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KENYON COLLEGIAN

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Classes and Masses

By Dr. Paul A. Palmer

Reading recent numbers of the *Collegian* I have thought of the Irishman who wistfully watched a street fight. "Is this a private fight," he soon inquired, "or can anyone come in?" On editorial assurance that this is a forensic free-for-all I am venturing to strike a few light blows.

A thoughtful student contributor to these columns has criticized mass education in Kenyon classes. He contends that some of them are too large to permit genuine discussion, and he proposes that these groups be divided into two sections which would meet half as often as at present. I do not seriously question the principle that generally small classes are preferable to large. I do think, however, that several observations and distinctions are in order. To begin with, I observe that most classes here are small by any reasonable standard of comparison. As a result of exhaustive research and the application of refined statistical techniques I can announce that the average (median or mode) class this term consists of eight members. Only five of the thirty-eight classes contain twenty or more students, and the largest class has forty. In many other institutions even these latter classes would be looked upon as cozy, intimate discussion groups. By "other institutions" I do not mean only the purveyors of mass education. I attended a college which proclaims itself to be small and which prides itself on the low ratio of students to faculty. Yet the introductory class in Political Science in which I was enrolled numbered about one hundred fifty, and most of my classes had at least fifty members. To be sure, some of these were broken up weekly into quiz sections; but many of these sections were larger than our largest Kenyon class.

Another point may be worth making. If what students and instructor want is the give and take of discussion, they can have it in large classes. Size is not the sole factor. A contemporary of mine in graduate school was the solitary member of one class in which the professor lectured uninterruptedly (and he would brook no interruption) throughout every meeting. On the other hand I can recall classes of one hundred and fifty in which instructors led very lively discussions. It is true that if such sessions are

to be profitable, all students must pitch in and help. Like members of law school classes they must read the assignments carefully and punctually. They must come to class prepared not only to answer but also to ask questions. When Robert Maynard Hutchins taught law at Yale, he used to dismiss a class very curtly if no member of it had enough initiative or ingenuity to put a question to him.

I believe also that for some purposes and in some courses formal lecturing to a large group may be the most efficient and effective method of instruction. Perhaps the clearest case is that of the sciences, in which essential information must be communicated and basic techniques explained. Individual conferences or small discussion groups would waste the time and energy of all concerned.

These are only qualifications of a general proposition which I do not dispute. Moreover, although I am convinced that faculty-student academic relations at Kenyon are closer and more fruitful than at most other institutions of higher learning, I agree that conditions here might be improved. I offer two suggestions, the first of which concerns smaller classes. I confess that I have taught classes of eight or ten members in which, before I was quite aware of what was going on, all but one or two students were sitting in the back row. To discourage this tendency many colleges are transforming the traditional, austere classroom into a seminar room. Instead of glaring and shouting at each other across a broad, heavily wooded expanse, students and instructors come to gether around a long table. Thus I look forward eagerly to the day when the seminar rooms in our new library will be available. Meanwhile, simply by rearranging the furniture in the Ascension classrooms we can lessen the physical and psychic distance between teacher and student.

My second suggestion relates to larger classes. There will be more of these as the College approaches its normal size. I do not know that this presents a problem in the sciences, in which laboratory exercises supplement formal lecturing. The student gets highly individualized instruction in the laboratory. But in the social sciences, at any rate, a real problem arises, or recurs. In the past we have attempted to solve it by sectioning, and

The Fraternity Crisis

In a recent Tuesday morning assembly, President Chalmers once again called attention to the crisis which confronts the American college fraternity. The fraternity is today without doubt on trial. In many of our leading institutions it has been eliminated, and in many others stands on shaky foundations. Now is the time that it must prove its worth, or face possible extinction.

The fraternity can reform, can again become what its founders had contemplated, can again regain the friendly support of the educators. There could not be a better place to begin these reforms than right here at Kenyon. For the Kenyon man is proud of the Kenyon relationship between school and fraternity, and by improving his chapter can render both school and fraternity a vital service. His school, to be sure, must be considered first, for is this not a principle he swore to uphold when initiated into his order? But by improving his Kenyon chapter, he will set an example for other chapters, and in time his whole national organization may become strengthened thereby.

Of what should these reforms consist? First of all, a sane rushing procedure must be adopted and adhered to. It is not wise to look to the past for precedent, for it is the policies of the past that have placed the fraternity in its present precarious position. It is gratifying to learn that our Senior Council has at last reshaped our program, delaying rushing for six weeks. Perhaps further delay would be even more effective, but at any rate this is a step in the right direction, and is worthy of our attention when put into practice next term.

