

Voices: Universities must adjust to change, too

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Higher education gets news coverage in both mass and social media. Much, I'm sure, is true. Technology is changing it at warp speed, and the old descriptions we used to toss about no longer fit.

We joked that colleges had buildings where “ivy is creeping around on the outside and teachers are creeping around on the inside.” Other bromides come to mind, but none seem to fit well in the ever-changing framework of what higher education is all about.

Greek philosophers considered the topic centuries ago, asking, “Whom, then, shall we call educated?”

Then, they proceeded to answer their own questions, claiming education should enable students to deal effectively with the circumstances they encounter day by day. It still fits, right?

Normal colleges

Truth to tell, institutions must be open to change. After all, many of them have changed their names, and several times at that. What formerly were known as “teachers’ colleges” head the list.

When colleges started popping up in Texas—most of them in the early 1900s—a word included in most names was “normal.”

Real old-timers, longest of tooth and grayest of beard, remember or heard tell of such colleges—including Sam Houston State Normal College—with

these three last names also applying to such institutions as North Texas, Southwest Texas, Sul Ross, East Texas and West Texas.

They removed “normal” from their names, a decision perhaps worthy of applause. Many changed their three final words to “State Teachers’ College.” Then came “State College,” followed by “State University.”

During the 1960s and 1970s, many colleges decided “university” had a better ring to it. Later, some joined the systems of two other institutions—The University of Texas and Texas A&M University.

Fort Worth higher ed

I want to focus on unusual happenings at two Fort Worth institutions of higher education—Texas Christian University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Both provided recent front-page stories mere days apart in the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*.

TCU leaders promised placement of the “big pot into the little one” for its 150th anniversary observance this year. Southwestern announced the sale of Carroll Park—a 24-acre tract with one- and two-bedroom housing—to the City of Fort Worth for \$11 million.

Though Texas Christian University has been the official name since 1902, founding brothers Addison and Randolph Clark called TCU “Add-Ran Male and Female College” in the early years.

About the time of TCU’s founding 150 years ago, Fort Worth was saddled with bawdiness associated with the joint impact of railroads and Chisholm Trail cattle drives. Afraid this setting could corrupt students’ minds, the Clark brothers relocated the school to Thorp Spring, some 40 miles away

and a few miles from Granbury.

Enrollment grew there from a few dozen students to more than 400 from 1873 to 1895. It was known for being “seven miles from any known sin.”

Then TCU relocated to Waco. In 1910, TCU moved back to Fort Worth, where the sprawling campus of some 300 acres now is home to some 11,000 students. It may be the only higher education institution in the United States that has been located in three communities, one of them twice.

Southwestern’s property sale is a head-scratcher, particularly since this was the world’s largest theological seminary during the 1970s and 1980s.

News accounts indicate Fort Worth plans to utilize the housing for homeless families. When Christ returns, his arrival might be at the very spot where Cowtown homeless abide.

University presidents

Presidents of higher education institutions these days seem to be on ground as shaky as football coaches whose school alumni promise to “support them always—win or tie.”

Average presidential tenure now is about four years, and Kenneth Ashworth—longtime Texas Commissioner of Higher Education—saw the entanglements coming.

Fact is, presidents are re-reading his delightful 2001 book *Caught Between the Dog and the Fireplug: How to Survive Public Service*.

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