

## WHAT'S HAPPENING AT THE COLLEGE

### Interview with Dr. Cross

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Dr. Cross

ELEVEN MILES southwest of Philadelphia in the residential town of Swarthmore is Swarthmore College. Founded in 1864, the school boasts an enrollment of just over 1,000 students. Its new President is Dr. Robert D. Cross, former President of Hunter College, which endures an enrollment of 18,000 students and lies in the midst of a city of 8,000,000 people of varied ethnic and racial identities. *The New York Times* on May 2 of this year quoted Dr. Cross as saying there were "more frustrations than opportunities for change" at Hunter. So in the peaceful suburbs of Philadelphia, he has gone to take a rest.

Before Dr. Cross hung up his foils, we interviewed him in his office at Hunter.

*"What is your real reason for leaving? Is it because of the large-scale administrative work at Hunter or is it the immensity of the problems which plague education today?"*

"I don't know," he said. "I don't particularly like large-scale administration work. About the middle of last year the job seemed kind of God-awful to me. I can't see how New York City can survive unless the university gets bigger and stronger. I couldn't foresee the complexity of the problems. It was like the first part of a long duel."

*"Should the university remain aloof from society, Dr. Cross, or should it become more active in shaping social and political structures?"*

"We've kidded ourselves thinking of the college as an ivory tower," Dr. Cross answered. "Colleges have been a tool of society, have worked with society in turning out the kind of student society demanded." This is now changing, he continued. Society is being challenged by students. The question now has become, as he expressed it, "Is American society willing to support higher education without knowing whether or not the students will fit in? Is society willing to turn out real individuals who will say, 'I hate you?'"

Dr. Cross taught at Swarthmore College from 1952 to 1959. He indicated that, if administrative work at Swarthmore was unrewarding, he would go back to teaching. He spoke about teaching in today's colleges.

"Rank and tenure don't have very much to do with the exchange between the student and professor." When the student feels he is being short-changed in the classroom and complains, he is

*Continued on page 20*

### Cross Interview—Cont.

confronted with the authority of the faculty. "He has no choice but to fight." To do this the student "demands power, and I don't blame him."

*We asked Dr. Cross if there were any real alternatives to the present system of professorial rank and tenure.*

"I don't know," he replied. "One of the central troubles is that when the chips are down, the faculty won't face the problem of relating to the students." Dr. Cross observed that the professor will not jeopardize his interests. "We've sustained a reward system which favors teachers," he said. "Lectures are not necessarily geared to students, but to colleagues. We have a problem of professors who are specialists dealing with students who are not specialists." The former President of Hunter felt the student was being lost in the shuffle. "I suppose most students get something out of all the courses," he said, "but enough students don't get enough out of enough courses."

The professor has the problem of which students to relate to while lecturing, he added. Dr. Cross mentioned as an example a survey course in American history that he had taught during a summer session. Present in the class were "first-year students, sixth-year students, and Dartmouth flunk-outs." Whom does one address in a class of such diversity?

Dr. Cross suggested that there ought to be more emphasis on determining for what type of instruction professors are best suited. Some teachers are more effective at lecturing, others at conducting seminars. He further indicated that some background in psychology and education could help the professor sus-

tain a more meaningful student-professor exchange. For the coming semester, he said, Hunter had reduced somewhat the number of prescribed courses in order "to help get teachers, students, and subjects more meaningfully lined up."

*"What do you feel open admissions programs will mean to the university?" we asked. "Will the gifted student suffer?"*

"I'm not worried so much about the gifted student," he answered. "I'm more concerned about the average student, the majority of students in the middle. As more allocation of societal services goes to the student who has accomplished less, the average student will get less and less attention."

Dr. Cross said that open admissions programs represent a movement by the New York City educational system toward a program similar to the California system: that of providing for students who fail to attain traditional university requirements but who have potential for higher education, by creating more two-year colleges that will prepare such students for continuation in regular colleges.

*"Should the Hunter alumni have a greater role in directing the institution?"*

"Yes," he replied, "I think the alumni ought to have a continuing role in the College" because "when students leave Hunter, they often take with them many good ideas which they never bring back."

*"What do you believe to be your most notable achievement as President of Hunter?"*

"Being a general irritant," he answered. "I introduced no great new ideas, no great organization. I think

I have been valuable in questioning what existed here, why things were done this way or that way, and not another way. We put more options in the curriculum, brought more students into college government. I hope I helped get us moving toward doing more for black and Puerto Rican students without tearing the place apart."

The new President of Swarthmore said that, as Acting President of Hunter, Dr. F. Joachim Weyl would be faced with the problem of too short a period of time to make significant changes. Dr. Weyl would also have to deal with a "larger component of students" who under previous standards would not have been admitted to Hunter. The problem of allocating sufficient resources to all areas would be a major challenge. Hunter does not have the problem of a hostile surrounding community as does City College, but Hunter is more crowded than any other college in the city. The former President lauded Dr. Weyl as a scientist and educator who would bring much administrative experience to the presidential position.

On leaving we wished Dr. Cross good luck at his new position at Swarthmore. "Thank you," he said, "I can use it. It seems to be the most important element for success as a college president these days."

Friendly, informal, yet concerned and sympathetic toward student, professor, and administrator alike, Dr. Robert Cross seems the kind of person best suited to deal with the conflict of interests plaguing universities today. But the greatest of personal qualities may remain impotent in the presence of the current educational challenges: