

VIET-NAM BULLETIN

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THE UNIVERSITY OF HUE

The former imperial city meets today's educational challenges

Breaking with tradition, the University of Hue is embarking on imaginative new programs geared to meet the practical needs of the Republic of Vietnam. Its young team of educators is changing the image of the typical Vietnamese university graduate: the gentle Confucian dilettante with scholarly preoccupations is giving way to the modern, well-rounded realist trained to face the challenges of today's world.

«Higher education in Vietnam has become old-fashioned and outmoded,» says Le Thanh Minh-Chau, 41-year-old rector of the university. «The trend has been to form a lofty elite, too far above the daily demands of the community. We want to break this down completely.»

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To break with tradition in a conservative oriental society is always hard. But for the second largest of South Vietnam's five universities it is doubly difficult, for its campus is in the former imperial capital revered by Vietnamese as the center of their ancient culture. A proud city, Hue has a history of scholarly attainment and support of the arts that can be traced back to the 16th century when it was a nobleman's fief called Phu Xuan. Mandarin precepts of learning permeate Hue's intellectual community, persist in its private school curricula and are respected by the city's 160,000 citizens. Hue is the home of most of Vietnam's *ancien* nobility, and these surviving remnants of the imperial court set the city's tone. The man in the street shares the nobles' dignity; like them, he honors the old ways and tends to place pride in his birthplace above region or nation. Change does not come easily in a graceful city steeped in the past, surrounded by the tombs of emperors and situated in the heart of a green province long isolated by poor

communications, by provincial self-sufficiency and by general indifference to the concerns of those beyond Thua Thien's borders. The high Pass of the Clouds separating Hue from Da Nang symbolically has separated the province's 670,000 people from the rest of Annam and made strangers of the visitors from Tonkin and Cochinchina.

But Hue's traditional isolationism, its feeling of remoteness from the central government based 640 kilometers to the south, and its aloof unconcern for the winds of change, for *patria* and for the anti-communist struggle absorbing the rest of the country — all these vanished with the Communists' Tet offensive of February 1968. Hue, lying 100 kilometers south of the Demilitarized Zone, had been largely untouched by the war until that time. But the Tet offensive left the city the most severely ravaged in the nation — 75 per cent of the buildings destroyed, 115,000 people homeless, more than 3,500 dead. This was the turning point for Hue, the time when its citizens found common cause with the Saigon government, when hatred of the Viet Cong replaced neutrality. The people of Hue, including university students and professors who had joined the Buddhist «struggle movements» against the Saigon regimes of 1963 and 1966, became champions of the anti-Communist cause. And for the university, which had to rebuild from the rubble left after 25 days of bitter siege, 1968 was a year of dedication to new educational concepts embodying Hue's burgeoning new sense of nationalism.

«The ultimate goal of higher education is to meet the changing needs of the country,» says Rector Chau. «It is our intention to bring programs to the University of Hue that will support the national economy. Otherwise, we would not be fulfilling our functions as educators. Otherwise, our young people would be robbed of the opportunity to be useful to themselves and to the country.»

Started 12 Years Ago

Since it was founded by the Rev. Cao Van Luan on March 1, 1957, Hue University has seen significant growth in its campus, student enrollment, faculty staff and budget. Launched with nothing but an official decree from the central government and a plot of land along the Perfume River, it has grown in a dozen years to five faculties, a library, three auditoriums, nine laboratories and various housing complexes. Now the emphasis is changing from physical growth to intellectual expansion, from quantity to quality. But the new academic programs aimed at preparing youth to meet Vietnam's everyday needs could not very well have been introduced without that initial period of sustained growth. From 1957-58 through the 1968-69 academic years, Hue University grew

* from 670 to 3,319 enrolled students, an increase of 495 per cent;

