

WALDEN U.: A WORKING PAPER

HAROLD L. HODGKINSON



WALDEN UNIVERSITY



UNIVERSITY VISION

Walden University envisions a distinctively different 21st-century learning community where knowledge is judged worthy to the degree that it can be applied by its graduates to the immediate solutions of critical societal challenges, thereby advancing the greater global good.

UNIVERSITY MISSION

Walden University provides a diverse community of career professionals with the opportunity to transform themselves as scholar/practitioners so that they may transform society.

UNIVERSITY GOALS

1. To provide multicontextual educational opportunities for career learners.
2. To provide innovative, learner-centered educational programs that recognize and incorporate the knowledge, skills and abilities students bring into their academic programs.
3. To provide its programs through diverse processual learning approaches, all resulting in outcomes of quality and integrity.
4. To provide an inquiry/action model of education that fosters research and discovery, critical thinking, and results in professional excellence.
5. To produce graduates who are scholarly, reflective practitioners and agents of positive social change.

SOCIAL CHANGE AT WALDEN UNIVERSITY

Walden University defines positive social change as a deliberate process of creating and applying ideas, strategies, and actions to promote the worth, dignity, and development of individuals, communities, organizations, institutions, cultures, and societies. Positive social change results in the improvement of human and social conditions.

This definition of positive social change provides an intellectually comprehensive and socially constructive foundation for the programs, research, professional activities, and products created by the Walden academic community.

In addition, Walden University supports positive social change through the development of principled, knowledgeable, and ethical scholar-practitioners, who are and will become civic and professional role models by advancing the betterment of society.

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DIAGNOSIS

Most informed critics and champions of higher education would probably agree that we are running low on new ideas. One of the major reasons for this is that we have become preoccupied with existing structures which then blind us from seeing higher education as it might be. Educational functions are being derived from structures, rather than the other way around. One classic function of the visionary is to provide a new model which may have an effect on practice. Without new visions there can be no new alternatives.

Evidence for the failure of higher education is all around us. If technology consists of “those devices which make it unnecessary for us to experience the world,” then education has become technological. Many of our brightest students are telling us that higher education is insulating them from reality rather than assisting them to peel off its infinite layers. We know also that many of the faculty, old men by the age of forty, are having their own identity crisis, and the large number of early presidential retirements and resignations suggests that all is not well in the administrative camp either. Much of this disaffection comes from the preoccupation of higher education with structure and its inability to deal seriously with process. The notion that human beings are capable of being educated without a vast array of numbers, letters, times, and compartments is anathema to many educators, who seem to share Machiavelli’s dictum that “unless men are compelled to be good they will invariably turn out to be bad.”

Americans tend to feel uncomfortable in discussions of process. Early discussions of this paper have indicated that collaboration, trust, and growth are a part of the educational rhetoric but not a part of the educational scene. If we wish to make reality out of rhetoric, we must adopt the view that structures are potentially evil, and that the goal is not a maximum of structure, but the absolute minimum without which the institution could not survive. Heavily structured colleges tend to graduate people who have been subjected to these institutional controls but who have not developed much in the way of private, personal control structures. (Or as one wag put it, “Small Christian colleges make small Christians.”) This paper is an attempt to develop a new conception of a college in which process and individuality predominate, and structure and system are seen as means to individualistic ends.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. Learning does not occur in equal units, nor on certain days of the week, nor at certain times of the day. When it does occur, it means that the individual's view of the world has shifted; learning is additive.
2. When twenty students read the same book, they have twenty different experiences.
3. Transfer of learning outcomes from one situation to another is highly unlikely. It is wiser to assume that transfer will not happen.
4. The universe does not seem to be organized by academic departments.
5. A good educational program provides for the personal growth of faculty and administrators as well as students.
6. The present status and mobility systems of the professoriat are un- if not anti-intellectual.
7. The job of certifying people for jobs in the meritocracy should be moved off campus and into state agencies in which performance criteria will be established.
8. Administrative positions and committees often have the function of generating enough work to justify their continued existence.
9. The rigid lines between content and method, teacher and student, ignorance and knowledge, and teaching and research need to be made more interactive and processual.
10. Participation in governance should be direct, not representative, and should include all interested parties.
11. Standing committees, and the precedents which they enshrine, are major causes of the hardening of institutional arteries.
12. A student body should not be age-graded, but should be limited to those who wish to inquire about something. Inquiry transcends sex, age, nationality, and social class.
13. One of the richest forms of education involves imitation. Through imitation can come identification with the personality and values of the person imitated.
14. Cultural deprivation is not limited to the lower class—in many respects, middle-class children know far less about the universe of humanity than do others.

