

- Not many people have a definite idea what a university is for. This article may be of help in this matter.

THE WHYS OF UNIVERSITY ORIENTATION

Our country will be much better off with an educational system, sufficiently comprehensive, aimed at what our people need as may be revealed in studies and perceptive observations carried out by persons qualified to plan and to work out institutions and courses especially fit to promote ideals and values deemed indispensable to the virility of the citizen and the nation. The form, substance, and structure of the cultural, social, political, and moral constituents of the life of our people should be moulded or erected upon patterns of our own choice and preference rather than on patterns furnished by outsiders. This is not to say that we should disregard or throw overboard everything foreign, for this action is impossible to carry out; and if it could ever be done, it is bound to

injure us in several ways. But we really have to realize that we have adopted foreign practices and notions uncritically simply because we want to ape the American or European no matter how offensive they may turn out to be to our ideals and values. In education, for instance, we have to admit that our schools, colleges, and universities up to now bear all the distinctive earmarks of their foreign counterparts imitated superficially and in several cases adopted thoughtlessly and with some degree of belief in their unproved excellence. Much of the poor or defective educational performance of Filipino students in general is traceable to this feature and practice in our schools in our efforts to transplant the heart of a system that the nature of our conditions cannot accept and assimilate.

Educators of high caliber are called upon to undertake the innovative task. It is a task that challenges mind, the imagination, and vision. But educators, if true to their profession, should accept whatever measure of necessary sacrifice such task demands for its realization. We could not have seen the development of a strong germ of Filipino nationalism if its original champion in the person of Jose Rizal had preferred to enjoy the comforts and splendors of the centers of culture and civilization abroad instead of coming back to the modest environment of his country with all the discomforts and the relatively primitive conditions which had to be slowly changed and improved.

It is regrettable that present-day Filipinos with their higher education do not seem to see the meaning of Rizal's life in this light and to follow the example it offers to them. Many of them consciously avoid the educational and cultural challenges of our provincial communities. There are even some who feel proud and

superior in being associated with institutions that have but a superficial sympathy with our nationalistic efforts and that silently adopt a condescending attitude towards Filipino organs for higher education.

It is obviously a matter of personal egoism and convenience that causes many of us to ignore the challenge of patriotic service outside the metropolitan centers. We see in this aloofness the continued servility to colonial standards and values and the indifference to the more satisfying rewards of self-reliance which needs time, determination, and patience to produce superior results.

Foundation University of Dumaguete aims at leading the Filipino youth away from strictly colonial values by impressing on their consciousness the importance of self-dependence and the re-acquisition of the best of national traits which are revealed in their history but which have long been overlooked and so may wither on the vine if not redis-

covered, nurtured, treasured, and refined.

Coming down to our work at this particular moment, we are now busy preparing our faculty members under the leadership of deans and heads of departments in preparing a comprehensive program of *University Orientation* for its faculty. It consists in a series of informal discussions, covering, among other, the following subjects: the meaning, nature, and purpose of a civic and secular university; the nature and method of the work of university teachers; the nature of the work required of its students; the need for adequate libraries, laboratories, and other facilities as instruments of university education; the necessary qualifications, practices, and attitudes expected of university faculty members; and the essential conditions for the maintenance of a university atmosphere as both cause and effect of the intellectual and cultural improvement of the university population.

The need for a *University Orientation* as briefly des-

cribed here is unavoidable in understanding the essence of higher education for Filipinos. But it has not been realized, much less observed, in this country for several reasons: one is the obvious failure of those who establish and administer universities in this country to identify and distinguish the essential nature of a university from that of a secondary school or a vocational or technical school. This failure arises from several causes. One of them is the absence of a tradition of devotion to intellectual work and excellence. A professional education which is really vocational in nature and purpose, commonly understood by many of our people as higher education, is really deficient in intellectual depth, breadth, and intensity. Law and medicine, for example, which were known in highly developed countries as the learned professions, are pursued in our schools more as vocational occupations calling for skills in action, manipulation, and outward observation rather than for intensive mental concentration

and scientific or cerebral activity.

Another cause is a simplistic and purely literal interpretation of the provisions of the Philippine law that to be a university an institution should have at least four colleges and a graduate school plus a library of at least ten thousand volumes. These formal and mechanical conditions do not necessarily indicate that the institution is engaged in higher learning, that its administrators understand the mission of a university, and that its faculty is actually devoted to the pursuit of knowledge and the quest for truth. After meeting these legal requirements, an institution feels entitled to be called a university especially when it has attracted a large student enrollment and two or three teachers with doctorate degrees or diplomas. But formal conditions required by our statutes, refer only to the external composition and appearance of the institution. They do not provide evidence of internal intellectual growth, educational activity directed to-

wards the improvement of knowledge, and an academic atmosphere which provides the mind of teacher and student with an intangible milieu that generates an actual intellectual ferment.

Coming down to the case of Foundation University, is there any real significance in the change of its rank from that of a college to that of a university? Has it ever occurred to its teachers, administrators, and students that a university should possess certain marks and attributes that it should possess by virtue of their devotion to learning and their interest in the quality of their performance? Or have they merely assumed that an institution automatically changes its character, purpose, goals, and procedures by the fact of the change of its name or by the fact that the Department of Education has authorized it to change its status from college to university? Is it realized by our educators that the rank of an institution of higher learning should not be awarded merely by reason of age and ar-

tiquity but should be merited by a satisfactory record of performance within its area of educational work and scope of action?

It is time that we in this country should realize the importance of University Orientation to stir and awaken administration and faculty to the educational significance of this status. It is essential that through them, the students should be correspondingly aroused and indoctrinated. If they are not collectively made aware of the meaning of the change, it is because they have but a faint idea of what it is expected to be done in the field of higher education. But this condition should not remain uncorrected, if the university is to perform its proper role in the improvement of a people. Hence, it is intellectually unpardonable for an organization bearing the title of university without understanding its true character, purpose, and procedures as a higher institution of learning.

A college that bears the title of a university should

have the intrinsic qualities and the essential conditions of a high center of learning. Should not this be the case, what is called a university may be merely a glorified high school. It cannot practice, cultivate, and produce habits of self-education, self-analysis, and self-criticism. But a university has to engage in the work of free academic inquiry and in the pursuit of intellectual discovery. Its teachers and students must ever be exposed to intellectual stimulation so that they may learn to experience the ecstasy of mental, moral, and humanistic achievement.

Unless they understand the meaning of higher education and the mental energy and the moral stamina it demands, our universities and their students and teachers will merely spend useless hours and weeks of self-deception devoid of the benefits and value of intellectual stimulation and vigor. In that case, our institutions will not and cannot really qualify as *universities or higher institutions of learning*. — V. G. SINCO