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DQU

# Their Own Place in the Sun

by Peter Janssen

**DQU** is not a typical university, but then it's not trying to serve the typical university student. DQ is now in its second year; its student body consists of about 100 dropouts, migrants, kids from reservations and East Los Angeles and anybody else who walks onto its campus on a former Army communications base six miles west of Davis, California. It is the first university of its kind in the United States: half American Indian and half Chicano; and it is designed to be fully independent. It has no ties to other institutions—or to most current practices in American higher education.

DQ is different. Students can stay for two years and get an Associate in Arts degree or for two weeks and get a certificate. They get credit for taking the usual array of college courses—and for participating in tribal dances or planting corn. In the past, the administration has gotten food for the student cafeteria by trading grass grown on campus for meat slaughtered by a nearby farmer, and sheep still graze just outside the administration building.

The university, which registered its first class in September 1971, was a long time coming. It traces back to the early 1960s, when Jack D. Forbes, a Powhatan Indian with a PhD from the University of Southern California in history and anthropology, started talking with Carl Gorman, a Navajo artist, about the need for an all-Indian institution. Forbes turned the conversations into position papers while he taught at Berkeley and in 1968 persuaded the Donner Foundation to give him a small grant to study the feasibility of an Indian school.

During this period David Risling, Jr., a Hupa Indian who had been working at Modesto Junior College for twenty years, was elected president of the new California Indian Education Association. At one of its first meetings, the association asked Risling to try to find surplus government land for an Indian college. Most of the association's members were from rural communities and wanted Risling to look in rural areas in the central part of the state.

Risling, who says the Bureau of Indian Affairs once considered his father, an early advocate of Indian legal rights, as "the most radical Indian in the United States," says the idea for DQ started when "people around the community got discouraged with the present education system. It didn't do anything to meet the needs of Indian people. It was very detrimental to the dignity of Indian people. Even if you made it through the system and stayed in school, you were insulted 90 percent of the time. You almost had to forget your culture because you were taught it was wrong.

"The big problem in school was that so many Indian kids were alienated. They didn't have the right dress; they didn't have enough money to buy the right styles or shoes. They had to fight with their parents for money and the parents had to decide whether to feed the family or buy clothes for school. The girls got pregnant and the boys fought. The teachers didn't understand them or their culture. Everything about school turned them off. Then in the sixties the civil rights thing came along big and people started to look at themselves. Indians got fed up and began to take things into their own hands."

Realizing that at least some of the problem was in teachers' attitudes, the Indian Education

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Association started special workshops for teachers. Then minority groups banded together to promote a resolution, passed by the state legislature, that promoted courses in black, Native American and Chicano studies in state colleges.

In July 1969 Forbes, then 35, came to the University of California at Davis to start a Native American studies program. Risling followed. They quickly teamed up with Chicano educators at Davis to start a library, and it was the beginning of a permanent alliance. The Indians and Chicanos discovered that the Davis administration was only too happy to leave them alone. "We found that the university was not interested in the program," Risling says. "They let us have just a little tokenism to keep us quiet. All of a sudden ecology was the big word; there was no money for the Native American studies program. Then a lot of other people—faculty—at Davis felt we were stepping on their toes. The anthropologists and historians were upset when we challenged their books or when kids brought in the real facts.

"The administration promised us a research unit and everything else. But they stalled and lost interest. We couldn't find out what happened. Then they put pressure on us and started to clamp down. We couldn't do the things we wanted to do. If we wanted to start a Native American music course, they said the music department should do it. Finally we decided we had to have control of our own institution."

Other Indians and Chicanos also were disenchanted with Davis. They thought it served only the dominant Anglo culture and fostered an elitism that was hostile to their communities. They wanted to break away.

**T**o be sure, the Indian-Chicano alliance was a marriage of convenience, since they were more powerful as a group than alone, but it also was a bonding of two groups whose cultures and aspirations were different from the atmosphere on the Davis campus. Leaders of each group believed that their cultures and history had far more in common with each other than with Anglo society. And neither had been able to start a college of its own.

They were in the right spot. In the summer of 1970, the General Services Administration declared a 647-acre former Army communications center, only six miles west of Davis on Route 31, government surplus. Most of the base was rich, flat farm land with only a small cluster of ten buildings that had been constructed in 1953 and scores of telephone poles. It was up for public bid.

The Indian-Chicano forces regrouped as DQU and made a bid; so did half a dozen other organizations, including UC-Davis, which wanted the site for monkey experiments. DQ got some strong political allies, including John Tunney, then a Congressman running successfully for the Senate. By November 3, 1970, the other organizations had dropped out; only Davis opposed DQ for the land.

