Times but also to a series of five questions I sent them, to wit:

1. To what extent was our splitting off from Chicago Teachers College a matter of geographical convenience--i.e., making it easier for Northside students to attend--and to what extent the desire of concerned faculty and staff to try new approaches to teacher preparation (i.e., to be innovative)? Were other factors (race? politics? economics?) involved?
2. To what extent have we become more or less "traditional" over the years? Is this trend, if you discern one, good or bad? To what extent have we become more or less "like a high school," as some persons accuse us of being?
3. To what extent was "small beautiful" in the early days--i.e., did we once have a sense of (academic and/or social) community that has since gone by the boards with our growth to an institution of 10,000-plus?
4. President Williams would like to see UNI become distinguished and distinctive as an "urban university." To what extent do we have urban "roots," and, in the light of the past, do you see us in the position to become truly urban in any sense?
5. Given your sense of Northeastern's development, do you believe that we have an institutional heritage which we need more fully to realize or a past that we need more fully to overcome? Why?

What Leo and Bill have to say is appended to the Memoir selections without comment. My hope, however, is that these three reflections on the way we were will both delight and instruct. The uses of the past are clearly many. With luck, our future may fulfill some of the promise to be found there.

Reynold Feldman
Director of Program Development,
Editor

* * *

SELECTIONS FROM EARLY TIMES AT NORTHEASTERN:
A MEMOIR BY DUKE FREDERICK, PROFESSOR OF HISTORY

A couple of recent experiences have given me a strong impulse to write something about the ancient history of Northeastern Illinois University and its various predecessor institutions. One of these experiences was the fifteenth anniversary dinner, commemorating the opening of the present campus in 1961. Some thirty-five survivors gathered at Monastero's Restaurant for food, drink, and nostalgic talk. Miroslav Samchyshin, the chief organizer of the tenth anniversary party in 1971, was also involved in this one, but Ely Liebow was in charge of arrangements. During the course of the evening, Ely called on me to make some remarks. It was completely unexpected, and I had prepared nothing at all. But it was easy to talk ad lib for ten or fifteen minutes about those stirring days, and in fact I could have gone on for hours. Still, it didn't come out exactly the way I would have wished. I probably said some things I shouldn't have, and left out some things that should have been said.

Several days later, in an extended conversation with two members of the administration, I found myself answering questions about those early days again. One of the administrators said he felt he knew too little about the university's history, and that he needed a "usable past" to understand some of the problems of the present.

So I decided to write something about the past of this university. I'm not sure how usable it will be. I'm doing it mostly for my own amusement, and to try to sort out things for myself. Probably what I write will be interesting only to a small number of people who may remember, in different detail and with differing emphasis, some of these events.

What follows should not be confused with formal history. I have done little research in the documents. This is a memoir, not a history. I've talked informally with some of the people who also lived through it, but that's about the extent of my research. The rest is what I remember....

The institutional heritage of Northeastern goes back to the 1860's. (I don't remember this part. I read about it.) Our earliest forebear was the Cook County Normal School, which eventually evolved into Chicago Teachers College.

In the 1930's, during the Great Depression, and even into the 1940's, Chicago Teachers College had a monopoly on the preparation of teachers for the Chicago public school system. To get a job teaching in the Chicago system, you had to be a graduate of CTC. Jobs were scarce. Teaching jobs in the Chicago system were coveted, even though there were years when teachers weren't paid. To get into Chicago Teachers College, you had to have a recommendation from your Ward Committeeman. This situation lasted until after World War II. In the late 1940's there was a big scandal in the Chicago school system, and then a comprehensive reform. CTC lost its monopoly.

Until the early 1950's, Chicago Teachers College was strictly a South Side school. The campus was located at 68th and Stewart, in a complex of buildings CTC shared with Woodrow Wilson Junior College (now known as Kennedy-King Community College). But in the early 1950's CTC expanded by establishing a North Side Branch. At first it was located at Schurz High School. A couple of years later it was moved to Sabin Elementary School, at 2216 West Hirsch Street....

