

144 - Univ. Act.

REPORT  
BY THE  
JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION  
ON ITS  
INQUIRY INTO ALLEGATIONS MADE DURING 1971  
AGAINST THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

During the summer of 1971, some severe criticisms of the management and operation of the State University, especially its central administration and the Albany campus in particular, were made public through the news media. A subsequent inquiry into the substance of these allegations by the Joint Legislative Committee on Higher Education was requested by Assemblyman Edwyn E. Mason. Although articles appeared in the "Letters to the Editor" column of the local newspapers making additional comments on the operations of the Albany Campus, the J.L.C. has confined its inquiry into two main areas:

- 1.- The charge by Professor Bernard Johnpoll, a tenured Professor of Political Science at Albany, that the State University's Central Administration is a "cesspool of incompetence" with waste and inefficiency in programs of: international studies, long-range planning, capital construction, faculty compensation and teaching responsibilities. Concerning the affairs at the University Center at Albany, he is reported to have accused the administration of practicing personal discrimination in campus programs.
- 2.- A 1968 report prepared by the Department of Audit and Control on the fiscal affairs of the University Center at Albany which covered the period 1960-1968 and which was severely critical of the business standards and campus procedures then in use.

Scope of Inquiry

The Chairman and the staff of the Joint Legislative Committee have held a series of meetings with State University Central Administration personnel and with members of the administration at the University Center at Albany campus. Complaints against the management of the State University were discussed in considerable detail. This Committee considered certain aspects of dissatisfaction with the management of the State University to be outside the scope of this inquiry.

Specifically these were:

1.- A detailed investigation into the day-to-day operation of the State University and its individual campuses. This Committee did not undertake a detailed analysis of State University programs. The Division of the Budget, the Assembly Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee are responsible for approving the programs requested by the State University in the budgetary process. These agencies along with the Department of Audit and Control, also are concerned with the implementation of these programs, after they have been initiated. In addition, the Legislative Commission on Expenditure Review has authority to instigate audits of agency spending. Thus there already exist sufficient organizations with experienced personnel who are more capable of insuring that the allocated monies were properly spent than are members of this Committee.

This Committee, however, cannot condone waste in higher education or any other governmental program, and believes that the criticisms made in the report by the Department of Audit and Control should alert State

University officials to establish procedures which will prevent further occurrences or situations of a similar nature.

Perhaps the greatest defect in higher education today, both public and private in every state, is the lack of reliable standards to measure effectiveness. Are each of the four State University Centers as effective or more effective than the large private universities in this state, or the large public universities in the other states? Frankly, this Committee does not know, nor have we been able to find any experts who do. Unfortunately, the lack of dependable information and commonly accepted purposes makes comparisons among colleges and universities extremely hazardous and unreliable.

We suggest that the Division of the Budget, in conjunction with the Department of Audit and Control and the State University intensify their efforts to explore this critical question of effectiveness and develop better guidelines or criteria for its measurement. Such guidelines should also be used to measure progress toward the goals and objectives of the State University as indicated in its Master Plans.

2.- Charges of unfairness and favoritism toward individuals and alleged violations of due process. Matters such as these are critical to the integrity of any institution. This Committee has ascertained that there is an established professional grievance procedure for the handling of complaints on every SUNY campus. This Committee does not consider itself a proper body to conduct a grievance hearing which would circumvent the established campus due process which can be followed by recourse to the Chancellor, and ultimately the courts.

The Committee Findings

Concerning the State Comptroller's 1968 Report. For many years the citizens of New York have recognized the important role of the State Comptroller in improving the quality of governmental services at the state and local levels. In the development of this Report, the Committee paid careful attention to the criticisms contained in the Comptroller's published report on the University Center at Albany. A review of other reports issued for various campuses indicates that the comments in this audit were similar to those applying to other institutions within the State University system.

