

**An excerpt from**

# **HANCHER VS. HILTON**

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**Iowa's Rival  
University Presidents**

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## INTRODUCTION

“Academic men quarrel as readily as men in other sectors of society. Since they persuade themselves more easily that they are standing up for a principle, they can be vigorous and sometimes cruel combatants.”<sup>1</sup>

– C. W. De Kiewiet, *fifth president of the University of Rochester*

**W**hen a university’s president proposes dismantling and absorbing the institution’s traditional rival, it makes news. It constitutes, by general consensus, a big story.

It’s no real mystery, therefore, how an unheralded weekday morning meeting of service clubs in Iowa City, in early 1964, not only made the 10 o’clock news<sup>2</sup> but kicked off days of press coverage, angry rebuttals, and eventually a frantic intervention by Iowa’s governor. President Virgil Hancher was advocating, essentially, the dismemberment of Iowa State University.

No milder term seems adequate to Hancher’s proposal of January 29, 1964. The University of Iowa president called for combining all Iowa’s public colleges into a single university system, as he had already proposed several years earlier to a firmly negative reception. For the state’s other full-fledged university, Iowa State, Hancher now offered an even more audacious prescription. The universities’ common governing board, he suggested, should expand the role of land-grant institution from

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Iowa State to both schools.<sup>3</sup> Then, once equally qualified for lucrative state and federal programs tied to land-grant status, the University of Iowa could assume control of its rival's state-wide off-campus extension service alongside its own, smaller extension division, and perhaps that of the state's third college in Cedar Falls. The three programs were poorly coordinated at present, Hancher argued, and would inevitably develop costly redundancies absent a single authority in charge. As the population was moving away from the agricultural economy toward which Iowa State's extension was geared, transferring it to the more urban and broad-based University of Iowa would neatly solve two problems.<sup>4</sup>

Iowa State University's president James Hilton saw the issue rather differently, to say the least. Hilton had spent his life among America's land-grant colleges, beginning as a freshman at North Carolina State 45 years earlier and continuing through a distinguished career that culminated at ISU. In between, he had also contributed to the ISU Extension firsthand as a county agent in the 1920s. Hilton revered Iowa State, and extension, as the best examples of a century-old tradition of placing higher education at the service of all the state's people. Hancher's proposal to remove these attributes and reduce Iowa State to a University of Iowa branch campus was appalling to Hilton, even absurd. Yet it was also probably something less than a genuine shock.

By 1964, Hancher and Hilton had clashed again and again for several years. They fought over broad policy and minor details, over curriculum, and funding, and even charges of unconstitutionality. They argued in meetings, in memos, and

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repeatedly in public statements; rumors of personal animosity and petty acts of sabotage, behind the scenes, seemed credible if unsubstantiated. Though Iowa State and Iowa were inherently rivals in some sense from their very creation, the battles of Hancher vs. Hilton were something else. Through these years—during which the schools did not meet in athletic matches at all—institutional conflict narrowed to a one-on-one contest. Rivalry, meanwhile, expanded to a struggle for existence.

A born-and-raised Iowan and alumnus of Iowa State University, for many years I supposed that I understood college rivalry in Iowa as well as all but the most dedicated trivia fans. So far as I knew there was little that would not be generally familiar to anyone in the United States, for that matter, simply because Iowa's college rivalries seem entirely ordinary. In 2002, veteran sportswriter Frank Deford produced what I imagined would be the definitive statement on the topic. Declaring himself, as a rule, a fan of any "State University," Deford explained this as his way of cheering the underdog:

State colleges invariably were created after the "University of" colleges. Usually the "University of" colleges are the more hoity-toity places. They like to call themselves "the flagships," *ooh*. In fact a lot of state colleges started out as agricultural schools, "Aggies," like they were marbles. So stuck-up fans of the aristocratic University schools would all go "mooo!" during games and holler other nasty barnyard things. [...]

