

CHANGES IN THE SOCIETY:
RETOOLING FOR THE STUDENTS OF TOMORROW*

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Although I have been toiling in the vineyards of higher education for a good many years now, and speaking for decades on the nature of changing student populations and the implications for higher education, this is probably one of the most difficult speeches I have ever been asked to prepare and deliver -- difficult to deliver because it is on a very serious topic coming at the end of a long day or work, travel, drinks, and dinner. Not exactly the humorous or relaxing stuff of after-dinner speeches. I am going to deal with that problem by promising to speak for exactly 28 minutes -- not one minute longer.

[The reasons I have found this speech difficult to prepare are , ironically, the polar opposites of the difficulties with most speeches. The usual problems are these:

1. Finding up-to-date and accurate information. That was not the problem with this speech. There is more good data on the demographics of changing student populations, especially minorities, than on any topic I've ever worked on. The problem is that most people in this audience are familiar with the facts -- maybe not the

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latest and maybe not with great precision, but I would guess that everyone in this room knows the general dimensions of the demographics. A decreasing population of 18-24 year olds, increasing numbers of adult part-time students, stagnation with respect to college entrance, retention, and graduation of minorities, and good progress on closing the gap between men and women in obtaining a college education.

Most of you have heard the forecasts that by the year 2000, one-third of all school-age children will be black, Hispanic, American Indian, or Asian American. You know that if things do not change, the likelihood of these children going to college is slim, except for the Asian American group. The educational pipeline is full of wasteful leaks, spilling minorities out of school at a much faster rate than whites all the way along the line, leaving minorities underrepresented in all levels of education.

All of you are probably aware that adults over the age of 25 have been entering college in increasing numbers; they now constitute nearly 40 percent of the students in higher education. Most of them are part-time and female. Those figures have been well-publicized, and most people know that college student populations are much more diverse than they were even a decade ago on almost every dimension that you can think of -- age, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, academic achievement, etc.

Because it seems to me that we have done a good to excellent job of disseminating information about the demographics of changing student populations, I am not going to spend much time tonight presenting "Gee Whiz" projections of what the future will look like. I

think you know that the college student population is changing in dramatic ways, and I think you know the general direction of those changes.

2. The second challenge to speakers in general lies in defining the problem clearly and coming up with some good concrete ideas about what to do about it. That is a problem in tonight's topic, not because we lack definition or recommendations, but because we are awash in recommendations. I had only to turn around to my bookshelf to pull out more recent reports of special commissions and task forces than I could possibly read, each with good up-to-date information, and sound, thoughtful, concrete recommendations about what higher education should do to prepare for the dramatic and inevitable changes in the complexion, cultures, ages, and academic backgrounds of the changing student population. The WICHE Regional Policy Committee on Minorities in Higher Education (1987) gave us five goals, 20 recommendations, and even more numerous sub-recommendations. The Commission on Minority Participation appointed by the American Council on Education and the Education Commission of the States gave us seven core strategies and assured us that "if followed, {these strategies} will lay the groundwork for success" (ACE/ECS, 1988, p. 21).

The most recent report on the subject of minority participation in education entitled *One-Third of a Nation* (ACE/ECS, 1988) confronted my problem when they finished their report this Spring, concluding with these words, "Countless hours have been spent trying to create a new vision for increasing the participation of minority citizens in American society. The final report is testimony

to the difficulty of finding new things to say on this subject. It also is a tribute to the importance of investing adequate time in the building of a new commitment to an old agenda." (p.31). "Build a new commitment to an old agenda," "work harder," "rededicate ourselves," "redouble our efforts" -- these are the recommendations of most of the reports, and certainly they appear to be necessary.

Having grown up cursed or blessed by the Protestant Work Ethic, I'm not one to knock the notion that hard work on noble causes will eventually triumph. That is a notion that seems to be shared by all the report writers, but none of us know now to rekindle old fires or how to build new commitments to an old agenda. We've tried appealing to both the ideals of social justice and the pragmatics of enlightened self-interest. Hodgkinson (1983) puts it starkly, "Retiring white workers will find themselves increasingly dependent on a work force heavily composed of minorities to pay their Social Security trust funds. Businesses seeking new employees... will be increasingly dependent on minority workers and on the educational system that educated them, from kindergarten to college. The motives for whites working with minority students and workers in the end of this decade will be neither political liberalism nor noblesse oblige -- it will be enlightened self-interest." (p. 15). The data as well as the arguments have been seen so often that we seem to have developed an immunity to their appeals. Thus, this speech will not be primarily an exhortation to work harder at the old agenda.

