



The REGENTS' COMMISSION REPORT:

a blueprint
for the seventies

In March, 1970, the University of Nebraska Board of Regents acted to establish a Regents' Commission on the Urban University of the 1970s to examine the appropriate role of the University of Nebraska at Omaha as an urban university.

Chaired by Willis Strauss, president of Northern Natural Gas Co., the 140-member committee accepted the responsibility to recommend specific educational philosophies and programs which are to be incorporated into the mission of the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

In the final, 32-page report, the Regents' Commission defined the general role of a university as well as the particular role of an urban university. In arriving at their conclusions as to their definitions and educational premises, the Commission studied the economy of the Omaha region, student life styles, environmental human and social deficiencies, serious immediate problems affecting UNO faculty, students and administration and the significance of Omaha's size.

The Commission's recommendations were presented under four major headings: 1. Community Services, Community Problems and their solutions; 2. Program Coordination and Community Relations; 3. Educational Programs: Participation, Kind, Thrust and General Structure; and 4. Finances, Resource Use, Budgeting, Evaluation and Space.

1. Community Services, Community Problems and Their Solutions.

Recommendation 1:

UNO should develop new programs and provide new services focused upon community problems in order to offer fresh insight into these problems as well as prepare trained personnel to engage in their solutions.

Particular emphasis should be placed upon the continuing education needs of the urban population and upon research activities in such vital areas as urban education, planning, ecology, business and labor problems and human communication.

Recommendation 2:

The Commission recommends a massive expansion in the role of the university in the community through the establishment of an Institute for Public and Community Affairs.

This Institute should have its own budget, its own board of directors and an affiliate arrangement with the university that assures staff appointments and teaching assignments for its key people. As an action-research agency, it should mount the university's attack upon community problems by organizing around interdisciplinary projects or on an ad hoc basis in order to bring the full range of current knowledge and techniques of the social, behavioral and management sciences to bear upon the problems encountered.

Recommendation 3:

The Commission recommends that a community University Council on the Creative and Performing Arts be established to furnish leadership in enlarging and strengthening existing programs and services in the performing arts fields.

Such a council might give consideration to the construction of a theater-concert hall in the Fine Arts complex of the University as well as to joint appointments of persons to the university faculty and performing arts organizations such as the Omaha Orchestra and Civic Opera Associations.

2. Program Coordination and Community Relations

Recommendation 4:

The Commission recommends the establishment of four coordinating and planning groups: one to be concerned with education at all levels; a second to oversee university programs; the third to serve as liaison between the City of Omaha and

UNO; and a fourth to explore ways of providing meaningful relationships of students to the governing processes of the university.

A metropolitan Community Educational Council should involve the various educational agencies in systematic planning and division of responsibility for all levels and types of education. A Board of Visitors made up of representative citizens from Omaha and the state should assume the responsibility for becoming knowledgeable about the developing programs at UNO and then interpreting them to the community. Because of the mutual interests between city and university, the creation of a liaison committee is essential. Finally, an internal committee of students, faculty, and administrators should be established in order to enhance fruitful and cooperative relationship among the main constituents of the university.

Recommendation 5:

The Commission recommends that the university give fresh attention to the kind of public information program necessary to enlighten the general public as to its aims and purposes and to interpret its current and future role to the people of the area.

Because UNO is underpublicized, undervalued and underutilized, consideration should be given among other things, to the establishment of a "university information center" easily accessible to the citizens of the community, to the publication of a monthly "newsletter" for a wide distribution to the public, and to drawing heavily upon distinguished "practicing professionals" from the wider community, perhaps in the role of occasional visiting lecturer.

3. Educational Programs of the Multipurpose University: Participants, Kind, Thrust and General Structure.

Recommendation 6:

The Commission recommends that UNO vigorously seek out disadvantaged and minority group students in order to expand educational opportunities for them.

Means to be used include locating indigenous recruiters in minority areas, educating parents to the importance of college, pre-college counseling in the secondary schools, advertising widely an open admissions policy and establishing a housing officer to aid students from out state. Accompanying these efforts must be strong supporting programs and substantial student financial aids. In the opinion of the Commission the importance of this effort warrants the commitment of staff on a full-time basis.

Recommendation 7:

Bachelor degree programs should be considerably strengthened and broadened in coverage.

Traditional offerings in liberal arts disciplines should be supplemented by the addition of programs in areas such as construction technology, electronics, and other areas where the needs of the community are not being met. The educational needs of women should be determined and met. Generous support also should be given to the black studies program currently being established to benefit all students, black and white, and to aid in reducing racial tensions in the community.

Recommendation 8:

UNO should undertake an expansion of the associate degree programs of less than four years duration.

Opportunities should be provided for specialization in such areas as teacher aides, community aides, health worker aides and in comparable fields with special attention directed toward the technical manpower needs of the industrial community.

Recommendation 9:

The Commission recommends that UNO strengthen the present graduate programs and provide new post-baccalaureate offerings in carefully selected areas where the need is clearly demonstrated, is not now being adequately served, and would be most appropriately based in Omaha.

The Commission believes study will reveal a variety of postbaccalaureate level offerings to assist in industrial, economic, social and cultural development in the area are needed and that such programs eventually should be undertaken. Because of the changing market demand for those earning graduate degrees, however, moves into graduate areas should be undertaken only after careful examination of the costs, the potential demand and the eventual outlet for such highly trained individuals. Providing these conditions have been met the proposal for a Doctor of Arts degree may have merit.