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Whatever the original reasons, schools with “State” in their name never have the cachet that the “Universities of” have. So, as a lover of underdogs, I always root for the state colleges.<sup>5</sup>

This more or less described public higher education in Iowa as I have always known it. Deford even reserved a special enthusiasm for “the teams that don’t even have a whole state,” e.g. University of Northern Iowa, the “littler brother” in Iowa State and the University of Iowa’s sibling rivalry.

Yet this pattern was not inevitable. Some states created university systems like that advocated by President Hancher. Deford listed a few exceptions to his basic rule, as well, in which the State University is actually the more prominent and prestigious “flagship.” Though not mentioned by Deford, Iowa is technically one of those exceptions.

This may come as a surprise to others, and it certainly surprised me. Iowa’s oldest State University has never been found in Iowa State’s home of Ames, but in Iowa City where it remains. The headlines of Hancher’s and Hilton’s day constantly referred to “SUI,” for *State University of Iowa*. Since then, Iowa has informally adopted the usage common to other states, yet State University of Iowa still exists in Iowa law and other formal documents. By itself this is arguably more factoid than fact, and readily ceded to the trivia buffs. But it is connected to bigger events and issues, and illustrates how large features of history can be the easiest to forget: when they extend beyond single turning points, things often become a background to day-to-day life, and their absence from the record is little noted because their presence was little noted.

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Much the same phenomenon applies to people. A president of the United States can serve only one term and remain a public figure long after; a popular artist can produce a one-hit wonder and still have some currency in old age. By contrast, public officials like university presidents can occupy a prominent office for decades, appear frequently in the news and leave lasting influences, only to become nearly unknown within a couple of generations.

On this score, both Presidents Hilton and Hancher are notable, partial exceptions. While their accomplishments and the battles they fought, and perhaps even their existence as persons, are nearly forgotten, their names have shared a curious ability not just to survive but to prosper. The coliseum named in honor of Hilton's efforts to see it and a larger cultural center built has long been familiar to Iowa State alumni. In recent years Iowa State basketball's "Hilton Magic" has carried the name toward national recognition. The prominence of Hancher's name, if narrower geographically, is no less deep. Growing up in eastern Iowa I knew of Hancher Auditorium from childhood, long before I had heard of either president or given any thought to a college choice.

That the names of Hilton and Hancher have survived, in some sense together, offers one reason to reexamine both of them. It is by no means the only one. They fought a series of political duels with one another, with results of great potential interest today, as Iowa State has leapt past the University of Iowa as the state's largest school. The 2015 controversy over a revised budget formula that would have awarded Iowa State (and cost the University of Iowa) proportionately was a very

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faint echo of the Hancher-Hilton clashes, but presents further grounds to recall them as context.

Additionally, James Hilton and Virgil Hancher were both interesting persons, whose eventful lives serve as valuable context for one another. Each was born to a rural household at the end of the 19th century, and took parallel routes through subsequent decades' upheavals to leadership roles in a space-age society. Inevitably, their stories are rich beyond just their conflict with each other. Hilton's early life approaches an American answer to Dickens, while as president he found himself entangled with events as disparate as panty raids and pranking Nikita Krushchev. President Hancher found himself embattled long before Hilton's presidency, conciliating an offended Grant Wood his first year in office, and fending off legislative witch-hunts more than once thereafter. He may also be the only college president to suffer a literal heart attack during a football game, and stay through the end anyway.

The core of *Hancher vs. Hilton* is, nonetheless, their arguments. Interpreting these involves some difficulty, as they were often complex and only resolved in a practical sense. Among other authors to review the same issues, the passage of time has produced no more than a partial consensus. *A History of the University of Iowa in the 20th Century* asserts bluntly that Hancher "hated" James Hilton<sup>6</sup>; writing in *A Sesquicentennial History of Iowa State University*, David Hamilton concurs that the two presidents "detested one another."<sup>7</sup> Yet their conclusions about which institution typically received less public money than it deserved, and which received more, are exactly opposite. Each

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author predictably finds that his subject was the one shorted in favor of the other's.