We have reviewed with University officials the steps which have been taken in response to the auditor's report. A detailed follow-up of the Albany campus audit was undertaken last spring by the State University's Office of Internal Audit after the release of the Comptroller's findings. Each particular recommendation made by the Comptroller's staff in the following areas was reviewed with care, and specific implementation activities identified: cash control procedures and records, maintenance of student accounts, operation of the computer center, postage records and procedures, the control of equipment, purchasing practices and procedures, and the collection of telephone toll charges. This Committee has been assured that the recommendations made by the Comptroller's staff in each of these categories has been implemented, either exactly in the manner suggested by the auditors, or in another manner of achieving the same result. These recommendations and suggestions have been distributed to all other campuses for their utilization.

There was no recommendation about faculty salaries in the Comptroller's report, but from the repeated assertions that average faculty compensation at the four University Centers is higher than the average at some other campuses selected by the auditor, the suggestion is that the SUNY faculty salaries are too high. There appears to be some disagreement among the professionals in the area of faculty compensation and instructional activities. The important issue of faculty salaries is of critical concern to this Committee, the fiscal committees of the Legislature, the Division of the Budget, and to the general public. Obviously, an excellent university must have an outstanding faculty. However, the salaries and fringe benefits extended to the SUNY faculty should not be out-of-line with those of comparable institutions.

This Committee is aware of present methods of comparing faculty benefits, but, since these are inadequate, we urge that further effort be made to find valid comparisons between SUNY faculty salaries and fringe benefits, and those paid at similar institutions, both public and private within and outside New York State. These comparisons must be undertaken with considerable care, insuring in the process of inquiry, that appropriate allowances are made for all fringe benefits. Consideration should also be given to such factors as teaching loads, class size, administrative responsibilities and items of similar nature.

The costs per student as developed in the Comptroller's audit also must be examined with extreme caution, not only because the nature of the institutions compared varies so greatly, but also because the source data report (the bulletin of the American Association of University Professors) states that since each reporting institution uses its own formula to calculate a full-time equivalent student, figures may not be comparable from institution to institution. A university with an expanding program may have a lower utilization of faculty in terms of students than

Another important concern is faculty workload. In many discussions of this subject, misinterpretation of data seems to run high. The faculty activities that contribute to the instructional function have been described in various ways, but the latest description adopted by a special task force of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education described them as follows:

- 1.- Formal classroom laboratory and tutorial contact with students, including preparation for such contacts, supervision of teaching assistants, and subsequent evaluation of student work.
- 2.- Formal supervision of research and thesis work.
- 3.- Informal seminar and conference contact with students.
- 4.- Academic advising of students.
- 5.- Development of new or innovative instructional materials or approaches for future use with students.
- 6.- Participation on academic committees.
- 7.- Departmental research, financed internally for the primary purpose of maintaining or improving the professional competence of faculty for the benefit of those students who may be involved.
- 8.- Participation in meetings and activities intended to produce professional growth.

Obviously, this Committee cannot judge whether the "total" workload per faculty member at SUNY is at, above, or is below, accepted professional standards. In an institution as large and as diverse as the State University, it is quite likely that some faculty exceed generally-accepted standards and others fall short of these. Therefore, the Central Administration has the obligation to establish policies under which the academic staff of the University shall meet their professional responsibilities, and the campus presidents must be held responsible for enforcing these policies.

State University Policy This Committee has studied a series of policy directives and administrative actions which the State University Board of Trustees has issued in recent months. On the whole, we believe that these decisions reflect a clear understanding of the fiscal realities facing the citizens of the State of New York and a commitment to meet the higher education needs of our adults and young people alike through innovative approaches.

The announced cutback in anticipated dormitory construction at several State University campuses should significantly reduce State expenditures. Also, recent studies of space utilization of facilities on State University campuses have led to a series of recommendations which will allow a downward revision of almost 15 percent in the anticipated space required to meet the enrollment goals indicated in the State University's 1968 Master Plan.

Chancellor Boyer had initiated a series of steps to reorganize the State University's Central Administration and to shift to the campuses the direct operating roles in the areas of international studies, continuing education and educational communications. The Office of Campus Development is being functionally merged with the State University Construction Fund, and certain computer operations have also been merged. The central administration budget request for 1972-1973 carries 55 fewer positions than the current fiscal year which will mean the lowest staffing level since 1968. This committee was informed that this shift in operations will permit the development of a more effective policy-oriented staff under the direct supervision of the Chancellor. This step is particularly important as the State University develops its 1972 Master Plan. The Chancellor has also enlarged the central administration's communications office to insure more rapid dissemination of information to the campuses



The international studies programs were the particular subject of some of the most recent criticism. This Committee reviewed these programs and found that they were originally established in an Office of International Studies and World Affairs (OISWA) with a maximum staff of 100. This organization is now an Office of Overseas Academic Program with a staff of four in the Central Administration. Control of the program on each campus is handled by its own campus director. Matters formerly administered by the OISWA now are being handled by travel agencies, by foreign nationals, and by the participating students themselves. With the shift of responsibility to the local campuses, any faculty travel or assignment of other resources related to international education must compete with other commitments of the campus. Therefore, there will be considerably less likelihood of abusing travel opportunities.

Recent efforts by the State University toward regionalism and new approaches to educational delivery systems also seem commendable. In view of its geographic distribution throughout the State and the need to improve efforts toward closer cooperation with private colleges and universities, the State University should intensify its search for a regional approach to higher education in New York State. This Committee is examining regional proposals with considerable interest and a hearing on this subject was held in Albany on October 28. Legislation establishing regional planning councils for higher education was introduced by this Committee in the 1971 session, and we are pleased with the affirmative response which this suggestion has brought. The interest of the Board of Regents in this subject is also noted, and we shall be watching developments in this area closely to insure that unnecessary duplication is avoided while real cooperation is encouraged.

This Committee also is hopeful about the development within the State University of more flexible delivery patterns in higher education. We are encouraged by the speed with which Empire State College has moved to the implementation stage. The recognition that students do not come in pre-formed packages within a single age group (18-24 years) is most welcome. The individualized instruction between a faculty member and his student planned for Empire State College may serve to develop similar endeavors within other institutions, both private and public. At the same time, this Committee believes that Empire State College can learn much from the extensive experience with off-campus programs gained at institutions such as Syracuse University.

Studies now underway may bring a reduction of present eight years of high school and college to seven by eliminating overlaps between grades 12 and the freshman level at college. Similarly, the increasing use of proficiency exams, the waiver of prerequisites and the programs of independent study may allow us to break out of existing time restrictions entirely. This Committee believes that these actions represent a significant concern for the development of less costly and more effective instructional delivery patterns which will be beneficial for all the state's residents.

#### CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of its discussions and deliberations, this Committee has reached the following conclusions:

- 1.- That the criticisms levied against the State University at Albany's business practices and procedures by the 1968 State Comptroller's Report have been met satisfactorily by actions taken subsequently by the University. In addition, the Albany Campus seems to have taken the necessary steps to improve their business management staff and accounting procedures.

2.- That the larger question of comparable effectiveness between the State University and other large public and private universities requires continuous study. We believe that the consumation of a Memorandum of Understanding relating to cooperation and assistance by higher education institutions in this State, as called for by the Committee on Master Planning for Higher Education in New York State might serve as the basis for such a study.

3.- That over-all policy guidelines concerning staffing ratios, faculty workload, faculty benefits, per-student costs, and other indices of administration should be clearly set by the Central Administration.

4.- That the responsibility for enforcing these administrative standards should be firmly placed on the individual campuses with a reporting system to the Central Administration which will facilitate inter-campus comparisons.

5.- That the Central Administration ensure that proper grievance procedures for students, faculty and other staff be maintained at each campus. Personal faculty grievances should be resolved within the University system, rather than by a Legislative Committee.

6.- That the need to expand, or even to continue, certain Ph.D programs should continue to be examined closely in light of the changing professional market. The Chancellor has already announced a moratorium on all new State University graduate programs, including those at the Masters level, and the Commissioner of Education has also asked both public and private universities to withhold inaugurating new Ph.D. programs.

7.- That State University should review the courses and majors on each campus and begin phasing-out those programs which seem to be unnecessary.