COOPERATIVE EDUCATION AND THE ACADEMY*

Ad Hoc Committee
Ad Hoc Commitee
on Cooperative Education
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In 1985, the President of the Cooperative Education Association formed an ad hoc committee to examine the position of cooperative education within the mainstream of American higher education. The disturbing thought existed then, as it does now, that cooperative education functions on the periphery of the academy. If this is indeed the case, several important questions come to mind: Why has cooperative education not been accepted by educators? Should the cooperative education community be seriously concerned and, if it should, what can be done to change the situation?

Quantitative and qualitative evidence strongly suggest that the concern over cooperative education's role in American higher education is well founded.

Background

A landmark study by Wilson and Lyons (1961) detailed the numerous benefits students and educational institutions receive from cooperative education. The findings made a persuasive case for large scale expansion of cooperative education, leading to a more than twenty-year effort on the part of the National Commission on Cooperative Education and the Cooperative Education Association to dramatically increase the numbers of colleges offering the program, while expanding the numbers of students enrolled.

Federal support over these years has not been lacking. Funds, first under Title IV of the Higher Education Act and now under Title VIII of that Act have supported the expansion of cooperative education. Beginning in 1970 with an allocation of 1.4 million dollars, financial support has been as high as 23 million dollars, falling back to a level of about 14 million dollars in recent years. Over the past 16 years approximately 80 million dollars has been spent by the federal government in support of strengthening and expanding cooperative education.

Title III of the Higher Education Act has also provided funding, particularly

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to traditional black institutions. It is estimated that approximately 30 million dollars has been given to colleges through this avenue. Further, community colleges have been able to receive federal funds to support cooperative education under Title I of the Act. A final important source of federal support has come from work-study allocations under Title IV of the Act where, supplementary allocations of unspent work-study appropriations have been distributed to cooperative education colleges on the basis of the numbers of students enrolled in their programs. In addition, Title IV allowed institutions to hire a cooperative education job developer out of the funds awarded.

While it is difficult to be certain of the numbers of dollars that have been awarded to support cooperative education from all sources, a conservative estimate might be as much as 130 million dollars over the years. This figure does not include the financial support that is beginning to be provided from state resources, e.g., the State of New Jersey's Challenge Grant program. While the overall total sum given to support the development and expansion of cooperative education over the years remains pale when compared to other programs, it would be hard to argue that the Congress, the federal government and now, state government have not supported cooperative education. If this approach to learning has not blossomed forth it is not due simply to the lack of "seed funds."

Many new programs have indeed begun during the last 15 years as a direct result of federal support. In 1970, the first year of Title IV allocations, 282 colleges reported having cooperative education programs (1). This number grew to 1,030 institutions by 1976. The number of institutions offering cooperative education since then has remained relatively stable, dropping to a low of 934 in 1984 but increasing to 1,054 colleges in the Fall of 1986. This represents the greatest number of colleges ever, but still accounts for only one-quarter of all post secondary institutions.

The data on student enrollments indicate that the numbers of students participating in cooperative education has remained relatively constant in recent years at a level of about 190,000. 1986 saw a slight increase in student enrollments to 205,000. What is particularly significant about these figures is that they represent less than 2 percent of the total full-time enrollments.

While the numbers are small, the data mask the development of a number of large cooperative education programs over the course of recent years. For 1986, twenty-three colleges report enrollments of over 1,000 students so that 2 percent of the institutions offering cooperative education enroll 24 percent of the students (see Table I). Almost 40 percent of the student enrollments are at 6 percent of the colleges with programs. To put this into another perspective, if programs having over 500 students can be considered as having significant

enrollments, then fewer than 2 percent of this nation's colleges and universities have made a commitment to cooperative education. The majority of programs are small, having a median enrollment of just under 250 students. Two-thirds of the colleges enroll fewer than 100 students in cooperative education.

Table I*
Cooperative Education Program Size, 1986
By College and Student Enrollment**

Number of colleges	Percent*** of Colleges offering Cooperative Education	Total Student Enrollments	Percent of Enrollments	Cumulative Percent of Enrollment
Over 1000 students enrolled				
23	2	49,000	24	24
Between 500 to 999 students enrolled				
45	4	29,000	14	38
Between 250 to 499 students enrolled				
87	8	31,000	15	53
Between 100 to 249 students enrolled				
198	19	31,700	15	68
Below 100 students				
701	67	64,300	31	99

*Data obtained from the Cooperative Education Research Center, Northeastern University, Boston, MA.
**Wilson (1987)
***Based on 1,054 colleges and universities.

