

8.30.06

Opening
2006

During the opening session I've tried to tie the original mission of Lehr's Northwestern Ohio Normal School to what Ohio Northern University is today. I've selected a number of the presidents (Lehr, Williams, McClure, McIntosh, Meyer) because of the challenges that faced each of them.

For Lehr, Williams, McClure and McIntosh, **the** major question was the actual continuation of the University itself. Institutions exist in a physical and historical environment. Each of these ONU presidents I've named faced the threat of possible demise from a wide range of factors. For Lehr, state support of public secondary education threatened the continuation of the private normal schools which had arisen in the absence of public support of secondary education. For Williams, the factors that threatened the University's continuation were the penury of the "Great Depression" of the 1930's followed by World War II, a war that drafted most of ONU's male student body and left only a small group of students on campus. McClure served as president following Williams' resignation. The debts of the University, and its inability to pay faculty and staff, the decay of the campus buildings nearly closed the doors of ONU during his tenure. For McIntosh, the greatest threat to continuation of ONU was lack of accreditation. In order to continue programs begun by Lehr, professional association and Higher Learning Commission (North Central) accreditation was necessary if the University was to survive.

For Henry Solomon Lehr, the environment in which his school was founded was the aftermath of the Civil War. The seminal historic event of Lehr's lifetime was that Civil War. It was friendships Lehr formed in the war and his continued connection with Civil War veterans after that helped Lehr build his school. Owner of a proprietary school, he needed to market the school to get students and he asked his friends to help him.

As Wilfred Binkley notes in a draft chapter of his history of the ONU: "It is no exaggeration to say that the continuous growth and prosperity of Ohio Normal University as a privately owned institution of learning depended in no small degree upon Lehr's persistent vigilance in his search to utilize opportunities to publicize the school, not so much by direct advertising, as through modest, sometimes spectacular public events brought to campus." Binkley goes on to say that: "The most notable was the McKinley-Campbell Debate in 1891, which he managed with extraordinary ingenuity to have arranged for and even scheduled in Ada where newspaper publicity would inevitably advertise the school. While it was held on the Tri-County Fair Grounds immediately east of the village instead of the campus, President Lehr obtained maximum newspaper publicity for his school by the almost lavish entertainment for that day of the important newspaper men who covered the event. Ohio Normal University suddenly took on a new importance in the minds of newspaper readers throughout the country."

What both Binkley and Sarah Lehr Kennedy clearly describe in their accounts of Lehr's school is how Lehr counted on the friendships he had developed in the Union Army and his ongoing ties to veterans of that war to further his school. Congressman James Campbell, a Civil War veteran, had helped Lehr obtain his military department, "established," as Binkley says, "under the auspices of the United States Department of War." This same James Campbell later became the Democratic Governor of Ohio and his and Lehr's friendship continued. Although a life-long Republican, Lehr was non-partisan in forming and maintaining friendships and ties with leaders of both the Democratic and Republican parties in Ohio government.

In 1891, Governor James Campbell faced a reelection threat in William McKinley, the Republican opponent. According to H.S. Lehr's and Binkley's accounts, Campbell, who had promised to deliver a graduation address at the University and been unable to do so, was asked by Lehr to engage McKinley in debate. Lehr convinced the two men to meet in debate, as I've said, at the Tri-County Fairgrounds east of Ada. Binkley describes Lehr as the consummate marketer, "determined to make the most of the event for the school. He had engaged a caterer from Cincinnati to prepare a luncheon for about 150 (guests) and an elaborate dinner of nine courses in the evening. Candidates and special friends and the newspaper men, editors, reporters

and party committees were invited guests at the luncheon."

Binkley tells us that about 10,000 people heard the speeches. Each speaker spoke an hour and 5 minutes. Thirty or 40 representatives of newspapers were there and included almost every metropolitan newspaper in the country. (Ada was on a rail line and accessible by rail.) Lehr had "four mounted messengers at intervals of three minutes convey copy from the dispatches of the reporters to the telegraph office at Ada's Pennsylvania Railroad Station." Cincinnati's *Commercial Dispatch* printed the entire three hour debate according to Binkley. Lehr also had the five military companies of the ONU battalion act as military escort to the notables and ONU's cannons fired a salute of 13 guns as the speakers' carriages passed the University.

