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SUMMARY OF REPLIES TO THE QUESTIONNAIRE  
SENT TO ILLINI IN SERVICE, AUGUST 1944

During the late summer of 1944, a letter from President Willard and a questionnaire were sent to 16,500 former University of Illinois students in the Armed Forces. The letter reported the new Division of Special Services for War Veterans, called attention to the facilities of the Armed Forces Institute, and described federal and State educational benefits for veterans. The two purposes of the questionnaire were (1) to learn the educational plans and needs of those who intend to re-enter the University of Illinois so that whenever possible, necessary facilities might be available, and (2) to obtain the reaction of these former students to their own previous experiences at the University. It contained the following questions, together with a footnote suggesting that a personal message from the recipient would be appreciated:

1. If you expect to return to the University after the war, would you be interested in an accelerated program which would enable you to go to school substantially the year round?
2. Would you recommend acceleration as a permanent plan for the University?
3. What curriculum or course of study do you intend to follow?
4. If you are married or expect to be married before you complete your education, will you want living quarters for yourself and family on your return to the University?
5. What suggestions do you have on how the University might improve its services to students?
6. What was your College in the University? Your class? If you have not graduated, approximately how many hours have you earned?

In the belief that common knowledge is one of the bases of common judgment, I am reporting the chief trends of opinion expressed in the 7,000 answers examined by mid-November.\* Many of the questionnaires were supplemented by letters amplifying the views of the writer, and the excerpts quoted are taken from these sources. Four thousand of the replies have been tabulated, and of the total, 72.7 per cent are from men who say they intend to re-enter school, the proportion being somewhat higher for men overseas than for men still in this country. These figures, of course, should be read with caution, since those filling in the questionnaire are the most likely to be interested in continuing

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\*Replies are still being received.

their education, there will be still more casualties, and some men undoubtedly answered while uncertain of their plans irrespective of the fortunes of war.

Of the 4,000, 31 per cent recommended temporary post-war acceleration, 36 per cent think it ought to be permanent, 28 per cent are against it, and 5 per cent express no opinion. Answers are frequently qualified with such remarks as: "If done by more efficient instruction." Those for an accelerated program feel the veteran wants to lose no time in catching up with his education and establishing himself in civilian life: "...At my age time is of the essence and family responsibilities will necessitate an early resumption of earning power." Some say the Army has shown them how fast the average man can learn and that college pace has been too leisurely in the past: "In G.I. instruction, we are forced to cover in six weeks what would ordinarily take months to learn...and we do it... ..there must be a waste of time somewhere in college."

The opponents to acceleration are equally positive in their opinions: "College should be a maturing period"; "The primary ends of a college education cannot be achieved in an assembly line program"; "We need the summers to earn money to attend the rest of the year." Two groups especially oppose permanent acceleration -- older graduates and those who have been in AST Programs.

As to curricula (question 3), the men are thinking along distinctly vocational lines. Interesting trends are shown in the number intending to change their curricula, - about 10 per cent, - and in the demand for refresher courses, although questions about the latter were not listed on the questionnaire. With the exception of a sizeable group naming law, most of those who indicate they will take a different program upon returning to the University are planning to make use of their Army training. The Colleges of Medicine and Engineering, and particularly the Department of Aeronautical Engineering, are attracting most of these.

The short, intensive refresher course is in demand. Graduates want courses of this type to bring them up to date in their occupational fields. Many doctors, dentists, engineers, and chemists say they have had no chance to practice their skills for several years and are completely rusty: "Give us comprehensive streamlined reviews"; "I need a survey of new developments in my field." A few individuals desire courses which will cover world geographic, economic, and social changes brought about by the war. Still others, feeling completely out of touch with their homeland, write: "Help the veterans to orient themselves to the new needs of America"; "Guide us back to civilization."

Another type of refresher course is demanded by the man who entered service when part way through college. He wants speedy, concentrated surveys of background work: "I cannot take advanced courses without some comprehensive review of the basic subjects."

The number stating they will want family living quarters is over one half (60 per cent) of those signifying they intend to resume their education at the University of Illinois.

Question 5 asked for suggestions as to how the University might improve its services to students. The responses, which frequently overflowed into long letters, have been classified according to topic, but only those topics which are of interest to the faculty as a whole are reported here in order of frequency of mention. The comments on various subject-matter fields, when numerous enough, have been distributed to the departments concerned.