* from six permanent and 19 visiting professors

Tet offensive

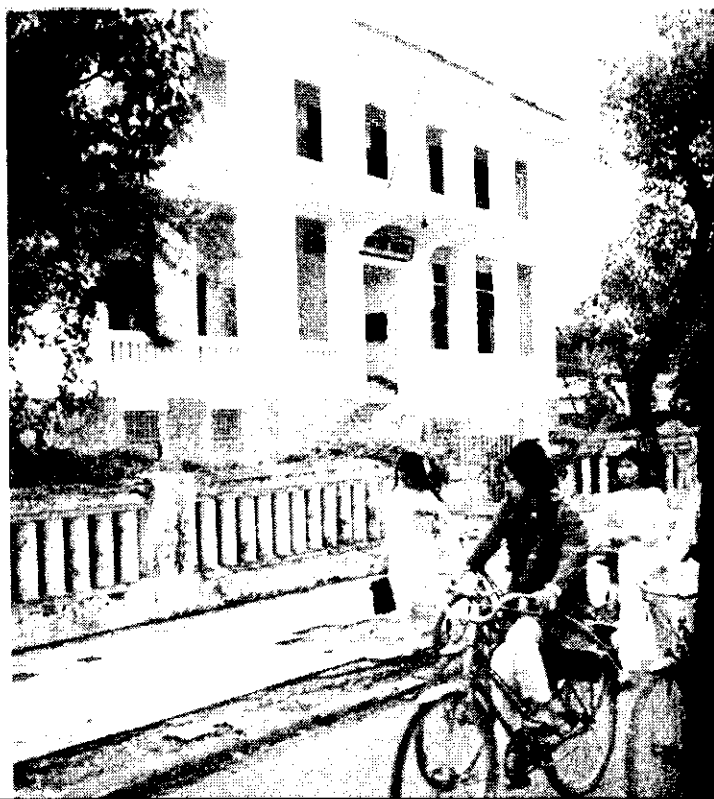
to 60 permanent and 145 visiting professors, an increase of 920 per cent;

* from an annual budget of 3,700,000 to 116,401,000 piasters (US\$986,450), an increase of 3,140 per cent.

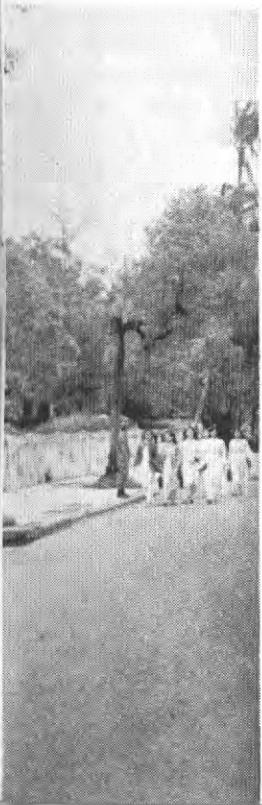
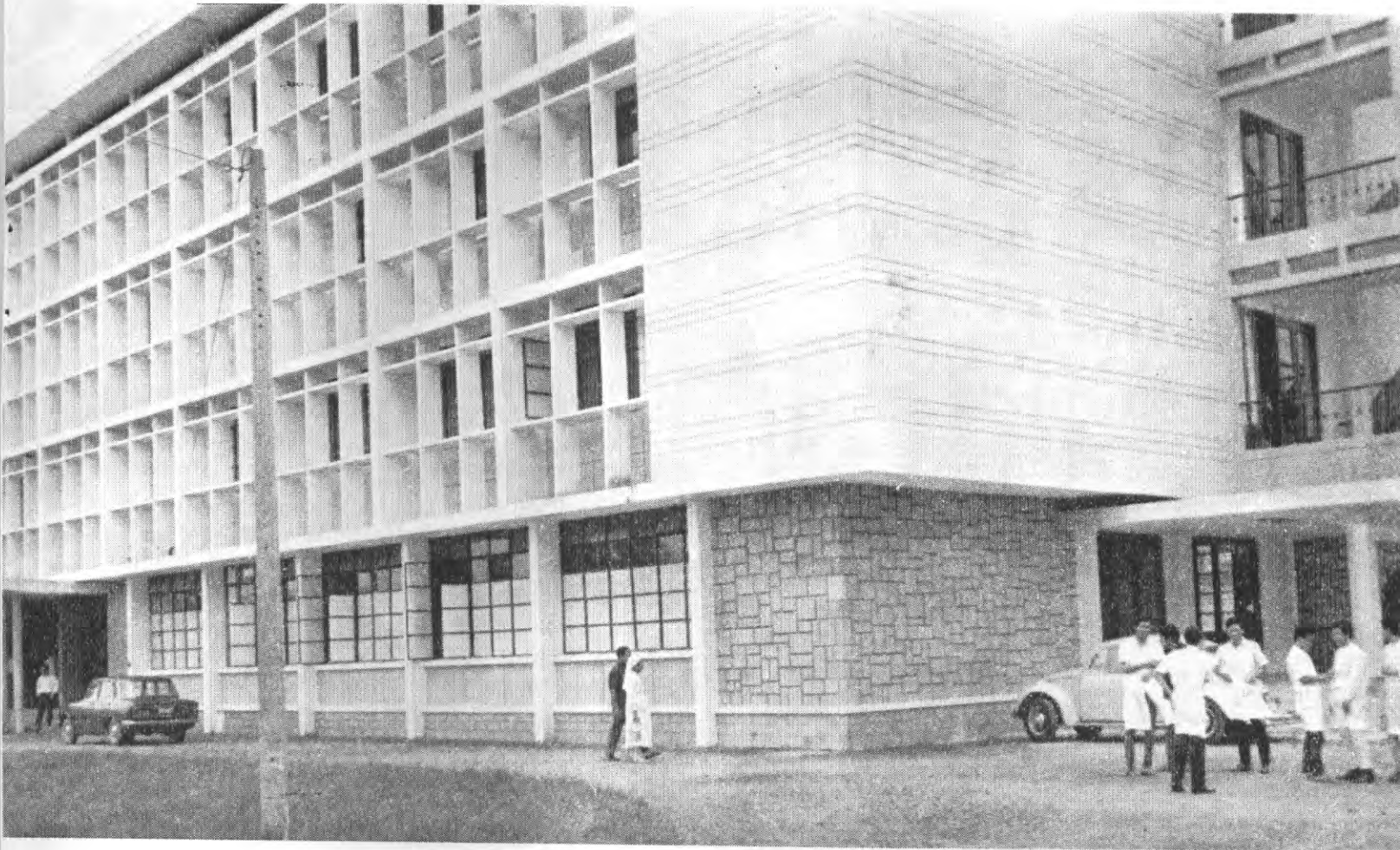
In this 12-year period the Faculty of Science, which looks to the world of tomorrow, saw its enrollment climb from 58 to 1,115 while the Faculty of Sinology, looking back on the grandeurs of Peking's Celestial Court, never enrolled more than 195 students and closed its doors after six years. In this same period female students rose from 15.7 to 22.5 per cent of the student body — another symptom of the departure from old ways.