An indication that there is some movement in the acceptance of cooperative education, at least at those institutions making the program available to students, is evidenced by the increasing numbers providing non-additive academic credit for the experience. In 1961 only a handful of institutions provided academic credit. It is of interest to note that the pioneer institutions which began offering cooperative education in the early years of this century have remained steadfast in their commitment to not award academic credit. In his most recent survey, Wilson reports that 70 percent of the colleges now report awarding credit (1987).

Reports on Undergraduate Education

Assessing the quantitative data suggests that while some progress has been

the curricula of the colleges and universities in any large scale way. A review of the numerous reports on undergraduate education recently published gives further evidence that cooperative education has yet to make serious inroads into the thinking of educators. In general, these reports have found the undergraduate experience to be seriously wanting:

> Our system of higher education, with its openness, diversity, and scholarly achievement, is the envy of the world. Unencumbered by suffocating ideology, the integrity of the American college and university is unmatched.
>
> And yet, while preparing this report we found that the undergraduate college, the very heart of higher education is a troubled institution. Driven by careerism and overshadowed by graduate and professional education, many of the nation's colleges and universities are far more successful in credentialing than providing a quality education for their students.

So begins the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching report entitled "College: The Undergraduate Experience in America." (1986) The Newman Report (1985), adds:

> . . . The American system of higher education is the best in the world. . . . despite it's high quality, American higher education must be even more effective if it is to meet the needs of this country in the decade ahead. New and powerful forces are reshaping American society, increasing and changing the demands placed on higher education.

Some of the issues raised by these and other reports include:

- The discontinuity between higher education and the secondary school system — the transition between the two needs to be smoothened.
- A confusion of the educational goals as represented by a degree—the education experience should be responsive to the diverse goals of students while at the same time providing a more integrated and coherent view of life.
- Closing the gap between college and the larger world.
- Restructuring the curriculum to include experiences that are essential to undergraduate education.
- Providing opportunities for students to become more actively involved in their own learning.

- Expanding access to higher education by giving individuals from all segments of society access into programs that lead to positions of leadership in the life of the country.

The *Project to Refine the Meaning and Purpose of Baccalaureate Degrees*, sponsored by the Association of American Colleges Council, reports that many opportunities exist for reforming the curriculum, including imaginative and instructive interaction with the world beyond the campus (1985):

> . . . External resources could be exploited in creating work-study programs, career education programs, internships in government and business, and other experiences that unite rather than oppose the values of career and liberal education.

The Newman Report also urges expanding internships and work opportunities, viewing such educational experiences as building character, encouraging a sense of responsibility, developing self-confidence, and creating a self-image of being a useful member of society. Curricula that incorporates internships and work experiences is seen as expanding a student's expectations about himself or herself, increasing the capacity for cooperation and adding to the student's knowledge of the world jobs. Yet, disappointingly, neither of these two reports, nor for that matter the others cited, suggest cooperative education as one viable, proven learning strategy to accomplish the reforms sought. Rather, the focus is on expanding the numbers of work-study jobs in the public and private sectors by federal funds and incorporating internship experiences into programs of study. It is not unreasonable to conclude that cooperative education remains either unknown or is not highly thought of by the members of these various task forces and committees.

Indifference to Cooperative Education

What accounts for this apparent indifference to cooperative education? The Ad Hoc Committee suggests several reasons as to why cooperative education is not viewed by educators as integral to the curriculum.

First, the committee suggests that teaching faculty do not recognize that learning, thinking, and general professional development can be achieved using the work environment as a "classroom" with the work itself serving as an instructional vehicle. Taking this point further, the Association of American Colleges' report states that minimum requirements of any program of study at the college level must consist of "the intellectual, aesthetic and philosophical experiences that should enter into the lives of the men and women engaged in baccalaureate education." Such a program of study would include having students understand and master:

- Inquiry, abstract logical thinking, and critical analysis;

- Literacy, e.g. writing, reading, speaking and listening;
- manipulation of numerical data;
- the development of a historical consciousness, and;
- the scientific method together with the human, social and political implications of scientific research.