If nothing else, I believe this offers a useful answer to any readers who may protest that the University of Iowa does not really have a rivalry with ISU, and that only Iowa State regards their contests as somehow special. Even if the indifference claimed by many Iowa fans toward sporting rivalry is granted, for argument's sake, the universities remain rivals at another more fundamental level. Where the prize of public support is concerned neither one can feign indifference for long.

Writing about one part of this ongoing contest thus offers an opportunity and a challenge. I hope that the stories to follow will interest devotees of both schools, and partly for this reason, I would like to be as fair as possible. I have attempted to withhold most judgments until the end. Otherwise my intent has been an interested neutrality—yet no narrator is ever truly neutral, and I am certainly not.

Raised just a few dozen miles from Iowa City, I will confess to sporting an Iowa Hawkeyes jacket for parts of my childhood. Into adolescence, however, I displayed no genuine interest in collegiate or other athletics. By the time I was old enough to consider more immediate college allegiances, I had determined to study graphic design; as the University of Iowa does not offer this as a major it was never in the running. Ultimately enrolling at Iowa State, like many teenaged misfits I embraced the college community which proved much more congenial than high school. I cheered enthusiastically for ISU, and possibly booed the University of Iowa even more enthusiastically. While 16 years have passed since graduation day and I live several hundred miles away, I still have a closet



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half-filled with ISU apparel. If my enthusiasm for sports is reduced, in adulthood, I retain a dependable pleasure at seeing the Iowa Hawkeyes defeated regardless of their opponent. In all candor, though no longer proud of this fact, the corners of my mouth still turn up reflexively even at embarrassments for the University of Iowa entirely unrelated to athletics.

Despite all this I entertain some hope of being fair. Reflexes aside, I cannot as an adult sustain any real negative opinion of the University of Iowa (even if its teams are a separate matter). Nor for that matter am I unwilling to acknowledge faults at Iowa State. If I am tempted to smugness at, e.g., some report of the U of I receiving high marks as a “party school,” the temptation passes quickly when I consider Iowa State students’ sustained campaign to eliminate the annual VEISHEA festival by starting small but utterly reasonless riots every few years. Further, like Mr. Deford Cyclone fans have traditionally savored cheering for an underdog, but in the battles between Hilton and Hancher the favorite can be difficult to pin down. Hilton’s administration played hardball more than once, and while State University of Iowa enjoyed its share of victories, most were a long time in coming.

Last but not least, I believe that I can relate President Hancher’s side of an argument fairly because I have come to sympathize with him in many ways. This may have been the greatest surprise in the course of my research, frankly. The portrait of Virgil Hancher that emerges from Iowa State’s version of history is one of a villainous, almost fanatical determination to hold back the school’s advancement. As I read more deeply into events, however, I discovered a thoughtful, wide-ranging intellect, whose arguments are fascinating and often challeng-

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ing even if I find their conclusions unconvincing. I have great admiration for President Hilton also, and of the two I suspect that I would enjoy meeting him more. But I feel a stronger empathy with Hancher, with the types of battles he fought, and the way he fought them.

I cannot pretend that I regret missing out on attending a University of Iowa at Ames. But if I don't believe the alternative has been a mistake, I'm not certain that Hancher's arguments were entirely wrong, either. I respect him for making them, even as I respect Hilton for his opposition.

I hope to do justice to both.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Marking Territory

**I**owa State University's historians have ascribed some remarkable things to President Virgil Hancher. He campaigned against the school changing its name. He fought Iowa State's admission to the Association of American Universities. He personally hated President Hilton. I found each of these suggestions remarkable, at any rate, and I will presume that most who read this far share at least some of that interest. Of all Hancher's purported aggressions, though, none surprised me more than the claim that he vigorously opposed Iowa State offering degrees in English and speech. This seemed such petty, vindictive animosity as to be grotesque, in a way that exceeded any of Hancher's other objections. Yet it is more reliably documented than almost all of the others.