Sabin School, built at the turn of the century, was a dingy, buff brick, nondescript building in a decaying neighborhood not far from the corner of North and Western. The concrete and cinder playground, surrounded by a high iron fence, had been converted into a parking lot for the faculty.

Physically, nothing had been done to change the building from its former purpose. It was an elementary school. The water fountains were about knee-high. The desks in the classrooms were elementary-school-sized. The ceilings were very high, and the halls quite wide. The main feature of the building was a huge auditorium, complete with a big stage and a balcony, and with miserable acoustics. On the second floor was a gymnasium, big enough to hold a basketball court; the floor of the gym sagged.

There were no provisions for the usual kind of faculty or administrative offices. The assistant dean in charge and the rest of the administration occupied the former principal's office. The faculty of the Social Sciences Department, the Music Department, the Psychology Department, and the Education Department had a classroom on the second floor for office space, and English, Art, and Science had another classroom on the third floor. Each faculty member had a desk, but there was no privacy at all for work or reading or counseling students.

There was a kitchen and cafeteria and a small faculty dining room on the first floor. Faculty meetings were held in the faculty dining room.

Cramped and inadequate as the building was, it wasn't all ours. We shared it, for a time at least. Overflow classes from Tuley High School (now known as Roberto Clemente High School) met in a couple of rooms on the first floor.

Ben Lease once complained that the janitor's broom closet was bigger than the space available for editing and publishing the school newspaper....

Students looked different in those days. They were much neater and better-groomed. The boys wore sweaters or sport jackets, and many of them actually wore ties. They had neat haircuts. The girls wore blouses or sweaters with skirts, and, many of them, nylon hose. Seldom did they appear in slacks or pants, except perhaps in very cold weather. But in late spring or summer some of the girls would appear in class wearing shorts, and this, beginning around 1957, precipitated a crisis. One male faculty member, who shall be nameless here, was shocked by the spectacle of girl students wearing shorts to class. In a faculty meeting he proposed that a rule be adopted forbidding the practice. After some rather hilarious debate, his motion lost. But every spring thereafter, until we moved to the present campus, he brought the subject up, always with the same result. (During one of these annual debates, the question of "long shorts" and "short shorts" came up. Ely Liebow proposed an amendment to the original motion, the amendment being to ban only the wearing of long Bermuda-type shorts.)

In addition to the educational handicaps some of these students had to overcome, many of them worked at part-time or even full-time jobs. Some of them also faced parental indifference or even hostility to the idea of going to college. Those who drove cars to work had no place to park them except the streets around Sabin. And they knew as well as we did that they were attending college in an unsuitable building with inadequate facilities.

The night students were an altogether different set of people. Nearly all of them were Chicago public school teachers who were either working on masters degrees or else accumulating hours beyond the M.A. or M.Ed. so they could move into the next higher salary bracket.

They came to class after putting in a full day teaching. Some of them had difficulty staying awake during the typical three-hour classes. Some seemed to expect free rides, with high grades for minimal work, like the man who tried to tell Natunewizc he wasn't in the Ivy League; after all, they were saying, we're all in the system and should take care of each other. But many of them were excellent students who were willing to work hard and were quite serious about learning more about their subjects. Sometimes, a night class could be a real joy to teach, but some were a drag. It was all very chancy.

Different as they were, these two student bodies had at least one thing in common: they were all, to use the jargon of sociology, upwardly mobile. In one way or another they embodied the Puritan work ethic. They were struggling, some of them against heavy odds, to better themselves....

That first year at Chicago Teachers College North was just about the weirdest I've ever experienced. It seemed that there was some new crisis every day, or at least a minimum of one a week. Without doubt, part of the confusion was simply due to the fact that we were beginning something new which had to be worked out as we went along. But of course the fact that we had to operate in this way also resulted from insufficient time to plan and prepare before the place opened for business.

Some of the confusion and conflict arose from intellectual and philosophical disagreements about the new curriculum. Clearly, not all of the oldtimers accepted the new order. But many did agree with the general ideas embodied in the new curriculum, at least in principle. But we (and I was among these) had been seriously alienated by the attitudes and tactics of the dean and his close advisors. We were so suspicious of his intentions that we tended to suspect ulterior motives in all that he did or said. Further, some of us had pretty much lost any respect we originally may have had for his intellectual qualities, and doubted that he really understood what he was advocating.

