

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION

WILLIAM HAROLD COWLEY (1899 – 1978)

Emeritus Professor W. H. (Hal) Cowley, pioneer in the systematic study of higher education and first occupant of the David Jacks chair in the School of Education, died at his Palo Alto home on July 22, 1978, at the age of 79. He is survived by his wife, Jean, of Palo Alto, and by a daughter, Ellen Cowley, of Los Altos.

Professor Cowley was born in Brooklyn, New York, and attended schools there and later the Mount Herman School in Northville, Massachusetts. He was graduated from Dartmouth College, where he was editor of *The Dartmouth* during his senior year. But during his junior year he presented the College authorities with his plan for a major revision of the undergraduate educational program, an early involvement in what was later to become a major focus of his professional career: the improvement of higher education.

Following his graduation from Dartmouth, he worked in the Bell Telephone Laboratories, but soon enrolled in the University of Chicago and completed his PhD degree in psychology. At the Ohio State University he was on the staff of the Bureau of Educational Research, working on the improvement of student personnel services there and nationally. From 1938-1945, he was President of Hamilton College. In 1945 he came to Stanford as a Professor of Higher Education in the School of Education. He retired in 1968.

Among his distinguishing traits as a professor was the unique quality of his relationships with his students. They sometimes described him as an affectionate curmudgeon who was ostensibly gruff but actually very approachable. He was as much concerned with a student's writing style as with the content, and he was often credited with putting almost as much work into improving a student's paper as the student did in preparing the original. Although he publicly lamented that his graduate students all entered careers of administrative action instead of a scholar's life of study, contemplation, and research, he was extremely loyal to them and continuously concerned with their professional activities.

He also had an exceptional talent for promoting academic efficiency. When the Education faculty saw a need to standardize and formalize the ways in which the School operated, Professor Cowley composed a set of by-laws which readily won adoption and continue to guide faculty deliberations and decisions. For his students he prepared a detailed document on writing style to which he could make quick and efficient reference when evaluating their papers. Perhaps most notable was a data collection and retrieval system which he invented to further his own scholarship and crowned with distinction those students who had the tenacity to master it.

Professor Cowley's professional contributions were great and, through his students and ideas, promise to grow greater still. First among those contributions are his former graduate students -- some eighty in number -- who have continued as a loyal band, meeting when they can, at least once a year, to ponder and praise his influence on them, which they in turn are seeking to exert on higher education. Then comes his early interpretation of the role of a

professor of higher education. He was one of the first scholars in the world to see that the phenomenon of higher education was worthy of scholarly study, and he invented many of the techniques to do so. Through that scholarship he produced the encyclopedic store of knowledge which he shared with all who wished it and which will be preserved in the writings of his former students and in his library, which will serve scholars of the future well.

Professor Cowley thought that the taxonomy he invented and its power as a tool of scholarship would be his major contribution. Others of us, however, believe that equal to that achievement were his historical insights, his understanding of the governance of higher education, and his ability to present an overview of higher education, splendid in its detail and dramatic in the grand design this portrait reveals. His approach to scholarship was of an Olympian sort. He was never satisfied with his work; he continued to improve on it until his death. It was the mark of the man that many of his drafts, to him still imperfect, were equal or superior to the best of some published works. As over the years draft after draft of his overviews fugitively entered the literature, other scholars had to revise their interpretation because of the deepened perspective Cowley's work produced. His kind may never come again: scholarship about higher education will long be in his shadow.

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