Southwestern At Crossroads
In Quest For Greatness

5. EIGHT CHALLENGES FOR '73

The University of Southwestern Louisiana has demonstrated its potential for greatness during its 72 years, but today the Acadiana university stands at the crossroads.

USL's enrollment approaching 12,000, its faculty and staff numbering more than 1,000, its student body mix indicating a high degree of acceptance of its programs by all citizens of Louisiana, its pooling of more than $20 million into the economy of Acadiana, its athletic program attracting nationwide attention, its graduates distinguishing themselves throughout the world, has certainly accomplished much in its 72-year history.

But the events of the next several months could well determine whether or not our University can proceed on the road to excellence or must travel the path to mediocrity.

Students, faculty, administrators, state and local officials and other citizens with a deep interest in education have contributed to the development of USL. Now it is in the interest of all Acadiana to help influence the outcome of these events which will determine the future of USL.

The Constitutional Convention, which has recently completed its organizational session, will soon begin its work of rewriting, among other things, those constitutional and statutory provisions under which institutions of higher education in the state are financed and governed.

It will be decided whether the proposed new constitution will provide that the present two-board system (the Louisiana State University Board and the State Board of Education, coordinated by an independent commission) will continue.

We favor a single-board concept but oppose the bulky, 37-member Super Board proposal as it stands now. We favor a concept that will insure equal distribution of funds and systematic coordination of new programs.

The creation of new, but unneeded four-year institutions, the proliferation of new programs with little student demand, the duplication of programs and inequities that exist at the level of funding of certain institutions in the state must be stopped.

There are many problems besetting higher education and they must all be considered in determining the proper type of government for Louisiana which will provide for its institutions.

It is up to educators, politicians and other knowledgeable persons to speak out in favor of equal treatment for all if we are to attain the best in university governance for USL and for other educational institutions in Louisiana.

USL recently submitted a record budget request of more than $21 million for 1973-74, an increase of $4.5 million. This request for additional funds comes at a time when every major office holder in the state—governor, lieutenant governor and state superintendent of education—is placing major emphasis on career and vocational education.

All will agree that this emphasis is needed but no one can afford to neglect those institutions which have contributed and will contribute heavily to the future welfare of our state.

USL's 1972-73 budget was increased by approximately $300,000 while its enrollment increased by 750 students—an increase of less than $700 per student. This is hardly sufficient to provide for the ever-increasing cost of providing quality education for our schools.

USL must obtain funds necessary to maintain and improve its existing programs. Certainly those officials who know our area and our University and have benefited by our voting power can appreciate our needs.

We have been aware for some time now of continuing studies at the University on the need for and the feasibility of providing new one, two and four-year programs in technology, enlarging its continuing education efforts and introducing a pilot program of personalized education for those workers in the oil industry because of their work schedule cannot participate in a program of continuous study.

If the University is to provide for that segment of our society which here-to-date was unable to or did not aspire to a four-year degree but recognized the need for specialized training, it will need the encouragement and support of all of us. USL cannot and should not dilute existing programs of high quality to expand its offerings to include career education. If USL, through studies, determines that it can and should provide these services, then a strong commitment of additional financial support must come from the state.

Toward this goal, this newspaper pledges its unqualified support and earnestly solicits your support from all of Acadiana.

(Tomorrow: Pollution, Ecology, Tourism)