

Underscoring University Values

By Richard Conklin
NC News Service

A few years ago, the academic council at the University of Notre Dame debated at length a proposal that all students — from chemical engineers to sociologists — be required to take an ethics course related to their major field of study. It would be a one-credit course and they would receive a grade of either pass or fail.

The proposal passed by one vote — cast by the council chairman, Holy Cross Father Theodore M. Hesburgh, president of the university.

I am fond of telling that story to those who think the question of values in higher education is easily resolved at an institution dedicated to the proposition that belief and scholarship go hand-in-hand in a world where truth is graced by God.

At the time, Father Hesburgh entertained few illusions about values and the academic community. Not long before the academic council meeting, he had written in the New York Times: "I have long believed that a Christian university is worthless in our day unless it conveys to all who study within it a deep sense of the dignity of the human person, his nature and high destiny, his opportunity for seeking justice in a very unjust world

"I would have to admit, even immodestly, that whatever I have said on this subject has had a miniscule



FATHER HESBURGH impression on the members of our university compared to what I have tried to do in public service to achieve justice in our times."

The debate in the academic council illustrated two divergent traditions. One agreed with the late Robert M. Hutchins, an educator, that "the prime object of education is to know the goods in their order." This tradition claimed that what is most appropriate to human beings is a sense of value.

The other tradition, most recently articulated by Derek Bok, president of Harvard University, declares disinterest the highest calling of the university which, above all, must be neutral.

Despite close votes, Notre Dame has tacked to a different wind than many of its peers in the university world. This shows up particularly in university efforts to promote awareness of justice issues as

well as action for justice.

For example, back in the days of student unrest, a group of students suggested to Father Hesburgh that the university teach an unrecognized body of knowledge called non-violence. He told the students to convince the faculty of its educational legitimacy (they did) and he would raise the money to implement it (he did — \$100,000).

When the resolution of the Vietnam War cooled moral passions on many campuses across the country, issues of poverty and injustice at home and abroad continued to simmer at Notre Dame. Father Hesburgh's continuing public involvement in areas such as civil rights and world hunger may well be part of the reason why.

At the university, an informal network of courses taught by faculty members who addresses peace and justice concerns in their classrooms grew into a formal university Committee on Education for Justice.

Formal academic blessing came in the creation of an endowed Chair of Education for Justice, the first of its kind in the nation.

This fall Notre Dame opens a Center for Social Concerns in a building formerly occupied by its commercial television station. It will bring under one roof all the student volunteer groups concerned with social issues: urban poverty, migrant labor, tax assistance for the elderly, legal services for the indigent, and others, including those who

fast on Wednesdays so that the cost of a dining hall lunch can be given to agencies fighting global hunger.

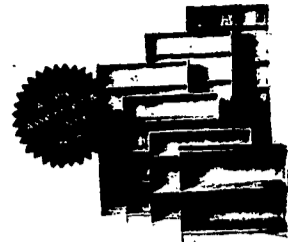
It is a sign of the increasing maturity of such groups as well as the role they play on campus that their proposal to use the building was given priority. Their proposal was chosen over the competing interests of several university units who wanted the valuable real estate for more traditional campus functions.

Where do values fit into the university?

At Notre Dame, the past 10 years have seen a bent toward an educational goal that underscores values in the curriculum, in the faculty reward system, in the allotment of scarce space, and in other areas too.

For a place with the moral aspirations of Notre Dame, this might not sound like much. But compared with trends in American higher education, these developments more and more represent a departure.

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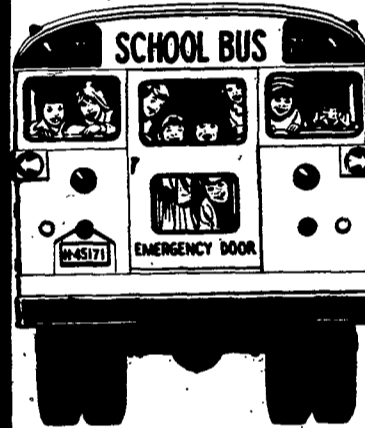


Getting Ready

Bob Smith (left) gets an assist from Aquinas Sports Booster president Mike Bonnano during installation of new bleachers at Stolze Field, the Aquinas sports field, in anticipation of the 1982 football-soccer season. The bleachers, an electronic scoreboard, field sign and concession stand will complete the school's main athletic complex.

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