Secondly, the fraternity must undertake to renew the intellectual activity within the fraternity. In the early years of Greek letter societies, relatively little time was spent on the "business of the day." It was dispensed with in a matter of minutes, most of the meeting then being devoted to discussion and prepared report. Many a man whose performance in class was below average, became skilled as speaker and debater in the friendly atmosphere of the fraternity meeting room. Today these literary exercises and discussion periods are virtually unheard of, the average fraternity meeting contributing little or nothing to our intellectual growth, or to the welfare of the college to which we and our fraternity owe so much.

And finally, we must eliminate all feeling of social exclusiveness and racial intolerance from our groups. The undemocratic atmosphere, the "clannishness," which has so often characterized the American fraternity must be outlawed once and for all. We at Kenyon are proud that we have gone a long way toward remedying this unfavorable situation. But we can do more. We can begin again to identify men by division and not by Greek letters. We can teach our pledges that we do not expect them to enjoy only the fellowship of those within their own division, or sit only with their brothers in Commons.

That we must foster tolerance of the various minority groups is too self-evident to merit dwelling upon. Here at Kenyon there is no real racial problem, but whether this is because of, or rather in spite of, what the fraternity has done is another matter. If you would argue that your organization has never really opposed the principle of equality, can you claim that it has ever been more than a neutral force, that it has ever worked positively to promote understanding of the minorities?

These are only three suggestions, and obviously many more could be made. Yet these are basic, and if they are taken to heart by the Kenyon fraternity, its right to continue will be in large measure secured. The fraternity question can no longer be lightly dismissed. There are signs on the horizon that warn that changes must be made, and made soon. Let future generations of Greeks look back upon us as the revitalizers of their societies, and not as men who let them die.

I do not doubt that in some cases that is the best solution. But I should like to see some experimentation along another line. Let the instructor meet the whole class for formal or informal lectures twice a week, and meet it in groups of five or ten members once a

week. The arrangement would include these advantages: (1) It would be economical of time used by the instructor in presenting the basic material of the course. (2) It would enable him to examine closely and frequently the student's mastery of the subject. (3)

Theatre Group Presents Modern Play

By James Hansen

Last Wednesday and Thursday the Speech Department of Kenyon put on "Jacobowsky and the Colonel." This play which is fresh from long successful New York and Chicago runs, was received with the utmost enthusiasm.

The three main leads, Jacobowsky, Marriane, and the Colonel were aptly portrayed by James Grudier, Bernhardt Sledge, and Hershal Welsh.

The direction of the Franz Werfel, N. S. Berhman comedy was neatly done by Dr. and Mrs. Black. A loud round applause is also due for those members of the cast portraying the smaller, but very important roles.

Probably the most notable performance of the evening was given by Howard Stafford. Howard was given his role only two days before the actual performance in order to replace Stewart Perry who was taken with influenza. Notwithstanding the short notice Stafford came across with a splendid portrayal of the Colonel's orderly.

I. R. C. Ends Term

Ending an unusually successful term, the International Relations Club at its last session marked by sharp discussion examined the Indonesian rebellion. There was general disapproval of the British-Dutch position in that conflict.

Over the term, the IRC discussions, under the direction of Robert Golden and Stewart Perry with the invaluable assistance of Dr. Raymond Cahall, have covered a wide range of international problems from dictatorship in Argentina to Government in China. In keeping its regular members well informed in international affairs, the club has fulfilled the aims set forth in its opening meeting last September.

It would permit every student to participate in discussion. Incidentally, I should like to have these discussion groups meet in the seminar rooms.

I am aware that reshuffling of furniture and subdivision of classes are no panacea. Reform of a legislative body does not ensure wiser deliberation or a better statutory product, but it should make it easier for legislators to achieve those ends. Similarly I suggest, revision of our educational practice may help us, student and teacher alike, to take more effective advantage of the rich opportunities which the College affords.

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LORDS PLAY MT. UNION IN OPENER

On December 8th Kenyon opened her 1945-46 basketball season by playing Mount Union College in Rosse Hall, the visiting eagles scoring a 75-41 victory over the slower, less experienced Kenyon five.

While the game was not as lopsided as the score might seem to indicate, there is no doubt that Mount Union displayed greater speed, and much greater accuracy. Nevertheless, several of the Lord's players, although new to the college game, demonstrated marked ability, among them Henry Roberts, high scorer of the evening, and runner-up Dick Bower.

With a few more games under their belts, and with the rest of the team back in the game after their bout with the flu, the Lords should begin to show more of the pep they are capable of.

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