Helping to stimulate change is young Dr. Chau. Although he assumed his duties as rector only last March, he has been a familiar figure on the campus since the inception of the university. He was among the original six permanent faculty members, the first professor of English, while his wife was the first Dean of Law. Both are graduates of the University of Paris' Sorbonne. In 1962, shortly after Dr. Chau was named secretary-general for administration of the University, he and his wife took leaves of absence and went to the United States to study at the University of Chicago. He received his doctorate in English literature and she in political science.

The modern air is apparent in University of Hue campus buildings. Top right: Faculty of Medicine building. The Library and the Faculty of Letters (bottom right).



provided the turning point for Hue



«When we left for Chicago,» recalls Dr. Chau, «our friends thought they were seeing the last of us. But I am a native of the city of Hue, and we were determined to learn what we could and then return here where we belong.»

Now the new rector and the five faculty deans, whose average age is 44, are cooperating closely in modernizing Hue University's curricula and teaching methods. They are united in their conviction that the university has a leading role to play in the post-war reconstruction of Vietnam. Toward that end they are laying the foundations for a sound and progressive system of higher education.

Unlike the French system introduced to Vietnam with the founding of the University of Hanoi, the Hue faculties work together in solving mutual problems instead of each going its own independent way. Coordination is achieved through the University Council, on which all faculties are represented and which establishes guidelines for the Faculty Council, the student body and the administration. The rector, who heads the University Council, is appointed by the Minister of Education with Senate approval on the recommendation of President Nguyen Van Thieu. Faculty deans are approved by the Minister of Education after their appointment by the rector or election by the Faculty Council, which is made up of members of the teaching staffs. Faculties now include:

- * Science, with 1,115 enrolled students, headed by Dr. Nguyen Van Hai, 44, a native of Hue and a graduate of the Sorbonne;

- * Letters, with 944 students, headed by Dr. Lam Ngoc Huynh, 39, formerly of Hanoi, also a graduate of the Sorbonne;

- * Law, with 627 students headed by Dr. Nguyen Si Hai, 48, a native of Hue and a University of Saigon graduate;

- * Pedagogy, with 407 students, headed by Dr. Nguyen Quoi, 45, of Quang Ngai, a Sorbonne graduate;

- * Medicine, which started in 1961, four years after the other faculties, and now has 226 students, is headed by Dr. Bui Duy Tam, 47, a native of Hanoi, with degrees from the Universities of Saigon and Chicago.

Involving People

A major feature of the new academic programs is encouraging the involvement of the people of Hue and surrounding villages of Thua Thien province in the university's development. When plans were announced for a special language training program, 25,000 local people came to the campus in the first month to inquire about the chances of studying English. And when the Faculty of Science embarked on a program to emphasize applied science dealing specifically with Thua Thien's soil, crops, mineral deposits and other resources, the opinions of the local

people were sought and weighed before curriculum changes were made. Other evidence of departure from the old ways:

- * The university is planning its first post-graduate course, to be offered by the Faculty of Science.

- * In the 1969-70 academic year, students for the first time will be given a chance to study science and letters in a one-year basic course before choosing a faculty in which to specialize.

