EDITOR'S FORUM

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF MICRONESIA: PRESENT SITUATION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS*

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I am especially glad to be here this morning to discuss with you some important issues in education in Micronesia. Without question, the Community College of Micronesia is unique among community colleges. Its beginnings can be traced to the post-World War II teacher training programs at Guam; then to the Pacific Islands Teacher Training School (PITTS) at Truk in the early 1950s. After PITTS developed into a comprehensive secondary school--the Pacific Islands Central School (PICS)--at Ponape, the Micronesian Teacher Education Center (MTEC), was established in two classrooms at PICS in 1963--truly a modest beginning. But from this start the present-day Community College of Micronesia grew, and over the years has changed its emphasis from teacher training to a broader community college program in general education, offering associate degrees in education, nursing, business, special education, and liberal arts.

Few developing areas in history have relied as completely on education for the expected solutions to problems and the achievement of modernization as has Micronesia. Journalist David Nevin says that "the people see education as the avenue to the new success . . . almost angrily they press elementary students to compete for high school positions, and they press American officials and their own political leaders to enlarge high schools so that everyone may go." Today the enrollments at CCM are higher than ever, and the applicants for next year's admissions are greater in number than in previous years.

While here in Hawaii and on the mainland college enrollments are steady or declining due to decreased birth rates, in the islands potential enrollments remain large as the birth rate there continues to grow. In 1977 the Congress of Micronesia passed PL-729, which was signed by act-

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ing High Commissioner J. Boyd Mackenzie, establishing the College of Micronesia. This law joined together the Community College and the Nursing School with the Micronesian Occupational Center (now the Occupational College) under one administration headed by a Chancellor.

The purposes of postsecondary programs of all kinds are greater now than ever before. Today much more emphasis is being placed on occupational/vocational education and on articulation with outside institutions in the areas of business and liberal arts. The decreasing availability of funds for education abroad is putting more and more pressure on the college to provide training and educational opportunities inside the country. This causes a new look at purpose and a new chance to frame an educational policy for the islands by the islanders themselves. In the past most educational policy has been imposed. There has also always been money in the budget--provided for from public funds--for some students to go outside the area for higher education.

Now, of course, the picture and pattern are changing. The Trusteeship is scheduled to end in 1981, and with it all federal programs except four: the post office, the civil aeronautics board, the weather bureau, and the federal communications commission. The basic educational opportunity grants (BEOGs)--federal college scholarships--which most Micronesians receive, and which we at CCM are dependent upon, are expected to cease.

It is envisioned now that the United States will provide the Micronesians with block grants--for Palau, FSM, and the Marshalls--and they alone will decide how these will be apportioned and allocated. The present costs of operating the entire college system in Micronesia is less than $2 million, but this figure will have to rise fast if quality is to be maintained. The Chancellor has estimated that over the next fifteen years it will take some $3.5 million to run the college annually.

In June 1978, the Community College of Micronesia was fully accredited by the Western States Commission for Community and Junior Colleges in California. The MOC had been accredited the year before, and the Nursing School--a part of CCM--is scheduled for a visitation by a commission team later this year. Accreditation is an important indicator of quality and it is awarded on the basis of quantifiable standards: education and experience of faculty, size of library holdings, condition of student service programs, facilities, and admission/graduation policies to mention only a few. It takes money to maintain and ensure such standards as have been set and achieved on a consistent and reliable basis. In addition to these accredited US standards, special attention must be given to

culturally-tailoring all educational programs, and this also takes money. A country practiced--as Micronesia is--in a wide dispersion of educational opportunity must also pay close attention to effectiveness. Participants who are not learning or gaining from inclusion in the educational program--at whatever level--represent a waste of increasingly scarce resources. In Micronesia the problem of student motivation is greater than the one of intellectual ability. A theory of instruction for Micronesians has never been developed by educators and psychologists and has been studied only scantily by anthropologists. Micronesian secondary and post-secondary students are reticent, retiring, and motivated generally to avoid failing rather than to achieve. In the classroom they will shy away from intellectual engagement in order not to risk failure, embarrassment or both. Yet the western imported models and many of the attending US teachers and administrators who deliver them, continue to assume a western cultural context in Micronesia. Lecturing, open discussion, free debate, outside-assigned readings--all these teaching techniques so common, and even second nature in more developed areas, are non-transferrable in the islands unless adaptations and modifications are made. This is what I mean by culturally-tailoring.

