

The Changing Professions

From Part III of the President's Report to the Board of Overseers

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N EARLY ALL the major professions in the United States – and the organizations associated with them – are in a state of unusual flux. Businesses face a difficult and uncertain economy, an altered international situation, and an era of widespread fundamental restructuring. The health care system is under severe strain and is undergoing large-scale comprehensive reform. Much the same can be said of our troubled public schools. Many institutions of government throughout the world are perceived even by those within them as being in need of serious rehabilitation; and global political developments have made the study and practice of public affairs even more complex than before.

Meanwhile, the legal profession faces a far more complicated international as well as national agenda: increased litigation and regulation, persistent questions concerning human and civil rights, the effort to help frame constitutions and systems of justice in emerging democratic societies, and a domestic criminal justice system under severe strain. The religious landscape has been dramatically transformed during the past quarter century, in our

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own country and beyond. Some established faiths have waned, while new sects and congregations have burgeoned; various fundamentalist movements have obviously emerged with great force; and questions about the relationship between religion and politics or government have arisen with great intensity in many quarters of the globe. Finally, in architecture and its associated design fields, there have also been profound changes – partly because of the continued internationalization of these professions, partly because of changes in the economy, and partly because of the need to address important social problems, such as preserving our built as well as our natural environment.

These developments in the professions (and in the major systems and institutions that are part of professional life) have an inevitable, far-reaching impact on education. If the professions change in more than superficial or transitory ways, then education for the professions must also change. A fundamental reexamination of many of our basic programs is already well under way at Harvard. Given the variety of Harvard's professional schools – business, design, divinity, education, government, law, medicine and dentistry, and public health – we obviously cannot expect to find a single new educational model or conception that will apply equally well to all or even most of them. Yet a number of common approaches and similar emphases have emerged in the course of our planning process.

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Among the most prominent common themes and directions emerging from the plans of our professional schools are these:

First, nearly every School is reviewing, or has recently finished reviewing, the design of its first-degree program – and, in some cases, its more advanced training programs as well. The Medical School has led the way: it began to phase in its watershed New Pathway program for the M.D. degree in the mid-1980s, and full implementation is near. The School of Public Health has just reor-

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ganized its basic curriculum around five interdisciplinary topics closely linked to its main research agenda; meanwhile, a special fund has been created in the School to support experiments with promising new teaching methods. The Business School is in the midst of a full-scale review of its M.B.A. program, and specific recommendations are expected soon. The Graduate School of Design is reexamining the curriculum for its master's programs, aiming to provide all students with the opportunity for an integrated introduction to the major design fields, including architecture, landscape architecture, urban design, and planning.

These are only a few leading examples of the "reconstruction" now under way in Harvard's professional schools. Comparisons are difficult, but it is hard to remember a time in recent history when curricular reform in professional education at Harvard has been so pervasive, so fundamental, and so potentially significant in its consequences.

Second, the Schools' plans reflect a growing emphasis on the mission of training for leadership in public service. The professional schools have always been motivated to educate students to become leaders who will, in the fullest sense, be useful to society. At present, however, there is an even stronger emphasis on the importance of leadership and on the mission of public service — an emphasis that is not so much ideological as genuinely civic in nature.

There is, as I suggested earlier, a greater concern to help restore the vitality of large-scale systems and organizations that have been weakened in the past quarter century. There is a special concern for the not-for-profit sector of society: schools, government, social service organizations, and cultural institutions and activities. And there is a marked tendency to take into account more profoundly the difficult questions of ethics and values that are intrinsic to all professional practice today.

In other words, many of our professional schools are defining not a new mission, but a different emphasis in the way they are

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approaching their traditional mission. There is a more conscious awareness that the world is troubled, that the foundations of society seem less stable, that interdependencies are greater, and that our need to be responsive must also be greater. Such concerns – underscoring a determined yet unromantic commitment to serve society – echo through the planning documents of many Schools.

Third, virtually every School has identified the reexamination of teaching methods as a major point of focus in the years to come. For it is teaching, in many different settings, that must bring together fundamental or abstract knowledge, the fruits of current research, and something of the experience of “live” practice and decision making.

Equally important, teaching needs to be structured in a way that involves students as active participants in the process of inquiry. From this point of view, the best teaching should be seen as an embryonic form of research. It should be designed to confront students with the need to test ideas and hypotheses against facts and experience, to find new ways to approach difficult problems, and to search for and analyze relevant evidence. It should, in other words, help students to develop habits of mind that can sustain them throughout a lifetime of facing unpredictable challenges and dilemmas that require continuous learning.

In short, as we move forward in professional education, we will continue to emphasize education for leadership – with a concern for the development of values, qualities, and capacities that leadership requires. Consistent with the University’s goal of remaining an international as well as a national institution, we will preserve a strong interest in virtually all aspects of international education. And we will continue our commitment to more effective teaching and learning, with a strong emphasis on small-group classes and seminars; a greater reliance on “cases,” problems, or issues that can focus attention on complex situations requiring active inquiry and debate; a recognition of the need to exploit the

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benefits of modern technologies in the classroom as well as in research; and an increased interest in student internships, fieldwork, or similar activities to help ensure that we do a proper job of connecting practice with formal academic study. In School after School we find that investments in additional faculty – however modest the numbers – are closely linked to investments in better teaching. Finally, we must recognize the benefits to be gained from integrating fields of knowledge, and from encouraging collaboration across different parts of the University in order to make more effective use of the resources we already possess.