

## WHAT IS THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

In a long professional life I have tackled the job of writing about a good many nations, cities, and institutions, and I have always sought to ask a number of questions:

What does this place look like?

Where did it come from?

What are its prevailing qualities and characteristics?

Who runs it?

Is the population satisfied?

Where is it going?

In this survey I will try to do the same thing for the University of Chicago.

This is what I found,

Quality at an academic institution cannot be built merely upon individual brilliance. First rate work and first rate people need support both broad and deep. At Chicago, the faculty is supported by a staff of 7,300 (including 1,200 part-time student workers).

The main campus has changed little since I first

saw it. It has, so to speak, been filled in, but the central design, the basic structure and pattern as laid down by the first builders, remains intact. It is still a handsomely self-contained community of lawns and quadrangles, the battlements of which are built of grey Indiana limestone in the Gothic manner. The gargoyles, ivy, spires, apertures, red slate, scrolled designs, look mildly anachronistic, but are pleasing.

South Campus has architecture quite different from the main campus. The works of three major modern architects stand in order along a "cultural mile," arrayed like specimens to be savored at leisure by the architectural connoisseur.

Looking at the University after many years' absence, I wanted first of all to find out something about the rockbottom citizenry of this principality, the undergraduates. Of course the Uni-

versity of Chicago is, and always has been since its foundation in 1891, primarily a graduate school. In fact students working for advanced degrees and those in the graduate professional schools outnumber undergraduates today by a ratio of two to one.

The University acquires as undergraduates the scholastic cream of the cream. It has appeal for all sorts of bright youngsters, and especially favors vigorous "achievers" with serious motives and imaginative, independent turns of mind. Chicago students come from farms and hamlets, from slums and suburbia. Although they study in the lee of a great graduate school, the College students are not repelled by their more mature and more extensively educated colleagues — instead, they are attracted. Chicago is not an obvious place for the average student, but gifted youngsters find it supremely challenging, and some others discover abilities they never knew they had.

No quota system of any kind governs entrance to the University. No questions are

asked on application forms about race or religion, and a photograph is optional. Tuition comes high — in the \$1,700-range for three quarters — and an additional \$1,500, at a bare minimum, is necessary for living expenses. About half the undergraduate body has helped in the form of scholarships, and nearly two-thirds have part-time jobs of one sort or another. The average scholarship for an entering freshman in the Class of '68 was \$1,225, and the University is spending about \$10 million this year on various forms of aid to College and graduate students.

Of course University of Chicago graduates were bright in my day too, but not as terrifyingly bright as today's leaders seem to be.

I spent one afternoon with four bright, knowledgeable undergraduates. One was a vice president of the Student Government; another was editor of the "Maroon" (the campus newspaper, circulation 10,000). These youngsters, one of whom was a blonde, pretty girl who seemed to be appallingly young, but who was specializing in

Russian Civilization and had already had her first extensive trip in the Soviet Union, impressed and puzzled me. They were very guarded — perhaps shy. I asked them what they like most about the University. Well, it was one hell of a good school. They did not feel at all that they, as undergraduates, were overshadowed by the prevailing emphasis on graduate study. Quite the contrary — they were being amply prepared for graduate work. Complaints? First, tuition charges were too high. They wanted to get at the bottom of the accounting system used by the University and see why costs could not be reduced. Second, the general education courses were sometimes “badly” taught and did not reach fully enough into the present. They wanted more emphasis on the contemporary, particularly in history and the humanities. Third, the University was behind the times in its approach to the racial problem. Fourth, although they freely conceded that the University was thoroughly liberal, youngsters could get into trouble by being over-

vociferous on civil rights, censorship, and so on. Fifth, intelligent youngish teachers might, my informants said, be in danger of being fired just before they got tenure if they did not “conform.”

I doubt that a professor ever has been fired at Chicago for “non-conformity” despite what students may say. In my interviews with them, faculty members were generous in their praise for the freedom and independence they are granted by the administration of the University. If there is a pressure on them, it probably is the social pressure of the academic community to work hard, teach well and contribute in positive terms to mankind's storehouse of usable knowledge.

The next day I climbed the old iron stairway of Cobb Hall and sat in on a sophomore humanities course. No rostrum, no desks. Eleven young men, ten young women sat informally with an instructor round a large oval table. Classes are commendably small — averaging 18 — at Chicago. The class was reading Plato's “Gorgias,” and instruction took the form of question, elucidation, and

discussion. The mood was nicely — but not exaggeratedly — spirited. There are all manners of innovations at Chicago. Formal lectures usually do not take place more than once a week, and only original texts are used. At examinations the identity of the student is unknown to the examiner who goes over his papers.

