

ADMINISTRATIVELY CONFIDENTIAL

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White House Task Force on Education

INTERVIEW WITH DR. FRED HARRINGTON, PRESIDENT, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN -  
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Dr. Harrington indicated that he was very pleased to talk with us because he was aware that any office that was going so rapidly from having no meaningful program to a significant program is going to have trouble. He remembered that Homer Ebbidge had wanted to try to get operating programs in the Office of Education years ago and that one of the burning issues then was whether the Office should be in the position of granting money.

He also indicated that he was aware that Commissioner Keppel had held to the decision that he would not get into internal management and that it was also Dr. Harrington's feeling that the Commissioner does not work hard enough on getting the people to manage the program. He felt that the Office needs about a dozen key people near the top.

Another problem cited by Dr. Harrington was that the Office tends to wait until new legislation is signed and only then assigns the job to work out management of the program to people in the Office. He feels that most people in the divisions know their business but play it in a limited way. They are not expansive and have not been brought out because of a lack of a strong management push. He also said that OE is not a place where there is a sense of movement and life that would tend to make people want to work for it. He said that many of the people have been pretty good but have been given chores beyond what they are able to handle. He cited Peter Muirhead as a good man who has been asked to do too much.

Dr. Harrington also said that the agency has not caught the imagination of the academic community. He felt that there has been excessive control by the professional educational group, but the Office now has to reach the attention of every educator. Until recently, he said a university president did not seek OE out as a place on his Washington itinerary. Now, however, the Office is on the regular "beat."

Dr. Harrington also said that one of his concerns is how rules are made for program administration. He feels that this is excessively in the grip of the lawyers who tend to interpret legal authorities narrowly. The program people, he feels, are too timid in dealing with the lawyers



and they should not be the "tools" of lawyers, but rather should use them as a resource rather than as a determinant of program. He also said there is an excessive fear of the Congress and that there is more concern about what one Congressman may say than is really warranted.

Dr. Harrington also indicated that the recruiting drive is unfortunately taking place at the wrong time, since the shortage of people in education is now at its greatest. He felt that the new federal pay scale helps some but this is not enough to meet the competition.

He also indicated that the Office has shown excessive slowness in getting to the point of decision. As an example, he cited the field of adult education about which there has been discussion for a long time. He feels there is a need for a firm decision and then for action to follow. He would not favor drawing rigid lines in organization and it is important that there be more internal lateral communication. It is his impression that there is insufficient communication among people in different offices.

Dr. Harrington stated that he strongly favors separating research from operations because people concerned with big grants would not have the time to devote the attention that is needed to research. He also feels that there should be a clear break between higher education and elementary and secondary education.

He feels that the present organization is clumsy and does not work well. He cited academic facilities as a program that did not get off the ground very well but its problems have only started. He also feels that good people are more important than organization, but that the current split of College and University Assistance outside of the current Bureau of Higher Education is a nuisance because there is no one to see on new programs.

With respect to Teacher Training, he said he might favor putting this in Higher Education, but this could operate outside as a Bureau. However, he is hesitant on separate teacher education because it could put it entirely under the influence of the "education" group. He feels that this group is fine when working with other disciplines, but should not be permitted to operate alone. However, a combination of research and training might be a good compromise if you don't separate out research altogether. He feels that total separation of research may foster more basic research which would be desirable.

With respect to the use of panels, he feels that this approach is generally good but that the OE does not use them well. He feels that they have been set up too late and they are not continuing. He also feels that panels have not had good staff within the Office to work with them. They should be advisory, not executive; there should be rotation and a wider search for people to serve on panels in order to spread knowledge about the OE.



He also cited the field of academic facilities as an example for the need for more leadership in the Office. He feels that this activity is competent to carry out a clear policy if the Office could decide on what is wanted, but that no such clear policy has been developed.

With respect to the field structure of OE, he said that the field people are varied in usefulness. Some are very good but others have limited experience and competence. There needs to be closer tie-in between the field people and Washington and a need for them to be more positive. He feels that they are afraid, currently, to be positive about anything and, therefore, have not been a success, although there is a strong need for field structure that can deal effectively with colleges and universities.

Dr. Harrington also indicated that he has had no dealings with Community Facilities Administration because the building program is so new that there has been no involvement with them at this point.

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