SPIRALING TUITION: CAN PRIVATE COLLEGES SURVIVE?

by Christine Reynolds

Steady inflation in recent years has pushed operating costs of private colleges and universities higher and higher, leaving these institutions with no other recourse than to continuously raise tuition fees – a rather risky move at a time when college students are questioning the necessity of spending thousands of dollars a year on private education and are turning in increasingly large numbers toward state-financed colleges and universities.

Simmons is among the many private colleges faced with the conflicting problems of finding funds to run the College, while at the same time maintaining the high caliber of its faculty and student body. Each tuition increase arouses inevitable discontent among students and speculation whether Simmons, and private education in general, might be slowly pricing itself out of the market.

As one Senior frankly admits, "If I had it all to do over again, I'd definitely go to a state university. I have nothing against Simmons, but I think no undergraduate education could possibly be worth the amount of money it has cost for me to come here."

The 1960s marked an era of tremendous growth in higher education. Colleges were suddenly faced with unprecedented numbers of applicants, and competition for admission, particularly among the elite private institutions, was stiff. Funds from outside sources were far more abundant than now. In their haste to move up in the academic world, many schools set their goals for expansion too high. It is frequently true that a college's heart is too often where its mind ought to be, and, in trying to be all things to all people, many colleges failed to exercise sound financial judgment. They neglected to foresee that the rapid expansion could not continue indefinitely. As the decade came to an end, many colleges found themselves overcommitted in terms of suddenly diminished resources. Federal and private grants were harder to obtain, inflation had restrained family budgets, and changing attitudes toward higher education caused many students of high academic caliber to reject the expensive, prestigious private colleges and instead opt for an economical state university. Applications to private institutions sharply declined, and most college admission offices found themselves having to go from a screening process to a recruitment policy.

As the economy became more and more service-oriented, colleges, whose biggest expenditures go toward salaries and wages, found it difficult to meet their budgets. At many colleges, expenses increased at a more rapid rate than income. Some colleges found themselves, as Simmons did at one point four years ago, having to operate at a deficit.

As colleges were faced with ever-increasing expenditures, budgets were cut back, enrollments increased, and tuition raised. These necessary attempts to increase revenues caused concern among administration, faculty, and students alike that costs would eventually erode the quality of education provided.

At Simmons, efforts to resolve financial difficulties were accepted reluctantly. Many were concerned that while applications for admission sharply declined, the College was obligated to accept increasingly larger enrollments. Despite student indignation over tuition increases, any proposed or actual academic departmental cutback has been met with student disapproval and suspicion that academic opportunities would be limited. Furthermore, there has been concern over the spiraling effect that tuition increases have had on student aid.

"Every time they announce a tuition increase at Simmons they also increase the funds for financial aid. But maybe they wouldn't have to increase the financial aid allotment if they kept tuition rates down," one student complained. Student financial aid is one of the most disputed, misunderstood problems on college campuses today. Thirty per cent of Simmons students receive financial aid, awarded on the basis of need as indicated by the Parents Confidential Statement. Very few students feel that Simmons' financial aid program is adequate. Many do not fully understand how the aid system works and believe that the policy which determines who will or will not receive financial aid is very nebulous and often inequitable.

"I really wonder if they couldn't come up with a better system for awarding financial aid," commented one student. "The present system often seems to penalize those parents who act most responsibly about their children's education and reward those who don't. It seems it is often the student whose parents saved over the years for her education, or whose mother must work to help meet college expenses, who finds herself just over the line that determines who receives financial aid. On the other hand, another student, whose father has just a moderate income, but whose parents over the years spent their money on vacations or other luxuries, or whose mother sits at home attending bridge and garden club meetings, could probably qualify for student aid. It's not a problem that is unique to Simmons; it's just as serious at other private colleges in this country. I just feel that maybe the entire financial aid policy could be reexamined."

"I'm afraid this really is one of the most unhappy offices in the College," explained Pat Keegan, Director of Student Financial Aid. "We try to be sympathetic to a student's need, but often we just can't help. There just never is enough money to go around. I know of about seventy students here now with a substantial financial need. We simply do not have the funds to help them. I believe that to run an adequate financial aid program here at Simmons would require about three million dollars. At the present time, our annual allotment in the College budget is only about one-third of that.

"I know that some schools, such as Bowdoin and M.I.T., are now leaning toward not admitting those who can't pay for their own education. This is one way of cutting back on a college's expenses, but I really don't think it's fair. I don't believe that anyone who has proven herself academically while in high school should be refused admission to college because of financial reasons."

Student financial aid is the one expense at Simmons that has risen the most dramatically. In 1971-72, $1,024,496 was spent on student aid. The proposed budget for 1973-74 allots $1,338,800 for student aid, an increase of $314,304 over the past two years.

