ChE letters

ON GILL'S ULTIMATE REPORT—NOI SPERIAMO

Sir:

Quite recently Provost Gill of SUNY Buffalo has visited upon us an evaluation of graduate Chemical Engineering efforts, in the spirit (indeed in carbon copy) of the celebrated Cartter report et seq. That the "Gill Report" has provoked comment, I have no doubt. That the "Gill Report" has done justice to Minnesota, I have no doubt whatsoever. They are "uno numero." But that, fair reader, ends equity. Witness the "top 20." Look into your minds, I plead. Permit me a few undemocratic observations.

As I am a professor at Notre Dame, I comment not upon our statistically established status in the Gill report. In fact, for reasons set forth below, we could not care less, save for the obvious acknowledgment that the University of Minnesota is rightfully ranked No. 1 and *several* other quite distinguished departments hold an elevated status.

But what is the nature of that properly first ranked department? It is, pardon me, catholic in instinct and implementation. The other 19 of the top 20? To be sure, in catalysis and fluid mechanics, Stanford is pre-eminent. In the several areas of chemical engineering science, surely Delaware emerges. One can go on, citing specific areas of expertise and assigning particular departments the role of "uno numero." My point, which I trust is virtually obvious, is that the ranking of graduate departments of chemical engineering must respect particular areas which, though ignored in the past of the unit operations mentality, now yield to delineations and specializations heretofore unanticipated. Which is to say, how do we rank a chemical engineering department of strength in, say, surface catalysis (e.g., Stanford) with one of signal merit in, say, thermodynamics (e.g., Florida or Oklahoma)? Tis the problem, dear reader, of contrasting oranges and apples.

Permit me a further illustration: VPI boasts a rather strong chemical engineering group (in my opinion) in the area of fundamentals of food sciences, including that most glorious of inclinations—wine technology. Delaware, a department of admirable scope and depth, claims not such expertise. How does the Gill report rank these departments? See for yourself. MIT boasts of a just reputation insofar as they and Michigan virtually invented "our trade," at a time when Minnesota could claim naught but Bronko N. No informed citizen of our chemical engineering group would or could place MIT and/or Michigan in the same province of universal excellence as is now occupied by Minnesota. Indeed, I, quite frankly, am very, very, suspicious of a goodly number of rankings, ala Gill, which place greats and near-do-wells within the top 20. Indeed, the top 30 or 40.

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Editors Note:

The following response was received from Provost Gill. (For another approach to the rating of departments, see the paper by Griskey in this issue.)

RESPONSE TO J. J. CARBERRY

Sir:

If Professor Carberry (B.S. 1950; M.S. 1951, Notre Dame; PhD 1957, Yale) is trying to say that peer evaluations, which disagree with his opinion, are meaningless, I disagree with him completely. It seems that Carberry feels that one man's opinions are superior to collective peer judgments. However, it has been demonstrated in many studies (i.e., Bernier, et al, **Chemical Engineering Education**) that collective peer evaluations correlate highly with objective measures of excellence such as numbers of papers published, research expenditures, citations, PhD's produced, etc.

I'm sorry that the chemical engineering departments are not viewed by other faculty colleagues the way Professor Carberry would like them to be. But I can assure him that no one at Buffalo, including me, participated in any of the rankings, including those of Notre Dame and Yale.

Faculty members at all ranks from 19 schools other than Buffalo provided useable responses. Some schools provided more than one useable response. To my knowledge no bribes of any kind were offered to influence the rankings one way or another.

It is worth noting that the introduction to the report includes the following statement:

> "An attempt was made to obtain what seemed to be a reasonable mix of raters among the various academic ranks of assistant, associate, and full professor. However, *this study is not purported to be as comprehensive and has not been designed with the care given to the details of statistical design that characterized the two previous American Council on Education studies.* Therefore, the results should be viewed in this context. That is, no doubt departments which should have been included have been omitted and the ratings of those departments which have been included certainly are subject to significant, but undetermined, errors."

State University of New York at Buffalo
William N. Gill

ChE news

Professor Joseph A. Bergantz
State University of New York at Buffalo

Joseph A. Bergantz, Professor of Chemical Engineering at the State University of New York at Buffalo, died June 5, 1976. He was the founder and first Chairman of the Department of Chemical Engineering, which was established July, 1961. He served in that capacity until 1969. He later served as Associate Provost of the Faculty of Engineering and Applied Sciences at SUNY/Buffalo. He also was a Vice-President of the Creative Education Foundation, Inc. of Buffalo.

Memorial contributions can be made in support of the Joseph A. Bergantz Memorial Reading Room by sending checks, payable to the University at Buffalo Foundation Inc. c/o The Department of Chemical Engineering, State University of New York at Buffalo, Buffalo, N.Y. 14214.