THE PROGRAM IN PROGRESS TERMS

Basic to the entire program is the concept of inquiry. Inquiry is the bridge between teaching and learning, content and method, as seen in assumption 9. Pedagogy, therefore, comes to mean the act of mutual inquiry. This means the virtual elimination of all formal teaching as such; no grades, no courses, no diplomas. The basic work unit consists of the faculty member working with students in a research

mode. (This is a very loose definition of research—any investigation or process would suffice, if mutually agreeable.)

The student will probably take a broader view of the investigation than the faculty member; therefore, the students will be able to form linkages between and around the more specific interests of the faculty. It is through this linkage that the basis of general education could be built. Although the student may come to Walden with only one area of inquiry in his mind, his associations with others should begin to expand his interests—after all, everyone will be excited about his learning, and will want to communicate it, and some “conversions” will probably be made. Because students will be drawn from all age groups and all economic backgrounds (there need be few barriers to admission), the possibilities of general education through human contacts should be enhanced. To borrow an old idea, the student’s education through human contacts should be seen as an inverted pyramid, coming into Walden with one area of interest and realizing that it is interrelated with thousands of others.

In a collaborative model such as this, the lines between teacher and student will become blurred; since most students know more about some things than faculty do and no evaluation of the student’s worth would be required, both would be free to learn from each other. They would have nothing to lose by doing so, and both could gain simultaneously. Age-grading will be very difficult in this environment, in that many of the students will be older than the faculty. The faculty may be more theoretically astute but a student group representing all ages and diverse background could bring a rich experiential base from which to validate and inform theoretical perspectives. Although the initial period of Walden will probably result in student imitation of and identification with faculty, a reversal may well set in if status distinctions between faculty and students can be kept at a minimal level.

Because the curriculum is conceived in processual terms, its only visible presence is the areas of inquiry which each faculty member posts on his door. Technically these areas are not the curriculum but only the arenas in which the inquiry processes operate. All will be free to work individually or in groups, but no group activity will come about without the expressed agreement of the group that it is desirable. (Participants can meet for an hour or a year, shifting memberships as needed. It is clear that if they have to meet for an hour every week, they will think of something to do, but then the time unit would be determining the activity, as DeGrazi * observed). Every attempt will be made to keep group behavior as flexible as possible, both in terms of duration of meetings and ease of entering and leaving groups. These work groups should look like a kaleidoscope of shifting group patterns. “The system” is here subordinated to the task, contrary to the conventional norm which makes tasks subordinate to system. Most of the systematization of curriculum

is necessary only because of the institution's obligation to certify to the outside world that a student has passed through a certain number of hours and units of exposure and can be certified; if the certification function is eliminated, most of the curricular "systems" are automatically eliminated at the same time.

Although there will be no common texts (see assumption 2) there will be an attempt to develop experiential bases for looking at student growth. Unlike much current theory, Walden will operate on the notion that human personality development does not occur in series of fixed, immutable stages, each one necessary for passage to the next. Rather the person will be seen as having flexible access to many growth-inducing stimuli at any time, in any environment. Human growth is seen as a lifelong process, not a phenomenon of childhood and adolescence ending at age twenty-one. The student will be encouraged to plan experiences which will result in growth along certain major dimensions (see Appendix). In that there is no "generation gap" to these dimensions, they will be as relevant to faculty growth as to students. Because of the elimination of the certification function, students and faculty will be encouraged to develop valid self-perceptions of their progress along experiential lines that they have chosen. This sort of self-evaluation is a vital part of the process network of Walden, and faculty should serve as role models for students in terms of self-appraisals of growth and change. Good teachers have always been able to make use of the fact that different people perceive phenomena differently, but in the research-inquiry context of Walden, these differences can be made even clearer and more productive.

Many materials will be available as support services for inquiry. When "tools" such as math or statistics, formal logic, a foreign language, or research design are needed, they will be available in programmed form. In the present pattern students usually take these courses before they have need for them and must brush up on the material before they can put it to use. In Walden, they will learn it as they need it. There is no particular reason to assume that any time will be lost in this plan; in fact, knowledge gained and put to immediate use may stay with the learner for a longer period of time. These tools will be seen as means to ends; no claim will be made that they build character or are a part of the Western heritage.

On the other hand, the arts and crafts will have a strong place in the activities of those at Walden, for there is much evidence that experience in the arts can be important for the development of the dimensions listed in the Appendix. There will be few "professional" artists in Walden, but everyone will be encouraged to develop his own modes of artistic expression. Again, the faculty will be models in this area, and the words "amateur" and "dilettante" will be the highest compliment rather than the lowest insult.