Further, students should develop:

- an understanding of the fine arts without which "we see less and hear less."
- values. Students must learn to make "real choices, assume responsibility for their decisions, be comfortable with their own behavior and know why."
- an understanding of international issues and multi-cultural society;
- the ability to study in-depth: "depth requires sequential learning, building on blocks of knowledge that lead to more sophisticated understanding and encourage leaps of the imagination and efforts for synthesis."

The report appeals to college administrators to join with faculty to, "lead us away from the declining and devalued bachelor's degree that now prevails, to a new era of curricula coherence, intellectual rigor and humanistic strength."

Few, if any, educators could seriously take issue with the report's vision of the undergraduate experience. On the other hand, a lively debate could be held among educators on the extent to which undergraduate education in this country achieves these goals and, if not, what remedies and changes need to be made to rectify the situation. Within this framework it is likely that cooperative education could be viewed as an intellectually inhibiting experience and thereby not enhancing the integrity of the college curriculum.

These points lead to the second factor cited by the ad hoc committee: cooperative education practitioners tend to see themselves as operational people primarily concerned with the logistics and administration of programs that successfully prepare students for placement into appropriate work assignments. While this perspective is vital to the delivery of effective programs, cooperative education professionals, it is suggested, must develop a broader view of themselves in their role of educators and become much more involved with the discussions on concerns with, and changes to, undergraduate education.

The third point made by the ad hoc committee is that the cooperative education methodology for promoting learning is vague and underdeveloped. It is likely that in many instances cooperative education may have the "means-ends" relationship of the experience reversed. In these instances, the work experience is seen as an end unto itself rather than the vehicle to achieve broader learning goals that complement and support the curriculum. As a consequence

not enough attention has been paid to developing broad educational philosophies and rigorous methologies to guide students learning while working. The learning outcome from the cooperative education experience must be clearly defined, be in line with the objectives of the curriculum, and readily allow for evaluation by faculty.

The non-curricula focus of cooperative education practitioners necessitates their arguing the non-learning benefits derived from the program. These include important outcomes such as helping students earn money to help defray college costs and strengthening the recruiting efforts of the institutions. While these are important, they are of lesser concern to faculty than the impact of cooperative education on students' learning. This is particularly true when academic credits are being awarded on a non-additive basis. As faculty are responsible for the academic integrity of the degree, the educational value of the experience must be weighed against the courses student forego.

Putting these observations together, the ad hoc committee concludes that cooperative education professionals tend not to view themselves as educators, thereby significantly contributing to their not being seen in that light by either their academic colleagues or by administrators. Finding cooperative education to then be outside of the academic mainstream should not come as a surprise. Indeed, any other position would be unrealistic.

The cooperative education community should be very concerned over the current status accorded programs on the vast majority of campuses. If cooperative education is not seen as an instructional strategy that strengthens the learning process and helps achieve the goals of the curriculum, then it is difficult to argue its importance, particularly during times when hard financial decisions must be made as a result of shrinking resources. This logic suggests that ultimately, the future of cooperative education, outside of those few committeed institutions, will depend upon its moving into the mainstream of academe as an important addition to classroom based instruction: a learning experience that makes important contributions to the intellectual growth and personal development of students, thereby strengthening the undergraduate experience.

What can be done to change the academy's perception of cooperative education? The ad hoc committee makes a series of recommendations that can be grouped into four areas: research, quality and standards, professional development and dissemination of information.

Research

Much more needs to be known about the educational role of cooperative education. Research is needed in order to have the learning potential understood by individuals within and outside of the field. Specific areas of research include:

1. Identifying and evaluating the kinds of learning outcomes that are attained through the cooperative education experience, e.g., the development of such cognitive skills as problem solving, application of concepts, and decision making. Cooperative education could be particularly useful in developing skills associated with the process of learning as opposed to mastery of content. The importance of process skills was recently cited by a National Education Association's report which states (9):

> . . . the elements that are least familiar as formal curriculum content are the reasoning and interpersonal skills. These represent the process skills on learned behavior rather than rote knowledge. It is, in fact, these process skills that American employers most often report that they find lacking in recent U.S. graduates. Further, a general weakness in process skills limits an individual's ability to apply his or her rote knowledge. This could explain at least some of the disparity between the relatively high student test scores reported by schools and the relatively poor graduate performance ratings reported by employers.

