

CASE VI
Kansas City Conference

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When those of us who work in Washington are asked to speak, it is usually to discuss significant federal initiatives or to convey the Washington perspective on issues of national importance.

I initially thought along these lines, but then I reviewed your program and noted its "sacred cow" theme.

I have long wondered about the origin of the term "sacred cow." Does it refer to a Hindu vision of life? Is it a Midwestern play on New England's "sacred cod"? Has it a reference point at all? One thing we do know, it has become popularized in university life – a term expressing the difficulty in effecting institutional change, and a descriptor of protected practices, and at times forbidden discussions.

So when you featured the sacred cow as your theme, I was intrigued. And when asked to substitute for my good colleague Judith Ramaley, I decided to talk, not only about national issues but also about sacred cows, especially those found on university campuses. I am pleased to be here, and hope this keynote address is sufficiently provocative to stimulate your thinking, perhaps even to challenge your assumptions. All of which is to say I am taking license with your topic.

As the story goes, Harvard, in its earliest days as a college/quasi-seminary compensated its faculty with a modest salary and the privilege of grazing a cow on the campus green. Times have certainly changed, but few campus practices have. We have a whole herd of sacred cows on the campus – all resisting change. I am fond of the observation that if a 15th century physician were transported to a 21st century medical center he would be hopelessly lost. On the other hand, a 15th century scholar transported to one of our campuses would probably make the adjustment in two weeks or less.

Of course the heart of higher education is the preservation of that body of knowledge developed over the centuries, the affirmation of lasting values, and the exploration of connectivity between past, present, and the future. Much of what we do is retrospective and deserves to be sustained. Still we have sacred cows. I have chosen to talk about seven of them – recognizing that there are more, but there is something "sacred" about the number seven. Here is my list: affirmative action, public information, teacher training, intercollegiate athletics, the library, the core curriculum, and student access to higher education.

I begin with the most challenging concept – that of affirmative action. The U.S. Supreme Court has granted certiorari to two admissions cases from the University of

Michigan. At both the undergraduate and professional school levels, this selective admissions university has chosen to consider race as one of several permissible factors in making those decisions.

Virtually everyone in higher education believes strongly that our universities must mirror the society we serve. It is unacceptable to have a de facto caste system where membership in the professions – or in any social or economic strata – is characterized by race, religion or any other group characteristic. Higher education has been a leader in creating opportunity for all Americans. Affirmative action has been one of the tools we have used. We have come a long way from the America of 1948 recently referred to, and we in the academy should be proud of our leadership role.

The challenges to affirmative action are strong and serious. It has become a pivotal, and at times a polarizing political issue. The Washington higher education associations will be submitting an amicus curiae brief in support of the University of Michigan. However, we must be prepared for a negative decision from the Supreme Court.

I call to your attention the words of John Casteen, President of the University of Virginia, who observed, “I see affirmative action as a management technique – a mechanism to keep the system honest. There are more ways than one to do that.” In short, the end is more important than the means. Affirmative action has served us well, but we should not treat it as a sacred cow. We may have to pursue other means to achieve inclusion and diversity in our institutions, and full participation in American Society.

The second sacred cow is the public information office. (I thought I would pick a topic close to home.) In days of yore, there clearly was needed a central office where accurate (and mostly full) information could be secured. This was the office linking the university to the general public and to its many publics. Those days are gone. The public has multiple access to news and information, and much of the work of this office has limited utilization. (Now, as a university president for over 25 years, I want to acknowledge I have benefited tremendously from services of the public information office – including its speaking for the President and at times its shielding my office – and on occasion covering a retreat.) I am not ungrateful for those services, at times majestically rendered. But times have changed and the marketing function has become the dominant communications function needed. And I know that many of you are engaged in developing integrated marketing programs and successful practices.