There are also more subtle--more difficult--cultural features to accommodate which although they are not exclusive Micronesian characteristics, nevertheless do not fit the efficiency of the western models. Among these are the idea that knowledge is private, not public property, and the acquiring of education is a privilege which has become a right. This notion comes as a result, largely, of massive amounts of US money for scholarships in recent years which has allowed many people of untested ability to go to college here or on the mainland. Father Hezel of the Micronesian Seminar at Truk has labeled this phenonemon aptly: the education explosion! Another special cultural feature in Micronesia is the scheduling of classes, their length and arrangement. This is an administrative area which has never gotten adequate attention and which could well result in higher productivity for both students and faculty.

On this matter of cultural adaption I should say that my own understanding of its complexities is slight after almost twenty years experience with it. Each time that I gain what I think is an insight, some contradictory event will occur causing me to reconsider. Still, my experience has tended to confirm that by teaching foreign skills there has been a tendency to inadvertantly, yet nevertheless really, promote a sense of cultural inferiority among the students. In turn this has tended to cause a certain alienation on their part which often manifests itself in passivity and

non-achievement. Too often, however, outsiders--particularly Americans--have used this situation to rationalize their own inability to intellectually and practically deal with the great challenge of cultural-tailoring. Persistent refusal to confront and lead in educational matters can be very unhealthy for the steady advancement of students.

Yet Americans have made tremendous contributions to educational development in the islands and we are capable of understanding and confronting some of these problems together with Micronesians. One of the reasons we don't do this, I think, is that traditionally the Americans have not really invested themselves in Micronesian education and its problems. They have not seen their professional reputations being made there, and hence, haven't tried very hard. Usually they are "short-termers." I often hold them analogous to the whalers of old who came vicariously to refresh and replenish and then move on. The result of all this is that truly organic approaches and techniques have not been developed and practiced widely, nor have they evolved. Many good techniques are introduced but these are not sufficiently professionalized and they die out with those who brought them when those people leave the islands.

The resources and money being spent toward an educational achievement in Micronesia are considerable. Let me give you some statistics. Formal education in Micronesia on all levels now absorbs about 20 percent of the gross territorial product (TNP). The budget of the Congress of Micronesia allotted a full 16 percent to higher education alone in 1977-78 when the new College of Micronesia was funded through PL-729. This reflects the high priority placed on education by the Micronesians, as well as indicating the effects of the American models and value of universal education.

There are currently about three thousand teachers in Micronesia--over 90 percent of them Micronesians--and about 41,000 students at all levels. The daily lives of well over half the Micronesian people are involved in formal education. And beyond or separate from formal education lies an enormous amount of organized training in the government sector, and in the churches and private sector to some small extent. Incidentally, religious groups established what today have become the finest secondary and vocational schools in Micronesia: Xavier and Emmaus High Schools at Truk and Palau respectively, and at Ponape the Agricultural and Technical School--PATS. These schools, together with the other religious high schools, account for some 15 percent of the territory's secondary enrollment. With the exception of the Palau Modekngei School at Ibobang, few new institutions are being started by religiously-oriented groups. The re-

sponsibility has passed to the public sector which is now largely self-governing and elected officials preside. Increasingly public support is being sought, and also funds being supplied for support of institutions essentially religious in their orientation.