The overwhelming sentiment of the men and women in uniform is deep loyalty to and appreciation of their Alma Mater. "Things are absolutely excellent. You're way ahead of other schools." They are grateful for the University's concern for their welfare while in service and particularly for the Alumni News. "I just want to thank all the staff of the University for all they are doing and planning for the fellows in the service... It sure is gratifying to know that when you get back to school, you just won't be a forgotten someone"; "That Illinois Alumni News over here in France is worth more than any other paper we get our hands on." Similar praise is given to the University's postwar plans, its new curricula, the Airport, and other programs.

A striking aspect of the replies under this heading is the number testifying to the value of a college education. Various motives prompt these opinions. "Education is our only hope for a better future"; "One gets nowhere without an education." Boys who did not make a good record frequently express their regrets: "I bilged out but I want to return and square myself."

Coming second in order of frequency are the recommendations relating to various phases of the instructional program. These have been broadly classified under the following sub-headings: Curriculum, College Plans, and Class Room Teaching. Those concerning the faculty, special veterans' needs, particular subject fields, and refresher courses were excluded from this category.

There are several hundred observations on the general curricular structure. Many of the replies call for a more practical orientation of the teaching program, and the trend which has been commonly anticipated by the teaching profession is very evident. The letters specify: "Practical application"; "Less theory"; "More work experience"; "More practical courses";

"Closer liaison between the University and industry - the academic and the real are poles apart." Most of the excerpts classified under "college plans" are suggestions for obtaining more practical training. Cooperative work-study programs, such as the one at Antioch College, are advocated whereby the University will alternate jobs with school work for its students. There are opponents of these propositions for eliminating all but the vocational: "It would be a tragedy if the so-called practical subjects on which this war has placed such a high premium were allowed to displace studies such as philosophy or English once the present conflict is over"; "Present a broader, cultural background for each student"; "Less emphasis on making a living and more on how to live."

A second large group complains of inflexibility in the program, and expresses resentment against required and prerequisite courses: "Allow a free or wider choice of subjects within a given curriculum"; "Many worthwhile courses require superfluous prerequisites for admission which take time needed for preferred subjects." However, a few dissenting voices are heard: "Discontinue the pernicious elective system - the A.B. degree has less value today than a high school diploma of thirty years ago."

Concern about the impersonality of University relationships is expressed in so many ways and in reference to so many of all the topics classified that it is evident that feelings about the matter are strong: "As much as I am grateful to the University of Illinois, I still look upon it as a huge, impersonal machine." Some would remedy the situation by smaller classes, others suggest more intimate relations between student and instructor. Required conferences, counseling, an improved faculty adviser system, orientation-to-the-campus classes, the seminar method, "Oxfordian type" discussions, and pre-college guidance are other suggestions offered.

The men are lavish in their praise of Army and Navy teaching methods. Dozens laud the clever use of teaching aids such as charts, lesson outlines, graphs, diagrams, models, demonstrations, and particularly films, and recommend the University adopt them much more widely. Small discussion groups and the assignment of problems to be worked and explained by students before the class are also advocated. "For years to come, colleges will have service men in school. These men are used to good instructors and good methods of instruction. They will expect our schools to be at least as good."

It is difficult to convey in a short summary the strong feelings expressed in many letters against what are viewed as false aims of instruction. One group of such opinions is centered on the need to make students "think", "analyze", and "solve problems" as opposed to "gathering a mass of facts -- forgotten in a few years." Another group has as an argument that college work is too often viewed as a means to personal or

vocational success rather than as preparation for service to country and fellow man. Some think the remedy lies in higher idealism on the part of the instructor; others suggest that the objectives might be attained by allowing advanced undergraduates to pursue some independent research, by comprehensive examinations, by self-study courses, by increased class discussion, or by seminars for upperclassmen. "I have become an advocate of the seminar, the forum, the open discussion, held informally wherever intelligent, tolerant people get together. It is my belief that...the junior and senior years could be of greater value if these were injected into...(the) course of study: sufficient seminars, forums, and discussions based on a firm academic foundation obtained in...(the) freshman and sophomore years."

Next come the requests for "better housing at lower cost". "The services are o.k. except for housing", is a typical remark about the Urbana and sometimes the Chicago campus.

