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A Critique of Ouachita Baptist University

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A Critique of Ouachita Baptist University

Honors Program

Presented to

Mrs. Jane Quick

Ouachita Baptist University

In Complete Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
Honors Program in English

by

D. G. Durham, Jr.

May 5, 1975

I

Being a denominationally supported university carries with it both advantages and disadvantages. Since Ouachita is supported primarily by the Arkansas Baptist Convention and Convention related churches, the tuition is lower than in other private institutions. Because of this it is possible for students to attend who might otherwise be prohibited by finances. Also, by being a denominational school, the atmosphere encourages Christian growth rather than stifling it. This is an important aspect during the intellectually formative years of college.

Along with the denominational advantages come unique problems. Probably one of the most thorny is that of academic and individual freedom. The Convention definitely has a right to have a say in the affairs of the University. However, it does not follow that it necessarily knows what is educationally best for the institution. The faculty members are given contracts to teach to the best of their ability. The fact that they were given a contract should carry with it confidence in their ability. Too often ability and orthodoxy are equated, which is both an error and an infringement on the educational process. Facts are neither orthodox nor un-orthodox, but are there to be learned. The facts must be presented ~~and~~ their value determined by the individual student. The University must not be turned into an accredited Sunday School.

The problem of individual freedom is an even stickier

situation. Part of being a Christian university is creating an atmosphere conducive to Christian growth. The catch is that not everyone's conception of a Christian atmosphere is the same. Too much of what is seen at Ouachita as trying to create this atmosphere is actually a creation of inequality. It is mistaken to think that for the male to smoke on campus does not violate this goal, but for the women students to smoke would violate it. This is a warped view. The Christian faith does not place unequal demands upon the sexes, and neither should the Christian community. Each Christian must decide for himself, based on his view of the Scriptures, what is required of him; and this cannot be forced. It especially cannot be forced in a discriminatory manner and without reasons stated. There is no easy solution to this problem, but there must be more dialogue between students and Administration; the problem will not go away just because it is ignored. No problem is insurmountable when recognized and dialogue begun.

II

Ouachita accepts 90% of all who apply. This is really not necessary, and does more damage than good. It is laboring under a false notion to think it is beneficial that everyone attend college. Many of Ouachita's students would have been well advised to have attended some type of vocational school. By not being more academically selective, the quality of education must suffer. This is not to promote elitism, but is in the interest of quality education. It is a fine ideal to say that everyone is entitled to a college education, but in effect this is not entirely true, and by considering it true penalizes the other students.

By having higher admission standards, the reputation of Ouachita would be greatly enhanced and the job of the professors would be made easier and more fulfilling. The name of the game is quality education, and that must be the goal, even if it means saying No to some prospective students.

III

The religion major is one of the most important areas. It is the minister who must intelligently and relevantly guide the Church in the Twentieth Century. Religion should involve every area of life, which means it is of vital importance that it be properly presented. Ouachita, being a denominational school, has an important task of training people in the area of religion.

Considering the weight that this carries, the Religion Major should be tougher. Under the present catalogue it is possible to graduate with religion as the area of concentration and not have an Old Testament course except for the G.E. course Hebrew Heritage. It is also possible to graduate having taken only Christian Heritage and Christian Doctrine. This is not a balanced degree, which is so necessary for a proper ministry, and which should be provided for the Undergraduate.

The Religion-Philosophy Department has fine professors and offers excellent courses, but the requirements need to be revised. The tremendous responsibilities and influence of the minister must not be minimized, and every necessary step must be taken to insure, as nearly as possible, that he has been given a balanced education.

IV

The purpose of an University education, primarily, is to prepare for a career. Yet, statistics on the availability of jobs upon graduation, and projected availability, are almost never known by students. The Placement Office gives some of the opportunities in Arkansas, but this is by no means the complete picture. The student needs to know in more concrete terms what the opportunities will be in his field.

Another area of slack is the help and advice given in preparing a Degree Plan. Granted, Advisors are supposed to do this, but all too often they do not have the time to really sit down and help the student. There are too many other obligations and too little time.

Ouachita needs a staff member whose sole duty is to advise students of the availability of jobs, the best graduate schools in their area, and to advise students in preparing their Degree Plan. This staff member would work in close connection with the faculty. This would greatly reduce the obligations of faculty, allowing more time for their other duties. At the same time, it would give the students a sense of security, knowing that there was a staff member they could always turn to to in preparing their future.

It is almost impossible to make any kind of a definitive statement as to what I have learned at Ouachita and the changes made in my philosophy. But I do know that the tools have been given me which will significantly affect future decisions and accomplishments. Much is said both negatively and positively about the "Ouachita Community;" both having valid arguments. But when the bottom line is written, I think it will be favorable. It is possible here to have a real relationship with the professors, gaining insights into their philosophies, that would not be possible on many university campuses.

Ouachita is more than anything else an attitude. Life here could be miserable if one really took seriously the absurdities that must be endured. Life is a tragedy to those who feel, but a comedy for those who think. With this philosophy I have grown to love Ouachita. It amuses me while at the same time fulfilling my need to learn--- learn academics and learn human nature.