Advocates of general education are listened to with respect. This, indeed, next to the quarter system (The school operates the year around and is divided into four quarters) which has been widely copied (and will surely be introduced in many more universities), is one of Chicago's distinguishing marks in the undergraduate realm to day. The alert, bright-eyed early careerists receive an excellent pre-professional education and often move rapidly toward their chosen goals. But the University makes it clear that it values the well-rounded person, with a solid underpinning of general knowledge, before specialization begins.

What the University wants to stress is the "interrelation of disciplines," and thus arose the now celebrated

broad-beam courses which every student is obliged to take and which totally occupy two of his four years unless he can prove by "placement tests" that he does not need them.

The eight obligatory courses are:

1. Humanities (including philosophy, art and music.)
2. English composition
3. A foreign language (not compulsory if a student passes a satisfactory examination.)
4. Mathematics
5. History of Western Civilization
6. Biological Sciences
7. Physical Sciences
8. Social Sciences

One should also mention that instruction in the fourth year may be tutorial, and that "specialization" does not mean vocational education. Chicago is certainly not the place to go if one wants to study ice cream manufacture or hotel management.

About 230 members of the faculty specifically serve the undergraduate body but practically all professors, no matter how elevated, may teach in the College. Many, including the President of

the College, like to do so, because it gives them the chance to associate with fresh, youthful minds.

The graduate divisions are the Humanities (roughly 565 students), Biological Sciences excluding medicine (260), Physical Sciences (505) and Social Sciences (1,150). Here are enticing realms of the recondite; courses exist from Balkan Linguistics to Neuropharmacology. Here too, in spite of close emphasis on the refinements of particularized scholarship, we find that some of the frontiers between disciplines have already broken down — particularly in the sciences. The University encourages this. There are professors who scarcely know whether they belong to one department or another. Nobody knows these days where biology stops and physics starts. Here too, the relations of professor to student can attain an exquisite level of intellectual intimacy. The Department of Music, one of the strongest on the campus and one of the most stimulating in the country, has a staff of 15 to 50 music majors. Astronomy presently

has ten teachers, including several men of formidable renown, for 15 graduate students.

Many universities today have a tendency to be choosy about students who apply for graduate work. Chicago takes a more liberal attitude and prides itself for its hospitality to "risk" admissions; it will take a chance on a bright boy, no matter how spotty or unconventional his previous education has been. Some of these have paid off well. And, of course, undergraduates progressed to earn a doctorate between 1936 and 1956 than in any other institution in the country.

Needless to say, the graduate and professional schools spawn an enormous amount of talent. Chicago ranks as the nation's largest per capita producer of college and university teachers elsewhere in the nation. It is an incubator, a teacher of teachers. No fewer than 167 presidents of other American colleges or universities — one out of 10 — either are Chicago alumni, or have been faculty members — an almost unbelievable statistic.

The Graduate School of Education, established in 1958, is the newest of Chicago's professional schools. But the University from the beginning has won renown for its research in education. Research is translated into direct service through a number of Centers in the education school — the Reading Research Center, the Urban Child Center, and the Comparative Education Center which investigates the differences in teaching and learning the world over. Since 1957 the University has been providing educational training and guidance in Pakistan, and for Pakistanis on the Chicago campus.

The Laboratory Schools, as the name implies, serve both as a demonstration center for effective teaching — from nursery school through 12 years of pre-college education — and as a research tool for testing and validating educational theory. Incidentally, the average I.Q. of the 1,200 students in the Laboratory Schools is higher than 130 — not surprising, I suppose, since about half of them are children of University faculty members.

What makes the University of Chicago great is neither endowment nor equipment, but men — the faculty. Twenty-four Nobel Prize winners have been associated with the University in one way or another so far. Twenty-eight members of the faculty are members of the National Academy of Sciences, 31 are fellows of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and 17 are members of the American Philosophic Society, the oldest learned society in the country.

Seventy per cent of the faculty live close enough to the University to be able to walk to their classrooms, an important factor in maintaining the community spirit, and their children by and large go to the same schools and play together. Nobody pulls rank; everybody from the President down is plain "Mr.," except Doctors of Medicine.