The whole atmosphere was shot through with something close to paranoia. A few incidents may illustrate the point. The first, seemingly rather trivial in substance, was a public controversy between the dean and the editor of the student newspaper over the quality and price of hamburgers in the dining room. The dean responded to complaints about this with what some thought was a ludicrously childish display of temper. More ominously, the dean seemed to be making an implied threat to censor the newspaper, to ban criticism, and to fire the editor. Cooler heads finally prevailed, probably Jerry Sachs and Murray Tondow; but the incident seemed symptomatic of an underlying attitude that was unhealthy.

A somewhat less serious episode reminded one of the annual controversy at Sabin over the propriety of the girls' wearing shorts. Dean Jervis issued a decree banning the wearing of slacks by girl students; his reason was that wearing the offending garments was not seemly behavior in those who were to become teachers of the young, and would lead to unprofessional conduct. There was some grumbling about this among the students, but it didn't come to a focus until Professor Y entered the controversy on the side of the oppressed students.

Professor Y, apparently feeling the need for some excitement, for once defied the wishes of his friend the dean. Y issued a ringing call to the girl students to wear slacks on an appointed day, and assemble in the parking lot. He, Professor Y, would lead the students into the buildings in defiance of the dean's edict.

Dean Jervis met this challenge to his authority by appointing Matt McBride his deputy to repel the invasion. Matt, with his military background, was no doubt an appropriate choice. On the day of the confrontation, Matt went out to the parking lot and told the assembled girls to disperse and not try to enter the building. Meekly, they did, in spite of Professor Y's appeals.

The dean couldn't hold the line on this dress code very long, though. One of his own key faculty recruits, Professor L, was a strong-minded lady who presently began to appear at school attired in slacks. One shudders to imagine what might have happened if Matt McBride had said anything to her about what she was wearing. That was the beginning of the end, and the dean gave up the fight....

The new administration made a very important difference in the way things were done, but the substance of what was being done remained essentially the same. Jerry made it clear that we were to continue on our previous course; we would still be committed to excellence in all things, and we would be an innovative experimental college. Jerry was in fact one of the organizers of a union of experimental colleges which included such prestigious schools as Antioch, Sarah Lawrence, Goddard, and--Chicago Teachers College North.

There was a change in style. Jerry didn't insist on having a monopoly on ideas. He welcomed ideas and suggestions from anyone and everyone. I think just about any proposal that wasn't totally impractical economically or administratively had a chance of being tried. Both the off-campus "field centers" and the Center for Inner City Studies had their beginnings during this time.

The faculty now began to assume its rightful place in the governance of the college. We wrote the first of umpteen faculty constitutions, which provided for an elected faculty council and various faculty committees. One of these had the responsibility of making recommendations for promotions in rank. The lower ranks had disliked the old system, which confined membership on the promotions committee to professors. We were able to liberalize this one by including associate professors and assistant professors, but no one could vote on promotions to a rank above his own. Recommendations came to the college committee from divisional promotions committees.

Tenure was a more complicated matter, since the Board of Education still retained its power, through the same system we'd had to endure at Sabin and Foreman. A year or so after the establishment of the new campus, the Board announced a certification examination for college teachers, and the new people were eligible to take it. Some of them raised strenuous objections to this method of acquiring tenure, but they didn't have any more choice in the matter than we had some years earlier, so most of them swallowed their resentment and went through with it.

An elected faculty committee began to revise the curriculum. Just about everyone agreed that the number of required hours in the Jervis curriculum was excessive. Practically speaking, it was impossible to have academic majors with 88 required hours. So, a process of reduction began. Inevitably, it was

difficult. There was no way to avoid stepping on some toes and encroaching on vested interests. I think a substantial majority of the faculty agreed that the essentials of the original curriculum should be preserved. The hard part was deciding just what the essentials were....

