

Third of a Series:

Building Curricula At MSU—O

BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

American business leaders of the future must be given educations that will prepare them to fully understand their role in the world and enable them to make increasingly tough decisions.

This was the opinion of five of the nation's top businessmen and business educators as they met at Michigan State University—Oakland to help plan the business administration curriculum for this new center of learning.

At this third of four seminars designed to provide ideas for the four curricular areas to be offered by MSU—O when it opens in the fall of 1959, the panel of authorities stressed that well-educated people are needed to head big as well as small businesses of the future.

Serving on the seminar panel were a college dean, two college professors and two representatives of small and big business who left their busy daily schedules to help lay the groundwork for the new school.

Fully Qualified Panelists

Comprising the panel were: Dr. George L. Bach, dean of the Graduate School of Industrial Administration, Carnegie Institute of Technology; Dr. Frank C. Pierson, chairman of the department of economics, Swarthmore College; Erwin H. Schell, professor emeritus and lecturer, School of Industrial Management, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; William H. Coleman, president and director, Twin Coach Co., and Theodore V. Houser, chairman of the board of directors, Sears, Roebuck & Co.

The five men met with MSU and MSU—O officials and members of the MSU—O Foundation to tackle this challenging question:

“With your knowledge and experience in the field of business and business administration, and given a clean slate upon which to write, how would you organize a program in business administration at this new institution to train business leaders for the half century ahead?”

Although the panel stressed the need for well-educated people to head the businesses of tomorrow, they warned against too much specialization in college. Rather, they pointed out, the business-bound college graduate should have an understanding of, rather than specialization in, the many components of business

structure and an understanding of basic values in order to make sound decisions.

The qualities of a good business leader, according to Mr. Houser, are initiative, leadership, strong will, a curious and logical mind and power of analysis. Both teacher and student, he said, should be well-exposed to business rather than devoting themselves to the excessive detail of business methods.

Mr. Coleman, representing small business, said the problems of human relations and “How do I finance my business?” should be emphasized for those who plan to move into small companies.

Looking to the future, the businessman is going to be increasingly unable to live on hunches, commented Dr. Bach. The businessman, he said, must be equipped to make hard-headed analyses in a fast-changing world.

Dr. Schell explained that the work of the teachers and students in the first classes at MSU—O will be important because they will set the tone and pace for those following in later years. For this reason, he said, students and faculty of top quality should be attracted to the new school. Because of its geographical location, he added, MSU—O has a tremendous potential.

Five Patterns Considered

The panel began the discussion by considering the five present patterns of education for business in the United States.

1. Most of the larger businesses in the U. S. now operate extensive business educational programs, or “company universities,” for their own employes. These companies admit they have major responsibilities for the education of their own people—a responsibility which they cannot and should not expect colleges and universities to take.

2. The junior or community colleges also have a role to play in education for business, particularly in their so-called terminal programs. Here, business and industry may find, in the future, its best possible source of technicians.

3. With the marriage of engineering and management in many businesses, our schools of engineering also have a role to play in education for business. Engineering schools, through programs in industrial engineering and industrial management, may train people for positions some place between the middle and top management.



PANELISTS for the seminar on business administration gather after the sessions for an informal discussion at Meadow Brook Hall, Michigan State University—Oakland. Left to right are: D. B. Varner, MSU; George L. Bach, Carnegie Institute of Technology; William H. Coleman, Twin Coach Co.; James C. Zeder, Chrysler Corp.; Erwin H. Schell, Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Theodore V. Houser, Sears, Roebuck & Co., and Frank C. Pierson, Swarthmore College.

4. Many of our 400 liberal arts colleges also have offerings in the field of business.

5. Business schools located within complex universities should provide guidance, leadership and experimentation for all of business education.

Related to this description of the various types of institutions engaged in education for business are three basic approaches to the problem now characteristic of business education as a whole.

Some institutions concentrate almost exclusively on the teaching of techniques and skills, because as the complexity of the business community increases some of these techniques become very involved.

A second approach is to take the field of business education as a self-contained subject. This approach separates liberal or general education into a component by itself and then usually permits about a year of specialization in business with relatively little attempt to relate the general and the special.

Finally, there are attempts to include interest in business as a part of the liberal education itself. This approach makes possible the treating of the problems of business as an opportunity for the application of principles learned in the study of the liberal arts and sciences.

In summarizing, Dr. Thomas Hamilton, MSU vice-president for academic affairs, emphasized certain kinds of knowledge and skills that the college graduate should have as he enters the business community. These in-

clude a thorough understanding of the nature of the society in which he lives, the ability to reason and an awareness of the universe and the attempts to understand it.

Only after these objectives have been achieved, or at least approximated, should the educational institution of higher learning concern itself with the specific education necessary for entrance into the business community, Dr. Hamilton added.

Said Dr. Bach in his paper, "Some Observations on the Business School of Tomorrow":

"Given the certainty of change and the uncertainty as to its direction and outcome, it seems to me clear that we must place central importance in our university training—for business as elsewhere—on students' thought processes and not particularized subject matter . . . insofar as we build in analytical tools, we must continually reach for those of broad and general applicability, with emphasis on how to use them effectively in widely varying situations, rather than on detailed particular skills and techniques."

Serving as moderator for the seminar was James C. Zeder, vice-president of Chrysler Corp., and of the 40-member MSU—O Foundation.

The fourth and last of this series of articles on MSU—O curricula will appear next month. It will report on liberal arts planning and the recommendations of Milton Eisenhower, Johns Hopkins University; Henry Steele Commager, Amherst College; Sarah Blanding, Vassar; Ralph W. Tyler, Stanford University, and Henry R. Luce, Time, Inc.