To summarize, it is the faculty which gives the University much of its unique quality, its special temper, based on a devout belief in research for its own sake and relentlessly acute and inces-

sant speculation and experiments. The dominant principle is solid scholarship, and it demands the best. Small principalities as well as large ones have their founding fathers, their historical *raison d'etre*. The University of Chicago was founded in 1890 by the curious impingement of three forces — a Baptist organization (the American Baptist Education Society) which contributed the idea; John D. Rockefeller who contributed most of the money; and the first President, William Rainey Harper, who contributed almost everything else. It opened its doors on October 1, 1892 as a full-fledged university, not a college. This was something unusual at the time, when a university normally grew out of a previously existing college. The original faculty of 103 included eight college presidents, whom Harper enticed from other institutions, as well as other eminent scholars. The student body numbered 594.

Harper, assuming charge of the creation of a new University, was enthralled by its possibilities; after being assured of getting a free hand,

he issued an extraordinary manifesto of policy — a policy so revolutionary that it provoked the amusement or scorn of almost all the orthodox pedagogues of the time.

Soon this remarkable innovator and energizer evolved a novel idea which is still one of the most distinctive marks of the University — the four quarter system. He scrapped the old September-to-June schedule, and established in its place the first all-year-round university in the history of the world. The year was divided into four quarters which were made as nearly as possible identical in the work offered and the professors in attendance; the University was to keep its doors open the whole year, in full blast all the time. By this scheme University education was made more flexible than it had ever been before. A student — even today — may come when his finances permit, leave again, come back, and graduate at any season when his work is complete; on the other hand, he may work all four quarters for three years without interruption and thus get out a year ahead of

time. Another advantage is that a student at Chicago takes no more than three or four courses during each quarter, and the curriculum is widened.

Harper died, worn out, in 1906, aged 49. The University has never changed much from the pattern stamped on it by this extraordinary and indomitable man.

In 1929 came Robert Maynard Hutchins, aged 30, from Yale, where he had become the "boy wonder" Dean of the Law School at 28. The University will never forget Robert Hutchins, and discussion of his regime still provokes lively controversy. Hutchins was a brilliantly inspired innovator, lucid, packed with principle, and possessed of enormous charm.

Hutchins' central belief was that "Every student should obtain a liberal education before being permitted to specialize." At the same time he wanted to speed up education so that work in the professions could get under way more quickly. What he sought was "more educated A.B.'s and fewer uneducated Ph.D.'s." He even looked forward, as

somebody put it, to the time "when Ph.D.'s would really be Doctors of Philosophy." What interested him was ideas, and he stood for culture and the human tradition.

The two men who have followed Hutchins as heads of state at Chicago came from quite different molds and have shown quite different styles.

Lawrence A. Kimpton, an energetic professor of philosophy and a practical man as well who had become vice president of the University, took over when Hutchins resigned in 1951 and served as chief executive until 1960.

George Beadle, who succeeded Kimpton in 1961 to become the seventh president of the Chicago principality, is a biologist, a specialist in genetics, which is a field that could well turn out to mean to this generation what atomic physics meant to the last.

Who does run the University of Chicago?

From trustees, faculty, students and outsiders, I got the same answer: "Under Beadle, Levi." Edward Hirsch Levi, formerly Dean of the Law School is Provost



of the University and Beadle's right arm.

The faculty has considerable autonomous power at Chicago, probably more than in any comparable American university. Beadle is faculty-minded, and so is Levi. Harper laid it down back in the 1890's that educational jurisdiction is the exclusive domain of the faculty, and this tradition has been pretty well kept up to this day. The trustees do not supervise on the academic level. Money follows policy not the reverse. The faculty is unshakeable.

Perhaps the single element that best characterizes the University is its incessant search for quality, which goes back all the way to Harper. It does not have to kowtow to any legislature or city council. It has unlimited reserves of energy and creative talent for dealing with the true business of a university, the pursuit and communication of knowledge, and it has risen again to become newly typical of what a university should be, an unfrightened and pertinacious community of scholars. — *John Gunther, condensed from Exchange, No. 36, 1965.*

## THE WRONG MAN

Pauline Bonaparte was in love with Freron, a commissioner of the Convention. She wrote him:

"I love you always and most passionately. I love you forever, my beautiful idol, my heart, my appealing lover. I love you, love you, love you, the most loved of lovers, and I swear never to love any one else"

Soon after she fell in love with Junot who became a field marshal.