I go into this detail because what it shows is Lehr as entrepreneur and marketer. His goal was quality education, but he knew that he existed in competition with every other private normal school in the country. Lehr was a practical man who knew he had to use political influence and publicity to further his school. Marketing may not have been in his vocabulary, but it was not a "dirty concept" to Lehr. Marketing was necessary to his plan to expand and strengthen his school and increase its quality. In the heyday of Lehr's leadership we are told that students came to ONU from 26 states. Granted that the railroad system and the depot in Ada facilitated that outcome, but Lehr's vision for his school extended far beyond Ohio and even beyond the U.S.

Lehr's goal, as I've said, was quality education. When he started his school, however, he wasn't interested in setting many entrance qualifications beyond a student's desire to learn. As you recall, many of ONU's first students had not been to high school. They had had some years in elementary school. Opportunities for education were sparse in the rural U.S. at the time as they had been earlier for Lehr himself. Lehr set as a primary goal for his school providing teacher training to improve teaching in the schools. As a populist...and poor, Lehr wanted to expand educational opportunities. A corollary goal was to provide education for those who sought it. Like many Americans, Lehr was a pragmatist. The teacher exams of his day were

quixotic and often arbitrary. Thus another outcome he sought was that his students would pass the teachers' exams...and be licensed to teach in the schools.

To accomplish all this, Lehr set a course schedule to meet the needs of students who needed to work part of the year in order to attend school. His focus was on what the student did. Before the jargon existed, Lehr understood active learning. He knew that students really learn what they do themselves; teachers serve as the primary facilitators. Lehr's development of the military department (discipline and physical exercise), his support of student governance, his development of the literary societies were all part of his emphasis on active learning. As Binkley and others have described, Lehr had a genius for picking faculty who could inspire and assist students and engage them in their learning. Student empowerment and responsibility grew, however, through the co-curricular and extracurricular activities Lehr established at his University. For Lehr, who rose from poverty, education ought to lead to a job and his curriculum was both a mix of knowledge-based and experiential-based student experiences. Further, for Lehr whose commitment to the Union compelled his own service in the Civil War, another major purpose of education was to benefit the community and society in which one lives. His insistence on the development of civic responsibility and the success of his educational strategy resulted in ONU simultaneously having four alums in the U.S. Senate (around 1928): Arthur D. Robinson (Indiana), John M. Robsion (Kentucky), Simeon D. Fess (Ohio) and Frank B. Willis (Ohio).

Lehr's willingness to meet student needs accounts for the addition of the professional programs that along with education and the arts and sciences have been the traditional base of the University. It was not that Lehr (or his teachers) had a grand vision to start professional education. ONU's logical movement to professional education came from students requesting those courses and from societal changes in required preparation for the professions. What was different about Lehr and his vision for his normal school was that he was not narrowly wedded to the idea of only establishing a normal school. He saw the need for education in a variety of fields. He thought enlarging the program would (and did) enlarge the student body. (At one point ONU had an incipient medical school and an agricultural school. These were never fully

developed, but the farmland became part of the campus.) The arts, music, physical training and rhetoric were all part of Lehr's educational design to train teachers, but his original design quickly evolved into the five colleges we have today.

Lehr's goals in learning are current goals today. We want students to take charge of their learning in the classroom and in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. We want students to pass the Boards, Bar and other exams that will permit them to practice the professions they are pursuing. In coursework we attempt to meet students where they are and help them to advance as they master those skills and habits of learning which will continue throughout their lifetimes and in their careers. Like Lehr, our goal is also for our students to contribute to their communities, their society, the world.

Lehr's vision for education is not dissimilar to that articulated by the U.S. Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education. The Commission's draft report, however, is rather critical of higher education. Two items, that the draft report focusses on are: "declining or inadequate learning in colleges and lack of publicly available and rigorously accurate information about colleges which mostly do not examine how students learn." This view of where higher education is today is one of the environmental challenges that face us.