- * A third year of instruction in economics has been added, making Hue the only Vietnamese university teaching beyond the second year of economics.

- * An in-service training center for prospective teachers is being planned.

- * The release of talented medical graduates now in the military service is being discussed with government officials so they can travel abroad for advanced training and return to teach at the university.

- * The Faculty of Pedagogy is devising a curriculum for the future that will include such practical courses as home economics, business education, practical arts, and sciences taught in modern laboratories.

- * The Faculty of Law is discussing with Saigon officials an on-the-job training program at the Ministry of Labor so students can learn the practical side of law.

- * The Dean of Law this fall will open a Bureau of Legal Studies that will do research into the legal systems of South Vietnam, the Republic of China, Indonesia, Japan and Malaysia.

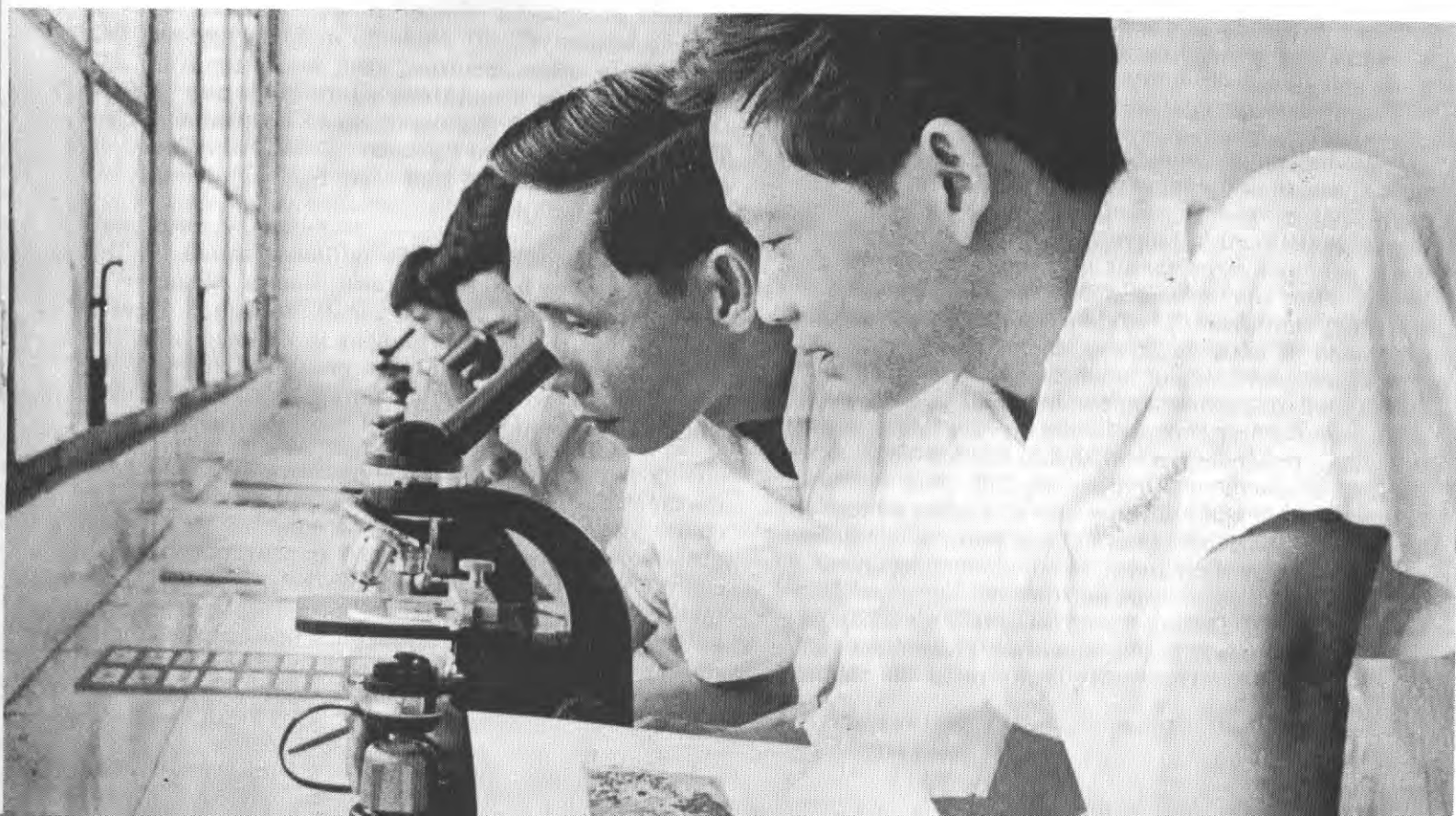
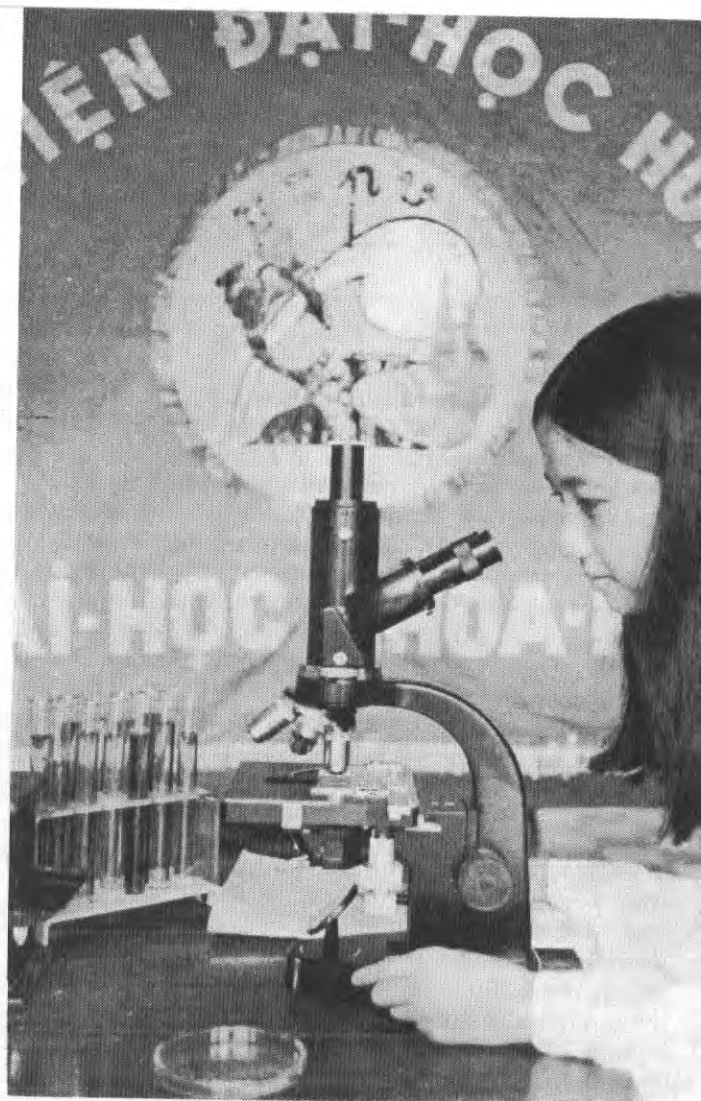
Student Performance

