The Urban Crisis: Part II

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The university's role as a major force in the environmental crisis is the subject of the remainder of an article by Gerald McLindon in October's LSU Alumni News. Our comment on this article is continued from last week because of its relevancy to today's problems, particularly with regard to architecture.

The university is the fountainhead of knowledge, McLindon states. But public acceptance of the university is necessary for its success. And it is too often only half-heartedly supported, or, out of ignorance of its problems, not supported at all.

"Twentieth-century man fights for a 'better chance than he had' for his child. And this usually means a college education. But, as McLindon points out, "the sheer pressure of numbers threatens to destroy the value of the instrument."

Entrance Standards

As a result, too much effort is expended by the college in remedial programs. This work, designed to bring students to a level from which they may reach for a degree, should have been finished in high school. Until we develop meaningful entrance standards for all universities, the resource drain will continue.

Does this mean that every child can still have an equal chance? Yes...starting with the first grade and continuing until the end of high school. "It is a cruel hoax to castrate him (the ill-equipped, college-bound student) into a situation where he will ultimately become marked as a failure," according to McLindon.

There is a monetary side to this picture, too. Money spent on taking unsuccessful students (comprising a good portion of the freshman class) through one or two semesters is money diverted from other uses. When money is cut back, it is not the remedial programs which suffer...instead it is those functions special and particular to a university.

New Solutions

Although plagued with these problems & others, universities can and should be allowed to suggest and implement new solutions to some of society's old problems. For example, most people do not realize that they are actually subsidizing slum areas. The cost of providing public services in slum neighborhoods is hardly offset by the small tax revenues collected there.

Studies by LSU and Southern students have shown that a small investment in sub-standard housing would not only raise it to a more adequate standard but would eliminate the need for a good deal of public expenditure. The dichotomies of the university's existence make their existing problems even more difficult. We expect the university to provide solutions to all of our problems, yet we are often distrustful of their findings.

Continual Change

And the university has its own shortcomings to deal with. Rather than anticipating the probable advances which will be made in every branch of knowledge and re-evaluating academically departmental activities, it often just "lets things lie." Things are in a state of continual change, and some colleges and schools within the university are no longer meaningful: some old alliances hinder development rather than help it, and new disciplines need to be mated.

In the light of today's expansion and discovery, is civil engineering as closely related to engineering as it is to architecture? Or, is traffic engineering closer to planning than to engineering? The article points out that new steps in thinking such as this must take place, and are indeed beginning to happen in some schools.

Five Schools

Currently there are five schools of architecture in Louisiana, of which only two are accredited. Although fewer schools could easily fill the future's demand for architects, the continuing competition for the same funds; consequently none are sufficiently funded. (This is especially true for USL which before it could get its feet on the ground schools at Southern and now Tech will begin.)

The wedding of the artist and the architect has recently come about in the LSU School of Environmental Design through the inclusion of a good deal of fine arts into the curriculum. But much, much more must be done if we are to work toward a feasible solution to the environmental crisis. McLindon ends his article with the statement: "No saying could be more appropriate than the resounding plea of Churchill. 'Give us the tools and we'll finish the job,' always with the quiet caution of 'He who hesitates is last.'"