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Our University – Loyalty

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Our University – Loyalty

Eighth and final in a series of who our students are and how they perform.

Appreciating different perspectives diminishes neither loyalty nor purpose, but enriches both.

Diversity of opinion within the framework of loyalty to our free society is not only basic to a university but to the entire nation.

James Bryant Conant, President, Harvard University 1933 -1953

I cry when I sing *Amazing Grace*, as do some of those around me, although I fear their tears are the product of auditory discomfort rather than commitment. The National Anthem, when sung with intentionality and precision, whets my emotions. These two songs make up an important part of my calculus of loyalty. You have such a calculus. Bob Dylan expressed one aspect of the equation in *One more Cup of Coffee*, when he twanged, “*Your loyalty is not to me, But to the stars above.*”

In this age of shrinking resources, alumni loyalty is more cherished than ever. Alma Mater means Nourishing Mother. Universities need that bond to be like Super Glue as they become more dependent on nontraditional resources.

Shortsighted leaders call up loyalty when the till is empty. Loyalty so rallied is a form of desperation.

Too bad. Too late.

Loyalty flourishes in crisis but is born of compassion. Loyalty is not the child of neglect, but the offspring of thoughtful, contemplative nurture.

Blind loyalty to a person, a community or an idea is debilitating.

Deliberate loyalty is powerful, stimulating and thoughtful.

Universities know this. The school song of the University of Illinois, *Illinois Loyalty*, crystallizes it by opening with, “*We are loyal to you Illinois,*” and, recognizing the insufficiency of blindness, ends with:

*Amid the broad green fields that nourish our land,
For honest Labor and for Learning we stand,
And unto thee we pledge our heart and hand,
Dear Alma Mater, Illinois!*

Our students appropriately expect loyalty to flow from the university to them. This is the algebra of the equal sign. Both sides must be equivalent.

There are three precepts that impel university loyalty to students:

Precept One: Loyalty to student purpose and aspiration is the foundation for a university.

We desire to serve good students. Good students see our loyalty to them through excellent academic programs. We serve no students well until we meet the threshold commitment of being loyal to their expectations for excellence.

Our students are of every stripe. White and black, ambulatory and not, Christian and Jew, old and young, with children and childless, male and female. All anticipate and deserve to be intellectually challenged by the university experience. They must be able to expect that, no matter who they are, our highest priority is to help them realize their aspirations.

Precept Two: Loyalty to a competitive spirit recognizes not entitlement, property or birthright, but only intellectual acuity.

Capable and motivated students are not afraid of competition. The more we demand from a particular student, the higher the accomplishment of that student will be. This is the law of the keen mind and the foundation for all intellectual enterprise. I will not inject Adam Smith here, or Ayn Rand - too easy.

Commitment to a competitive environment precedes any attainment of mind, heart, and soul. Blind to the nuances of race, color, and persuasion, the competitive spirit will foster excellence.

Students become who we want them to become. I have witnessed an unfortunate truth from time to time. On occasion, the people in a college classroom with the highest and most demanding expectations are students, not faculty.

Precept Three: Succumbing to the mediocre is the ultimate university disloyalty.

Enrollments are at record high levels across the nation and likewise, concerns about the quality of students and their work may be also be at historically high levels. Times like these require appropriate, purposeful and intense loyalty to our students, because the most important part of who they are, and how we serve them, revolves around it.