Unlike Iowa State's new name, or its candidacy for the AAU, President Hancher made his objections to an ISU major in English repeatedly, and publicly, leaving behind an ample paper trail. He also went into deep detail about his reasoning,

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which does at all events challenge the notion of a simple reactionary turf battle. He found powerful allies, too—though at the same time he was so vocal that a number of State University of Iowa’s own alumni called on him to back down. Hancher never did so willingly, and even after giving his arguments their full due, his lasting offense at this particular proposal can appear excessive. Seemingly here, if anywhere, is indisputable evidence of arrogant “big brother” selfishly trying to hold back “little brother.” The basic facts are beyond dispute.

Unfortunately for this version of events, there are more facts that tell a larger story. In that story Hancher’s SUI may still be a bully but it isn’t the only one, or even the first. Well before Hancher entertained even a single unkind thought about James Hilton, the Iowa State president’s administration was picking on “littler brother” Iowa State Teachers College. Most awkward of all, it was doing so in exactly the same way.

In fairness to President James Hilton, he largely walked into Iowa State’s efforts to restrict curriculum at ISTC after they had begun. He also did nothing in particular to stop them. Presumably he could have, even if it would have been difficult saying no to Helen LeBaron. Just beginning an eventual long career running Iowa State’s home economics programs, LeBaron was a human dynamo who also squeezed in endless volunteer work, boards of directors, national committee appointments and several years on the Ames City Council. Being a woman dedicating her career to domestic arts in the 1950s did not dissuade her from forming strong opinions and fighting for them. One month before Hilton took office as presi-

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dent, she wrote Iowa State's dean of science Harold Gaskill to express her very negative opinion of a proposed new course at ISTC.

That Iowa State Teachers College earned LeBaron's ire by proposing to teach vocational home economics may surpass any other example of how obscure the era's conflicts now appear, in their details. In 2015, home economics is essentially a minor program at Iowa State University. Promoted to a college along with other divisions in 1959, it was renamed the College of Family and Consumer Sciences in 1987, then merged with the College of Education in 2005 under the heading "Human Sciences." Long before that, the distinction between home economics and vocational home economics was already fine. A contemporary newspaper article suggested that "The difference between a vocational home economics teacher and other home economics teachers is largely one of federal definitions."<sup>1</sup> Today the very term is nearly obsolete.

In 1953, however, Helen LeBaron was dean of a full-fledged college of home economics (even if it was not formally labeled a college) and took all of its offerings very seriously. Writing to Gaskill, she argued that Iowa State should firmly oppose ISTC establishing a rival program in vocational home economics. First, she wrote, it would violate the Board of Education's edict against duplication. Second, it would distract ISTC from a more basic responsibility that was already being neglected; LeBaron asserted that nearly one-third of Iowa high schools lacked certified teachers of general homemaking, and suggested that ISTC would do better to focus more on this subject, which it already offered. As a teachers college, LeBaron added, ISTC was better suited than Iowa State to prepare these

teachers, whom high schools frequently assigned additional subjects. Finally, LeBaron protested that a duplicate vocational home economics program would harm the high quality and standing of home economics at Iowa State. Declaring that “we have an unusually fine faculty with a large proportion holding doctor’s degrees,” she warned that a competing ISTC program would inevitably divert resources from Iowa State and result in loss of top faculty.<sup>2</sup>

Short of actually employing the word “mediocrity,” LeBaron’s complaints prefigured many of President Hancher’s later themes to an uncanny degree. Details of the competition for funding were somewhat different, here; LeBaron was particularly concerned about federal grants for vocational education in home economics and other subjects. But in general she made most of the same arguments later offered by the Hancher administration: *the Board charges us to avoid duplication, Iowa’s schools should focus on established specialties, a competing department will dilute the budget and prestige of our own.* While Hilton himself had little to say, Iowa State pressed these objections throughout his first year, and as president he was ultimately responsible. His administration’s response to the Budget and Financial Control Committee in 1954 took a very aggressive line on duplication in general: “If constant vigilance in this respect is not maintained, many departments tend to expand their offerings to the point where they are actually conducting parallel courses under different names.”<sup>3</sup>