President William J. Holmes commented: "At this point, Simmons is using its own College operating funds in amounts unmatched by other private institutions. Only $528,800, or less than one-half of the funds allotted for student aid, comes from traditional sources, such as endowment income, gifts, or sponsored programs. The remainder must come from our general operating expenses. We would love to spend more than we do now on student aid, and I'm certain that we will continue to provide substantial amounts for student aid, but at the moment we're doing the best that we can to provide an adequate student aid program here at Simmons.

"One current problem is that Simmons' financial aid program is oriented toward the lowest income bracket. This, in combination with rising tuition costs, could eventually create a 'double' student body, comprised primarily of students of lower-income and upper-income brackets, with no real middle. Right now, about all that we have to offset this problem is a relatively large student work program. I know that Ms. Keegan has tried to give the middle-income students every break she can. However, there just aren't too many breaks they can have."

Simmons has traditionally been comprised primarily of students from middle-income families. In recent years, however, the tuition costs of private colleges have turned more and more students away from private colleges and toward state universities. This has caused some concern that Simmons might eventually attract wealthier, but less academically capable, students. Furthermore, many of these middle-income students, who can't qualify for financial aid themselves, resent having a part of their tuition spent toward subsidizing lower-income students' education.

That college costs will continue to rise is inevitable. That someone must pay them is understood. Several members of the Simmons administration agree that the outlook for direct institutional support, from either the state or federal governments, within the next five years is rather dismal, and that colleges will have to obtain revenues from traditional sources. There are, however, much brighter possibilities for federal aid aimed directly at college students from low-income brackets. Starting next fall, students who qualify may receive up to a $1,400 direct federal grant.

Endorsing such a policy, Ms. Keegan said, "There are a lot of problems yet to be worked out. However, I believe that this type of a system, of direct federal grants to students, has excellent possibilities. Ideally, the government could provide an entitlement for a student who could then apply it to his or her first choice college. I believe this would be a far better system than the one we have now, where often a student must accept the best deal she can get from a college, instead of being free to attend the college of her choice."

Middle-income families will face increasing pressure to think twice before spending their money. It is possible that the consumer will have to make a shift in his expenditure patterns, using his income for personal services such as education, rather than luxuries such as second homes or automobiles. Figures indicate that the percentage of a family's budget that is put toward education has remained fairly constant. As long as colleges can keep their tuition increases at the same level as cost of living increases, it is likely that private colleges will continue to attract students.

President Holmes has stated that we must maintain "quality and uniqueness" at Simmons. It is now important for Simmons, and all private colleges, to make very clear what they can offer that a large state university cannot. Private colleges must maintain their individual character, instead of attempting to be universities on a smaller scale. For as long as they provide quality and innovation, there will be a place for private institutions in higher education. education.

THE STATE OF UNIONISM AT SIMMONS

by Linda Hatzis-Wagner

S*immons Faculty Strikes!* A headline of the near future? The thought is not as absurd as it might immediately appear in light of current, prolonged strikes by various high school faculty unions, notably in Philadelphia and St. Louis, as well as the trend toward faculty organization in public and private universities and technical schools. The question raised by both faculty and the administration is how would a faculty union affect the future of Simmons College?

Aside from the education of students, the primary concerns common to individual faculty members are money and job security. Why, then, are certain university and college faculties organizing, while others resist? And especially, why are members of the Simmons faculty choosing not to organize? Is Simmons an island of calm or complacency in a general sea of crises?

Richard Lyman, Assistant Professor of History and past President of the Simmons chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), admits, "The AAUP has failed to keep up to date with newer trends in education," but it does continue to stress that the faculty members are professionals. He describes the AAUP as a "federation of allied professionals" with national prestige and a history of defending academic freedom. It is interesting that of the 140 full-time Simmons faculty members only 83 are members of AAUP.

It is this concept of the faculty member as a professional – a view taken by the faculty itself, as well as by the general public – that is the strongest constraint on the formation of unions in higher education. Faculty members take great satisfaction from their professionalism and act according to this role. The golden rule of professionals seems to be, "Thou shalt not belong to unions and, above all, professionals have no business threatening to strike."

This professionalism gives faculty and administrators a sense of comradery, which facilitates the collaborationist approach often adopted by the AAUP. This approach works particularly well at Simmons, where the administrators either are, or once were, faculty members. Many were also AAUP activists before becoming administrators. The faculty is loyal to the College, and, for this reason, forfeits the economic benefits a union might offer. "I take great pride in my sense of professionalism," insists Professor Lyman, summing up the attitudes of most of the faculty.

The clear sense of crisis, which causes unionization in educational institutions, is conspicuously absent at Simmons. "There are no terrible conditions existing," says Professor Lyman, although the fiscal conservatism of the College has created a two-fold irritation. First, there exists a class of faculty members which has been depressed in rank and salary – women. Dialogue among faculty members, representatives of the AAUP, and the administration has elicited a promise from the College to improve this condition within the next two years. After this problem of sex-discrimination is resolved to the satisfaction of the faculty, the question of general salary levels must be dealt with. The salary scale at Simmons is consistently lower than the scales at colleges with which we compete for students. President William J. Holmes recognizes this discrepancy and says that he intends to eliminate it after the problem of sex-discrimination is satisfactorily resolved.

