

## CHAPTER 18

### THE PLACEMENT OF GRADUATES IN EMPLOYMENT. ALUMNI RELATIONS

A GREAT variation in policy prevails among colleges and universities relative to the placement in employment of their graduates. While some institutions concern themselves very little in this matter and disclaim responsibility, others feel responsible for the employment of every graduate.

It would seem that an institution which encouraged young people to spend four years under its care and instruction "as a preparation for life" would be much concerned to see that they met with maximum success in life, and that they would do everything possible to give them a good start.

The lack of concern common among colleges probably is a survival of the sentiment developed many years ago when practically all college graduates were preparing to enter theological schools, and later to enter theology or other professions. Such student's future plans were clear and definite, and they needed no placement assistance. Later, when a considerable number of graduates began to enter other occupations outside the professions, most college students came from families of the well-to-do, and the graduate's father or other relatives were quite able to look after his employment.

Today this whole situation is changed. While perhaps one-third to one-half of the 170,000 who graduate annually from colleges and universities need no assistance in placement, the rest need help very much. A much smaller proportion than formerly enter the professions. When these complete their professional training, assistance in getting established in professional employment is very often badly needed, as was

not the case in the past. Also today a large proportion of our college graduates, and many of our ablest, come from lower middle-class families, lacking experience or familiarity with the fields of employment of their sons and daughters, and having no useful personal contacts with these fields. Often, in fact generally, the young graduate has prepared to enter employment in a field entirely outside his own or his family's acquaintance. It is now enormously helpful to the average college graduate to be placed in employment through the assistance of his alma mater.

On the other hand, employers are forced to turn to the colleges and universities for help in securing the graduates they desire to employ. The personnel or employment office of the institution is more and more required to act as middle-man between the employer and the graduate—the agency which brings the right employer and the right graduate together. Such a department through the years establishes a great many contacts with business, industry, professional and graduate schools, employers of teachers, etc., so that each year many calls for graduates come in from old friends.

Finally, the satisfactory placement of its graduates is good policy for any college or university. Probably the actual outlay on each graduate ranges from \$1,200 for a four-year college graduate to as high as \$10,000 or over in the case of students who spend eight years in undergraduate and professional schools at our greater universities. If this expenditure was really made with the purpose of fitting the graduate for effective living and service, it would seem that the least the institution could do would be to place her graduates' feet on the ladder of employment and service.

Also the real test of the value of college training in any field is the ability of the graduate to live wisely and serve usefully in the world in the field of his preparation. Every institution should be constantly seeking to test the skill of its teachers,

the suitability of its courses, and the value of its training, by noting the ease or difficulty with which it places its graduates in appropriate positions, and the success these graduates achieve.

One other aspect of the work of an institution relative to placement of graduates should be noted. It is important not to train more in a specific field than can be employed. Where narrowly directed training is given, as in mining engineering, or veterinary medicine, or pharmacy; or in training for the doctorate in English, or history, or German, it is undesirable to graduate more than can be placed in employment in the field of their training at a reasonably satisfactory salary. An annual report in the fall covering placement in each field will indicate where too many or too few are being trained. The tendency of each department and each college is to magnify its own work, to seek continually larger numbers, to rejoice at an increased number of graduates. This enthusiasm is often tempered if they are definitely expected to place their graduates in positions.

If a college has unreasonable difficulty in placing its graduates this fact raises a question as to whether its courses are organized as they should be or whether their graduates have been well trained. In such a case the trustees might ask the president to look into the matter thoroughly and suggest what procedure might improve the situation.

The most common causes of failure to place graduates, chargeable to the institution, are as follows:

1. Ineffective placement office.
2. Students of low ability or of very inferior personality have been inadvisedly graduated from courses offering employment only to capable men.
3. More students are graduated from a given course than there are openings for employment.
4. The curricula offered are not suitable for the employment opportunities available.

*Alumni Relations*

For many years the older private institutions have had their alumni well organized, chiefly with a view to securing alumni financial support. More recently many public institutions have developed effective organizations of their alumni. Today practically every college, as well as every university, has an active alumni organization. Alumni over the country have contributed a great deal of money to their alma maters. Until quite recently alumni secretaries were chiefly occupied in maintaining a directory of the alumni, publishing an alumni journal, and soliciting the alumni for contributions. But lately there has been a marked shift toward serving the alumni. This has taken several directions. One has been to organize courses for alumni at the Commencement season. Another has been to endeavor to suggest current reading for alumni. Most important has been the effort to make the alumni feel that the alumni secretary is their representative at the college—the secretary *for* the alumni—who is there to serve them in any way they may desire his services. There are many services of great variety which the alumni, particularly the younger alumni, may desire from their alma mater. The alumni secretary has easy access to all the administrative and departmental offices. He can be the ideal avenue of access for the alumni to needed aid from the institution. The alumni secretary can talk over the employment prospects of an alumnus with the placement officer. He can secure needed information for an alumnus from a department or place him in contact with the right man in the department. He can look up records in the registrar's office. The college personnel and organization changes, and after a few years an alumnus is often quite out of touch even with his own department, and a secretary for the alumni can often be most useful.

It seems probable as time passes that the function of the alumni secretary will shift entirely away from soliciting funds,

an activity that will be transferred to the business office. The secretary for the alumni may devote all his efforts to extending the services of the institution to the alumni, in editing the alumni journal, in maintaining the alumni directory, in serving as the agent of the alumni at the institution, in aiding alumni to secure better positions where needed. It seems highly probable that alumni will look more and more to their alma mater. Happily, the encouragement of this continuing relation will undoubtedly increase the gifts of alumni.

Recently a few of our great state universities have carried on well-organized campaigns to raise funds from alumni, with more than usual success. Each graduate has received a free gift from the state in education costing from \$1,200 to \$5,000 beyond all fees paid, the latter figure in the case of those who complete courses in professional schools. These alumni should recognize an obligation to the state in this amount. It can be paid in large and generous service and in many cases can only be repaid in this way. But every alumnus who is able should realize this obligation and repay it in cash if he can, in whole or in part.

There has been a widespread feeling that our alumni owe nothing to a state-supported institution, other than to pay the ordinary taxes from which it is supported. This narrow view is changing. To a considerable degree the excellence of service of any institution, private or public, can be gauged by the recognition of the alumni of their financial debt to their alma mater.

Far too often the alumni interest centers chiefly on their alma mater's success in athletics, especially in football. The intensity of the demand for winning football teams has decreased somewhat in the last twenty-five years, and there are increasing numbers of institutions with very loyal and enthusiastic alumni where athletic competition, and especially

in football, is relatively unimportant. The University of Chicago, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, California Institute of Technology, Swarthmore, Haverford, Rochester, and Johns Hopkins might be mentioned as examples. At many other institutions, such as Harvard, Princeton, Iowa State College, or the University of North Carolina, other aspects of the work and life of the institutions absorb relatively a much larger proportion of alumni attention than formerly.

The trustees can well concern themselves that the institution under their direction maintains a cordial and wholesome relation with its alumni, that a continual effort is made to keep the alumni well informed and broadly interested.