The Americans, during the first two decades of their administration, spent a record of $25 million on education. By 1975 the figure had reached more than $14 million for that year alone, and this was more than the United States had spent for all educational services in the islands between 1945 and 1965! In the future, as I have already noted, school enrollments will continue to rise while money available for school budgets will shrink. Education is handicapped in three ways in trying to meet the future challenges. First, it now relies on continued inputs of US money in the form of Trust Territory budget allocations, and federal programs; both of which are scheduled to terminate with the Trusteeship in 1981. Second, the more effective use of funds may require selecting and tracking of students at the secondary level which will call for policy reversing universal education through high school which presently exists. Third, the segment of education in the greatest need of support, proportionally, in the next decade in Micronesia, will be higher education. The cost per student now at the CCM approaches $4,500 per year, and still the quality is low compared to institutions here in Hawaii, in the Philippines, and on the US mainland where costs are also lower!

The birth rate in the islands is still on the rise--more than 2 percent per year--and the explosion in higher education demand--from twenty-two high school graduates in 1951 to 1,175 in 1977 in Truk alone-keeps climbing. Graduate and professional study abroad, and its demand by Micronesians, is expanding. Consequently per capita expenditures for post-secondary education will rise more rapidly than will those for primary and secondary education.

The major source of funding for all this must come from the US block grants which will be allocated by the Micronesian governments. But those newly-formed governments have other great demands on their resources; and internal competition for additional expenditures will be against such high priority projects as public works facilities, and agricultural/fisheries development programs.

Now, who are the people involved in making educational decisions? They are politicians. The legislatures of each political entity--Palau, FSM, and the Marshalls--have education committees. The regents' board members who are becoming politicized rapidly, now are immediately responsible for the college. Of course the various district directors of education

are also very important in decision-making. And with the election of public officials, these positions will now be more political and more influential. Finally, and very importantly, there are many non-Micronesian educators in the islands who are influential, especially among the various missionary ranks. These people and groups which I have mentioned have and do exercise important control over the future course of higher education in Micronesia.

I shall turn now to the new political organization--the three political entities--and their possible implications for the college. All of my comments are speculation since none of what I am about to say is certain. The four central districts--Ponape, Truk, Kosrae and Yap--which form the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), all send students to the college and will continue to do so. Their revenues support the college. Palau and the Marshalls, who are now sending students to the college--at both Palau and Ponape as well as Saipan--it is hoped, will continue to support the college with their revenues and continue also to send students. Just how this support will come, and in what amounts, is still to be decided.

Some of the other questions which can be posed in connection with the new political organization are: will the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas (CNM) send any students to the college, or will their students go to Guam? Or will they start their own college as some have suggested they will? Can other island groups outside the present Trust Territory, such as Nauru and the Gilberts, send students to the college? Will they be accepted? Would they want to come in large numbers? How much revenue would outside places contribute? Finally, what will the new policies be within the three Micronesian political entities regarding the sending of students abroad? Many of you here in this room this morning, I know, are interested in this question.

Most of Micronesia's highly-trained manpower needs today are met through training in outside institutions, and this will have to continue. It's expensive of course. Last year the total cost from all sources to maintain all Micronesians studying in colleges abroad was about $15 million. Surely this will change. It is already. And it will keep on changing. Yet training and education outside the islands is very necessary and important. All of the new political entities will have to decide how much money to allot for this purpose. These are difficult and highly-politically-charged decisions. It's clear that money spent outside of Micronesia for higher education is money taken away from the institutions inside Micronesia. And growth inside depends largely on money.

In Micronesia, college is still a place where instruction is delivered

and not a place where people get together to work on problems related to the country and its development. Herein is a part of the college's uniqueness in Micronesia: it must strive to do both.

In these brief remarks I have touched upon a number of large issues, and, I realize, have raised more questions than I have answered. While our optimism for the future must be cautious, for my own part I have been particularly gratified during my service as president because it's been my privilege to work with some really fine people and to preside over the college at the time of its accreditation. For me this has been a great personal as well as professional high point which I shall always remember. There are very few college presidents--even in the states today--who get the chance to lead an institution through its first time accreditation. I'm grateful for the opportunity and mindful of the responsibilities this entails. Although in the future it will be necessary to make adjustments and tighten-belts even further than we have already, it is clear that a great deal can be built on the foundations which have been laid. The fact that the Micronesians will do this by themselves will certainly be to their credit.

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