

Last of a Series:

Building Curricula At MSU—O

LIBERAL ARTS

EXAMINATIONS, grades, course work and credit hours — all must go.

This was one of the more startling recommendations made by five of the nation's leading authorities in liberal arts education at a Michigan State University-Oakland "Seminar on Higher Learning."

A maximum of freedom permitting the student to carry on his work in the laboratory and in the library under the counseling and guidance of faculty members was the consensus at this, the last of four such conferences at Meadow Brook Hall on the rolling 1,600-acre MSU—O campus.

The seminars brought together outstanding people from four major fields — engineering science, teacher education, business administration and liberal arts — the curricular areas to be offered by MSU—O when it opens next September.

Comprising the panel for the liberal arts seminar were: Dr. Sarah G. Blanding, president of Vassar College; Dr. Henry Steele Commager, professor of history and American studies, Amherst College; Dr. Milton S. Eisenhower, president of Johns Hopkins University; Henry R. Luce, editor-in-chief of Time, Inc.; and Dr. Ralph W. Tyler, director of the center for advanced study in the behavioral sciences, Stanford University.

The central question put to the panelists:

"With your experience and knowledge in the field of educational matters, and given a clean slate upon which to write, how would you go about developing a program which will insure that the students at this new institution are, in fact, liberally educated regardless of the field of specialization?"

Because MSU—O is not bound by tradition and is starting with a clean slate, the panel saw an "unparal-

leled opportunity" for the school to lead in developing new educational concepts.

The panel tended toward virtually eliminating the rigid schedules and course work which have marked American universities and which contrast strikingly with the more liberal university systems followed by European schools.

In suggesting almost revolutionary freedom for students, the panelists admitted that the burden of responsibility is shifted from the instructor to the student.

Such a liberal program, pointed out Miss Blanding, president of the New York Women's College since 1946, would be predicated upon the "inquiring mind" and the student who is "motivated to learn." Lost in such an environment of freedom, however, would be the student who comes to college because it is the "socially correct" thing to do or because of family demands, she said.

But for the serious student, panelists admitted, it would offer the greatest possible opportunity for individual development.

But how would this concept in liberal arts education fit in with today's tendency for students to specialize in narrow fields of learning?

Dr. Eisenhower, a former Kansas newspaperman and journalism professor, said:

"I see no tendency in American education today to become more specialized and restricted, but rather a trend in the other direction toward broader education for the student not only for his career but for his role

MSU PRESIDENT John A. Hannah, left, confers with three of the panelists at the fourth Seminar on Higher Education at Michigan State University—Oakland, designed to produce ideas for the development of a liberal arts curriculum at the new school. Talking with Dr. Hannah are, from left, Dr. Sarah G. Blanding, president of Vassar College; Dr. Milton S. Eisenhower, president of Johns Hopkins University, and Henry R. Luce, editor-in-chief, Time, Inc.



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as a responsible citizen.”

Because of the narrow specialization in many schools, and the irrelevancy of some programs, the panel agreed that many brilliant students become discouraged because they are forced to master material which is without meaning for them.

The liberal program advocated by the panel would not retain the emphasis on such typically European classical subjects as Latin and Greek. In fact, several of the panelists felt that all elementary instruction in foreign languages should be the responsibility of the secondary and elementary schools.

“Many subjects offered undergraduates today have no place in a university program,” maintained Dr. Commager, the noted Massachusetts historian and author. “Things such as remedial reading and beginning language courses should be taken care of in high school,” he declared.

The concept that students should take a certain number of courses to graduate was also debunked by Dr. Commager. “Americans are dazzled by them,” he said. “You take a course in marriage and you’re supposed to be assured perpetual ecstasy.”

Language instruction is far more expensive at the university level than in the high schools and takes up valuable time, according to Dr. Commager. He felt that American children are as capable as children in Europe who learn several foreign languages at lower academic levels.

Dr. Eisenhower advocated that what a student takes in college should be determined by his interests and aptitudes, and not purely by the dictums of a course catalog.

Said Miss Blanding:

“Students are forced to do too much in college. Let us not try to cover the earth in four years.”

The panelists agreed on the following points regarding liberal arts education:

1. Liberally educated students should possess the ability to communicate with others at a level of some profundity.
2. They should be capable of creative thinking.
3. They should have a broad comprehension of

various fields other than those in which they specialize.

4. They should be able to think critically about problems varying in nature.
5. They should be able to think in global terms.
6. They should be fluent in at least one foreign language.

Dr. Tyler, who entered the field of education as a high school teacher in 1921, felt that the study of other cultures and people should be stressed in the liberal arts curriculum. “Without understanding other people,” he said, “we can’t find an answer to world problems.”

Mr. Luce, who is publisher of *Time*, *Life* and *Fortune* magazines, felt that the knowledge of past civilizations still offers many important lessons to today’s students. “It is vital that we study the histories of Rome and Greece, which contain the background of the Western liberal tradition. For unless we carry this tradition forward, we must collapse and fall.”

Mr. Luce further emphasized that no one is really educated who is not familiar with the thought of the classical world.

In the final analysis, said Dr. Eisenhower, we must strive to improve our concept of curricula and course study. “We can’t get better engineers and scientists without improving all phases of education — and liberal arts is an integral part of this education.”

Dr. Thomas Hamilton, MSU vice-president for academic affairs, summed up the panel discussions by stating that present liberal arts education too often fails to relate the student and his field of study to the world and its problems. It places too much emphasis on the mechanics of teaching the student and not enough on the student as an individual learner, he said.

A student should graduate with an ability to communicate with others effectively, a mastery of his own field and a knowledge of other related fields, and an ability to think critically and on a global scale, he added.

The recommendations of the four seminars are being studied by the MSU—O Foundation and MSU officials. Many of these ideas will be integrated into the curricular program when MSU—O opens next fall.

Moderator for the four seminars was James C. Zeder, vice-president of Chrysler Corporation and of the MSU—O Foundation.



D. B. VARNER, left, MSU vice president for off-campus education, and James C. Zeder, second from left, vice-president of Chrysler Corporation and panel moderator for the MSU—O Seminars on Higher Learning, listen as two panel members expound on some new ideas for curriculum development. The educators include Dr. Ralph W. Tyler, second from right, director of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford University, and Dr. Henry Steele Commager, right, of Amherst College.