Those years from around 1962 to around 1966 or '67 were, in retrospect, the Golden Age of the college. We still had our special identity. The essentials of what made us unique were still intact. The quality of the faculty was excellent and improving. The library was growing. Our students were of high quality. The college was still small enough to be comprehensible and manageable. Many of the suspicions and conflicts of the past were being laid to rest. That was a time of accomplishment, of promise, of hope.

In a way, the symbolic high point of the college's history came on the summer day in 1966 when Jerry Sachs was installed as president. Many dignitaries were here. There was a good deal of pomp and academic pageantry. The whole campus seemed to be overflowing with good feelings and good will.

Among those present was the chairman of the Board of Governors, Paul Stone. Mr. Stone was an affable man, a politician, from downstate. I met him, and chatted with him briefly. I uttered some pleasantries about how great it was to be part of the state system, and how we were all looking forward to our future as a state college. In reply he made a remark I found only vaguely disturbing at the time; since, I've come to think of it as a pronouncement of doom. "Now," he said, "you have to grow. Numbers is the name of the game."

The implications of those words only gradually became apparent over the next several years. They were also the years that brought us the "student revolt," the SDS, black power, and a general erosion of the authority of rationality and academic learning. In that time the college was changed, fundamentally and permanently. Those were interesting years, in the sense implied by the ancient Chinese curse: "May you live in interesting times."

But that's another story.

* * *

"SMALL...WAS EASIER."

Small may not have been beautiful at Sabin, but it was easier. As Duke Frederick pointed out in his memoir, faculty from the different disciplines were able to meet easily, relate the content of their courses, and give the students a sense of interdisciplinary relationship without the need for special programs. Even after we were on the present campus, we were able to continue that kind of activity. The disciplines were not treated as isolated entities and faculty offices were not separated according to discipline. Whatever the weaknesses of that arrangement were, it did offer all of us a chance to get to know each other and to talk about our professional interests. The dinner-seminars gave us other opportunities to meet and learn from each other. A good deal of what I know of the attitudes of faculty in other disciplines comes from my contacts in those days.

In addition, because of this sense of community, it was possible to get to know students better. Many of us were able to watch the same students and by comparing our observations, develop insights which enabled us to understand and help them.

It is obvious that this sense of community has been lost. Can it be recreated in any viable way? About ten years ago an effort was made to do just that through Project Changeover. Groups of freshmen were blocked so that they would take the same courses with the same small group of selected faculty. This faculty met together to plan and evaluate, and with the students socially to develop the kinds of relationships which it was thought would contribute to a successful educational experience. This program lasted for a short period of time. Its failure, too, is part of my memory.

Duke refers to the contribution of technology to teaching during the first years at Northeastern, and his memories suggest that it was minimal. My recollection is quite different. I used the equipment in the auditorium for several years (including the Edex responders in the armrests of the chairs) and found the student response enthusiastic. I know that other people used the available technology with much success, and some of us continue to use it in varying degree. I would agree that its use was not widespread, and that its sense of importance has diminished since that time.

There are several reasons for the lack of continuing impact of technology on education at Northeastern, including the inappropriateness of the initial installations and the inadequacy of some of the equipment. But what I recall as being more important was that most faculty did not support its significant use, felt threatened by it, and wanted its budget. The amount of time and energy consumed in preparing programs utilizing this equipment was enormous, and it was difficult to maintain the necessary enthusiasm for long without support.

How useful are my memories of my past? Each one of us who go back to the "old days" remembers what happened to us--what we have heard happened to others--and places these memories in the context of our values and goals. Such history is written out of our own perceptions and prejudices, and besides the pleasure of sharing recollections, what value do they have in planning for the future? Who among us developing our ideas today will take the time and expend the energy to investigate and evaluate the recollection of others? How similar are the situations anyway? Everyone of us discovers fire for the first time and has to invent the wheel for himself. There are many pasts, but I doubt if any of them are useful.

Leo Segedin, Professor of Art

* * *

THE WAY WE WERE

I was one of the newcomers. That in itself says something about the way we were. We were old-timers and newcomers. (Some used other terms.)