The arguments deployed by Iowa State Teachers College and its president, in response, offer interest as well. Notably, President Maucker made a case for prestige’s value in attracting good faculty five years before Hilton offered the same rationale

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for changing Iowa State's title from college to university. A memo to the Board of Education suggested, in favor of ISTC's proposal, that "Restriction against preparing teachers for vocational home making is interpreted by many as indication of a low caliber program" and was prompting both prospective students and faculty to look elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> The proposed program, Maucker told the Board, would allow ISTC "to strengthen our instructional program without appreciable additional cost."<sup>5</sup>

Beyond this, the Teachers College played down the idea that its program would pose any competition to Iowa State's. In addition to ceding any claim to the federal grants that concerned LeBaron, ISTC's dean of faculty suggested that "I suspect that the Iowa State people are not so well acquainted with our relatively small set-up" and might be reassured by touring the modest programs in Cedar Falls.<sup>6</sup> Maucker's administration also pointed to existing duplication within areas that were arguably its own area of responsibility, noting for example that "All three institutions have prepared persons for careers in public schools during most of the lives of the institutions."<sup>7</sup> Above all, the ISTC president questioned whether the Board's formal aversion to duplication should really restrain the development of Iowa higher education at all times, and in all places. "Duplication has almost come to be a 'scare word,'" he wrote as the Board weighed a final decision in early 1955. Previewing his later thoughts on appropriate "Future Directions" for Iowa's colleges, he asserted that "Not all duplication is bad; in fact, some duplication is both necessary and desirable."<sup>8</sup>

For interpreting the larger battles over curriculum between Iowa State and State University of Iowa that followed, howev-

er, the most significant feature of the skirmish over vocational home economics is its outcome. In May 1955, the Board voted to approve the ISTC proposal. While remaining formally in favor of three distinct institutions and opposed to further duplication, it chose to respect President Maucker's arguments for making an exception. I can only guess that Dean LeBaron did not welcome this outcome. Though President Hilton's papers record no direct comments on the issue, it may be that he was disappointed as well. I have a stronger suspicion that, whatever his opinion of Maucker's reasoning or the Board's response, he was certainly paying attention to both.

By autumn of 1959, James Hilton had already been through a very full year even for a university president. He had parried proposed restrictions on "Future Directions" for his institution, with a detailed, forceful response. He had, through intense personal conferences, won over more than a dozen state senators to recognizing Iowa State as a university. He had maintained the ongoing effort to persuade legislators to provide adequate funding. He was overseeing plans to open an experimental two-year technical institute the following year. He was, as always, still trying to scare up resources for the Iowa State Center.

In September, Hilton also earned one of his most memorable anecdotes at the cost of a very tense moment or two. With Cold War tensions relaxing slightly, if still quite high, an eccentric farmer named Roscoe Garst had invited the leader of the Soviet Union to visit Iowa, and premier Nikita Krushchev had accepted. Krushchev spent the morning of September 23



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with Garst (who regularly wrote Hilton with various novel suggestions as well) inspecting his farm. While in the area, the premier and his party then spent the afternoon touring Iowa State University. Despite the Cold War and guards from the Secret Service, Hilton recalled Krushev's manner as ebullient, perhaps even impish. Security arrangements called for keeping curious students at a distance but they repeatedly circumvented this, to Krushev's delight. Students lined windows of MacKay Hall "while Krushev was supposedly looking at demonstrations there," Hilton wrote, and "He immediately went to the windows and shook hands with the students... as if he were campaigning for office."<sup>9</sup> Secret Servicemen may have been less amused by this, but they were absolutely frantic when, a little later, a group of unknown persons approached wearing long coats and dark glasses, and carrying violin cases.