ADMISSIONS AND WITHDRAWALS

Because the “output” of Walden will not have to be certified, the student input also escapes the need for codification and certification. The great virtue of Walden lies in the possibility of mixing very different people together to learn from each other in a situation of low or no threat. The fifty-year-old Mexican gardener, anxious to discover the roots and nature of prejudice, would be very welcome even if he had completed only six years of schooling. Virtually anyone who wishes to engage in inquiry could be admitted, for admission is not seen as a guarantee of anything. The student can stay for a day or ten years, and fees would be prorated on a daily basis and determined by ability to pay. Because of the flexibility of the program, the student body will not have to be carefully regulated as to size. The goal will be to let in as many people as possible, rather than to keep as many out as possible (it is estimated that of those who apply to institutions of higher education, only one in twenty graduates; clearly one of the latent functions of higher education is to make most people feel rejected). Because of the desire to attract all races and social classes, as well as all age levels, Walden will probably not be residential, for students will be living active lives in addition to being involved at Walden. In fact, there need not be a central campus, as permanent buildings make for permanent programs. Modern communications systems would make it possible for Walden to exist all over a large urban area bringing the campus to the community rather than the other way around.

No one will graduate from Walden; he will leave. A possible substitute for graduation could be the celebration which would come from the completion of a task of inquiry. After some festivities, the teachers and/or student responsible would present the results of their inquiry as a “gift” to the school. Several hundred such events could be held each year, ranging through all the areas of human inquiry. This is probably the only group teaching that will occur at Walden, and might represent in its entirety a fair approach to general education. There will be no finality to these celebrations, since it is assumed that inquiry never ends. But the community can be happy that the process has reached a given stage. Such parties would also be good places for the faculty and students to sing and dance together. Although our stereotypes about thinking would lead us to believe that Walden would be a grim place (thinking is hard, dangerous, and depressing, ala Hamlet) the realities of people coming together to share and celebrate could make a real community out of Walden.

One of the most difficult tasks will be that of “de-briefing” entering students in terms of their highly structured expectations of academic life and their probable inability to engage in autonomous, self-directed work. They will require the best efforts of a highly skilled person, referred to later as the Psycho-Social Registrar. It is most likely that the more mature entering student (in terms of age) will have some advantage in this regard, and the younger students may emulate the more self-directed patterns

of the older ones. Even the person who is vague as to the areas he wishes to inquire about can try them out for a week or a month and stop whenever he wishes, with no penalty or punishment.

FINANCE

The normal relationship between size of student body and institutional income will not hold in Walden, for the duplication of construction which provides for classrooms, residence halls, faculty office space, and research facilities can be avoided. A rough approximation of size of student body at any given time would be five hundred. On grounds of ability to pay, fees could range from \$50 to \$9,000 per year, broken down into daily equivalents. With a mean tuition of \$4,000, one could pay a faculty of one hundred an average salary of \$14,000 a year and still have \$600,000 left for operating expenses. It is to be expected that about half of the faculty member's time could be paid for through research grants, thus saving Walden another \$700,000. There would be no conflict of interest here, since the faculty member teaches through his research activities. No faculty load statistics would have to be calculated; there is no assumption that the faculty are identical, interchangeable parts. Some may have twenty students working with them, while others may work with only one or two. Student scholarship assistance would be written into grant proposals for research and clerical assistants.

It is hoped that this arrangement would have a significant impact on the faculty reward and status systems of increasing the importance of qualitative evaluations and decreasing the importance of quantitative ones. Number of students, size of research grants, number of publications, and the like would be of little use within the Walden community, for there would be no promotional hierarchy in which these would be used. This would be tough country in which to try to build an empire. There would be no reason for tenure, and no point in splitting the faculty into junior and senior levels, with the juniors trying to climb into the senior bag. The conventional faculty reward system is indeed extraneous to the person. With adequate financing, Walden could help faculty to develop intrinsic rewards which would be more meaningful.

GOVERNANCE

Walden will illustrate the dictum that the best government is the least government. First, there will be no positions without clearly defined tasks which are ascertained from the title. This means that there will be no President, and no Dean. (After all, what are the things that all presidents and deans do? The titles do not clarify the activities.) A variant of Parkinson's First Law—positions generate work which must be done to justify the position—will be used to keep down the number of administrative tasks. Fund-raising, which is usually considered to be in the province of the President, will be contracted out to an outside firm, just as one can contract for food service, dormitory construction and supervision, etc. The fund-raising agency will appoint a Board of Supporters. They will be responsible to the agency, not the college, and will be selected for their ability to give and get money for the college. They will have no influence at all on the governance of Walden, but they will receive a five percent commission on every dollar they raise for Walden. The profit motive has worked well for these people in the past, and the conditioned reflex of working hard for profit may make this board more effective than some others.