That day a group of young Indians "occupied" the abandoned site. A month later, with the kids still there and DQ threatening to fight Davis in court, Davis withdrew its bid. On April 2, 1971, the title was deeded over to DQ, and the new university had a campus. It was the first time that government surplus land had been granted to Indians or Chicanos for a school.

The campus still carries indications of its former life. Large signs say that some buildings are "off limits" to enlisted personnel. One parking space is still "reserved for executive officer," although a few feet away an old school bus is parked, with "Viva La Causa" painted on its side. Two large signs at the

*Many articles dealing with new learners have appeared in past issues of Change. Readers may wish to refer to this partial listing for further reading.*

May/June 1971—"Black Visions, White Realities" by Bartley G. McSwine.

—"Miracle of Malcolm X" by Sharon Johnson.

Winter 1971-72—"San Diego's Turbulent Third College" by Ken Hudson.

February 1972—"Run to Freedom: Chicanos and Higher Education" by Thomas J. Cottle.

—"Working with the Working Class" by Alan Wolfe.

March 1972—"Teaching Veterans to Teach" by Katherine Y. Cudlipp.

April 1972—"The Dot and the Elephant" by Gilbert Moore.

—"Higher Education for the Military" by Captain Anne L. Ducey.

—"Women's Colleges and Women's Lib" by Caroline Bird.

May 1972—"Don't Call it 'Pig U'" by Bernard Bard.

—"Success comes to Nairobi College" by John Egerton.

June 1972—"You Mean the Wyandanch College?" by Jerome M. Ziegler.

Summer 1972—"College at Middle Age" by Thomas J. Cottle.

September 1972—"The 'New' Old Westbury" by Earl Lane.

Winter 1972-73—"Federal City Tries Harder" by Jerome M. Ziegler.

main gate have been repainted. At first they announced "Universidad Deganawidah Quetzalcoatl" in red and brown letters. Deganawidah was the founder of the Iroquois federation of nations, and Quetzalcoatl was Aztec patron of the arts. The name was changed, however, when an Iroquois chief flew out from the East Coast to explain that the Iroquois considered it virtually sacrilegious to use the name of a deceased chief except during religious ceremonies or in a time of emergency. The signs and stationery were changed. The name of the institution became simply DQU.

Power at the new school is divided evenly among a 32-member board of directors selected by leaders of Indian and Chicano community organizations in northern and central California. There are sixteen Native Americans on the board and sixteen Chicanos. Risling, head of Native American studies at Davis, is chairman, and Louis Flores, an engineer who is head of Chicano studies at Davis, is vice chairman. Ultimately DQ's founders hope the school will be governed by a board elected annually by Native Americans and Chicanos across the United States. In 1971 the board hired Jose de la Isla, an administrator with the American Association of Junior Colleges in Washington, to be DQ's executive director, or president. De la Isla returned to Washington after a year and was replaced by Leroy V. Clifford, a 30-year-old Oglala Sioux who had been a consultant to many tribes on economic development.

Tuition at DQ is \$20 a unit, but finances, like almost everything else at the college, are informal. Students are urged to pay what they can; most come with grants from the Equal Opportunity Grants Program. Everyone is welcome at DQ; the only requirement is a desire to learn something. DQ opened as a two-year community college. It has "correspondent" status from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and is recognized as a degree-granting (AA) institution by the state.

If all goes according to plan, by 1977 DQ will consist of four colleges with an enrollment of 1,500. The first college, Tiburcio Vasquez, is already operating. It emphasizes the trades, agriculture, forestry and small business administration. The second, Hehaka Sapa (black elk), will deal with special Indian concerns such as water rights. The third, Quetzalcoatl, will concentrate on Chicano issues. The fourth, named after the doctor Carlos Montezuma, will train paramedics and nurses to carry health services to Indians and Chicanos.

In addition to its special emphasis, Tiburcio Vasquez offers the usual community college courses in math, history, the humanities and the natural and

social sciences, but all the courses have a Native American or Chicano orientation. A natural science class, for example, studies tribal mind-altering techniques; a history class traces the flow of migrant farm labor. As might be suspected, DQ is not the place to come for formal lectures. The five full-time faculty members hold classes when they and their students want—for as long as they want. Grading is exclusively on a "pass" or "superior" basis; no one is stamped a failure.

The college also has developed a "contract" system of education where the student stipulates what he or she wants to learn and how fast he or she wants to learn it. For the more advanced courses, the student agrees to a contract with a three-member contract committee, including a DQ faculty member, one person who is expert in the field under study and another student who is working at the same level.

DQ wants strong community support and involvement. It gives credit for working in community development. Throughout the college, some courses are taught for credit and some are not. Many classes start and just keep going; people come in whenever they are ready.

With the help of a \$3.1 million contract with the United States Department of Labor, DQ also is operating four community centers at Blythe, Fresno, Stockton and Modesto for the basic education and retraining of migrant workers. By the start of 1973, the centers were holding classes for 550 farmworkers in cooperative farming, bilingual skills, auto mechanics, household appliance repair and nursing.

