When A. Whitney Griswold asked Kingman Brewster to come to Yale as his Provost in 1960, there was much consternation and concern among the faculty. A lawyer who had never taught at Yale (although he had earned his B.A. there in 1941), Brewster was a professor at the Harvard Law School. To quiet possible criticisms, Griswold arranged for Brewster to spend a year as provost-delegate learning about the office from his predecessor, Norman S. Buck. Griswold and Brewster were close personal friends who had been sailing companions on Martha’s Vineyard since Brewster was a teenager. Griswold had kept the staff he inherited from Charles Seymour, and Brewster was the first important administrator he appointed. After Griswold’s death, Brewster continued his duties as Provost and also served as Acting President. The Corporation’s search committee was chaired by senior fellow Wilmarth Lewis, who described it as “even more thorough than it had been in 1949-50.”

Kingman Brewster, Jr., who was the choice of all who had come to know him at Yale, was chosen President and, as George Pierson noted, “entrusted with the leadership of a sparkling and energetic university, already beginning to be caught in the rising tensions of a critical period in our nation’s history.”

According to Reuben Holden, “Brewster’s inauguration in April 1964 was more elaborate than were those of most of his predecessors. The occasion was marked by a particularly international spirit, with university officials and scholars attending from all over the world. The formal ceremony in Woolsey Hall was preceded by a symposium on the relationship of the university to its national government, thus singling out an area on which the new President was to place increasing emphasis. The weekend celebrations were climaxed by a ball in gaily-decorated Ingalls Hockey Rink.” The choice of venue would prove oddly prophetic, for the Ingalls Rink was to be the scene of many dramatic events during Brewster’s presidency, including student protest meetings against the Vietnam War and the R.O.T.C.

The turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s was handled with great aplomb by Brewster. Much has been written of May Day 1970 in New Haven and the Black Panther trial; the underlying theme has always been that Yale was one of the few institutions which survived those days of upheaval without serious incidents thanks to Brewster’s leadership. The words Brewster wrote for the twenty-five year volume of his Class of 1941 accurately reflect what did happen in the minds of alumni of the turbulent sixties: “Our time will be short as the life of the institution is measured. Happily too Yale is bigger than any other person, or group, or genera-

1 Lewis, 438.
3 Holden, 148.
tion…. It is happy to know that the sixties will be someone’s ‘good old days’ twenty or thirty years from now, and through all the changes of intervening time the continuities will be strong enough to hold.”

In 1977, the newly inaugurated Jimmy Carter asked Brewster to serve as Ambassador to the Court of St. James. Brewster accepted, resigning the presidency of Yale and departing for England in May 1977 with his wife, Mary Louise Brewster. James Tobin, Sterling Professor of Economics and one of Yale’s Nobel Prize winners, wrote to him that month saying, “You have made Yale a significantly greater university than it was seventeen years ago. That was your main task, and you accomplished it…You steered the university through some difficult times, maintaining both its high academic standards and the unique spirit of mutual respect and comity that makes it possible to speak of a Yale ‘community’…You made Yale conscious of its national and local responsibilities, and at the same time you were the most eloquent and thoughtful spokesman on the national scene for higher education, especially for the importance of private universities.”

1 Kingman Brewster, Jr., Twenty-Five Year Record, John N. Deming, editor, published by the Class of 1941, Yale University, on the occasion of its 25th reunion, June 1966, xi-xii.
2 Letter from Professor James Tobin to Kingman Brewster, May 2, 1977, graciously provided by the writer.
Kingman Brewster, Jr.
INAUGURAL ADDRESS

KINGMAN BREWSTER, JR., APRIL 11, 1964

Mr. Lewis, fellow trustees, officers, faculty, students past and present, spokesmen for higher education everywhere— I am honored to be your colleague. I join you all in a common trust of the continuity of civilization.

The weight of this responsibility is lifted by the excitement of its challenge.

The next decade of our trusteeship must cope with three revolutions: the explosion of knowledge; the burgeoning population; and the uncanny development of automated machines and mechanized intelligence.