What has become a sacred cow on many campuses is the allocation of resources to unproductive uses in this office. At a time when the majority of Americans receives its news from radio and television, where do we allocate our resources in the public information arena? At a university where I recently served, over 70% of personnel costs were allotted to covering various campus units – in the mode of a big city newsroom. No

funds were spent on radio, and only marginal expenditures on television – and virtually none of that for marketing purposes. At a time when universities are desperately in need of rebuilding public support for funding higher education, we are not reaching the public. We may need to replace the sacred cow with a new beast of burden, which can carry the university's message and impact public sentiments.

Teacher training has been a university responsibility for over a century. The question is: has it become a sacred cow? I hope not, for I believe that universities do excellent work in preparing new teachers, who in fact do an excellent job of teaching. I especially note a number of universities, including Emporia State in Kansas, Southeast Louisiana, and North Alabama, which have “guaranteed” their teacher education graduates, promising to re-educate – at no additional cost to a school district – any teacher found to be deficient. The number of claims on this guarantee can be counted on one hand. Just a week ago the University System of Georgia announced it would henceforth guarantee all teacher education graduates of all the public universities in Georgia. If we are doing such good work why is the teaching profession so harshly criticized? I am not sure why, but I suspect that the public is unaware of the fact that a number of teachers in their schools are not graduates of teacher training programs, that a sizeable number of teachers are teaching in fields other than their field of preparation (35% of math instruction is being provided by teachers with neither a major nor a minor in mathematics), and that state policies and union contracts often protect the few inept and unproductive teachers who become the poster representatives for critics of public education.

The end result is that floodgates may be opening for everyone to get in the act of preparing teachers. In four states community colleges are now offering baccalaureate instruction in teacher education, and state education agencies in two states are moving in the direction of offering both programs and certification in lieu of teacher education programs. There also seems to be an unwarranted praise of alternative preparation of teachers in the U.S. Department of Education.

We need to look hard at whether university teacher preparation has become a sacred cow that we are unwilling to touch. Quite obviously with this degree of criticism, much work needs to be done to rebuild public confidence in teacher education. And that may mean taking action, such as guaranteeing one's graduates, a policy that campus committees could well oppose. There is also the issue of continuing education and professional development activities for teachers. Here higher education does not have a distinguished record. In fact much of the criticism toward our graduate programs and continuing education courses for practicing teachers – criticism from K-12 teachers themselves and faculty elsewhere in the university – is justified. And just as important, higher ed may need to provide greater leadership in school improvement and reform--including full disclosure of teacher credentials.

The next sacred cow is Intercollegiate Athletics. I don't think this cow could be moved off the campus green, even if we all agreed to. James Friedman, former president of the University of Iowa and Dartmouth University, recently concluded that there is an inherent incompatibility between intercollegiate athletics and the academic culture. He may be right, though there have been extensive – and for the most part successful efforts, to strengthen the academic expectations and performance of student athletes. And, for the most part, universities have been successful in maintaining the amateur status of the athletic enterprise. However, rampant commercialism and the gross, perhaps even obscene infusion of dollars into the athletic enterprise, have corrupted many of the values we have long attached to university life and amateur competition. Unfortunately, there are no persuasive signs that the higher education community will be able to tackle the matter of excessive revenues, inequitable distributions, and injudicious expenditures.

With change comes renewed hope. Whether the former president of Indiana University, who revived institutional control of athletics, can restore educational control of the far-flung athletic enterprise, remains to be seen. Intercollegiate athletics makes many positive contributions to campus life, and serves to connect alumni and friends to the institution. Harnessing those energies, while regulating abuses, has become a formidable challenge far beyond the ability of a single campus or a group of campuses to control. Yet, we must restore education control of this growing commercial, and increasingly autonomous enterprise. Canceling Thursday afternoon classes to accommodate the network's desire for a Thursday night game (as recently occurred in Florida) is a step in the wrong direction. We should worry that a sacred cow may become a mad one.