Richard Lyman asserts that "with rising costs, Simmons will be in deep financial trouble in the next decade." However, an organized faculty demand for higher salaries might succeed only in destroying the College. And, if the institution is lost, tenure and salary mean nothing. It is the sense of professional loyalty which helps to insure the College's survival. Professor Lyman considers this loyalty a strength of Simmons.

Organization is seen by him and by other faculty members as an easy answer to the problems; one which might have undesirable consequences. At this time, the faculty has the responsibility of organizing the curriculum, granting degrees, and determining the status of faculty members. In addition, individual members negotiate on a one-to-one basis with the administration, while maintaining full control over their own time. Unionization, predicts Dr. William F. Kahl, Provost, would eliminate the professional status of the faculty vis-a-vis the institution, as they would become, first, employees, and, only second, professionals. The faculty could lose its self-government and, ultimately, have less control over its time, with concurrent loss of flexibility. This could result in measurement of productivity by an administration forced into a management role. Dr. Kahl noted, "Decisions would be based less on individual considerations and more on group considerations, considering the faculty as a body of people." In his view, individual financial status might improve but possibly at the cost of professionalism, and perhaps even of Simmons College itself.

He goes on to say, "Unionization might force on the administration some radical measures of economy." Such drastic economics would include cost accounting methods, which rate a professor according to the cost per credit hour, a figure derived from class enrollment figures; further increases in tuition; and greater endowment recruiting.

At this time, however, unionization at Simmons is purely speculative. According to Richard Lyman, "There is no sense of estrangement of the faculty from the administration at Simmons." He doesn't believe that the faculty will unionize in the immediate future: "However, it depends a great deal on the responsiveness of the administration to the needs of the faculty." Dr. Kahl supports this view, pointing out that "the faculty and the administration work well together. There is some conflict; yet, given the fact that people are reasonable, the conflicts are resolved."

Obviously, the College can't control the rise in the cost of living, and the members of the faculty are directly affected by this economic fact of life. However, the faculty appears to be willing to tolerate low-level salaries for the good of Simmons. However, if there is, indeed, as Dr. Lyman warns, "a deep sense of malaise, drift" to be found in the faculty, a financial crisis might eventually necessitate the formation of a faculty union.

THE CITY MOUSE VERSUS THE COUNTRY MOUSE

by Nancy L. Campbell

Once upon a time a city mouse went to visit his cousin in the country. The country mouse lived a calm and simple life in the cornfield, but was eager to make his city cousin welcome. Beans and bacon, cheese and bread were all he had to offer; however, he offered them freely. The city mouse turned up his nose at the country fare and said, "I cannot understand, Cousin, how you can put up with such poor food as this, but of course you cannot expect anything better in the country; come with me and I will show you how to live. When you have been in the city for a week, you will wonder how you have ever endured a country life."

Off they went and arrived at the city mouse's residence late that afternoon. The country mouse greatly admired the house and the garden full of flowers and vegetables, and the larder stocked with a wide variety of meats and cheeses. "Yes, indeed," said the city mouse. "This is something like life! Why, there's never a dull moment! Come on, let's have some refreshment. What will you have? A little roast chicken, or perhaps some cheese and biscuits? I have a particularly fine cheddar this week."

Just as the country mouse was about to try some cheese, they were interrupted by fierce growling and barking. "What is that?" cried the country mouse. "It's only the dogs," replied the city mouse. "Only!" the country mouse cried in alarm. "Never a dull moment is right. I don't need that music at my dinner. Goodbye, Cousin." "Going so soon?" the city mouse asked. "Yes, and you can keep your fine house and splendid fare. The country life is the life for me. What's the good of all the meat and cheese in the world if you can't enjoy it in peace?"

In this fable of Aesop, the city mouse and the country mouse evaluated the alternative life style in terms of its advantages and disadvantages, and each mouse proved to be acclimated to his own environment. The calm of the cornfield was utter boredom to the city mouse, while the danger of dogs was total terror to the country mouse. If we were to send our mice to college, would they make the same decision, given the choice between the quiet natural environment of the country and the stimulation and excitement of the city for their college experience?

College is only a four-year stint in a life style, yet it can give an invaluable perspective on our multifaceted reality. It would be unfair to state that a college is a product of its environment, for its identity is a result of many forces; however, the location is undeniably influential in formulating the character, the curriculum, the campus life, and even the future of an institution.

City colleges such as Simmons have a package to deliver to their students which varies drastically from that of a country school such as Colby College in Waterville, Maine. Our city mouse would certainly find nature in "God's country," but what else?

Colby is a small coeducational liberal arts college situated on a hill overlooking the Kennebec Valley and the Belgrade lakes. The college is passionately committed to its curriculum and to its location. While being aware of the cultural and social disadvantages of its isolation, the administration distinctly feels the college offers a positive climate for the learning experience. Colby's Dean of Admission, Harold Carroll, cites the