Although there will be no vertical hierarchy of positions in Walden, one person will be the most visible. He is the Coordinator of Inquiry. Elected by the students and faculty for a three-year renewable term, he will serve as a communication link of the first magnitude, and should represent the best characteristics of mind and personality in Walden. He will most likely be a faculty member, but because the student body is not age-graded, a student could also be elected. Hopefully, he will be able to continue his own inquiry on a reduced basis, if he is wise enough to avoid self-generating tasks which must be continued after their first performance. In that there will be no standing committees, and precedent will not be determinative, the decision on the machinery to be used will be made by him for each individual case. The one assumption that should guide him would be that involving as many concerned members of Walden as possible, conceivably everyone who wishes to get involved. He can be recalled by a two-thirds vote of the student-faculty body.

The Coordinator of Inquiry will be responsible for making two crucial appointments. The first is that of Manager of Finance and Auxiliaries. He will oversee the functions of accounting and disbursement of funds, food service, buildings and grounds, and equipment purchase. Although the Manager is selected by the Coordinator of Inquiry, he can also be recalled by two-thirds vote. Business Managers often have a very influential role in academic policy decisions, since they sit in high councils where such things are discussed. In that there will be no high councils at Walden, the influence of the Manager of Finance will be limited to his own vote in community decision-making.

The Coordinator's most important appointment will be that of the last member of the administration, the Psycho-Social Registrar. Although his formal power will be low, his attitude and personal skills will be crucial to the success of the program. He will be a skilled psychometrician, well trained in counseling and testing in all its phases. At the time of admission, all new faculty and students will have an extended interview with the Psycho-Social Registrar, at which time some agreement on the person's goals for his stay in Walden will be reached, and some attempt at setting up criteria for personal growth will be made. After this initial interview, all further contacts will be at the request of the individual faculty member or student. In that he will have absolutely no ability to threaten or coerce, it is to be hoped that he would become very busy with individuals who wish to develop their ability to understand themselves, and to assess their personal and intellectual growth. In that Walden will not be a certifying agency, these confidential records will be given to the person when he leaves, rather than being kept at the college. It may be that a group at Walden will wish some assessment of their work, but the matter of personal confidentiality of all records of growth will be the responsibility of the Psycho-Social Registrar. He also will have to know the current interests of faculty and students so that he can steer the new student in the best direction. In that the ability to assess one's personal and intellectual growth is a prime objective of Walden, the Registrar probably "teaches" the most important skills of anyone at Walden. He must be extremely broad in his interests so that he can help people translate the results of their inquiries into personal growth and development. Like the Manager, the Psycho-Social Registrar can be recalled by a two-thirds vote of the student-faculty group.

Every effort will be made to avoid the establishment of an elaborate committee structure. Most problems will arise in the context of the work of faculty and students, and should be solved at that level. Problems which have a broader level of application will be communicated to the Coordinator of Inquiry, who will establish the procedures for the handling of that particular problem. By minimizing precedent and abolishing standing committees, it is fervently hoped that the widely noted tendency of faculty members to play politics will be reduced if not eliminated. By making administrative tasks as clear as possible, and by reducing the vertical status hierarchy which provides ego massage and political sophistication for many administrators, the administration may truly find their rewards in serving the needs of others.

CONCLUSIONS

There are many advantages to Walden as a concept, such as the genuine student "mix," the elimination of vertical hierarchies, the possibility of moving this institution into an area of hard-core poverty and working through people of the area who could not be rejected by the school, and the specificity of administrative roles. There obviously would be problems as well. One of these concerns the faculty member who wants to leave Walden and return to the more conventional reward system of the other colleges and universities. His "re-entry" might well be painful in terms of position and salary if the other institution failed to recognize the worth of what he had done at Walden. He also would find it extremely difficult to adjust to the highly structured situation of most university faculty members. There is no easy answer to this. However, it would seem that the faculty who learned how to work well in the Walden setting would probably become a superb teacher in almost any collegiate setting. His research, freed from the political compulsions of keeping up with the minute and the mundane, might reach a greater level of significance.