A major issue facing ONU today, and facing all higher education, is the insistence from the U.S. Congress, the Ohio State House, the Ohio Department of Education, most of our accrediting bodies and program approval professional associations, parents, alums and students, that colleges and universities, that **we**, be accountable. These bodies want measurable evidence of the quality and effectiveness of our educational programs, and coincidentally, the effectiveness of academic and co-curricular/extracurricular out-of-class activities, many of which have not been effectively measured to date.

The work that we at ONU are currently doing in the colleges in evaluating how we actually meet program goals set for our students beyond individual course grades and the objective results of Board and bar exams is vital. As educators we are designing curricular goals that outline what is needed by a graduate to begin to effectively function in a field. We are, in

many cases, also measuring how our students are actually performing and then, as a faculty, changing the curricula and courses to better achieve those outcomes we seek. The processes we use are really the scientific method or the social action formulae of post World War II. We are also using measures such as focus groups and graduating student interviews along with civic leaders', alums' and employers' reports on how they perceive these goals being met by our graduates. We compare ourselves to norms set nationally or to our selected peer institutions. We use NSSE (National Survey of Student Engagement), LSSSE (Law School Survey of Student Engagement) and the CLA (Collegiate Learning Assessment). These studies along with our Institutional Research Office's analyses of these data and other studies requested by the colleges and units are part of this effort to see if we can document the effect of what we are convinced is "value added" through the educational experience here at ONU.

An expectation by all those parties I've named is that our measurement will be public knowledge. In addition to what we currently make public about campus crime reports, academic persistence and standardized exams pass rates, ONU like others in higher education is expected to broadly expand information about the effectiveness of ONU student learning to the public. Because there is manipulation of data in some pockets of academia, the threat of direct federal access to all individual student data looms.

In his recent book, *Our Underachieving Colleges*, Derek Bok, former and current Harvard president, notes that in higher education we've regularly measured faculty scholarly output, number of terminal degrees of faculty, cost of tuition and fees, student persistence and graduation rates and a host of other easily measurable facets of U.S. higher education. What we have done relatively little of, according to Bok, is to actually measure student learning beyond the exams and papers we give for individual courses. Bok is talking about overall goals of education, not a body of data, since knowledge changes and continues to expand dramatically during one's lifetime. Students need to learn the tools to continue their learning and to revise their knowledge base throughout their lives.

What President Bok identifies as learning outcomes necessary for undergraduate (and I would add first professional) education are the following:

- 1) Ability to communicate
- 2) Critical thinking
- 3) Moral reasoning
- 4) Preparing citizens
- 5) Living with diversity
- 6) Living in a more global society
- 7) Increasing breadth of interests
- 8) Preparing for work

(Bok's litany sounds a bit like the ONU mission statement.) Throughout the 400 pages of his book, Bok describes how these goals might be curricularly achieved. His focus is both general education and program academic goals.

At ONU in the last 35 years or so at least, general education has been a single or limited number of "distribution" courses to meet general education aims. For example, some colleges have prescribed a "non-western" course; there are single courses in philosophy and religion, generally a minimum of one freshman writing course, an oral communications course, and so on. What Bok is saying is that to meet the eight goals he's listed as essential for undergraduates today, those goals need to be introduced through general education and effectively integrated throughout the entire curricula the students take. His corollary expectation is that we ought to be able to measure whether our students are meeting the base level we have judged necessary.

To an outside observer, it might seem we at ONU have focussed on the majors of our departments and colleges and have hoped that the distribution programs we've chosen for our general education programs won't take too much time away from the majors. We've generally abandoned the responsibility of the general education courses to the College of Arts and Sciences and thus have left the assessment of general education to them. Now I know these last comments are probably too broad, but they do have some validity. Bok postulates the obvious: the individual program (major) goals and the goals of general education are identical or at the least complementary.

