

Recognition of Leland L. Medsker

The usual mortal in academe is expected to perform well in one of three areas--administration, teaching, or research. The fact that Lee Medsker performs exceptionally well in all three is truly a mark of his distinction.

He has been a college president, a faculty member, a department chairman, a researcher, and a research administrator. It is no wonder that his writings about higher education are so successful; almost no one can complain that he doesn't know how it is or that he can't understand their problems. I can think of only three prevalent issues in higher education that Lee has not personally experienced. He has never been black, a woman, or I suspect, a low achiever. But that only leads me to observe that one of his most remarkable characteristics is his great sensitivity and understanding of people, be they students, faculty or research colleagues, college presidents or trustees.

Not only has Lee served in almost every kind of position but he has made major contributions to the understanding of many forms of higher education--starting with the community colleges, moving into higher education generally and then into non-traditional studies. The only way left for Lee to broaden the range of his interests in higher education is to go world-wide. And he did that last year, returning to write his report on The Global Quest for Educational Opportunity.

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The work of artists, as you know, is frequently discussed by periods-- the blue period, the yellow period, etc. Since Lee is an artist as well as a scientist in higher education it seems appropriate to discuss his work as the community college period, the higher education period, and the non-traditional period, remembering that these are expanding spheres of influence rather than discrete periods.

Lee started his professional career with the community colleges, and rapidly rose to a position of national prominence as president of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges and author of a well-known study on The Junior College: Progress and Prospect, a book published in 1960 that is still widely read and extensively quoted today.

While retaining his interest in community colleges, Lee expanded his concerns when he came to Berkeley in 1956 to serve as vice-chairman of the Center for the Study of Higher Education. It wasn't long before his talents as a national leader in higher education were again recognized and he was elected president of the American Association of Higher Education. Thus by the mid-1960's, he was helping T. R. McConnell direct the Center, teaching and directing graduate work at Berkeley, and working on two major research projects that are classics in longitudinal research in higher education. In collaboration with Jim Trent, he wrote Beyond High School which is a study of 10,000 high school graduates and their entrance into college or the labor market. That work still contains some of the best data available on what happens to young people who do and do not go to college. In collaboration with Dorothy Knoell on a longitudinal study of junior college transfers, he put to rest the idea that junior college graduates needed to be screened for admission to senior colleges.

In addition to working on his own research in the mid-1960's Lee was involved in the transformation of the Center for the Study of Higher Education at Berkeley to a Federal research and development center. His appointment as director of the Center in 1967 rechanneled his energies and his leadership into the formulation of the major programmatic thrusts in research and development that still characterize the programs of the Center today--the changing functions of higher education to serve a diversity of student needs and the decision-making structures that govern colleges and universities.

Now in Lee's non-traditional period, he has retired from his position as Professor of Education at the University of California and is devoting full-time to the direction of an interdisciplinary team of researchers at the Center. Under funding from the National Science Foundation, they are probing the mysteries of non-traditional forms of education and their effect on students and colleges in a 14 month project involving case studies of non-traditional programs at 20 colleges and universities. Once again, Lee Medsker will be on the cutting edge of change in higher education, studying what is happening while simultaneously influencing the course of events.

I'm not quite sure how we go about honoring a man who is still in the midst of doing so much. Rather, he honors us by presenting tonight his thoughts on some new and perhaps unexpected trends in higher education.

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