Jews for Jesus free speech

The Tech

The university and society

Two weeks ago, Harvard University President Derek Bok did something which no other university president has tried to do. On March 9, Bok issued a statement entitled "Reflections on the Economic Responsibilities of the University in Society: An Open Letter to the Harvard Community" in which he outlined how he felt the university should approach certain issues such as South Africa and the Nestle's boycott. Although his letter was aimed specifically at Harvard, his comments are relevant to all universities and their constituents in how they educate.

A foundation for dealing with the issues

The bulk of Bok's statement is devoted to setting a foundation for dealing with the issues. He states that universities must consider not only their responsibilities to society, caused by their activities, but also their responsibilities to their students and faculty. He goes on to say that universities must take a position, but also the negative indirect effects which might result from taking a position. He notes that if the university has an official position on an issue, a student is entitled to a separate hearing if they feel the position is inappropriate.

Also, taking certain positions could lead to financial losses and economic collapse of the university, according to Bok. Finally, he notes that the deliberations required for the university to decide its position could take “hundreds and hundreds of hours . . . away from regular academic pursuits.”

The really controversial part.

The difficult part is handling issues which lie between the two extremes of “harmful” and “innocuous.” Bok also states “neither as stockholders nor as purchasers nor as contractors of services do universities possess sufficient leverage. to approach certain issues such as South Africa and the Nestle’s boycott. The really controversial part."

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