Comments on a Review of the Department

● In the section "Endowed Chairs", the Review remarks "Indeed, the question of modifying the conditions of the professorships, e.g. size, citizenship requirements, etc., seems to focus attention on the problems of recruiting, rather than the opportunity." I fear that this remark fails to reflect how serious it is that we have endowed chairs for US citizens only. The requirement restricts us, as intended, in our choice, but it hurts us much more severely: by accepting such a constraint, UT has disqualified itself by the standards of the world of scholarship and science; if we are treated as outcasts and first-class scientists refuse to join us, we have only ourselves to blame.

● The Review's conception of the rôle of the Department is rather parochial (and the parish can get quite small).

It states that we should create "one of the strongest, balanced, computer science departments in the nation," but why not in the world?

Later it says: "First, since Texas companies pay taxes, this makes local industry

part of the department's constituency. Understanding their problems and anticipating their future needs must surely impinge on curriculum development.". Sorry gentlemen, but there ain't no such thing as Cowboy Computing: if Texas companies have special problems that non-Texan companies don't have, these problems have more to do with Texas than with computing science and fall outside our professional competence. We can —and should— zoom in on the foreseeable (technical and methodological) problems worldwide (and I think that that's what we are doing).

Finally, in the introduction and in the appendix, the Review seems to suggest that we get involved in all sorts of computer usage on campus (e.g. "the importance of the department's subject matter to the institution" and "Computer science should be at the heart of this development of [communication] technology, particularly the development of technology for educational delivery."). When, about 30 years ago, the University Computation Centers were split off from the Departments of Computer Science, this separation was a great improvement — you don't ask the Biology Department to be involved in campus land-

scaping either — but the Review seems to suggest to undo this improvement by re-involving the Department in all sorts of campus matters.

<u>Aside</u> I consider "knowledge transfer" a travesty of teaching. Teaching has much more to do with inspiring and with helping students to change their habits than with letting them absorb more knowledge or in-formation. The term "educational delivery" was new for me and makes me wonder what view of education underlies the Review. (End of Aside.)

• The Review describes in glowing terms the fruits to be harvested from close co-operation with local industry, but I fear that in this respect the Review is hopeless-ly optimistic. Universities are about qual-ity and competence, industries are about earning money, a goal that is hardly related to the quality of the product: the two types of institutions diverge, and "industrial acceptance" is an irrele-vant yardstick for the significance of scientific work.

When what society asks for coincides with what society needs and academia can

provide it, the latter's position is easy. Today we have a conflict: society needs competence and asks for quackery (for instance in the form of Software Engineering). In a sad way, academia has the last word: it can provide both.

But — as I wrote in EWD920, 1985 — we have no choice: " [The university] has to refine and to teach to the best of its abilities how computing should be done; would it ever yield to the pressure to propagate the malpractice of today, it had better fold up. ".

● In these anti-intellectualistic days it is fashionable to accuse professors of neglecting their educational obligations. Accordingly, the Review recommends that our lecturers currently involved in undergraduate teaching be gradually replaced by "regular faculty" — presumably our premier teaching force — , a change that might require that regular faculty be tripled. But society being as fickle as it is, the pendulum will swing back, and long before that extra tenured faculty will have retired, spending your premier teaching force on The Great Unwashed will be considered a waste of its talents.

The Review assumes that the replacement of lecturers by regular faculty will improve the undergraduate curriculum and its teaching, but this assumption is unwarranted, to say the least. The recommendation in question is too ill-considered to be taken seriously.

- The Review is obsessed with the Department's interaction with all sorts of entities in its environment, and that it was supposed to review a scientific enterprise is hardly visible. This is probably the reflection of the opinion of one of the authors that all fundamental problems of CS have been solved and that CS departments therefore should switch to applications. (It is an opinion I emphatically do not share.)

The Review ignores science to such an extent that it strikes me as a recipe for mediocrity. Consequently, I shall ignore the Review.

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