3. The third challenge a speaker relies on to keep attention and stimulate thought lies in exploring differences in perspectives,

arguments, and data. There are no major differences among researchers and writers on this topic, no opposing schools of thought, not even much argument over data -- unless you wish to become involved in the minor controversy of whether we are actually losing ground with respect to the higher education of minorities or only failing to make progress. I have not seen any study or report that advises us that we are on track and all is well. Virtually everyone agrees that we are headed for serious problems in providing equal opportunity to all our citizens, that higher education needs to respond in more sensitive and useful ways to new populations, and that most institutions are not moving fast enough to satisfy the need, which most agree is urgent. As the WICHE report puts it "The trends are clear, and the challenges are inescapable." (p.3).

Now, I think you can see my problem. If I can't present new information, make fresh and insightful recommendations, or explore differing perspectives, what can I do for the next 20 minutes? Maybe I should call for rededication and recommitment to old agendas, and once again present some startling statistics, but bumping up against this problem reminds me of the insight in the words written by Mina Shaughnessy (1977) in the late 1970's when we were all facing discouragement in teaching remedial writing to disadvantaged college students. She wrote, "The keys to their development as writers often lie hidden in the very features of their writing that English teachers have been trained to brush aside with a marginal code letter or a scribbled injunction to "Proofread!" Such strategies ram at the doors of their incompetence while the keys that would open them lie in view. This is not to say that learning to write

as a young adult does not involve hard work, for certainly it does, but only that work must be informed by an understanding not only of what is missing or awry but of why this is so." (p. 6). What is missing or awry in our approach to preparing for the inevitable majority of minorities? Are there some keys that lie in view that would open the doors that we seem to be ramming with injunctions of "urgent" and "work harder?"

I don't know. But after reading dozens of reports and hundreds of recommendations, I concluded that ramming at the doors of educators and policy makers with more data and more recommendations was probably not going to accomplish much. For the purposes of this message tonight, I decided to try several keys that lie in view in most of the reports, but have not often been put in the lock and turned. Before I try those keys, I would like to review briefly what we have been doing to see if there is something awry or any explanation for why the door to adequate preparation for the coming changes in student populations seems to remain stubbornly closed.

For some years now, we in the research community have been advised to disaggregate our data on the quite legitimate grounds that the educational problems for blacks are not the same as those for Hispanics, which differ in turn from those of Asians. Add to that the fact that we have vastly different sub-groups within any Hispanic or Asian or Black category. Add to that the disaggregation of the age groups; the needs and interests of 18 year olds are not those of 38 year olds, nor of 78 year olds. Add to that recent research findings that the learning styles and values of women differ from those of

men, and we have a flood of information that manages to intimidate, by its sheer quantity, all but the most determined of change agents. Were we to be quite precise about what needs to be done, we would end up talking about individuals, each one of whom belongs to many sub-groups, stratified on the basis of age, ethnicity, gender, social class, academic background, etc.

Added to a surfeit of disaggregated descriptive statistics are disaggregated recommendations. It is stylish now to address separate sets of recommendations for action to each agency or institution. The Carnegie Council on Policy Studies (1980) addressed separate recommendations to colleges and universities, states, and the federal government. The recent NIE report (1984) developed recommendations for graduate schools, accrediting agencies and state offices, the research community, and students. The just published ACE report (1988) cast its recommendations to individual institutions, national leaders, elected officials, minority leaders, and education leaders. All of this disaggregation is done with the good and quite reasonable intention of directing specific calls for action to those who can do something about them.

Admittedly, there is still much to be accomplished by individuals and agencies working in their own spheres of responsibility and knowledge, but education is basically a community and societal responsibility. The unexamined assumption of the disaggregated approach is that some place down the road, the reaggregation of all of these separate actions will result in a whole which is at least equal to the sum of its parts.

Once we have disaggregated both data and recommendations, however, I am very much afraid that we have a Humpty-Dumpty -- "All the king's horses, and all the king's men can't put Humpty-Dumpty together again." Picture, if you will, a dedicated band of the king's men, (and women) sincerely committed to putting Humpty-Dumpty together again, each holding a piece of the disaggregated Humpty. All know intimately the size and characteristics of their individual pieces, but few know what the whole Humpty-Dumpty should look like, and unless everyone works together to fit their contributions into the whole, it is unlikely that they will ever get Humpty-Dumpty together again.

We probably have too much fragmented information and not enough shared vision. It is entirely possible that we have carried specialization and disaggregation too far, and that we will have great difficulty getting Humpty-Dumpty together again to serve the common good. We face the additional challenge, I might note, of getting our fragmented Humpty together again in good enough shape that he will cease sitting on the wall, exposing himself to further fragmentation, and get out and meet the world in a more holistic manner.

I am thinking, not just about a college pulled in disjointed directions to serve the new student diversity, but of the fallacy of trying to serve individuals by concentrating on the various needs of the subgroups to which they belong. A black 20-year-old single mother has different needs from a 40-year-old married Hispanic male. There is however, very little point in trying to devise an educational program for the latter by putting together what we know

about the needs of 40-year-old adults with what we know about Hispanics, combined with recent knowledge on gender differences. The whole is not equal to the sum of the parts.