Each of our institutions must respond in its own way. By our separate and distinctive responses perhaps we shall learn enough from each other so that we shall see in these revolutions more of hope and of opportunity than of fear. It had better be so since there can be no counter revolution. All these revolutions are man made, but they cannot be undone by man, short of total self destruction.

Knowledge is our special concern. We cannot afford the restraint of knowledge for the enhancement of the power or prestige of its possessors. Excellence sometimes may require selectivity. But those of us who would be selective must guard constantly against permitting exclusiveness to be mistaken for excellence. Every university must do what it can to respond to a rapidly expanding population’s need for a rapidly expanding knowledge.

If modern technology fulfills its promise, we are on the threshold of a revolution in the storing and in the transmission of knowledge which should match the revolutionary increase in population and in information.

Already lectures can be taped and stored and selected for viewing on demand. Nothing but organization and adaptation of the lecture hall stand between us and the general availability of every university’s lecture courses to students everywhere within the reach of the right microwave relay.

Day after tomorrow it will be technically feasible for the core collection of any research library to be available to all institutions and students wherever they may be if only they are on the other end of a coaxial cable over which a printed page can be selected, retrieved, and reprinted.

Precisely because we at Yale may wish to continue to go about our traditional business in a traditionally selective way it behooves us to take the lead in adapting our ways to any arrangement which will make our resources publicly available as long as it does not dilute, distort, or distract us from our first mission.
That mission remains the development of the capacity and the enlargement of the opportunity of those who entrust themselves to us.

At the undergraduate level our original, and still our central, purpose is the training of young men for a life of learning and of service; once best fulfilled in church and civil state, now finding outlet in a host of careers which put a high premium on trained intelligence.

The refinement of talent is of no avail, however, if it is not infused with purpose. A lifetime search for a more adequate truth requires the light of intellectual enthusiasm. For those who do not seek to be their brothers’ thinker, a career of effective service or leadership requires first the aspiration to responsibility.

A PERPLEXING CHALLENGE

Here, perhaps, lies our most perplexing challenge. To many students of proven intellectual or operational capacity the prospect of twenty unbroken years of competition for nothing worthier than test scores dampens all aspiration, intellectual as well as active. To the considerable number of the young who yearn to become involved in something more meaningful than inherited patterns of success, learning too often seems to be involvement’s adversary.

If the Peace Corps is the best national outlet for the larger active purposes of the oncoming generation, perhaps it should be given no less academic house room than military and naval training. Lest zeal be squeezed out by the academic process, we might well establish a Peace Reserve Training Corps.

If we are to serve well our most ancient public purpose, we should be willing to entertain radical departures from the collegiate pattern without waiting for the psychiatrist’s intervention in behalf of the young man who should have a year off to “find himself” despite the remonstrances of his alumnus father. Might we not consciously break the sequence of testable learning somewhere between five and twenty five, not under the shadow of opprobrium or for a fancy “grand tour” but as part of a programmed educational pattern which splices experience with learning, especially in exposure to contrasting cultures.

We dare not admit that in order to be true to our University tradition we must seal the windows against all relevance to the real world. Indeed, in order to keep the business of learning itself uncorrupted it may be important to open the gates of the walled city more frequently for those who would sample experience.
At the more advanced levels of learning the gates of even the most traditional university may have to be opened more freely both for honorable exit and honorable entrance for those whose needs would justify transfer from the place of original enrollment.

With the sprouting of sub-specialties from old root disciplines, no university can now contain the full growth of the tree of knowledge. Although pride will always urge us to insist that the good student stay with us, even if he develops an interest which we cannot adequately reward, society cannot allow the misdirection of talent or the frustration of its fulfillment. The traveling scholar program of the eleven great Midwestern universities is a lead the rest of us should find ways to follow. Institutional chauvinism can no longer justify barriers to the free movement of the worthy itinerant scholar.

So what is left of us if the world is wired to our library and our lecture halls and our students are no longer to be captive? I do not intend to suggest that the old family mansion of the proud “mother of men” is destined to become a motel for vagrants, with free TV and special rates for the Peace Corps!

Quite the contrary. As collections and lectures become progressively easier to retail by wire, all the more reason for some universities to focus on those elements of study and of learning which require the sharing of live experience.

