What is a college president?
Critics lament that more and more colleges are run by "men of management rather than ideas. Here is a good, old-fashioned idea man.

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What is a college president?

ICY WINDS of the North and South Poles have weathered the rugged, handsome face of Dr. Laurence M. Gould. The civilian chief of the U.S. expedition to the Antarctic in 1957-58 is, at 63, one of the world's legendary explorers. Fifteen years ago, he "reluctantly" gave up teaching geology to become president of Carleton College in Northfield, Minn. He misses teaching, but he has found that "discovering good teachers is a college president's reward. You do well to turn up three great ones in a lifetime." He is now busy raising $10 million by '62 to increase faculty salaries and expand the 1,000-student capacity to 1,300.

Dr. Gould dons his academic gown, symbol of the scholar, before entering chapel.
Isolated Carleton has been called a "coed monastery"

The big, competitive race to get into college is on in full force at Carleton. During the past two springs, upwards of 1,300 high-school seniors have applied for entrance to the small (300) freshman class. This entails some personal ordeals for Laurence Gould, whose office phone shrills with calls from disturbed parents and alumni who beg, or demand, that he admit their children. ("People think every problem in a small college must be handled by the president," he says ruefully.)

A big Carleton attraction, apart from high academic standards, is a democratic, relaxed social life. Fraternities and sororities have been abolished. No student is permitted to drive a car. Northfield, nearby, is a sleepy Minnesota town that offers few gay diversions, and the big twin cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul are 40 safe miles away. This isolation turns Carleton, to quote Dr. Gould himself, into something of a "coed monastery," where study is undistracted and fun must take place on campus.

Topflight concert artists, lecturers and jazz musicians of Duke Ellington caliber come through with commuter-train regularity, but still some students grouse that life is "too monastic." Lamented one boy, "You take a girl out once, and you're going steady." A dean suggests, "Why not have a social revolution at dances and bring back the good old stag line? You have so much initiative in your studies. Why not in your social life?"

To lampoon student activities in Dr. Gould's college, a handful of young Carletonians set up the elaborate live comic strip above, with the new library as backdrop. At far left, the perenially egocentric BMOC, in a "C" sweater, suffers the attentions of pretty women. Perched in the tree in striped sweater is the Hi-Fi Addict, whose records, turned up loud, make form life hideous. The All American Coed, who rockets around the carless campus on a bicycle, wears her daytime uniform—sweat shirt and dirty tennis shoes. Next is the Male Fashion Plate, correctly Ivy League down to derby and umbrella; behind him, the frantic All-Around Athlete, driven to go out for football, hockey, tennis, EVERYTHING. On the topmost branch of the tree snoozes the Sackhound, for whom sleep is life's greatest joy. Below, three guitar players sing folk songs, flanked by a Nature Boy, left, and a studious Bookie, right. The Big Campus Politico wields his gavel, while the Bridge Hounds, just behind, silently play their umpteenth rubber. Young Lovers (kneeling) find indispensable a blanket and beer-filled cooler, which they tote to the wooded privacy of the college arboretum. At right are two extreme female types—the Campus Belle, parasoled and petticoated, and the grimly earnest Modern Dancers in leotards.
His is a warm, fatherly presence

A good small college, thinks Dr. Gould, offers a student “excellence plus intimacy.” There can be free, friendly intellectual and social contact between faculty and students. "I went to a big state school," he says, "the University of Michigan, where I was a spectator of events. But smallness itself is no virtue—some of the worst education in America is being given in small colleges!"

His personal relations with Carletonians, past and present, are warm and paternal (he has no children of his own). An able young junior, worried about financial problems, found herself one day in the President’s office, chatting about her troubles. "I don’t know how Dr. Gould found out," she says, "but all my life I’ll remember that this very busy, important man took time out to worry about me."

In the college paper, Dr. Gould is often cartooned affectionately as a penguin (a large stuffed emperor penguin adorns his living room). On “Larry Gould Day” each spring, faculty and students break out in red wearing apparel, honoring his remark that "I like any color as long as it’s red." But study is the biggest campus preoccupation. Courses are stiff; the emphasis on the humanities is strong. More than half of the seniors go on for graduate work in universities. The class of ‘60 alone reaped eight Woodrow Wilson Fellowships, six National Science Foundation Scholarships and at least two Fulbright Scholarships. Dr. Gould’s one concern about his hard-working scholars: "We’ve created a generation whose chief aim is security, in a world which is changing so rapidly that security is impossible."

Photographed by JAMES HANSEN
Men become presidents of the nation’s 1,800 colleges and universities by curious routes. The guardians of the nation’s young brains range from a theologian like Dr. Nathan Pusey of Harvard to a general named Eisenhower, who ran Columbia for a spell. Dr. Gould points out that both his own scientific and presidential careers were rather “accidental.” He had set out to study law, at Michigan, when a topflight geology professor hired him part time to stoke his furnace. Thus was his interest in science whetted. By 1928, at 32, he went off to explore the Antarctic for two years, as second in command to Adm. Richard Byrd, who named an icy peak “Mt. Gould” for him. In 1957-58, he was the driving power behind U. S. Antarctic explorations during the International Geophysical Year.

“I feel best in weather that makes me shiver,” Gould says, and those isolated months, he feels, “refreshed me both mentally and physically. A college administrator needs sabbatical leaves just as much as teachers do. It is easy to get so involved in the job that you lose proportion. As a teacher, you can absorb spiritual energy from your students. As president, you are constantly giving out.”

Over and above his international reputation as a polar scientist, Gould is one of America’s most influential academicians: national president of Phi Beta Kappa, a trustee of the Ford Foundation and of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, a member of the National Science Board. These posts take him away from campus for long stretches, as does fund raising. A consummate artist at extracting large sums of money from donors, he has almost singlehandedly raised half the $10 million Carleton desperately needs for such physical improvements as new dormitories, physics and biology labs, a campus theater. Gould admirers often say he has the talent to be “anything,” from a big industrial tycoon to a U. S. senator. But education is his overriding concern. “Our civilization will perish,” he said recently, “unless the scholar replaces the salesman as its spokesman. We pay lip service to spiritual values in America—but we give top priority to mink coats and Cadillacs.” And: “There is no excuse for a small private college any more, unless it specializes in excellence and sets standards. Free of political control, it can experiment with curriculum and ideas and be a bearer of values. If America’s academic life accepts the mores of the market place, we are really sunk.”
His joy: "finding teachers"

"Most of my time (and my most important function)," says Gould, "is spent talent scouting for teachers. I look for lively young men who show promise of becoming great scholars. Even if they leave us eventually and go on to places like Harvard, we've had the best years of their lives." In his 15-year tenure, he has hired 90 per cent of Carleton's yeasty young faculty of 110 (average age 41), and $3.7 million of his fund-raising campaign will go toward upping their salaries. Says mathematician Kenneth May, "Gould runs an administration free of red tape. This leaves you plenty of free time for research. The peaceful atmosphere is also ideal for a scholar's big job: just thinking."

Benevolent Gould hears out opinions at faculty meeting. His stimulating reaction to a good idea, they say, is: "It's great!"