

## *Address by President Meng*

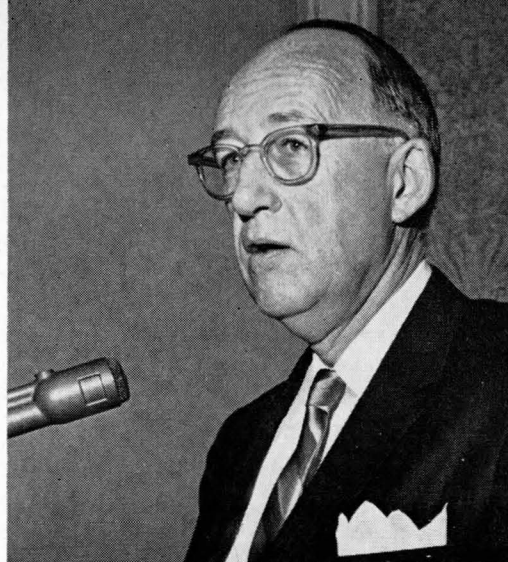
. . . A college is people and it is of the people of Hunter that I wish to talk briefly today. These people range in age from seventeen to seventy. Some study, some teach, they all should learn—for learning is the central aim of higher education, and it is a never-ending process. Learning is more than study; learning is more than teaching; learning is more than the sum of all the statistics, all the data that the human mind can assimilate. It is a strange and beautiful amalgam of facts, figures, and feelings, expertly blended with the insights provided by experience, and with whatever degree of wisdom the individual can himself provide. . . .

Most of you here are the products of a Hunter education, and you may wonder whether your present-day successors are better or worse than you were; whether the sheer magnitude of today's operation has not fundamentally altered the Hunter College that you knew; whether today's professors are not perhaps more interested in a search for grants than in teaching the young; whether the much-discussed rebellion of students against all authority is not changing the character of liberal education and of the nature of the College as an institution.

Stop and think for a moment. Some of you in this room today graduated from Hunter fifty years ago; some twenty-five years ago; some ten years ago; some five years ago. In its physical and curricular aspects the College was a different place for each such group of you. . . . Somehow or other, with all the changes in subject matter, with all the differences in size, with all the alterations in the nature and character of physical facilities from one period to another you all recognize your intellectual affinity, however individualistic you may be in your points of view and your special interests. This is the stamp of Alma Mater.

So, too, is it with our students today. Surely they are rebellious against authority! Weren't you? There was a time, I'm told, when Hunter girls rebelled against gym bloomers. Today's students demand lifting the ban on stretch pants! I've listened to graduates of thirty years ago tell me about professors "who didn't like students" and of others whose wisdom is still remembered and whose ideals are still revered and followed. When you read about our rambunctious students, please remember that today's mighty oak is just a little nut that held its ground.

Of course times change and circumstances alter, but the problems of students remain remarkably alike. In an urban setting such as ours, and especially in our mechanized society, it is difficult to establish and maintain the



*President Meng*

close personal contacts between student and teacher which constitute so significant a part of true education. This has always been true in our City Colleges. Our student and teacher population explosion has worsened the situation and made its solution more difficult. Complicating factors also develop from the pressures of what has been called the "knowledge explosion." In almost every field of human endeavor time-saving devices and new research tools have widened man's horizons more swiftly than college courses of study can be adapted to the new knowledge. There is a rush to "catch up" and a consequent de-emphasis of the more leisurely, cultural aspects of education. A renewed drive toward vocationalism emerges from all this, with students becoming more interested in "know how" than they are in "knowing."

The serious student rebellions of today have as a large part of their cause the increasing impersonalization of the educative process: the lecture course by a distinguished professor for three, four, or five hundred beginning students at a time, with whatever personal contact the undergraduate may have maintained through a group of graduate student assistants; the use of mechanical teaching aids such as closed-circuit television which reduces the distinguished professor to a two-dimensional picture in black and white; the resulting decrease in classroom teaching time by the distinguished professor so that at best only a handful of advanced undergraduates can ever get to meet him, much less to know him as a person; the complete absorption of all top administrative officers in the corporation technique of running a "big business" and their inability to meet and know students and to understand their interests and their problems.

Hunter College today is under great pressure, for example, to reduce the classroom contact hours of its teachers to match those in vogue in the large universities from which we recruit many of our staff. We have made valiant efforts to meet the competition, but we have refused to dilute the quality of our classroom instruc-

tion. All new members of our instructional staff, including those recruited primarily for advanced graduate teaching, are placed on notice that they must be responsible also for some work with undergraduates. Undergraduate class size has been held to a maximum of thirty-five for the introductory courses and to twenty-five and even much less for advanced undergraduate courses. Graduate students may be used for non-teaching functions, but may conduct a class only under the supervision of a member of the faculty. Closed-circuit television is being used in a special way so that not more than a hundred students at a time may attend a single lecture, followed in the same week by two small-section sessions with the same professor, not his graduate assistant. Reductions in the amount of time a teacher is required to be in a classroom are compensated for by the requirement that the teacher schedule additional hours for individual student conferences. Every College administrator, including the President, spends allocated segments of his time with students for the purpose of discussing with them the problems they confront as the members of the College family. Superior classroom teaching remains, at Hunter College, an important criterion for the conferral of tenure and for promotions in all ranks. In these ways and in many others the interests of students are our chief concern.

The most frustrating factor of our current situation is lack of room, especially at the Park Avenue center of the College. Faculty offices are few and the need for classrooms and labs is such that no more space can be remodeled for office purposes. With a commuting student body and a faculty whose homes are dispersed throughout the City and neighboring counties, lack of office space for student-faculty individual counseling purposes results inevitably in a sharp lessening of the personal element in our educational process—the very element from which flow, as you all know, some of the most significant values of a Hunter degree. . . .

The buildings we are planning for the future will ease this situation, although even this new construction, be-

cause of library, classroom and laboratory requirements for new generations of students, will not completely solve the problem.

But I have very great faith in the City of New York, in the devotion of our graduates, in the loyalty and sense of commitment of a fine faculty and administrative staff, and in the character and potential of our young people. Hunter College has met problems before and has solved them. We will continue to do so as long as we adhere to the principles that have made this College great, and as long as we justify in our educational endeavors the great public trust placed in our efforts.

You, our graduates, can help us, and help us greatly. The Centennial Fund drive you have undertaken to help finance activities and functions not provided for by public agencies, the continuing Scholarship and Welfare Fund grants which enable us to retain promising but needy students, constitute handsome evidence of your goodwill and your ongoing support. In other less tangible ways you can be of assistance to the College. Your individual achievements in the larger society outside the College walls are the best evidence we have of the excellence of a Hunter education. Your vocal support of our aims, your assistance in directing to our doors first-class students, your support of public policies which are directed towards the retention of excellence in the City's unique colleges—all these things are of inestimable value to us.

In short, the College needs you and your continuing help in many ways. Just as we have never ceased to retain an interest in your welfare and to take pride in your achievements, we trust that you will remember your College with affection and support its aims and purposes at all times and in all places. With your help Hunter College will five years from now enter the second century of its life a modern college, strong, dynamic, and effective in providing for the young people of our City and State that fully-rounded education which is essential to the development of an intelligent, thoughtful, and forward-looking citizenry.

*D.C. Chapter Birthday Luncheon View*

