

A Statement on the Nature and Purposes of a University
Presented to the Board of Trustees on May 7, 1968,
by the President and Vice Presidents of the University of Kentucky

Throughout the Western World, universities and colleges are becoming sources of grave public concern. Certain campus occurrences are commanding much attention, and the campus of the University of Kentucky is no exception.

Expressions of anxiety about these events are heard daily by your administrative officers. Representing the opinions of the educated and the uneducated, persons in positions of leadership and those with less influence, friends of higher education and those who are hostile to the University, these expressions have been delivered to us in various ways. They have come in letters and personal comments, from discussions in the chambers of our State government, and a recent report of the Fayette County Grand Jury. While your administration shares many of these concerns, we are increasingly confronted with expressions that reflect an erroneous concept of the nature and purposes of a university. Exemplifying the critical character of such expressions is a recommendation of the Grand Jury "that the Board of Trustees of the University take a closer look at the persons in authority at the University and try to encourage and develop in the Institution an attitude more compatible with the desires of the Alumni and general public."

This situation is of such gravity that your president and vice presidents feel required to present a statement to you, the governing body of the University. It is our hope that our statement will clarify some misconceptions held by various individuals and will help broaden public understanding about the purposes and procedures of the University.

At the outset, we wish to state that while we will vigorously defend the concept of academic freedom, we seek no special immunity from the law for our students, our faculty, or ourselves. The University does not, however, impose punishment for violation of state and local laws. We recognize that this is the sole prerogative and duty of law enforcement agencies and courts. If anyone at the University violates the law, let him be subject to the penalties of the law as are all other citizens.

Having said this, however, we feel that the current climate calls for a reexamination of the functions of the University. We view this institution as the central agency in Kentucky for furtherance of the development of our people and State. Its functions are fourfold. First, to transmit knowledge imaginatively from each generation to the next and develop in our students inquisitive minds, understandings, attitudes, and skills that will equip them for living a creative and meaningful life. Second, to provide our State and nation with educated graduates for the professions, for business, for the arts, and for government services. Third, to discover new truths about as many things as our resources will permit, and expand the boundaries of knowledge through research. Fourth, to aid the citizens of our State in applying the results of research through extension activities and in so doing bring the vast

intellectual resources of the University to bear on the social, economic and political problems of our State. Measured by any standard, these are noble and vital goals, and the progress the University has made in attaining them has been impressive.

As administrators of the University, we are dedicated to maintaining on this campus an environment in which these purposes can be served. Above all, we believe this necessitates a spirit of free intellectual inquiry and an open exchange of ideas. If Kentucky citizens expect the University to contribute to progress, our teachers and students must be permitted and encouraged to investigate any theory, challenge any premise, engage in political and social debate, and express their dissent--without jeopardy to their academic careers--provided their behavior is not in violation of the law and does not interfere with the normal operation of the educational programs of the University.

Moreover, if society is to assure itself of a new generation trained to understand the world in which it will live, it must not impose restrictions on exploration of ideas. Ideas, popular and odious, are a part of the world in which our students live, and cannot be understood without discussion and critical evaluation. Historically, universities have been a primary instrument for providing society with independent criticism and advice. It is out of this need that society has provided freedom for scholars and for the university as an institution, even when the criticism, the advice, and the results of research were unpalatable to many. The special rights and privileges the public has bestowed on the academic institutions were not conferred for the benefit of the institutions but for the benefit of the society which they serve. Regretfully, history abounds with instances of hostility to universities, purging and silencing of faculty and students who exercised their right, and duty, to express religious, intellectual, and political ideas that were unpopular or seemed dangerous to some groups. Such practices always threaten the very essence of a university.

Another popular misconception is found in the expressions of many that the University should play the parental role for its students. Perhaps it is not widely understood that most students at the University are beyond the age at which Kentucky legislation declares a person an adult. Ranging in age from sixteen to seventy-eight, with most in their early twenties, many of our students are married and have families, many are veterans, and many are enrolled in professional schools and graduate programs. With this composition of students, we do not think it reasonable to ask University authorities to play the role of parents.

Even though the University does not play a parental role, our students, along with our faculty, must sustain rigorous self-discipline. The task of obtaining a college education is indeed a difficult one, and our students have clearly defined duties and responsibilities. Despite inferences to the contrary, they do not have freedom from moral imperatives. They are subject to institutional disciplinary procedures when offenses against the University or its

community of scholars are committed. The Student Code of the University establishes procedures for determining whether a student has committed an offense against the University, and punishment for offenses ranges from reprimand to expulsion or, in the case of organizations, revocation of registration. Beyond this, persons who fear freedom and the democratic processes should not expect University officials to do what parents and civil authorities cannot do.

While we believe that a university is a place where the search for truth is to be carried on through free inquiry, we do not believe the University should be a sanctuary for those who seek freedom from moral and social obligations. Neither do we condone tactics such as disruptive demonstrations, destruction of property, and violence. We believe, however, only misconduct, not opinions, should make faculty and students liable to persecution or prosecution. When dissent, peaceful protest, free inquiry, and discussions are destroyed, there is no remedy left for errors but that of violence.

We further believe that the University, to the extent possible, should be responsive to the will of its alumni and other publics who support the institution. We like to think, though, that this will is best reflected in an atmosphere which enables our students and faculty to engage in a search for the truth wherever it may lead. It is unrealistic to think that the wishes of the institution's many publics can be observed in all University matters. Because of the conflicting attitudes and interests of various groups, it is impossible for the University to respond in harmony with the will of all publics. In selection of faculty, professional qualifications must be given primary consideration. In establishing curriculums, research, and extension programs, academic considerations are at least as relevant as the interests of special groups. Is it possible, then, to respond to the wishes of all publics when, as an illustration, a major public of the University encourages expanded tobacco research because of the significance of tobacco to the economy of the State, and certain other publics wish to halt the investment of public funds in such research because they believe the use of tobacco is harmful to health? If the University were responsive to the interests of all groups, few courses could be taught, professional curriculums would not be accredited, and our graduates would not be competitive with graduates from other State universities.

Let us point out, too, that the University as an institution takes no position on public issues. The University has no corporate judgment on disputed public questions. Our faculty and students are not institutional spokesmen. But they are citizens. As such, they may speak or write without threat of institutional censorship or discipline. The institution should not be judged by their utterances, as on public issues they speak only for themselves.

Within the context of a free intellectual atmosphere, the University of Kentucky has made striking progress. We have attracted a competent, dedicated faculty and staff and a student body which exhibits a high degree of maturity and responsibility. The success of our alumni attests to the quality of our academic programs. If the citizens of our State will continue to mobilize behind the institution informed understanding, active support, tolerance, and protection from unwarranted attacks, the University will continue to fulfill its vital purposes. We must warn our citizens, however, that in the absence of this support, this University will not be an institution in which our descendants can take pride.

As the principal administrative officers of this institution, we request that this statement be recorded in the minutes of the May 7, 1968, meeting of the Board of Trustees of the University of Kentucky.

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