Jim Racine, director of DQ's North American studies, says the school is aimed at students from reservations and migrant camps. "We want kids who never thought of going to college," he says, "who probably wouldn't get in anyplace else. We're looking for people who will return home and use their education for the benefit of their community, assist those behind them."

In the spirit of building a new community, everyone works at DQ. Students sit on all committees; they also perform much of the menial labor associated with keeping an institution going. They help with the sheep, with the bakery and with the kiln that can make adobe for other buildings as they are needed.

To date, DQ's greatest problem is its small financial base. The university has received \$200,000 from the Office of Economic Opportunity plus \$70,000 from the Office of Education to get it started, and its founders hope that Indian colleges will get some kind of Congressional appropriation. They consider DQ a land-grant institution and feel

that black colleges are receiving a great deal of emphasis, money and media attention while Indians and Chicanos are comparatively ignored.

Forbes readily describes the difficulties he and Risling have faced: "The problem with starting something new," he says, "is that it doesn't fit into the bureaucracy of higher education. Most legislation, most accrediting agencies, most educational systems are not geared to learning; they're geared to a structure and a sequence of events. You attend a certain number of classes, a certain number of events, and you get a number of grades. In trying to get DQ started and qualified for aid we were up against that procedure. It's so foreign to what we're trying to do. It makes it very difficult for a new school to be innovative."

DQ wants new kinds of college students and Forbes realistically expects them to bring some problems. He describes three groups of Indian and Chicano students: "One type is Chicano from East Los Angeles or Indian from urban areas or from disorganized reservations. They tend to have negative attitudes to education. The fact that they come to DQ means something, but their basic attitudes are negative. Many have severe social and psychological problems—drugs, drinking, fighting, hostility.

"Back at home they might be classified as hoods; they're pretty rough, maybe they have a record. They're the type of population that a white school is not confronted with because it doesn't want to serve the socially marginal individual. DQ wants to try to meet the needs of this group. But it has to use unique approaches to do it.

"The second group is the more traditional Indian student, regardless of age, who's still an Indian. He's the real thing. These students tend to be easy to work with. They're polite, with the traditional Indian virtues of sincerity, honesty and so forth. They present a problem only in that they'd probably flunk out of a white school.

"The third group is the normal, middle-class, stable group of Indians and Chicanos who make it through white schools. This is a small group. The problem they present for DQ is that they are very anxious now to become more Indian and Chicano, to recover their heritage and sense of being. They want to be more like the second group.

"Now when you mix the third group with the first group, you've got trouble. The first group cannot attack the second group because the second group represents the real people—they know the Indian songs, the values, the roles. But the first group can attack the third group, because the third group represents white values. White colleges avoid the conflict because they restrict their admissions to

group number three. But DQ has to develop an educational program suitable for these diverse groups."

Forbes says that when the groups had been thrown together, such as during the occupation of Alcatraz or demonstrations in Los Angeles, the first group was so hostile that it eventually drove away the other two.

Forbes' philosophy will influence what happens at DQ. "The important thing about education," he says, "is that an individual has to develop himself and make key decisions himself. There's no way in the world you can force a person to be a good person. A white college thinks it can force a person to be a well-rounded, civilized person. One could easily prove they have not been successful in this.

"At DQ we try a different system, where an individual works out his own programs and where he can stay with something, if he wants to, until he masters it. The important thing is individual accomplishment, not the time spent. If one student can do something in two years, that's fine. If it takes somebody else four years, that's fine too. The time he spends here is absolutely irrelevant. When he's ready, we'll test his mastery of the subject—perhaps by an oral exam, a written exam or something else."

**M**ike Ginnett is typical of DQ's freewheeling approach to higher education. A former mountain pack guide who spent a six-year "vacation" in California prisons after a burglary conviction, Ginnett now takes some courses in Native American literature, helps out in the small day care center for the children of students and faculty, and also helps plan Hehaka Sapa College. "DQ is about the best thing that's happened to me," Ginnett says.

Another student, Kathy Koskela, came to DQ as part of an independent study project during her junior year at the University of California at Santa Cruz. She was majoring in Native American literature "and all of a sudden I found that nobody at Santa Cruz knew anything more about it than I did. So I came here." Kathy, a member of the Wylaki tribe in northern California, also does some teaching at DQ while completing her own work.

The key to DQ is its emphasis on meeting each student where he is—and then helping him get where he wants to go. "DQ is a place where Chicanos and Indians can come and blossom like flowers," says Executive Director Clifford. "The students are finding their own cultural identity. From now on DQ will be a place where people can come and learn the things they really want to learn—not the things the dominant white system imposes on them." ■