GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
FALL 1995
NEWSLETTER
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT BUFFALO

The State of GSE

Hugh G. Petrie

The Graduate School of Education at the University at Buffalo is currently in the middle of a two-year self study that will continue this fall with an external site visit. Higher education, generally, is in the midst of the most serious reevaluation of its role in society since the end of the second World War. It therefore seems appropriate to take stock of where we have been, where we are, and where we might be going.

For that reason, I am taking this opportunity to describe GSE from my perspective of nearly fourteen years as dean. It is, to be sure, a unique perspective. It is, nevertheless, I believe, an important one that will perhaps suggest some directions to consider as we approach the next century. It will, I hope, inform the GSE self-study with the dean's perceptions. My perceptions, in turn, will be informed, I am sure, by the progress of the self-study.

In part because GSE, over the next several years, will be composed of a faculty, half of whom will have been here fewer than ten years, a short historical sketch may be helpful in setting the context. The Graduate School of Education, like so many other units at UB, can trace its modern history to the beginning of the State University system in 1962.

1962 was in the middle of the Rockefeller years of "wine and roses." It appeared that the largesse of New York State was limitless. The low tuition, high access policies with which we are now struggling were set in those days, as were the policies and practices that led faculty, students, and administration alike to assume that the state will provide. We are now paying the price for not having built the kind of resource-seeking infrastructure, from sponsored programs to continuing professional education and summer schools, from alumni relations to development, that our public peers elsewhere had to construct from their beginnings.

Within GSE, or, as it was then called, the Faculty of Educational Studies, resources and support were also relatively abundant in the early years. We operated a number of teacher centers in conjunction with neighboring schools that almost foreshadowed today's professional development schools. There was a finance and policy center funded by the State Education Department and located in the Western New York Educational Service Council (formerly the Western New York School Study Council) that later was transferred to the Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). In the early days GSE conceived of itself as being composed of a faculty (of nearly a hundred) who would think great thoughts, write great books and papers, and reproduce themselves with some minor attention to preparing professional leadership for the field of education. It was a heady period, or so I am told.

But then came the hard times of the mid-'70s. New York State found that it could not afford everything that it wanted. UB, in the midst of massive construction plans, had to scale back its aspirations and its timetable again and again. Education, the second faculty to be moved from Main Street to Amherst, had to wait until 1981 before the majority of the liberal arts and sciences, our natural allies, were transferred to the North Campus. And, as we know, construction is not finished yet.

The mid-'70s was also the time when GSE, along with the arts and sciences, became known as a "donor faculty." This was the euphemism used to describe the internal reallocations that allowed UB to build its School of Architecture and Planning and to provide the needed additional resources for the boom in management and engineering enrollments. GSE suffered a gradual erosion of faculty from 90 to about 70. Interestingly, student-faculty ratios did not fall precipitously during this time, since faculty were lost at about the same rate

continued on page 2

continued from page 1

as student demand fell. However, the effective contractions occurred in often inappropriate ways, with some programs suffering enormously and others retaining faculty who had much less to do. From the mid-'70s until the mid-'80s there were perhaps two or three new appointments across the whole of the faculty. Indeed, until last year, the least senior educational psychology faculty member had been with GSE for 18 years.

When I arrived in 1981, the faculty numbered 65 to 70; now we are in the 60–65 range and we may well go lower still. In 1981 the Faculty of Educational Studies was organized into eight departments, several of which had as few as five members. It was clear from the discussions of the preceding years that such an organizational structure was inappropriate to the challenges we were facing in the '80s. So we spent that first year considering and implementing a reorganization. Among other possibilities, we considered a non-departmental matrix organization that would concentrate on professional programs, but the pull of the traditional departmental structure with its emphasis on strong, independent graduate programs was stronger so we settled on the structure we have now—the departments of Counseling and Educational Psychology (CEP), Educational Organization, Administration and Policy (OAP), and Learning and Instruction (LAI), as well as the Buffalo Research Institute on Education for Teaching (BRIET) and the Center for Educational Resources and Technologies (CERT).

> *"No organizational strategy for a professional school of education is optimal. Each has its strengths and weaknesses."*

The reorganization solved some issues, provided the opportunity for new and exciting initiatives, and has proved to be a barrier to others. No organizational strategy for a professional school of education is optimal. Each has its strengths and weaknesses. The constant challenge, no matter what the organization, is to capitalize on the strengths and be sure to address the weaknesses.

