

The administration's response to the SCALE sit-in has been recognized by many faculty to have been inappropriate, heavy-handed, and possibly in violation of written procedures governing disciplinary action. Recourse to coercive tactics not only promised to destroy the academic careers of some of our brightest students but also confirmed the students' conviction that the University respects neither them nor its own moral rhetoric.

But this event is symptomatic of deeper institutional contradictions. USC straddles three different kinds of higher education: a vocational education, furnished by its professional schools, that promises to form students for careers and leadership roles within corporate America; a liberal arts education that offers a cultural and scientific education with an emphasis on critical thought, close dialogical relations with teachers, and an ethical formation; and a research-based education that seeks to be competitive with the most prestigious national research institutions. A student's choice of USC may be guided by two possibly incompatible goals: that of gaining professional training and that of receiving, within the context of a research university, the benefits of a small liberal arts college education.

But what if the intellectual and ethical ends of an education in the humanities and social sciences are at odds with professionalization or careers in corporate America? What if classes in the humanities encourage students to question the fixation on economic success that drives corporations and instead lead students to desire alternative ways of living based on ethical values? What if classes in the social sciences give a richer appreciation of the hierarchical structure of corporate leadership or a finer sense of the brutal exploitation of workers by those corporations? What if classes in the sciences lead them to understand the fragility of the environment and the destructive effects of unhampered corporate greed? And what if a liberal education leads students to want to work to transform society rather than to conform to it?

In the 1960s, a sense of almost boundless possibility made experimentation and dissent not only attractive but also self-evidently feasible to students. Since then, the programmatic defunding of education has made such options increasingly risky for them. Students graduate from college with large debts, often subsidized by parents who sustain financial commitments they can ill afford. The pressure on students to conform and succeed economically soon after graduating is thus far higher than forty years ago. (The knowledge of this predicament was implicit in the administration's decision to call student protesters' parents, making their action virtually tantamount to blackmail). Nonetheless, as the intellectual level and the diversity of the student body increase (two tendencies usually correlated), the likelihood of students questioning both society at large and the university itself also increases. That is and ought to be the consequence of the critical thinking embraced in the traditions of liberal education. But it would be fatuous to think that students who learn to critique their institutions will remain quiescent before what they regard as manifest injustice and wrong to demand they do so. In all likelihood, as USC's intellectual profile rises, so too will levels of student activism.

The question is how the University will respond and whether it will embrace student activism or seek to deter it. In practice, the room for maneuver on the part of university

administrations is relatively narrow: since the end of the cold war, federal funding of higher education has greatly decreased. At least three factors are involved here: the shrinking of the military-industrial-research complex that was sustained by the specter of a Soviet military threat; the diminished need for the support for the humanities and social sciences that was once part of the ideological campaign against communism; and the increasing pressure on educational institutions to privatize their funding sources. The pressure to gain private or corporate funding has real impact on faculty freedom and on the integrity of research as well as on the priority given to different kinds of inquiry. For the university as a whole, as an institution devoted in principle to freedom of thought and action, and as an institution that fully thrives only as a community of peers rather than as a hierarchy of leaders and the led, the increased emphasis on fund-raising has peculiarly distorting effects.

Not least of these regards public image: an administration that is pursuing corporate funding can scarcely afford to be seen as endorsing student protest against corporate practices. Such protests affect negatively not only the capacity of the university to raise the funding that it must increasingly seek from corporations but also the prestige of administrators whose reputations are increasingly based on their prowess as fund-raisers. Accordingly, the national trend towards the increasing size and relative prestige of university administrations in relation to the faculty, which has followed closely on the increasing privatization of educational funding, has a negative impact on intellectual and practical freedoms on campuses. The priority of an administration that is not merely the agent of faculty governance, but rather an increasingly autonomous body, is control rather than freedom, public relations rather than intellectual inquiry.

The administration, faculty and students of USC will have to figure out the positions they will take on both individual dissenting actions and the larger tendencies of higher education in light of those contradictions and measure their responses accordingly. It is in all our interests to improve not only the reputation but the quality and meaningfulness of higher education, and that means assessing what kind of institution we wish to be. No university can become intellectually significant that subordinates intellectual and collective freedoms to the interests of corporations or of administrations that are economically bound to them. Whatever the outcome of the recent unrest on campus, let us hope that it will lead to an increased commitment on the part of the faculty to setting our own priorities for the mission of the university whose ideal core lies in the community of scholars that is constituted by professors and students researching, learning and acting together.

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