The Commission commends the UNO faculty, students and administrators for their desire to maintain and to develop excellence in graduate education and research. Moreover, UNO faculty members increasingly should be involved in graduate education and research as members of the Graduate Faculty of the University of Nebraska at Omaha and the Graduate Faculty of the University System.

Recommendation 10:

The Commission recommends a continuation of broad liberal arts academic training as the core program at UNO.

Such a base is essential for UNO to be a multi-purpose university on both the graduate and undergraduate levels.

Recommendation 11:

UNO should explore with Omaha business and industry the possibility of greatly augmenting a work-study program for students, thus providing alternating periods of employment and study for those taking part in this program.

Students should learn and receive credit while "on the job" and while taking advantage of the learning laboratory commerce, industry or urban government can provide.

Recommendation 12:

UNO should place a special emphasis on experimental and innovative ways of improving the learning experience and academic programs.

Laboratories should be established for experimentation and demonstration in order to develop innovative educational techniques. Programs should be provided and students should be encouraged to spend one academic semester in service in the community for which credit should be granted. Students also should have the opportunity to receive academic credit for appropriate work experience. Opportunities should be offered for students to learn by different methods, as, for example, by direct observation of inner-city problems. Programs should be made more flexible to permit career switches. Credit-by-examination should be encouraged.

Recommendation 13:

The Commission recommends that the Regents support the administration in investing heavily in one or two special "pacemaker" programs having as their objective the attainment of national prominence and respect.

Programs deserving consideration might be a management-labor institute, a reading clinic, an interdisciplinary effort in urban studies, experiential learning or some area of the performing arts.

Recommendation 14:

The Commission recommends that UNO establish a University College to assist in the expansion of bachelor degree programs, as well as those of shorter duration.

A variety of post-high school sub-baccalaureate programs should be included. Degree credit for proficiency in skills could be awarded by the college in order to shorten the formal educational process for members of the urban labor force seeking to raise their overall skill and knowledge level. Strong consideration should be given to encouraging and expediting the upward mobility of the skilled labor force. Entry into other colleges of the university would be facilitated by the university college.

Recommendation 15:

The Commission recommends that UNO bring educational opportunities to the people by further expansion and development of instruction in

Program Centers away from the main campus.

Such carefully selected Program Centers should provide a wide range of academic and professional programs. Consideration might also be given to "roving professorships" to offer credit and non-credit courses in schools, churches and elsewhere on request. Program Centers might even be desirable in other cities as well. It also might be helpful to move some of the activities presently housed on the main campus closer to the students being served.

4. Finances, Resource Use, Budgeting, Evaluation and Space.

Recommendation 16:

The Commission recommends that the university join with other parties in seeking to develop a community foundation in Omaha.

The availability from such a source of even a relatively small amount of money to support new community ventures, including those which may be developed by the university in cooperation with other agencies, can be of inestimable value, and can frequently be the basis upon which much larger amounts of money can be generated from national funding agencies.

Recommendation 17:

The Commission recommends that UNO commit itself to imaginative, economical and wise use of its resources.

The latest systems techniques for manpower and financial resources budgeting, administration, and control should be employed. Present programs and services should be evaluated and screened carefully for their merit and quality. Consideration should be given to the development of a compact to allow Southwest Iowa students to attend UNO supported by an Iowa subsidy. A study should be made of the feasibility of providing regular transportation between the two major metropolitan campuses at Lincoln and Omaha. Moreover the central administration of the university system should make a careful assessment of where the expensive professional programs will be most in demand and can best be staffed. Much can be done to improve and expand programs by a concerted effort to strengthen the professional ties between the faculties of the universities at Lincoln and Omaha. The Commission also sees great potentiality in developing closed-circuit two-way or talk-back television to permit instruction to originate at either Omaha or Lincoln, with students on both campuses being able to take the course simultaneously.

Recommendation 18:

The Commission recommends the Unicameral be requested to set up a minimum of \$250,000 per year for commitment to new and innovative programs and as an offset to any deficits they

may incur in their first years.

This flexibility is required in the quest for innovation and during a period of rapid change when resources must be moved from the obsolete use to the new needs. Departmental and line budgeting inhibit such flexibility. These funds should be used only on the recommendation of the President with the approval of the Chancellor and the Regents, thus assuring the accountability desired by the Unicameral.

Recommendation 19:

The Commission recommends that UNO prepare a Master Plan for educational development that assigns accountability for effective outcomes, and includes performance standards with which to measure actual progress toward achievement of university goals.

During the coming year, UNO should prepare a Master Plan for development. To command respect, loyalty and effective performance from the faculty, UNO should commit itself to the maintenance of competitive faculty salaries. The quality of their teaching and community involvement then should be an integral part of the evaluating faculty for rank and compensation.

Recommendation 20:

Finally the Commission recommends that immediate action be taken to resolve the twin problems of space for educational and parking purposes.

Implementation of the preceding recommendations will be severely handicapped, if not precluded, until these space problems are overcome.

Conclusions

It should be obvious that these recommendations will cost money, indeed a great deal of money, if they are to be implemented adequately. But reflecting as they do the broad needs and concerns of the citizens of Omaha and Nebraska, the ultimate barrier should not be resources. The state university does belong to the people and should be responsive to them, and in being so should receive their whole-hearted support and commitment.

The Commission believes that a partnership between the university, the community and the state is developing that can bring citizens into full awareness of the university's role in community and public affairs, and in the general improvement of economic prospects for the state. Since the social, economic and cultural benefits of the university to the community and the state are virtually incalculable, the Commission looks forward with confidence to broadened and generous citizen support for the University of Nebraska at Omaha.