

Call number: 01-80-02

Name and place: William R. Wood interviewed by Paul McCarthy

Date: June 11th, 1973

Summary created by: Varpu Lotvonen

Date of summary's creation: 1/9/15

Notes: Original on 7-inch reel. Master copy on CD.

Paul McCartney introduces the recording with William Wood that is a follow-up for the recordings made previously about Dr. Woods 11 years at the University of Alaska. Paul asks Wood to talk about the crisis in higher education and the changes that UA needs to make for serving the public better.

Wood says that higher education has reached a plateau in its development due to various reasons. There is a change in public attitude that emphasizes the fundamental point that college education isn't needed for everyone. That's a contradiction to the idea that education should be available for everyone. To say that there's no need for a college degree is different from saying that one needs to continue learning as long as one is alive.

2:18 Wood says that there are many professions that pay very well but aren't at professional level and don't require the general type of education that one acquires as a part of an academic degree. Many jobs require skills of technical nature which can be acquired through practical experience or a short training program.

Also, the Southeast-Asian war is about to end and the pressure to go to college in order to avoid getting drafted has lifted. There is also great affluence in the country and young people can wander around without having to worry about work and they expect that they will get by with the help from their parents.

Young people postpone going to college for a couple of years after they complete their secondary level studies because they can put off going to work for a year or two.

5:04 That's a big trend which dimensions aren't yet known, but based on projected enrollment figures, something fundamental is happening. The numbers of recent high school graduates is dropping by 40-50%. On the other hand, people who have been taking a year or two off are returning to college in great numbers. It's not 1-1 offset because the adults are part-time students who are taking one or two courses in order to upgrade their careers or change into another career. That is a very fundamental change and Wood doesn't know how to assess it.

It is not an indication that a society is discarding institutions of higher learning but that they are finding a variety of ways to make a use of them. There is very little change in the concepts that higher education is presenting. [More about those concepts that don't change very much – just like human nature.]

8:10 The things that change rapidly are the techniques and skills because there is rapid technological upgrade. Attitudes and human relationships change at lesser pace and largely due to what happens outside the institutions of higher education rather than because of what happens inside.

The changes affect higher education in the way that the delivery system should be altered and that their packaging has to be altered from what it was in the past. They had a rigid university system and they were more or less apart from the society and the local community.

Now the idea is to take the education to people wherever they are and the community college movement has created a new distribution system. They find that community colleges are the ideal vehicle for the particular new packaging and delivery system.

10:41 The new thing that undoubtedly evolves is communication by satellite. Wood thinks that they will jump beyond television stage, and he thinks that radio is a better instrument since it's less limited than television, but satellite technology will help television to become the primary mode for taking education into homes with rather inexpensive devices. People can tape programs and re-play them at their own convenience.

New technology won't replace traditional institutions of learning where people come personally to learn and network. It won't replace community colleges either, but will just augment in-person education.

13:24 Paul says that Dr. Wood has been the president for some 13 years, which is a long time. He asks what Wood's most outstanding accomplishments were. Wood thinks that the most satisfying thing has been the evolution of both the faculty and the instructional and public service programs. Also, there has been development in supporting services which are a necessity for having good instructional field.

The expansion of University of Alaska has been noticeable. They had only an embryo of an university a dozen years ago, but now they have a university in fact. In fine arts in 1960, there were only beginnings of a program with the help of a grant from Carnegie Foundation to bring distinguished artist, musicians and other distinguished people to campus on short-time basis. Out of that initial thrust, they built a splendid music department that, in Wood's opinion, is one of the best ones in the country. They also have substantial art instruction program and they have developed an excellent program in drama. Some creative arts have seen substantial development. [Wood mentions development in philosophy, music, languages, linguistics with Dr. Krauss and Gordon, and so on.]

21:13 They have developed the library and the faculty alongside with their programs because one can't have good programs unless one has a good faculty. They have a small but distinguished faculty, and increasingly people are building their homes in Fairbanks. None of that wouldn't have been possible without modern facilities.

They didn't have tenure or sabbaticals until 1964. The library has grown and is under good leadership. Also community colleges and regional centers are growing.

Wood thinks that advancements have also been made in public relations and the University has become visible whereas previously it was ignored. It has come with a great deal of attention, some of which is quite critical. Visibility is a good thing although some of that has been frustrating.

23:56 Paul asks about Wood's frustrations concerning his job. One of the things he hasn't been able to do is to set up a development office and manning it with full-time personnel. That would pay off because they have to look for sources other than tax money to do the special things that "are on a plus side for any institution." Wood thinks that it's the obligation of tax paying citizens to support higher education in its basics, but when it comes to special things, they should raise money from other sources

like from foundations and private citizens. Their faculty has done a magnificent job in raising money in contract research and training. The University has got some money with no strings attached but more needs to be done in scholarships.

In English department, Wood has failed to develop strength that could be there, and the department is mediocre. It's been a great frustration to Wood because English is his field and he has tried to help out by acting as the head of the department, but while it calmed things down, it didn't result in permanent gains and may have been a handicap. Wood wanted to have fine programs in creative writing, literature, and so on, but that has never gotten above surface. [More about development of programs that couldn't be started.]

27:59 Wood also hasn't been able to raise funds for a major museum of the north. [Break in the recording.] In addition to the library, Wood has wanted to develop the archives, which is of great value to all Alaskans and that's one of the great accomplishments in past years.

Wood wanted to have a field house for winter intramurals and a year-round ice rink that could serve the whole community like the swimming pool does now.

The other thing they need for facilities, is a new teaching laboratory for science. They also need more things for Anchorage and Juneau.

Wood says that he has also failed to convince everyone in the legislature that they should support higher education to the level of 10% of what general appropriation is and they haven't yet put higher education in priority.

Paul says they are at the end of the tape and they will stop.

[End of the recording.]