The current departmentalized structure is strongest in facilitating traditional teaching, research, and separate, discipline-based, doctoral programs. It is weakest in facilitating interdisciplinary scholarship, co-teaching, and integrated professional preparation programs. Encouragement for interdisciplinary scholarship, cross-departmental programming, and a commitment to the profession must come, therefore, from outside the departments, in essence from the dean's office. In a non-departmentalized organization I suspect, in contrast, the dean would need to be primarily a champion of traditional disciplinary values.

The early '80s also saw the low point for schools of education across the country, especially in research universities. Several were closed, including the ones at Duke and Yale. Others were under serious threat, for example, at Berkeley and Michigan. All were perceived as largely irrelevant. The nation's major concern with education was kicked off with the stinging attack of *A Nation at Risk*. It was in such an environment that the Holmes Group was formed with GSE as one of the charter members. The message of the Holmes Groups was, in retrospect, startlingly simple. If education was at risk, it would not be saved by the major universities abandoning it. If university commitment to education was lagging, if their schools of education were not all they should be, the answer was not to shut them down, but to help reform them. As higher education has come to realize, it cannot stand aloof from the problems of the schools; we are all part of one system.

The growing acceptance of that kind of approach to schools of education has manifested itself in the Graduate School of Education during the past decade in a variety of ways.

- In response to questions from then Provost Greiner about our status as a professional school, we changed our name from the Faculty of Educational Studies to the Graduate School of Education and adopted a mission statement consonant with that change.
- As our response to the Holmes Group challenge, the Buffalo Research Institute on Education for Teaching (BRIET) was formed to link research and teacher preparation.
- As learning technologies became more and more widespread, we established the Center for Educational Resources and Technologies (CERT) to pull together a wide variety of curricular and technology resources.
- About four years ago we also adopted a new set of Categories of Evaluation consistent with our emerging image of ourselves as a proud professional school. These categories have begun to influence our tenure and promotion categories, but have also profoundly affected the way we think of ourselves. They explicitly broadened our conception of research to include application

continued on page 3

continued from page 2

and synthesis. In addition we were among the first units at UB to take professional service seriously, adding it to our categories of evaluation. In all areas, however, we insisted on our work meeting the tests of quality, relevance, and impact.

- Last year, we adopted GSE workload guidelines that enable us to see that all faculty contribute fully to the work of GSE, even if there may be differences among faculty in the types of contributions they make or differences in the contributions the same faculty member may make during her or his career.
- We entered a major era of faculty retirement and replacement that is still going on today.
- We have made major strides in increasing the diversity of our faculty, with about 25% of our appointments being underrepresented minorities and over half being women.
- Our commitment to diversity has encompassed our graduate students as well. We have aggressively participated in the university's minority graduate fellowship program and continue to have the highest number of minority fellows at UB.
- We began the first GSE Alumni Association about five years ago and it is now one of the top four in the university in size, sponsoring many programs for GSE and our students.
- We established our first endowments; we now have nearly a half million dollars worth of endowments providing funds for programs, lectures, and scholarships. We hired our first development officer this past December and have embarked on a major fund-raising effort.
- We have a president who is very favorably disposed to the manifestation of scholarship in professional service and who has gained national recognition by appointing a vice-president of Urban Affairs and Public Service who holds her doctorate from GSE.
- Within the past several months we have gained a measure of external validation for our efforts by having been ranked among the top ten graduate schools of education in the Northeast and among the top 20% nationwide by *U.S. News & World Report*. We have done even better in the West and Rhee study in *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, ranking in the top five in the Northeast and in the top 30 nationwide, with three of our areas—secondary education, policy studies, and administration—in the top twenty-five of those fields in the country.
- A listing of our graduates includes university presidents and vice-presidents, national and state educational policy analysts, successful business persons and consultants, almost a who's who of university professors, leaders in the fields of counseling and psychology and countless teachers, administrators, counselors, and psychologists who, we are beginning to learn from our development visits, have a real fondness for GSE and who attribute much of their success to our efforts.

"One thing above all is certain in these uncertain times. The future will not be like the past for those of us in higher education."

Looking at what we have already accomplished, I grow optimistic about our future prospects. If we get our environmental analyses right, we just might be able to emerge from the next decade as one of those schools of education that saw the future needs of the profession, put them together with our talents and historical strengths, and became one of the great schools of education for the 21st century.