Just moments later the grim faces split with amusement. A handful of students had decided it would be funny to give the Soviet premier and the Secret Service a scare. Krushev, doubtless to the great relief of his hosts, agreed; in Hilton's words, after explanations were made the premier "was very amused and slapped his knee as he laughed heartily." Years later, Hilton acknowledged the incident among other amusing moments of his presidency. All the same, he confessed, in most cases "They were not so amusing at the time."<sup>10</sup>

Under the circumstances, President Hilton might have decided that he had taken on enough for 1959. The Regents had tasked Iowa State and the other schools with hammering out development plans—this had first prompted the "Future Directions" argument earlier in the year—but there are always means of deferring bureaucratic chores of this type. Hilton

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might very reasonably have employed them to focus on other work, or even to take an afternoon to unwind. Courtesy of coach Clay Stapleton, Cyclone football was finally winning games. Reduced to just 30 healthy players, the team that finished a victory over Drake University covered in mud became a minor legend as the “Dirty 30.”<sup>11</sup>

But while President Hilton enjoyed a rousing gridiron contest or other diversions, when he allowed himself the time, these were not the reasons he had returned to Iowa State. In his first address to staff, he had pledged not only to fight the school’s battles but to fight for specific, additional development beyond existing programs. As much as Hilton revered Iowa State’s achievements in agriculture, home economics, or other applied sciences he had concluded that deeper responsibilities to society demanded more. In 1953 he declared “...we must train citizens who will have some understanding of the great moral and social issues of our day. We must have more research and education in social sciences and in human relationships because herein lie some of the greatest problems of our times.”<sup>12</sup> Six years later, he remained as convinced of this as ever, and meanwhile the Board of Regents was asking him to outline plans for his university. The time had come, and Hilton was not going to be diverted by other projects or deterred by the already contentious year behind him. He would deliver his views on developing Iowa State University, and its peers as well.

On its face, President Hilton’s 1959 plan for expanded humanities and social sciences at Iowa State was simple. He

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wanted to introduce degree-granting majors in English and speech, and modern languages. He later added physical education for women to this list, but with or without this addition it seems a very modest request relative to the great controversy that resulted.

Hilton's arguments could be judged straightforward as well, given that most of them had been advanced by Iowa State Teachers College six years earlier, and judged adequate. I hesitate to suggest that Hilton lifted material directly from ISTC and President Maucker; an idea is rare indeed that has no precedent elsewhere, and quite possibly both Maucker and Hilton were already familiar with similar reasoning before the debate over vocational home economics. But whatever the platform's origin it had obviously persuaded the Board of Regents just a few years earlier. Hilton can have seen no compelling reason to depart from the same script, and he did not do so. He repeated the suggestion that good faculty valued having students majoring in their field, emphasizing that restricting them to service-course roles was not thrift but rather increasingly costly. Iowa State spent more than most schools to attract equally qualified English and speech faculty, yet department morale was low, turnover was high, and quality suffered.<sup>13</sup> Just like Maucker and ISTC, Hilton insisted that Iowa State's programs would be very modest. The department would remain small. He was asking for neither master's degrees nor PhDs.<sup>14</sup> His provost James Jensen explicitly declared that "the 'main show' in these fields will be recognized as being at the University in Iowa City."<sup>15</sup>

President Hilton's other arguments were generally simple and direct as well. As with his campaign to rename Iowa State,