Most of these ideas are new to Vietnam. The trend towards modern concepts is evident. But Hue University still has a long way to go before it begins to resemble the modern, well-endowed campuses of the Western world where registration, teaching and examination procedures are so streamlined that some universities can educate tens of thousands of students at a time. Higher education is still new to South Vietnam; there was none at all until refugees from the University of Hanoi founded the University of Saigon in 1956. Today less than 40,000 students are enrolled in all five of South Vietnam's universities, most of them in Saigon University (about 30,000). And only a minority will graduate.

Because the universities' teaching staffs and classroom space can handle only about a third of the students enrolled, much of the study must be done at home. Class attendance is not required except in such specialized faculties as medicine and pedagogy. To be admitted to other faculties an applicant needs a second baccalaureate (equivalent to a high school diploma) in mathematics, natural sciences or philosophy, but for Pedagogy and Medicine an entrance examination also must be passed. For most faculties the accepted student registers, then obtains printed



Chemistry class students measure liquid in laboratory (above). At the Faculty of Sciences (right), is student before an electronic microscope. Letters p.v., in emblem of faculty in background, means «phuc vu» which is service. Pathology class under Dr. Ton That Chieu (below).



Professor find talent in demand

copies of the lectures the professors will be giving that semester. Relatively few stay on campus to hear the lectures. At Hue University, for instance, many students work in central government offices in Saigon and visit Hue once or twice a year. Graduation is by virtue of passing annual examinations based on the printed lectures. Only a small percentage of the enrolled students around the country take the exams, and a much smaller percentage manage to pass them. At Hue University during the academic year just completed, for example, 1,370 students sat for exams and 619 passed them. The successful ones represented only 45 per cent of those examined and 18.6 per cent of the total enrollment of 2,574 men and 745 women students in all faculties.

