

KEMENY John SPIN-OFF WRAPAROUND

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BODY COUNTS AND DOLLAR BILLS

Presidential Perspective

Such are the pressures on college presidents these days that a five-year survivor like John Kemeny of Dartmouth is considered an elder statesman. A distinguished Hungarian-born mathematician who once served as Albert Einstein's assistant, Kemeny, forty-nine, has successfully run Dartmouth since 1970, the second-longest presidential tenure in the Ivy League. The following talk took place in Kemeny's cavernous office, looking across his deceptively somnolent green campus in Hanover, New Hampshire. Kemeny speaks as he thinks, with the precision of a computer and the fluent wit that seems unique to very bright Hungarians. —Robert Shnayerson

We hear a lot these days about the prospect of shrinking enrollments and the difficulties some colleges may have surviving. Is this a false alarm?

The facts are that the number of eighteen-year-olds will peak at the end of this decade, and that during the 1980s the number of eighteen-year-olds will go down by 30 percent. That's a very large percentage difference. It also looks as if the percentage of high-school students who want to go to college, especially to a four-year college, has peaked and, if anything, has begun to go down. Therefore, I see a very major decline in the next decade in the number of students in four-year colleges. One could argue that perhaps everybody should cut back 30 percent, but when you've built all the facilities and faculties to a certain size there is no easy way for an institution to do that. What I suspect will happen is that a certain percentage of present institutions simply won't survive.

Do you anticipate a period of really intense competition for students?

Yes, I think it has already started, which is interesting because right now the number of eighteen-year-olds is at an all-time high. Already a small

number of private colleges have had to go out of business because they couldn't get enough students. Many more are in trouble today, and I'm wondering what will happen ten years from now, when the supply of students is much smaller.

Are you talking about institutions at the Ivy League level?

Most of the endangered colleges are either smaller than Ivy League institutions, or their quality is not as high. Still, a number of high-quality ones are in trouble. For example, I recently visited one of the leading private universities in Texas, and I learned that they are having a terrible time filling their freshman class. Although they don't offer what Dartmouth offers, they do offer students, perhaps not quite as outstanding as ours, a very fine education, and it would be a shame to see an institution like that go out of business.

Can you visualize a time when one of the Ivy League universities might be in serious trouble? After all, Brown University is under some threat—apparently so much so that its president recently felt compelled to resign.

I can certainly visualize Ivy League colleges being in trouble, though not for lack of students. The problem for these institutions is that they cannot charge enough tuition to cover the full cost of education. They have to rely on outside charitable giving to make up the difference. Apparently, Brown is losing that race. At the same time, Brown has a great surplus of applicants and has done superbly in recent years in competing for students. They just plain don't have enough money. The real danger for a school like Dartmouth or Brown is that it may have to compromise quality. That would be a suicide course for an institution such as ours. Some of the trustees worry about the tuition getting too high. I don't, as long as we have a generous financial aid policy; and we do. I think there will always be people who will want to get the very best for their children, and we can assure ourselves of having

a heterogeneous student body by having sufficiently good financial aid.

What is the cutoff level above which families cannot get financial aid?

There isn't a cutoff point. We approach it on the basis of a confidential form that a national organization based in Princeton, New Jersey, analyzes for all schools. It figures out what the parents can contribute, and we make up the rest as financial aid. As tuition and costs go up, the cutoff point goes up. For example, two years ago, for the first time, we gave scholarship aid to a family that earned over \$30,000. This year, the median family income of those who got scholarships was \$17,500. You have to remember that the total cost to a Dartmouth parent this year is about \$6,000, although that includes everything—clothing, for example, and pocket money. Somebody who makes \$20,000 a year doesn't have a chance of earmarking \$6,000 for education.

Do you have any concern that select colleges will inevitably be forced to take only wealthy students, that there will be a return to the Thirties ethos of Ivy League colleges?

Not unless we misplay the game. This problem is within our control if we can keep up sufficiently good financial aid policies. And that's a priorities question. This past year we had to make very substantial cuts ourselves. We cut \$750,000 out of the total budget, yet in the same year we made a very large increase in the financial aid budget.

What percentage of the budget was that \$750,000?

Of the funds that we actually control—which is about \$25 million—it was about 3 percent. That's a sizable cut, however, because we did not have great fat. The fat had been trimmed away in previous years. It meant, for example, abolishing thirty-seven positions at the college. But, again, our priorities were such that none of those were faculty positions.

What about the philosophy of a place like Dartmouth? Is there any self-examination go-

ing on about its purpose, its justification for asking for all this money? One imagines that you can get so involved in the financial crises that you might not think about whether you are simply perpetuating the institution as you would a bureaucracy or even about why you exist.

I think, basically, Dartmouth has seen a clear-cut purpose for itself for some time and that has not changed. We feel that a school like Dartmouth should be here to train future leaders and to do this by offering as high quality an undergraduate liberal-arts program as possible. What that means in 1975 as contrasted with what it meant in 1900 is the basic question, because we have gone through some quite fundamental changes. The most important one of these is that the student body today is vastly more heterogeneous than it was a decade ago. Dartmouth was affected, first, by the coming of the equal opportunity program and, second, by the decision to go coeducational. Both of these took a good deal of soul-searching on the part of trustees. There are other fundamental changes in direction for the college, but let me take coeducation as my example. I think that ten years from now a school like Dartmouth that remained all-male would not attract students.