he acknowledged that trends did play a part and ISU could not realistically ignore them. Relevant professional societies were strongly recommending more social science and humanities curricula for students majoring in the sciences. Other land-grant institutions had already responded, and Iowa State, Hilton insisted, “can do no less than this.”<sup>16</sup> Already, it was “the only four-year institution in the state of Iowa which does not now offer a major in English.”<sup>17</sup> English and speech, and modern languages, were basic disciplines and well within ISU’s traditional responsibilities. The closest that President Hilton came to any sort of esoteric argument was in claiming that at Iowa State these majors would emphasize science and technology, producing in effect a different curriculum than the bachelor of arts programs at a liberal arts college.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, most of President Hancher’s reasons for opposing the new majors at Iowa State demanded a more ambitious conceptual reach. As he marshaled his objections to the newest item on Hilton’s agenda, Hancher argued again for a holistic view of Iowa higher education instead. If the state had need to expand language programs, in his view the most natural place to do so was at its liberal arts university.<sup>19</sup> Hancher also continued warning that a kind of domino effect would follow from duplication. He proposed that “the pressures for expanding programs into the masters and doctors degrees were natural once undergraduate degrees were established,” no matter how sincere Hilton’s reassurances at the moment.<sup>20</sup> The ultimate result would be, of course, a complete duplicate liberal arts college, dilution of funds, and mediocrity.

The alternative which Hancher outlined was the most challenging of all his ideas, perhaps in any context. He proposed,

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**Three Presidents: Virgil M. Hancher, James H. Hilton and J. William Maucker.**

University Photographs, Box 62, Iowa State University Library Special Collections.

in effect, transforming the whole prevailing concept of liberal education. Hilton, in order to integrate more humanities into applied science curricula, basically advocated traditional social science and humanities courses with an emphasis on relevance to science; essentially, i.e., to teach liberal arts somewhat more scientifically. Hancher's solution in turn envisioned teaching sciences much more liberally.

Throughout his career President Hancher thought, spoke, and wrote frequently on the issue of liberal education. By 1960, as Iowa State campaigned for majors in English and speech, etc., he had expanded and refined his thesis that this direct approach was a flawed, peculiarly American model. It was still both costly and elaborate in practice, he argued, while

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simplistic in its thinking: “a liberally educated man is not produced automatically by the study of any particularly designated subject matter. A liberally educated man is one who, by whichever route he has come, has achieved that breadth of outlook and depth of wisdom which enable him to see life steadily and to see it whole.” Simply assigning students social sciences or humanities requirements, Hancher believed, might only provide a liberal education on paper. “Too often his liberal courses seem an obstacle to be overcome in order to get on with the professional study which is his goal,” he warned.<sup>21</sup>

For his own solution Hancher turned back once more to his studies at Oxford. In his case, studying the history of Roman and English law as part of his primary coursework had opened his eyes to broader views of society and history in general, and—just as important—to how his chosen profession interacted with them. Hancher called for similar integration of liberalizing knowledge and ideas into American professional and science majors’ core curriculum. Warming to his theme, he speculated on the likely product of Hilton’s approach:

The engineer is not made a liberally educated man merely by adding Chaucer to Engineering Drawing. ... Indeed if the engineer learns his Chaucer only because it is an obstacle to be overcome, he may well end up by becoming a pedant both in Chaucer and in Engineering Drawing. On the other hand, if his Engineering Drawing is so taught that it opens his eyes to the civilizations it has served and to the social utility out of which it has come, how can he escape becoming a more liberally educated man?<sup>22</sup>

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Again Hancher took an instinctively holistic view. Think beyond assembly-line curriculum models, he urged, think beyond trying to solve every institution's problems within that institution, think beyond the way things happen to be done in our culture and look further afield. It was heady stuff, admirable for a leader of higher education. It was also, however, an awkward pitch to offer the bureaucratic system that was the presidents' most important audience. Hancher's own ideas were complex, in their demand for imagination and different perspectives. The complexity which he also perceived in Hilton's approach was, however, the sort with which bureaucracy is most comfortable; if it was in some sense elaborate it could be diagrammed, and if it was costly the costs could be calculated with formulae.

For the Board of Regents, then, President Hilton's request was at least straightforward in and of itself. But Hilton was making that request within a larger context. In that fuller context his pursuit of this modest, simple proposal led onto narrow, tricky paths.

At the same time that Iowa State was defending its right to introduce new majors, it was still campaigning against one of its peers doing exactly the same thing. While President Hancher spoke in favor of larger, grander visions, his administration had also replied to the Regents with more immediate and concrete proposals. In combination with reactions from ISU, these State University of Iowa requests challenge any impression of a simple or straightforward conflict.