The long-distance phone calls from the dean in Chicago to me in Cleveland sparked my enthusiasm for an innovative, exciting new institution. Unfortunately, they also made me aware of being a newcomer in the midst of old-timers. The distinction was more fictitious than real, but it was fostered, and it festered like a sore among us in those early months. Not until the administration was seen as a common enemy by most of the faculty was this split in the faculty laid to rest.

Then, however, the hostility between administration and faculty exacted its toll and left its legacy, contributing to a degree of politicization within the university that was more counter-productive than productive. As a result, it seemed to me that we often neglected to consider the real benefits and costs of an innovative idea, preferring to be sidetracked by the personality of the issue.

In spite of this climate, however, there were creative innovations perpetrated by both old and new faculty, and there were solid academic traditions perpetuated by both new and old faculty.

That says something else about the way we were. With occasional exception, it was the faculty and administration who actively perpetuated and perpetrated. The students remained quite passive. (Their press commonly used the term "apathetic.") But that, in part, is the condition of the first-generation college student. Degree-oriented and somewhat in awe of an institution denied their parents, such students drifted with the tide or floated with the wind.

In doing so they reinforced an attitude already endemic to the faculty--a deeply rooted inferiority complex. Among us faculty this new urban teachers college in so many ways failed to match the image of higher education which we had acquired in the more elitist days of our own undergraduate study. (I still recall my own disappointment just in approaching the college on Kennedy Expressway; this north side of Chicago didn't look like a small college town.)

Like the internal politics, this inferiority complex drained too much of our energy in the early days. Yet little by little many of us came to see that an urban commuter institution is in many ways a superior institution. Its students may not come from homes with big libraries, but a surprising number of them already know two languages. They may not have had the financial ability to travel widely, but they have had on-the-job learning experiences which some prestigious colleges write into the program requirements for their bachelors degrees. They may not be as polished in traditional academic skills as students of another time and place, but neither are they as encumbered with sophisticated preconceptions of higher education.

Likewise, the faculty in its better and more honest moments could perceive that it really had an educational function and that pride could be as easily found in creative teaching as in esoteric research. Some students started coming to Northeastern because it was a university where students could actually talk with their professors.

Increasingly it became apparent that those who decried the "apathy" and "high school" atmosphere of CTC/Northeastern were even more ignorant of higher education in general than they were of this institution in particular.

The small size of the college population in the early days no doubt enhanced the communication. The inadequate physical facilities no doubt hurt our self-image. Trade-offs became commonplace as we grew larger. There is no question in my mind that Northeastern today has almost all the elements--historically and geographically--to become a "distinguished urban university." Some small doubt hovers around our commitment to such a task.

It has been asked whether we have become more or less traditional over the years. To answer that is, for me, to once again pit the oldtimers against the newcomers.

I do not choose to go through that one any more. But I do find it worthwhile to sift through my memories for those themes (no doubt "innovative" sometime, some place) which still evoke my enthusiasm and zeal. Among them would be:

- a sense of internationalism (not to be confused with a four-semester required course) from the Picasso sculpture to the Fermi Lab--our Chicago environment demands it.
- an ability to communicate in at least one other language (not necessarily two years of compulsory language-hating)--how beautifully exciting was Bill Lyell's teaching of Mandarin Chinese!
- field experiences (not to replace good classroom teaching but to accompany it).
- an interdisciplinary understanding (not to eliminate "the discipline" but to realize its greater relevance)--an ecological perspective on our urban human condition would be one example.
- a human scale in academic relations--where students and faculty alike are seen as human and interact as humans.

There must be a multitude of ways to achieve such goals. I would hope that a failure here and there in the past would not stop continued attempts in the future.

Finally, from somewhere in my past I have learned to suspect symbols, as opposed to the reality which they purport to represent. Where we had problems in the early years I think that they were oftentimes related to an undue emphasis upon symbols, both old and new. I do not know what the symbols of "a distinguished urban university" are, but I hope we do not get so involved in seeking them that we fail to achieve the real thing.

William L. Howenstine,
Professor of Geography
and Environmental Studies

* * *

NEXT...

Competency-Based Education at
UNI: A Faculty Forum Issue.