The Case Against College, by Caroline Bird, is a badly written book, but it touches a raw nerve, I think, in many people. It essentially makes the case that college is unnecessary and shows that people do not necessarily earn more as a result of having gone to college; also that there's very little connection between what they're trained to do, even in graduate school, and what they actually do in later life. In a period of steeply rising tuitions, all of this is going to be a problem for you.

I haven't read the book, but I have seen similar articles. The trouble is they invent a fiction called "the American college," and there is no such thing. You're talking about 2,000 institutions, and there's

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"Cauliflower is nothing but cabbage with a college education." —Mark Twain, 1894

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very little in common between the best and the worst of them.

What are your basic priorities? Continuing financial aid? Undergraduate teaching?

Certainly number one has to be the quality of undergraduate teaching. Being able to maintain a heterogeneous student body is also extremely important. A third priority grows out of the need to control expansion—to achieve a steady state—and I don't claim to have solved that. I'm terribly worried that once Dartmouth and similar institutions have stopped growing, everybody is going to fight for maintaining everything we're doing now and oppose everything new that we want to do, and at that rate the institution will stagnate. I know it sounds like a very negative priority—nonstagnation—but I think this is one of the very big problems we have to solve. And the test will come in the next five to ten years.

What do you mean by "steady state"?

Remaining at the same size. Given the present climate and the coming decline in the number of eighteen-year-olds, it would be a major mistake for a college to plan on growing. For one thing, even with the financial restrictions, I hope very much to maintain Dartmouth's present student-to-faculty ratio. It's now 13 to 1.

What kind of pressures for growth are coming?

I'll give an example from the very recent past—the environmental studies program. It came during a period of growth, so as we increased the student body we were able to add to the faculty without having to cut anybody back. If this were coming in the future, the only way I would see of adding an environmental sciences program would be by taking faculty members away from other departments. A more spectacular example, to go back thirty years, is biology. I would argue that half of what's known today in biology was not known thirty years ago. The change has really been awesome. Therefore, the biology curriculum today is much richer than it was then. And thus we have a larger biology department. A college like Dartmouth just can't afford to be left out as human

BICENTENNIAL BURGER

by Paul Del Colle, Lynn, Massachusetts

By now, most of us are familiar with the attempts of business and industry to capitalize on the nation's 200th birthday. It's a target ripe for a bit of satire. Let's imagine that we are opening a fast-food outlet called the Bicentennial Burger Boutique. What might we sell?

The Tom Paine patty—an uncommonly sensible sandwich.
The Franklin frank—spicy beef with electrifying relish.

The menu, of course, need not be limited to revolutionary-era figures. Thus, we could also serve the Harry Truman burger—salty but respectable.

Readers are invited to help fill out the menu. Send your entry on a postcard to "Bicentennial Burger," Harper's Magazine, Two Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016. Entries must be postmarked by October 7, and become the property of Harper's. Winning entries will be published in the December issue. Decision of the editors is final.

First Prize: *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, edited by Alfred Harbage (Penguin).

Runners-up: *We're Going to Make You a Star*, by Sally Quinn (Simon and Schuster).

Winners of "Dear Abbie," the August game that invited readers to imagine what personas ex-Yippie leader Abbie Hoffman might have adopted, are:

(Sorry, no first prize this month.)

Runners-up *Memoirs of a Survivor*, by Doris Lessing (Alfred A. Knopf):

Abbie Hoffman is now . . .

... Idi Amin's speechwriter.
—Robert Tobinski
Chicago, Ill.

... guest host on *Let's Make a Deal*.
—Deanna Boe
Chandler, Ariz.

... a floorwalker at Brentano's foiling attempts to *Steal This Book*.
—David D. Watt
Williamsville, N.Y.

... writing a memoir about his 1960s experience as an undercover CIA agent.

—Don Snetzinger
Fresno, Calif.

... winning first prize in the August Harper's GAME.

—Len Elliott
Auburn, Wash.

... an FBI agent assigned to the Abbie Hoffman case.

—Philip Van Vleck
Norman, Okla.

... posing as Norman Mailer in a wax museum.

—Louis Rossetti
Narberth, Pa.

... trudging around with a fire extinguisher, looking for a burning bush.
—Lillian Koslover
Redondo Beach, Calif.

... appearing in a Bicentennial movie titled *The History of the American Flag*.

—Albert Manski
Boston, Mass.

knowledge expands or new priorities arrive. Yet, you don't want to cut out the classics department just because something newer comes along. What you may have to do is reduce all existing areas slightly to make room for new things. That's a very painful process. Faculties usually are very generous about approving something new as long as it doesn't come out of their department. But it will in

the future and the faculty knows it.

Then a college president's job seems to be largely one of dealing with this tremendous pressure for growth which comes out of new knowledge and out of empire building.

Yes. But also one of a willingness to give up empire, which is what we're facing now.

Robert Shnayerson is editor in chief of Harper's.

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