The fifth sacred cow on the campus is the Library. The surest way to engender the condemnation of the faculty is to criticize the library, so that is why I am speaking to you and not a faculty senate. Three years ago I visited a prominent liberal arts university in the northeast. The president proudly showed me the new library under construction, and then added, there will not be a single stack in the building. I was shaken by that comment, but came to appreciate its significance. The historic purpose of universities to serve as a repository of knowledge has been eroded by extraordinary technological advances. Today's imperative is to access information easily and quickly. There is no need physically to store materials, if they can be readily obtained from other sources. All of us have become proficient in using the Web, though the assistance of skilled information specialists is widely needed. That expertise represents the new face of what we have known as library personnel. My colleague, Peter Magrath, NASULGC president and former president of the universities of Minnesota and Missouri, expressed well this significant change:

“Information technology systems are revolutionizing how we communicate and exchange ideas. Universities that do not adapt and creatively use the opportunities of the Digital Age...will be marginalized....Tomorrow's library will be different because of the various digital technologies, making it

possible to move far beyond the communication of the printed word....Not only will this make possible new forms of intellectual discourse, but it will also make it unnecessary for every university to stock every possible periodical and book. “

The real question remains how much longer will universities commit significant resources for acquisitions and the employment of cataloguers and acquisitions staff. At what point, if ever, will thousands of square feet devoted to storage of unused and underutilized printing materials be more productively utilized. Is this a sacred cow in the heart of the campus?

If describing the library as a sacred cow on the verge of transformation has not stepped on some academic toes, then let's go one step further and talk about the ultimate sacred cow – the core curriculum (or general ed as it is often denoted). Despite the repeated references in catalogues, annual reports and in alumni and development publications to changes in society and the University's progressive responses and innovative undertakings, in truth the core curriculum has not changed. On most campuses the core curriculum is essentially the same as it was 40 years ago when I was an undergraduate, and I am told by my seniors that this curriculum has essentially been the same for a century. Now, I want to acknowledge that several universities have modified the core curriculum at its edges, and course components, particularly in the hard sciences have periodically been revised – but I would comfortably say that at least 75% of the core curriculum is the same as it was a century ago. Talk about a sacred cow. Of course, the core curriculum today is far less a function of faculty creativity than it is a function of textbook publishers and training programs for graduate students. Is there anything wrong with this picture? Not necessarily, unless you believe profound changes are reshaping the nature of life and work on the planet and that universities need to adapt to these changes.

Let me cite one factum. Today more people are studying English in China than live in England. The great advantage which our nation's graduates have enjoyed – fluency in the language of the world's commerce and technological advances – will soon be lost. Why would any international corporation need to employ American college graduates, when a growing pool of college graduates throughout the world are fully prepared, usually with greater skills in mathematics and science, and as a bonus, are fluent in several languages – including English. It is interesting to note that the Commission on National Security, the Hart-Rudman Commission, conceived and jointly appointed by President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich, concluded--a year before 9/11-- that terrorism was our major immediate security challenge, and, important to this discussion, that the nation's unsuccessful efforts to educate sufficient math and technical graduates, and foreign language speakers, posed the primary long-term security challenge. I believe we as educators can no longer leave the core curriculum to the fate of interdepartmental politics, but must rethink and reformulate educational expectations known as the core curriculum.

This fall I spent time in Russia and visited St. Petersburg University and its new Smolensky Institute of the Liberal Arts – the first liberal arts program so conceived in Russian higher education. I was particularly intrigued by three courses in their American Studies program. I think you might be interested in the content of these courses, designed by and for Russians better to understand us.

First is "The History of Things that Created America," described as the history of the development of American science and technology ... "from weapons, industrial equipment and technologies, vehicles and communications equipment, to computers, household appliances, and the American style in building, clothing, living habits, etc. We will focus especially on resonant inventions such as jeans and the Jeep that demonstrated perfect conformity with Americans' needs, habits and tastes that shaped the economy and spirit of America."

The second course is "Fundamental Texts of American Statehood," described as the history of and the creation and adoption of key documents in American history, including the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. "We will investigate the aspiration and ideals of the authors of these documents, the principles and ideology behind them, and the influence of these documents on other countries and peoples."

And lastly, "PAX Americana," described as the history of the "ideological basis of the USA's messianic role in the 20th century, plus American foreign-policy objectives concerning support for the ideals of freedom, progress and democracy."

