

The rise of professionals, decline of the university

◆ Administrators with little or no ties to the faculty are creating us vs. them mentality

By MARC MANGEL
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The recent controversy surrounding the retirement and compensation of David Gardner as president of the University of California has many facets.

The secrecy of the regents and President Gardner borders on a moral violation of public trust. The timing of the announcement (in a year when students face, once again, large raises in fees and the faculty will likely receive no merit or cost-of-living increases) was exceptionally bad.

Perhaps most sadly, as President Gardner prepares to leave the university the focus is not on the many good things that he did for the university, but on his personal finances.

There is no doubt that the issues currently being raised should be discussed and the subject of public scrutiny. The focus, however, treats a symptom instead of the basic problem, which is the current status of the professional academic administrator.

It is, in fact, this new breed of academic which has caused many universities to deflect from their original objectives.

The numbers of professional academic administrators has expanded greatly in the last decade. Typically, they are "senior" administrators (deans, vice chancellors, chancellors, presidents) who are hired from the outside, having no previous association to the university and who appear to climb in their careers by stepping from one university administrative position to another at a rapid rate, usually leaving one university and moving to another where they "move up" the ladder.

There are two especially pernicious effects of this career pattern.

First, consider the perspective of the administrator. This indi-

vidual has no ties to the university, no long-term relationships or collaborations with faculty colleagues, and no strong sense of the campus community, history or ideology. At UC Davis, for example, only two of about a dozen senior administrators rose through the faculty ranks.

Furthermore, this administrator is usually isolated (being a top-level individual) in the administration building of the campus, rather than out among the faculty. Hence, feedback and a sense of good performance come from two sources: other administrators on campus (most of whom suffer the same lack of perspective and background) and other administrators nationwide.

Thus, instead of measuring successful performance in terms of how the broad scholarly activity of the faculty is facilitated and how the quality of education is insured, the administrator focuses on numbers (numbers of extramural grants and the dollar value of those grants, numbers of faculty in the National Academy of Sciences, etc.) and on personal gain (salary, retirement packages, etc.).

In the keynote address to the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, President H. Gray of the University of Chicago noted that "The single most serious problem of our universities, in my opinion, is their failure to adhere steadily to their own purposes." The rise of the professional administrator has given contributed greatly to this loss of purpose.

Finally, faculty and students, rather than being the viewed as the individuals whom the administrator serves, are viewed as the servants of the administrator; they are the individuals who will generate the numbers so that the administrator can move on to another position at a different university.

Second, consider the perspective of the faculty. Because these senior administrators come from the outside, the faculty usually have no tie to them. The natural

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result is the development of an "Us" (faculty) vs. "Them" (administrators) mentality.

The university administration is not viewed as a source of ideas and help for facilitation, but as a set of barriers in a bureaucracy to overcome whenever initiatives are developed. Faculty colleagues who do choose to participate in part of the governance of the university are usually viewed with disdain.

Furthermore, the more effective a colleague is at contributing to administration, the less he or she is viewed as one of the faculty.

Thus, individuals with skills in administration, teaching and research are haunted by the realization that each successful performance of administration may actually lower the opinion of this person by his or her colleagues.

The problem is, of course, not without solution. We simply must return to the notion that senior administrators need a deep connection to the university which they serve. (The next president of the University of California, Jack Peltason, clearly has such a deep connection, even though he did spend time elsewhere.)

There are many forms that this connection can take: undergraduate studies, graduate studies, or

rising through the faculty ranks all provide a link (which outsiders almost always lack) to the sense of purpose and community of a particular university.

Universities should strive to build excellence by nurturing young faculty and by determining for themselves who are likely to be outstanding future scholars and encouraging them, rather than by hiring "superstars" from the outside, and thus encouraging the view that excellence is achieved externally.

Senior faculty must recognize that it is their responsibility to participate in administration, even at the personal and professional cost associated with such work, so that other colleagues may succeed. Additionally, we must encourage administrators to maintain contact with faculty colleagues (by at least attending regular colloquia) and students (by at least occasionally teaching).

Finally, we should consider limiting terms of administration so that individuals can productively return to teaching and research. There will, of course, be exceptions to these broad guidelines, but their application is essential for the future well-being of our universities.

—Marc Mangel is a professor of zoology at UC Davis.