The particular educational needs of the veteran filled many letters and follow in frequency of mention. The interest in an accelerated program and refresher courses was reported upon in reviewing answers to previous questions. There were also numerous inquiries about credit for training received while in service.\* However, the predominating request is for aid in obtaining employment, both while in college and after graduation. Many contend that, even with government or State aid, either they or their wives must work if they are to return to school. They urge a central placement bureau, they ask the University to establish close contacts with industry, and they beg that older graduates who are well established in their professions be mobilized to help them get started. Another common appeal is for a "streamlined" veterans' educational program and permission to take any course, in any department, regardless of college boundaries. "Useless prerequisites or required subjects not directly applicable to the course of study" are again disapproved, and it is obvious that the majority of the men will resent having to take courses they believe to be unrelated to their vocational field: "I have a wife and baby and can only stay long enough to catch up in my profession. I don't want to meet hampering restrictions." The men are also afraid of being dealt with, as they say, "like kids". The trend of many such opinions is expressed by the following: "We have become grown men; treat us as such when we return." Several commanding officers, however, do not feel all the men will be able to stand on their own feet: "There will be many restless and bewildered boys and they will need plenty of help."

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\*All letters containing questions have been answered.

Some of the service men think that they will be so accustomed to intensified Army training that they will chafe under the slower pace of the University; they believe a seminar or some other method of instruction, which will allow them to progress at their own rate, is most suited to their needs. But an equal number think that "it will be a difficult leap from foxholes to desks", and that the veteran must be given considerable time to adjust himself.

Finally, there are a few suggestions on survey courses: "This is the type of thing that will appeal to the soldier when he returns. On speaking to men out here in the Pacific, I found that most of them wish to concentrate intently on their major subjects and to acquire the remainder of their liberal education by means of surveys."

Army and Navy experiences have obviously increased the servicemen's knowledge and appreciation of scientific testing and classification procedures, and consequently they would like to see "more and better counseling" at the University. "Every student upon entrance to the University should be thoroughly interviewed and tested"; "...offer guidance in selecting vocations"; "Maintain a consulting psychiatrist." Another common remark is that students need aid in relating fields of study to vocations.

In addition to recommending a strong central guidance agency, the respondents feel that students need more out-of-class associations with their instructors, both for counsel and friendship. In summary, this group proposes: "Many more student-teacher conferences, especially with deans, department heads, and the more distinguished members of the faculty."

Opinions on extracurricular activities are worthy of notice. For example, there are considerably more comments on the fraternity-sorority-independent system than on football, with the predominating view against the organized houses. The following, which will speak for all, is one of the lengthier expressions of opinion: "I have always felt that University life should teach people how to live in a democratic society. The extracurricular life at the University should be a good chance to learn and practice that -- yet the outdated fraternity and sorority system remains to injure, both Greeks and Independents. There is no place for a caste system in a modern university.... Let's democratize school life at the University of Illinois and teach our students how to grow up out of a 'dream world' of 'Greek' life!" The other remarks included in this category are extremely diversified, advocating such as the following: "Control of book prices"; "More intramural sports"; "More cultural events"; and "Fair play in campus politics."

A need for improved placement services is referred to repeatedly. If all statements about the finding of employment for graduates, such as those made on the behalf of veterans or addressed to particular departments had been placed in this category, the topic would precede some of the others already noted. It is felt that the University should establish a permanent central employment agency and strengthen its ties with industry.

Half of the observations which were made on the faculty can be summed up in the following two quotations: "Have more personal contacts between instructors and students"; "It is difficult for new students, especially those from small colleges and high schools, to orient themselves to the ponderous machinery of a large university such as ours." The following opinion also reflects the substance of many replies: "Increase the salaries of the staff so as to invite and retain the most capable... Choose instructors in the elementary subjects with both knowledge and the ability to teach." Illini do not care much for the young inexperienced instructor, particularly the part-time graduate student and they want faculty men to be good teachers as well as specialists in their fields. There is much more praise than censure, however, and great appreciation is expressed for professors who have done far more than teach their students.

This summary has given only the chief trends in thinking among 7,000 men returning the questionnaire. No mention has been made of the references to individual colleges or departments and to many points of view expressed by small groups. Furthermore, the method of reporting according to the number of replies in arbitrarily fixed categories tends to obscure or underestimate sentiments running through all the answers, such as the protest against the impersonality of a large institution or the consistent faith in, and loyalty to, the University.

The questionnaires obviously received the most careful attention. Accompanying letters are usually in a markedly serious vein, and they deal with almost every phase of higher education. It is possible, of course, that the perspectives achieved by our service men have increased the importance of schooling, but it is difficult to examine the replies without being convinced that the scholastic interests of former students are greater than is usually estimated.

Jessie Howard

Provost's Office  
December 28, 1944