

To the members of the budget council (Confidential)

The following comments have been triggered by our recent meetings on promotion and tenure.

- There is no intrinsic connection between scientific significance and industrial interest, the one being a cultural concern, the other a financial matter. With the greatly different time range of their planning --say, five years versus fifty-- the correlation is, in fact, negative. Since science is the University's primary responsibility, a candidate that tries to recommend himself by stressing the industrial interest in his work disqualifies himself for an academic position and is just applying for the wrong job.
- Similarly, there is no connection between scientific significance and degree of acceptance of ideas or sales figures of books. In fact, again the correlation is negative; whether we like it or not, the "Vulgar Studiosorum" applauds the vulgar, and this is the reason why a scientist's scientific integrity tends to get corrupted when he adopts the morals of the best-seller society. We have to make a clear distinction between the scientist and the salesman.
- Industry is so incredibly backward and its quality standards are so disgracefully low that, if there is to be a bridge between the industrial world and the academic world, we have to ensure that that bridge will be used for one-way traffic only. Since experience has shown that this last traffic regulation is almost impossible to enforce, it can be argued that we are much better off without the bridge.
- Note how rarely a letter of recommendation gives the considered opinion of the letter writer. Recommendations for Mr.X seem to follow the following pattern. Mr.A writes "Mr.X is great for Mr.B thinks highly of him.". And this you may check, and you will find A's letter confirmed: Mr.B, in fact, had written "Mr.X is great, for Mr.C thinks highly of him." etc., until you reach Mr.Z who writes "Mr.X is great, for Mr.A thinks highly of him.". All this delegation of judgement only adds more layers of dishonesty to an already very dishonest process. (I call it dishonest because each time verbal inflation occurs and candidates of well-established mediocrity are discussed in a terminology that would fit semigods.)
- For any candidate one can raise the question whether he is an intellectual. We have either to answer the question or to decide that the answer to this question is irrelevant. I seem to observe a preference for the last option in the case of so-called "systems candidates", thereby granting them the privilege that we seem to owe these days to the minority of the mentally handicapped.
- One can hear the remark that we should not frighten away our students --for instance by making the undergraduate curriculum more substantial-- because it is to their large numbers that we owe our positions. My comment is that the university was not created to fill the pockets and purses of faculty.
- One can also hear the remark that we need more faculty of such and such type because of the teaching load caused by the huge enrollment for such and such courses. At first hearing it sounds reasonable but it raises the question who decides our curriculum. If what society needs coincides with what society asks for, one is in

educational heaven, but we are faced with a huge discrepancy. Since it is still our charter to become a Leading Department, we have no choice: we have to lead, rather than be led, we have to give what society needs rather than what society asks for, and curriculum determination by public demand is out.

- A few times in the discussion, a science-versus-engineering controversy surfaced. I am all in favour of science, I am all in favour of engineering, I am all in favour of their happy marriage. (For more than twenty years I was engaged in the education of Mathematical Engineers and "Informatics" was a topic par excellence for the Mathematical Engineer.) He who feels a controversy between the two has too low a conception of one of the two (or both): it is the poor engineer who has no use for scientific method, it is the poor scientist who cannot contribute to engineering.

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