But we will have to be nimble in going beyond the traditional conceptions of graduate schools of education, even while we maintain the best of the past. The changing environment of higher education will ensure that.

A few examples will illustrate my point. Henry Rosovsky of Harvard has called for a new social compact between higher education and the society that supports it. Gerhard Casper, president of Stanford, at the recent AERA meeting in San Francisco noted the changes to higher education that will be wrought by the erosion of public and private support, the resistance to tuition increases, the challenges of new learning technologies, the waning of public confidence in all kinds of social institutions, and the need to address the practical concerns of society. The Pew Higher Education Roundtable, a group of higher education administrators, has recently discussed the challenges of the changing demographics of higher education, changes in the nature and distribution of work, changes in public finance, changes in our sense of time and distance, and changes in our values with the increasingly acrimonious debates over what it means to be an American. Our own president, William Greiner, has called for a

continued on page 4

continued from page 3

recommitment, especially of the urban research university, to help address the pressing social and economic issues of our times.

One thing above all is certain in these uncertain times. The future will not be like the past for those of us in higher education. We will have to adapt to all of these changes and others that we can only dimly discern.

My own reading of the issues facing us in higher education is that we will be able to meet the challenges and maintain our historical contributions to society if we are attentive to the need for a subtle, yet profound, shift in our implicit social contract with society. The shift is in the burden of proof regarding what we do. In the past we in higher education simply assumed that our traditional research and scholarship, no matter how esoteric and abstruse, was so obviously good for the development of society that it was sufficient for us to say, "Trust us, this will ultimately be good for you." Indeed, given the individualistic nature of much scholarship over the past forty years, we say to ourselves, "Trust *me*, my work will be good for the academy."

But society is no longer willing to trust us so implicitly. It is asking us to make explicit that what we do, and do best, is of value. What we need to do now is to demonstrate that we do, indeed, contribute to the well-being of society. We need to provide excellent undergraduate instruction at affordable prices. We need to pay attention to teaching best practice for the students we prepare in higher education's professional schools. We in education must be intimately involved in the simultaneous reform of our schools and our schools of education. Our research and scholarship must be seen to make a difference. Then, and only then, can we argue that these obvious benefits to society will occur only on the condition that we are allowed to continue the great human conversation of inquiry, research, and reflection—always attuned to the ever-changing needs of contemporary society—but equally cognizant of the best that has, is, and will be thought and done in our great research universities.

We can and must continue the careful, critical and rigorous scholarship that has always been the hallmark of the academy. The difference is that rather than it being self-evident why society should support us in those endeavors, we must now *gain* society's agreement for such pursuits through our own attention to the concrete and practical. There is, indeed, nothing so practical as good theory, but neither is there anything so generative of good theory as real practical problems. That must be the motto of any professional school of the next century worth its salt. To draw an analogy with other units in the university, we must be like a first-rate school of engineering, not a second or even first-rate department of physics.

We will be facing additional challenges. We can no longer afford, if we ever could, to be simply a collection of independent scholars bound together by a common mailing (or e-mailing) address. Everyone must contribute, although each will contribute differently. Some will teach more than others. Some will perform more professional service. Some will excel in obtaining external support for GSE's programs. Some will contribute new theories of teaching, learning, schooling, counseling, social organizations, and on and on. Others will design new programs that put those theories to use, in turn generating more problems for their more theoretically inclined colleagues. Our scholarship and inquiry and teaching and professional service will be more focused, more collaborative, and more integrated.

"We are a very good school of education. But the exciting prospect is that we can become a truly outstanding school of education in the next century. . . ."

And as the details of that vision begin to emerge with more clarity from our self-study activities, we will almost certainly have to ask ourselves once again whether or not we are best organized to carry out our mission and goals. If the burden of proof has shifted, as I have suggested, from the self-evident value of traditional scholarship to the need to justify that scholarship in terms of its contributions to society's problems, then, perhaps, our organization should also serve to make those contributions easier and more visible. At a minimum we need to revisit the question of a possibly more functional rather than disciplinary form of organization.

We are a very good school of education. But the exciting prospect is that we can become a truly outstanding school of education in the next century if we are willing to consider carefully the changing times, our own strengths and weaknesses, and take the risks that will be necessary to move ourselves forward. I am confident that we can do that—faculty, students, staff, alumni, friends, and our colleagues in the field, collaborating on the steady work that is educational reform.