Except for teacher-training and medical students, the percentage graduating from all universities is low. Of the 484 students enrolled in Hue's Faculty of Law in 1957-58, only 18 have since graduated, along with five of Science's 58 students and two of Letters' 67 students enrolled in that first year. But the number of graduates from this initial class will continue to increase in future years because there is no rigid matriculation period, no requirement that four years of work be completed in four years. Because of economic pressures, Vietnam's undergraduate students earn their degrees much as graduate students in the Western world do — they spread their learning over a number of years. Many take a year's university work and then seek employment for a year or two to finance their next year at the university.

In Pedagogy and Medicine — both courses which assure employment on graduation, employment that cannot be obtained without a degree — the students' motivation to complete their university work as quickly as possible is higher than in the liberal arts and science schools. Hue's Faculty of Pedagogy enrolled 61 students in 1957-58 and has graduated 56 of them, giving them three-year diplomas which qualify them to teach in secondary schools. Faculty of Medicine's figures for that year showing graduated its first class of 25 during the latest academic year. This compares with the Saigon University Faculty of Medicine's figures for that year showing 217 completing their seven years of higher education (one year of basic sciences and six years of medicine, also required at Hue), with 164 of them subsequently having their theses accepted for the degree of Doctor of Medicine. During the 1970s Hue University expects to graduate 50 fully qualified physicians each year, while Saigon University is aiming at 200 doctors a year after 1972.

Teachers Needed

Ministry of Education planners calculate that at least eight per cent of the nation's youth in the 18-to-22 age bracket must be enrolled in universities if the system is to produce the educated citizens needed for sustained national progress. So far little more than half of that goal has been achieved. But before universities can appreciably expand enrollment, before they can insist on classroom attendance in all faculties, before all students are required to sit for examinations and pass them for continued matriculation and promotion to higher classes, campus facilities must be considerably increased. And, even more important, additional teaching staff members must be recruited. The shortage of teachers is acute. University professors find their talents so much in demand and are so poorly paid — an average of 18,000 to 20,000 piasters a month — that they must «moonlight.» There is a corps of professors who regularly fly to Hue, Dalat, Saigon, and Can Tho, using the national airline to spread their skills among five campuses. «Many of our professors,» says Rector Chau, «are forever commuting. This leads to all sorts of problems. There is no involvement in any one university as an institution. Certainly, there can be no meaningful relationship between the student and his professor.» Hue's visiting or «suitcase» professors outnumber the permanent staff two-and-a-half to one.

To expand the teaching staff or the facilities sufficiently, the universities in South Vietnam require more funds than the government can now afford. Hue University's income comes almost entirely from the central government budget, which pays for salaries, maintenance, construction, laboratory equipment, plant operation, scholarships and publications. Each student pays annual fees of 1,036 piasters except for those on scholarships, who in 1968-69 totaled all 407 students in Pedagogy and 262 students in other faculties, each receiving from 350 to 1,000 piasters a month in addition to free tuition. (Besides Hue, the Universities of Saigon and Can Tho are government-financed. Dalat University is operated by Catholics and Van Hanh University in Saigon by Buddhists.)

«We have asked for 260 million piasters for the forthcoming year,» says Hue's Rector Chau. «We don't know if we will be fortunate enough to receive that amount. But our argument is that we need the additional funds for our new programs, for the 500 new students we expect to enroll this fall, for new teachers, for scholarships and for construction.»

The rector concedes that more money is not all that is required to recruit a sufficient number of teachers. «There is no sound program for training of professors,» he says. «With the improvement in the country's secondary school system, which makes more students qualified for higher education, the gap between the number of university professors and the universities' student enrollment is widening. With military manpower requirements taking talent away



Medical student is all ears as Dr. Tu lectures on the human anatomy. University expects to graduate 50 fully qualified physicians each year during the 1970s while University of Saigon aims at 200.

from education, the future appears bleak. Unless there is a reversal of policy, unless something radical is implemented, the next three or four years will find a student population three or four times greater than it is today. Then we will have a real crisis in Vietnamese education.»

Communist Attack

The Communists' 1968 Tet offensive added to Hue's staffing problem and increased tremendously its financing troubles. University and Hue city police authorities say there is no way to determine how many professors and students were killed, wounded or kidnaped by the Communists during the three weeks they occupied large areas of the city.

«There are no records to show what happened to them,» says Rector Chau. «We do know that before Tet we had an enrollment of 3,453 students. Only 1,945 returned to continue the school year after the offensive waned. We know of the deaths of three of our German doctors, two administrative clerks and

15 students. We believe one of our professors defected to the side of the Communists, as, perhaps, some of our students did. Otherwise, we have no knowledge of what happened to those who did not return to classes that semester. But by the next school year our enrollment had climbed back to 3,319 students.»