Art, artifact, and manuscript can be identified on a television screen at a far distance, but critical perception and evaluation require intimacy with the original. Day after tomorrow it may be the rare collection, not the massive assembly of researchable words and data, which will become the intellectual asset whose location matters.

There is much teaching, too, which cannot be experienced vicariously. Participation in tutorial dialogue, seminar discourse, or the colloquium requires personal presence. Most especially does discovery by experimentation require a personal apprenticeship.

If there is to be give as well as take, if learning at a university is destined to be distinctively personal, then effectiveness sets severe limits on the size of any group.

There also may be limits on the appropriate size of the institution of learning itself.
THE MANAGEABLE UNIVERSITY

As life becomes more impersonal and highly organized all the more important for some universities to try to remain manageable and informal enough for their members so that exchange is easy and responsibility and loyalty have a personal meaning.

For some people, the sharpening of ideas thrives best in the relationships of a community at once comprehensive enough in the scope of its intellectual concern so that all questions find response, and manageable enough so that lines of communication are short. Some will work best where life is intimate and informal enough so that discourse even among different disciplines can be impromptu, more on demand than by plan. This sense of community in turn is deepened if each member of it feels that he can participate in the selection of colleagues, of students, and of priorities which might affect him.

Perhaps the spirit of a community derives at least as much from limits on its function as from limits on its size.

As other corporate and government groups mobilize intelligence to discover as well as to apply knowledge to meet topical needs, it is all the more crucial to have a few academic centers predominantly motivated by a self directed search for truth.

Confidence that purposes by and large are shared; and that one is tested, honored, or dishonored by common standards may be the most essential single attribute of a community at once free and cohesive.

Any single intellectual pursuit may be highly individual, but there is a common ethic which draws some men to a university in preference to any of the many other groups which are now publicly and privately organized to discover as well as to apply knowledge. Affluence often, prestige sometimes is foregone in order to be able to spend one’s time and energy and mind upon whatever seems to him most intriguing and exciting, not to be directed by what some client or customer may request, or by what some absentee bureaucrat is willing to support.

Maintenance of a university community based primarily upon self directed search for truth as its dominant ethic necessarily excludes many other useful functions. Obviously it is not the only or a necessary way to organize the advancement and transmission of learning. Indeed if there were not many institutions, including universities of the first rank, willing and able to organize intelligence to respond to practical demands, our country could not meet its needs for either welfare or survival.
But the integrity of the university as a community, even if it seems slightly aloof, is worth preserving not only for the sake of the quality of learning which a personalized community permits, but for the sake of the style and character of the nation.

In a complex political economy such as ours, it increasingly seems that everything hinges on everything else. Everyone has a constituent, a sponsor, a supplier, a buyer, a boss who dominates his life. Freedom has too often been reduced to the right to choose on whom to be dependent. There are few centers left where genuine constructively motivated independence is proclaimed with serenity and zest.

The nation needs to preserve safe havens where ruthless examination of realities will not be distorted by the aim to please or inhibited by the risk of displeasure.

Popular and official displeasure have long been the risk of free inquiry. The more so today when science joins religion in the pacifist cause; and when the dream of world law has become survival’s necessity.

Our Soviet friends are quite correct. Free inquiry is very dangerous. To a society built upon coercion free inquiry by the foreigner is almost indistinguishable from espionage, as Yale has special reason to recall. To the society built upon coercion free inquiry by the citizen risks the charge of treason.

If we would forego coercion as the organizing principle of human destiny, if we would take the risk of persuasion as our arbiter, then the free scholar may be our staunchest hope.

In some countries all universities are instruments of political power. But it is touching that even for them the compulsion of self respect urges obeisance to the international republic of science and of letters. It may be more form than fact, but pride in the observance of form is not without its educative power.

The world needs a credible spokesperson for the human purposes which transcend nations. That spokesperson can easily be lost in the trumpeting of lesser and more immediate interests. Even the pressure to serve the state must not lead the University to forfeit that credibility which belongs alone to those who answer only to the dictates of a conscientious intellect.

For the sake of learning, for the sake of the quality of our nation, and for the hope of men everywhere, in the proud company of those represented here we shall strive to deserve this trust.