Another problem concerns the tendency for Walden to fill up with those interested in social and scientific areas, leaving the arts and humanities behind. It may be that the "professional" artists or humanists might not be too interested in Walden, but it is clearly assumed that faculty members would for the most part have active roles in the arts and humanities as amateurs. It also might be that Walden would fill up with "professional students," who want to spend their whole lives there. This, of course, happens now at almost every university. The only defense would be that Walden would make the rest of the world look more interesting rather than less; it would hardly be a good place for a recluse. Most student and faculty would be off campus as much as on, pursuing their inquiry wherever it led. The Psycho-Social Registrar could act in severe cases of student and faculty inability to grow and develop in the Walden environment, but such cases would be rare. The Registrar will admit anyone unless he can prove a case against them, and after admission it will be assumed that they are being productive unless there is evidence to the contrary.

One final question is whether or not there are people capable of working productively in a place like this. The answer is that new visions must by definition depend more on the human potential than the conventional modes. Thus far, the evidence would suggest that the human creature is infinitely more capable than our social structures will allow him to be.

APPENDIX: THE WALDEN RATIONALE FOR PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

The conventional college experience forces the student to concentrate on those things which (1) he can do well, and (2) are a part of the reward and certification system of the institution. This approach, called variously “psyching out the institution” and “leading from strength,” is bound to result in an individual with narrow insight into his potential. Because of the meritocratic sword hanging over him, he is not allowed to dabble, to fail, or even to be casual. As Riesman puts it, “Leading from strength may rob the students of the possibility of discovering other areas in which they may not be so well-equipped, but which may nevertheless be more relevant for them as they slowly grow.” It could be argued that faculty are forced into a view of themselves which is very similar in its narrowness to that of the student, that “leading from weakness” may be the most important strategy for personal growth, yet our institutions of higher education, because of their obligation (self-imposed) to evaluate and judge human worth, cannot allow this to happen.

A theory of human development which successfully integrates the individual and the social structures in which he participates has yet to be created. It certainly does not seem to be on the horizon at the moment. Perhaps closest is the work of Stern* and others (based on Murray)** which tries to relate individual needs to the “press” imposed on the individual by the institution. But this is not a longitudinal theory, and does not help us to explain (or predict) how different individuals will grow through similar structures in different ways.

Because of this failure, we are forced to the position of simply trying to keep the doors to new experience as open as possible. The best metaphor for how this can be done is the system of “scrambled access” cafeteria patterns. In previous systems, it was assumed that everyone had to enter at the same place, go all the way through the line, and emerge at the other end. In the scrambled system, there is no line. Each person simply goes to the various “staging areas” to get what he wants, in the order he wants. This metaphor could apply to the passage through college as well as through a cafeteria line—in a normal college program, all the students move through a heavily structured line, picking up items in the order imposed by the institution (course A must be taken before course B, etc.). The line never varies, so the student cannot vary. A “scrambled access” curriculum, based on the principle that the learner selects his own sequence of experiences as he perceives a need for them, could be defended both on terms of efficiency and in terms of what is known, about personality development.

For example, the conventional cafeteria line curriculum is designed to allow invidious comparisons to be made between middle-class and lower-class students (the "line" structure certainly favors the middle-class student, and giving the lower-class student more time to get into the line does not change the essential fact that the line was not designed with his needs, skills, and values in mind). In the scrambled access model, invidious comparisons would be almost impossible, for there would be no standard "route" which all would take and which would allow for rating individual performance of identical tasks. Age-grading would also be impossible, as there would be no relation of student age to his work (in the conventional curricular cafeteria, those who enter the line are "the young," those who leave are "the old"). Similarly, little emphasis would be placed on the "one-way" theories of personality development, with their usual insistence that one "stage" must be handled before the next can be reached. In that there is no personality theory which successfully takes us through all of Shakespeare's Stages of Man, we will assume that the adult is still full of growth potential, and that it is not necessarily unhealthy to be forty and still not "know what you want to be when you grow up." But because no one knows what directions of growth are typical of adults, there is no justification for any linear or sequence system, and the scrambled access approach remains superior in terms of maximizing personal growth.

The best way to achieve a scrambled access curricular model is through a research-inquiry scheme like that of Walden. The student can move into (not through) it at any points he wishes; he continues to be free to move in new directions at any time, and to move in several different directions simultaneously. Just as pluralism remains as the bedrock of a healthy democracy, so the pluralistic principle is the best approach to understanding the complex interweaving of factors which constitutes an individual personality.

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Mr. Hodgkinson is the director of the Carnegie-sponsored project, Institutions in Transition. His most recent book, Education, Interaction and Social Change won an NEA award for best book in the area of social foundations.

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