Damage to the university during the offensive was so great there was no place to conduct classes. «The events of Tet were truly our darkest hours,» says Rector Chau. «The physical plant of the university suffered nearly 90 per cent damage. The handful of buildings left standing spilled over with refugees living behind blistered walls punctured by rocket and mortar rounds. We lost millions and millions in piasters. Almost all of our scientific equipment and laboratories were lost. But the people raised the money to rebuild the university under the leadership of President Nguyen Van Thieu, who headed the National Committee for Reconstruction. We received 15 million piasters from the Saigon government and the U.S. aid mission for rebuilding.»

All faculties had to be closed for four months.

They reopened in makeshift quarters in May 1968 — except for Medicine, its facilities so shattered it could not operate. But the faculty — 30 professors and 220 medical students — migrated in a body to Saigon and did nearly two years of academic work in borrowed quarters at Saigon University's Faculty of Medicine. After graduating its first class there, the faculty moved back to Hue on July 25, 1969. Medicine's rebuilding program is costing 3,200,000 piasters, and classrooms will be ready for students in November. «The Viet Cong said the faculty would never open again,» recalls the Dean of Medicine, Dr. Bui Duy Tam, who led the exodus and return. «But with U.S. and Vietnamese government aid we will soon be back in full operation on our home campus.»

The Faculties of Pedagogy, Science and Letters spent 10,500,000 piasters in rebuilding. Students at the Faculty of Law are in barracks-type buildings pending construction later this year of a three-million-piaster Law Building.

It was the Faculty of Pedagogy that was faced with the task of refurbishing the library, which had been 90 per cent destroyed. Says Dean Quoi:

«We had to begin from almost zero. Ohio University professors, contracted to work in Vietnamese education, helped us plan the reconstruction and aided in the purchase of new books, as did the Asia Foundation. But we are still sadly lacking in equipment. We badly need audio-visual aids.»

Rector Chau says putting the library back into operation was one of the most difficult jobs during Operation Recovery. «We lost every index card, leaving what remained of the library's stock of books virtually unusable. For a year and a half it stayed that way. Finally, with funds from the Asia Foundation and CORDS (the U.S. agency for Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support) we have been able to hire students to type new index cards. And with the help of U.S. AID (Agency for International Development) library consultants, we are beginning to rebuild our list of books.»

New Programs

Although rehabilitation work continues, it is the new academic programs that are engrossing staff and student body today. At the Faculty of Law, Vo Xuan Han, the assistant dean, explained that under the French education system, much of it inherited by Vietnamese universities, law and economics are taught in the same faculty. Professor Han, a 31-year-old Masters graduate in economics from the University of Pennsylvania, said only in recent years has the faculty offered a full four-year course.

«Next year we are offering a third year of economics,» he says. «The previous program was highly academic and theoretical, whereas the new program will be much more business-oriented. We are trying to recruit professors as well as improve the curriculum. We have talked to the presidents of private and government banks. They seem willing to lend their

time to help the students. We plan to send students to Saigon for brief on-the-job training programs with the Labor Ministry. This goes along with our plan to introduce more business courses.

«We are trying to orient the students towards a practical career. We are planning more seminar courses to acquaint students with the various legal procedures. During Tet all of Hue's courts were destroyed. For 18 months there were no trials. All the legal files were destroyed. Now we are able to take the students into court again. And we are asking American experts to come here and demonstrate full court trials with a mock jury.»

Emphasis on Research

Professor Han grinned with pride as he described the emphasis the faculty puts on research. «The Bureau of Economic Research here helped in the reports submitted by the Postwar Planning Group and the Joint Development Group. Our students went out into the countryside and interviewed hundreds of people for the information subsequently used by Dr. David Lilienthal, Dr. Fred Moore and Professor Vu Quoc Thuc. We have probably the best collection of available data on the economy of Vietnam. We hope to receive more funds for research dealing with the economic integration of the region, perhaps enabling us to act as a liaison center for the countries of the Far East. We plan to study the feasibility of a Common Market for Southeast Asia. And this October Dean Hai is opening a new Bureau of Legal Studies for South Vietnam, China, Indonesia, Japan and Malaysia. We hope through this work to meet the practical needs of the country and the region. We want to use our talents for economic development.»

Headway also is being made in the field of science. Rector Chau calls the new applied science program, scheduled to begin in October, «a very big break» for the university.

«We are extremely happy about it,» he says. «From the beginning we decided to involve the people of Hue and Thua Thien province in the program. We made an appeal to the population to help us in changing our science curriculum into more practical programs. We wanted the views of people not necessarily involved in higher education. We invited the help of engineers, civil servants, people working in the Ministries of Economy and Agriculture and — most important — the people who otherwise would remain isolated from the academic community: business people, shopkeepers, parents of students. We sent out hundreds of invitations and we invited them by radio and television. We asked them to attend our seminars or to send us their views, their past experiences. We received hundreds of letters, really very moving letters.