I wonder how many of us would like to take these courses, partly out of curiosity, partly for our own enlightenment. The question is whether Russians in American studies will be more knowledgeable about our society than our own students who have been through the core curriculum.

Which brings me to the seventh, and last sacred cow: access. This is a sacred cow to which I have a strong and passionate commitment, but one which I fear may soon be lost. The cornerstone of American higher education has been access for all our citizens to advanced learning. Key to that access is affordability, not only through reasonable tuition, but beginning with the Lyndon Johnson administration, federal student aid to eliminate financial barriers. And in the following decade, states joined the federal government in extending financial assistance to students attending both public and private higher education, all under the banner of insuring access. In the 1980s that commitment began to flag as President Reagan and the Congress began a shift of federal aid from grants to guaranteed loans; states joined in this shift by giving funding priority to merit-based aid, rather than need-based aid.

These trends have continued unabated in the '90s, compounded by state legislatures consciously underfunding higher education and in many states, actually

reducing appropriations. Universities have contributed to this attack on access by raising tuition above inflationary levels--largely to recover funding withdrawn by the state. But, I must add, in the last couple of years a pattern is emerging on a few campuses in which tuition is being increased beyond what has been lost in appropriations and beyond inflationary pressures. Tuition is being increased for revenue to enhance the stature of the university through additional expenditures which do not necessarily benefit the undergraduates who foot the bill.

This converging of need and greed, of neglect and disregard, has propelled student borrowing to levels not envisioned or, in my judgment, justified. Official data tend to run a few years behind, but I would not be surprised to see graduates of a public university in 2003 leave the institution with an average debt approximating \$20,000. I surmise that independent university graduates will average \$24,000-\$25,000 in indebtedness. (These figures refer to debt undertaken for a college education--not including automobile and credit card indebtedness unrelated to education.) We are creating a new debtor class--our students. Oh, we can find rationales to justify our actions--and those of you in communications and alumni work are called upon to persuade others that this indebtedness is a worthy investment. Depending on what career opportunities may unfold, that statement may prove to be true. But one thing is for sure, students with that kind of indebtedness--or better still married couples with double those debt levels--will find it extraordinarily difficult to assume positions as public school teachers, youth workers and a host of other socially important careers, because income streams are insufficient to finance debt as well as live, much less rear a family.

I, as I suspect several of you in my generation, was fortunate to graduate from college with no or insignificant indebtedness. That is because my parents' generation was passionate about education and genuinely believed they should and would sacrifice in order that their children could have a better life. I regret my generation does not have a similar philosophy. In fact the opposite is true. Today the prevailing sentiment is that the younger generation should sacrifice so that the established and the elderly can enjoy a better life. Think about it. What other conclusion can you draw when states lower property and income taxes to benefit the established and the elderly, and then force students to borrow money to finance their education. And the federal government has embraced this unconscionable practice of providing massive tax cuts geared to the wealthiest, while simultaneously failing to provide additional funding for Pell grants and other forms of grant and work study programs. We have this year a \$3 billion shortfall in Pell grants, for which we cannot find sufficient funding, but according to the administration we can afford to forego \$30 billion a year on taxes, a tax cut benefiting almost entirely my generation.

In short we have so compromised the concept of affordability that access to higher education is seriously threatened, or maintained at such a high social cost that we should truly be ashamed of what we are doing. Access is a sacred cow we should keep. I fear it will be slaughtered, to feed the wealthy, of course.

I don't think we can reverse this trend until young people vote in numbers equal to the proportion of the elderly going to the polls, and even then young folks will need to be instrumental in voting out of office some of these wrong-headed policy makers. One lesson you learn in politics is that public policy more often flows from fear of voters than from good intentions.

Well, I hope my comments this morning have proven stimulating. I have sought to discuss some of the major issues in higher education, in Washington and on the campus, in the context of the theme of your conference--sacred cows. And having done that, I need, as your program suggests, to "mooove" out. Thank you for being such an attentive audience and best wishes, not only for a productive conference, but for a great 2003.