2. Relating cooperative education to various cognitive psychological concepts. Are there groups of students for whom the relatively more structured experiences offered by cooperative education strengthens overall learning effectiveness and learning efficiency?
3. Understanding the impact of cooperative education on student development e.g. personal growth, motivation and career choice.
4. Assessing the effectiveness of different instructional strategies currently employed such as the use of behavioral objectives to guide learning.
5. Developing new instructional models that better integrate the work experience with the classroom.
6. Developing instructional materials for both cooperative education and the classroom to assist faculty in making fuller use of the experience in the teaching process.
7. In carrying out research projects, it would be highly desirable to enlist faculty, from relevant disciplines: e.g. sociology, psychology, education, economics, political science, etc. The scope of research could go beyond cooperative education, encompassing other forms of experientially based learning such as traditional internship programs. Comparing the relative effectiveness of different experiential formats could help to expand an understanding of these learning strategies.

Quality and Standards

The second set of recommendations are in the area of quality and standards for programs and professionals in the field. The committee observes that the cooperative education community should better define itself as a profession. Criteria need to be established and accepted by those in the field for assessing program quality. These may well include the amount of financial and physical resources provided by the institution relative to the size of program, the student/cooperative education coordinator ratio and the relationship of cooperative education assignment to student's program major. The Cooperative Education Division of ASEE and the Canadian Association of Cooperative Education have established certification standards for cooperative education programs, although this is not a recommendation of the ad hoc committee. It is further suggested that the Cooperative Education Association establish a committee to examine the feasibility of establishing a code of ethics for professionals, perhaps along the lines of the College Placement Council's code.

The Committee strongly believes that academic credit should be awarded for cooperative education, especially if the recommendations on strengthening the learning aspects are followed. Guidelines and criteria for awarding academic credit need to be established.

Along with awarding credit for cooperative education, comes the issue of according faculty status to cooperative education professionals. Until such time that those individuals working with students are seen as academic colleagues, it is difficult to have cooperative education accepted as an academic experience. Preparing the rationale and criteria for providing faculty status, carrying tenure, is a task that should be undertaken by the Cooperative Education Association. Specific questions that should be addressed include: how the roles and activities of cooperative education faculty compare with those of other faculty; how do cooperative education faculty facilitate and evaluate learning; translating traditional and acceptable faculty and tenure criteria to job duties of the cooperative education coordinator. Institutions committed to cooperative education and which accord faculty status to coordinators, such as Northeastern University and LaGuardia Community College (which functions under the by-laws of the City University of New York) have been able to resolve these questions.

Training and Professional Development

Successful cooperative education programs have two components. One is effective program administration which includes job development, preparation of students, and the development of management information systems. Training

and professional development activities in this area are offered by existing regional training centers, as well as by national, regional, and state and local associations. Much less is available to support the professional development of the second component — providing an effective educational experience for students. As an example, while cooperative education uses the work experience and the work environment as the instructional setting, many professionals do not have an understanding of work from an interdisciplinary perspective. Few cooperative education coordinators are familiar with what such fields as psychology, sociology and anthropology have to say about the relationship between people and work. An understanding of the impact of work on human growth and development seems fundamental to using it in structuring learning experiences for students. Practitioners need to develop teaching and counseling skills that are as good as their administrative and job development skills. The regional training centers and the various professional associations should offer programs and sessions in the areas of education, teaching and counseling. A last recommendation is that some of the leading universities committed to cooperative education develop and offer doctoral programs in cooperative and experiential education.

Dissemination

The ad hoc committee's final recommendations deal with the dissemination of material and information to the cooperative education community. Its suggestions include having the editorial board of the Journal of Cooperative Education intensify their efforts towards publishing educationally related articles, particularly authored by individuals from disciplines outside of cooperative education.

More detailed information on exemplary programs currently operating needs to be put into the hands of the cooperative education community. The Cooperative Education Association could undertake publishing monographs and research reports on a wide variety of educational issues, and other topics as raised in this paper.

As we move into the last decade of this century, it can be argued that cooperative education stands at the crossroads of its future. If cooperative education educators truly believe in the efficacy of the program, then they and the professional organizations in the field may have to assume the leadership to do what is necessary in order to bring cooperative education within the mainstream of American higher education. To do less may prove to be a serious loss to the quality of undergraduate education in this country and its ability to prepare graduates for the future.

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