«Until now our science program has been teaching botany, general physics and so forth, all giving the students theoretical knowledge. Our program in geology, for instance, taught general knowledge

Higher education takes healthy position

An Assessment



Rector Le Thanh Minh Chau hands out diploma to laureate during graduation ceremony of the Faculty of Pedagogy.

about the soil — not the soil of Thua Thien or of South Vietnam, but the soil of the United States! There was no possibility for practical application of this knowledge to the problems we face here. Now we are offering programs of study in what is happening here, what kind of soil, what kind of crops, what untapped resources we have, what the mining prospects are in Thua Thien and South Vietnam.

«Some of the country's top engineers, the highest salaried men, have offered to come here for meager wages to teach our students the new programs. With the engineers and the students working together, we can solve current problems affecting us. This is real involvement that fits into a kind of national framework.»

Foreign educators watching the progress of Hue and the other universities in Vietnam agree that the period since the 1968 Tet offensive has seen more advances in higher education than the previous decade. In fact, European, American and Asian scholars are inclined to applaud progress in Vietnamese higher education more often and more enthusiastically than the Vietnamese themselves. Most foreign educators generally contend that in view of the tremendous problems facing a government at war, a government with a limited budget, educational progress is the Republic of Vietnam is well worth commending.

«Higher education in Vietnam is taking a healthy position,» says Dr. Howard Holland, U.S. adviser on higher education. «Certainly Rector Chau is a dynamic leader who feels all the right things about education. And he has his deans with him, working closely.

«Hue University has a very good future. The vision of the administration is much more realistic. With increasing communications, better transportation and the introduction of transistor radios and television, more and more Vietnamese are getting the idea that life can be better. Sooner or later the realization that life should be made more liveable, more broadly humane, will require more practical programs, as well as the scholarly ones, throughout higher education.

«If there is going to be a broadening of the base of national leadership, there must be a constantly improving system of higher education. Vietnam must have educated people if it is to take its proper place in the world community. It must have trained professors who know how to teach business and industrial leaders. There must be an indigenous production of professors in Vietnam. They cannot all go to the United States or France or Germany.

«The pursuit of higher education must be South Vietnam's No. 1 priority in the postwar years. I think today's university administrators are very wise now in trying to predict what is going to happen. For example, Rector Chau and 60 other outstanding administrators in higher education met last year at Nha Trang to talk about the common problems they face. They discussed the problems of requiring a second language of students, of dealing with student affairs, the problem of a credit system so educators and students can accumulate credit hours toward building an educational package. They recommended the appointment of a committee to determine policy for higher education on a national basis, and recommended that each university be assigned a specific role in national educational development and moder-

nization. They discussed the institution of basic courses common to all faculties. And they discussed the university's relationship to the community.

«The people in Hue and Thua Thien are being more closely drawn to the central government, and Hue University is helping that process. I did not always think that. But every day it becomes more clear that the people in Hue are achieving a closer relationship with the people elsewhere in this country. Certainly that is a proper function of a national educational system.»

Rector Chau recognizes that despite current progress his university still has many problems facing it. «Our scholarship program,» he says, «does not go far enough. We should have a scholarship program that reaches out into the countryside. Our program is too conservative. I would like a program where we go out and interview, where we seek out talent, where we might give the youngsters a chance to break away from their environment.

Rector Chau on Problem

«I think we need a work-study program here at Hue. Most students come from the lower economic strata. I don't want to simply hand them scholarships — I want them to work in the library or elsewhere in the university, I want to bring these people to the city to do work complementing their studies.

«We need better housing for students. We have some housing for male students, and this coming year we hope to build a dormitory for 70 girls. But it is not nearly enough. Most students stay with relatives or friends. Most homes are very crowded and the study situation becomes very difficult in a home full of children.

«I think we should have stronger support in our efforts to train potential teaching staff and upgrade the skills and qualifications of our present teachers. This is particularly important in an isolated university such as Hue. Every now and then our teachers should be able to go abroad — to break away from the small-town atmosphere. Our Faculty of Medicine has submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Education asking that the military release talented medical graduates to allow them to travel to foreign countries to learn new medical techniques and then return here to teach. It concerns us that we are not able to fill out our teaching staff, but the military obligation makes our job very difficult.

«There should be some kind of program to allow freedom for young professors to develop, to study, to grow, to move up in the academic community. We should be allowed to select at least 10 or 15 each year to be sent abroad until the nation has a sufficient number of people who have received their doctorates. Only then will we finally be able to focus our attention on the real job — training our young people to live with and to solve the complex problems that face us as a nation.»

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