One of Bok's goals or outcomes is that colleges prepare students to live in a more global society. A general education course or two could be dedicated to this aspect of education. Bok suggests two. The first course he suggests is one on the U.S. role in the world (not an easy topic to deal with today, in my opinion). The second is a course to assist students to approach and understand a foreign culture. For those who also elect a foreign language, that learning becomes a vehicle to assist the individual to have a greater in-depth experience abroad. We all know that our own experiences of extended time abroad, particularly when we have worked in that foreign culture, change us for life. They also change our way of examining our own society.

(My own compulsion to see and understand U.S. places and phenomena really arose from being asked to help teach an American culture course in Algeria. I found out how little I really knew about the U.S.; I saw no way to summarize the country and Americans. I'd had history and civics courses and learned dates and overall movements, but I had not really **thought** about U.S. culture or attempted to understand the impact of events on changes in the country.)

In short, Bok's concept is that general education courses are used to introduce a concept. Learning takes hold as the concept is enmeshed throughout the program. Whether it's incorporating ethical considerations in a broad number of engineering courses (I believe that's done now in the College of Engineering) or writing and communication expectations across particular curricula and finally, in the culminating senior capstone, it would seem that if we want our general education goals to take hold, there needs to be good articulation between the general education courses and major and minor programs. There also needs to be continuing emphasis on those goals/skills/outcomes throughout a student's college years.

Bok lists breadth in the educational experience as another goal of general education/program majors. Lehr's own idea for his normal school was to provide courses for students in every subject they'd have to teach in the schools. Remember that in 1871 when he opened his school, one of the first teachers he appointed was Theodore Presser, a music teacher. Lehr provided elocution and art courses to Ohio Normal University students, even if some of these courses were taught at independently operated academies in Ada. Mathematics, the

sciences, geography, literature, grammar, rhetoric, music, history, art were all part of the curricular mix that Lehr designed. To deepen the effect of the curricular mix, Lehr also designed out-of-class activities that would strengthen both course content and his educational goals. These were the military department, the literary societies, the independent living environment in the Ada boarding houses.

Currently, it appears to me, that the colleges' general education programs are geared to breadth through introductory courses and limited integration of these areas in the major curricula. What I'm suggesting is that through intentional planning, we, too, can use the curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities we require or strongly suggest for our students, to further our overall general education and programmatic goals. As you can tell, what I'm speaking about are activities that may or may not have academic credit, but actually help produce the educational outcomes we seek. These include pharmacy rotations, engineering co-op, internships, student teaching and teaching observation, honors' activities, participation in student professional groups, athletic teams, co-curricular clubs, study abroad, volunteering for Habitat, and on and on.

To summarize: what is my point in all this? Marketing was integral to Lehr's plan to develop his school. As you may recall, a major argument Lehr had with his successor as president, Dr. Belt, was over a marketing/educational issue. Lehr's practice was to appoint well known, respected educational leaders to teach teachers in his summer session. Belt thought it was more economical to get local clergymen to teach who would come for much less money. Lehr was focussed on bringing teachers to hear great educators. He knew his summer sessions had attracted teachers because of that. Two very different views on how to make the school prosper.

A second point is that results were always foremost in Lehr's mind. He wanted his students to find jobs once graduated; he sought success for his students in their licensure exams. Lehr also wanted to provide a broad, quality education for his Ohio Normal University students.

Lehr's ONU is important to us because that is the base on which we build the future ONU. Today, August 30, 2006, we're positioned for 2006-2007. Our environment as educators and citizens appears precarious, but is our time really more precarious than the U.S. during the Civil War, or during the pre-Civil War time of abolitionist activity (a time like the 1960s of massive civil disobedience)? Is it more precarious than the Great Depression of the 30s or the world flu epidemic after World War I or the terrors of World War II or the Cuban Missile Crisis? We can't simply hide away in our books and forget the issues of our world today. We need to help our students develop the skills and knowledge to meet and conquer our contemporary challenges. Carpe diem. Let's seize the day. Welcome to 2006-07.

Anne Lippert