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Hancher's provost Harvey Davis suggested several new SUI majors, over the course of 1959. Two in particular might almost have been chosen to cast Hilton and Iowa State in an awkward light: vocational home economics, and nuclear engineering. The request for vocational home economics, of course, reminded one and all that Hilton's presidency had previously resisted much the same case that it was now arguing for itself. One of Davis's memos is remarkably frank in emphasizing this very point. Declaring it "highly important" that SUI introduce a vocational home economics major, he adds that "I hardly need to list arguments here for they are essentially the same as those listed by Dr. Maucker..."<sup>23</sup>

The SUI provost's case for nuclear engineering seems to have been, initially, even more an overt criticism of Iowa State's positions. At the early 1959 meeting when President Hilton and his own provost first made their pitch for extending social sciences and humanities offerings, Davis seems to have selected nuclear engineering simply as a hypothetical counter-example, i.e. *well, what about this?* He pointed out that SUI could present similar justifications for adding new degrees, asserting that "a number of extremely competent men on the University staff feel that the University must offer a major in nuclear engineering." Yet, he added, the major would still violate Regents policies.<sup>24</sup>

The SUI proposal for nuclear engineering illustrates as well as anything how complex the curriculum debates became for all participants. In the months that followed his rhetorical suggestion, Davis repeated it as an increasingly serious proposal. By autumn he formally included it along with his request for vocational home economics.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, in elaborating on



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his justification for the degree, he turned yet another of Iowa State's arguments back on President Hilton. The "new" major in English and speech, Hilton maintained, could be provided without any new staff or other resources; ISU's existing departments needed only permission. Pressing for nuclear engineering degrees, Davis wrote that "We have the courses now... Our staff feels that there would be considerable gain in allowing these courses to be grouped together to form a major."<sup>26</sup>

If Hilton appreciated the contradictions in his position, however, he was unembarrassed by them. His administration continued to oppose duplication in vocational home economics, as well as the proposed nuclear engineering major. In late 1959 Iowa State circulated a memo responding to all of SUI's proposals for expanded curriculum to that point. Its comments are a mix of polite approval and mulish obstinacy, plus what seems like yet another example of gratuitous needling.

On both vocational home economics and nuclear engineering, the Hilton administration remained inflexible. It claimed that both fell within the preserve of Iowa State, and should remain reserved for it as neither was a basic discipline like English and speech. (The already enacted extension of vocational home economics to Iowa State Teachers College went unmentioned, perhaps for multiple reasons.) Nuclear engineering, in contrast, required extremely expensive infrastructure, and while SUI already offered and ought to offer some courses in the subject, they could not be combined into a full-fledged major as simply as Davis had suggested.

Some of this is an awkward fit with Hilton's general arguments, elsewhere, but with allowance for nuance it's at least reasonable. The ISU memo reinforces this appearance with

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positive comments on a number of other proposed degrees. It declares a master's in library science plainly needed, for example, adding that "Iowa State enthusiastically supports this proposal." An urban and regional planning program also receives favor, despite ISU reporting both plans and resources for expansion in the same area; "in our judgment," the memo asserts "this is an area in which the efforts of both Iowa State and SUI are needed."<sup>27</sup>

Responding to several proposed PhDs, Hilton's administration affirmed that it had no objections to any. If a relatively lukewarm endorsement, this might still have amounted to a demonstration of the support Iowa State wanted for its own proposals—except that ISU seemed unable to leave things there. The memo appends "a friendly suggestion from a sister institution" that gerontology, public administration and social psychology were, in its authors' view, excessively "narrow and fragmented Ph.D. programs."<sup>28</sup> As ever, sincerity seems the safest assumption absent firm evidence to the contrary. Whatever its intent, however, my instinct is that the recipients of this friendly suggestion may have seen it as more than a little obnoxious.

Continued in the pages of *Hancher vs. Hilton*  
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