Moreover, we are still doing our research on "unalterable variables" (Bloom,) -- variables such as age, race, and gender, that are easy to measure, but impossible to change. Education, if we are to improve it, should be based on "alterable variables," such as the motivation of students for learning, the past experience of some students with miserable failure in school, the accurate assessment of academic accomplishments, and other variables that educators can influence or change. This is not to say that data on the changing mix of student populations is not useful, for certainly it is. It is to remind ourselves, however, that describing the new mix and even the characteristics of the college students of the 21st century is not a program for action. The action program that must be built will come from shared values and a vision of what we want our educational system to look like. Martin Luther King had the right idea when he had a dream that saw the whole and inspired people to envision that dream and to work to achieve it. But we don't speak of dreams when we seek to prepare for the new student diversity. Even when we implement the numerous and wise recommendations that are coming at us from every commission and task force, we manage to create a very knobby Humpty -- so distorted by our numerous piecemeal add-ons that it is hard to find any meaningful shape to undergraduate education. Instead of working hard to make the various specialized services an integral part of higher education or example, we have simply added an incredible, albeit necessary, array

of special services -- a center for re-entry women, an office of minority affairs, womens' studies, black studies, a course in non-Western cultures, an adult counseling center open at night, and on and on. My point is not that these services are not necessary and desirable, it is that we have not even started the task of making them an integral part of the campus. Often they sit, physically as well as symbolically, at the fringe of campus or curriuclum, add-ons to an already fragmented conglomeration.

This fall, the Berkeley campus became, for the first time in its history, a campus with no racial majority. There is no new majority, with add-ons for minorities. The essence of the campus is its diversity.

Education is not an aggregation of the diversities of our society, with uniquely appropriate treatments devised for each subpopulation. Education is a total community and societal responsibility. The key to unlock the door for the students of the future lies in view I think, but I believe it calls for some transformations in the way we are looking at the question of providing for a future in which diversity will be the order of the day.

I am going to suggest two shifts in perspective. The first is a shift from viewing student diversity as a **problem** to be solved to looking at it as a **resource** to be utilized. Rather than asking how we can handle the "problem" of diversity in student populations, we should be asking how we can use diversity as an important contribution to the education of citizens who will spend their lives working in a multicultural, multigenerational society. To paraphrase John Kennedy, it is time to ask not only what education can do for

new populations of students, but what their diversity can do for education. Have we considered, for example, how to use the intergenerational classroom as an educational resource, as well as the more obvious question of how to schedule evening classes for adults?

The second shift in perspective that I would like to suggest tonight is an action agenda which calls on each person or agency to go beyond doing what they can in their particular area of expertise. We must ask people to find a partner to help them do what they cannot accomplish by themselves.

Recommendations that are currently addressed to separate agencies might be reformulated to advise, "Ask yourself what prevents you from making the greatest possible impact in your area of responsibility and then identify a partner to work with you toward greater effectiveness. To take an obvious example, neither high schools nor colleges can, by themselves, solve the problem of declining minority applications to college. High schools must prepare students for college, while colleges must reach out to welcome students to appropriate and attractive opportunities. Identifying a common goal and working in partnership to achieve it is a potentially powerful approach to problems that have not yielded to more unilateral efforts. I'm not going to conclude these remarks with a new set of recommendations on how to use diversity as a resource or how to form productive partnerships. Needless to say, both of these transformed perspectives view the coming diversity, not as a set of subpopulations to be accommodated, but as the heart and soul of higher education in the 21st century.

Were I a policy maker thinking about how to plan for the known future, I would encourage actions and programs that pulled people toward a vision of diversity as the new center of education. I would celebrate differences and use them to educate. But if people are to work together toward common ends, there must be some broader vision of what we want education in the 21st century to be. I don't think we will get to that vision by reaggregating our current disaggregations. I can't paint that holistic picture of higher education in the 21st century yet, but I can make a start. My vision of the education that will provide for the new diversity would make each student not only the recipient of education, but a contributor to the education of others. It would have these characteristics:

1. It will offer each student the opportunity to develop his or her talents fully, **and** it will offer all students the opportunity to contribute in some significant way to the community of which they are a part.

2. It will develop an institutional climate in which each student is treated with dignity and respect, **and** it will require that all students treat every other person with respect.

3. It will celebrate diversity and give students the opportunity to learn about cultures and values different from their own, and it will encourage all students to contribute whatever they can to a healthy cultural pluralism.

4. It will create collaborative educational partnerships wherein education providers, credit and non-credit, work together toward the common end of providing educational experiences appropriate to the needs of lifelong learners.

5. It will provide assistance to those who need it, and require it from those who can lend a helping hand.

6 It will impose no barriers to lifelong learning, and it will encourage people to return as often as they wish to revitalize themselves and contribute to the education of others.

7. It will never compromise on quality or standards, and it will encourage everyone in the community to demand high performance of themselves and to expect it from others.

In a curricular approach to using diversity to educate, some campuses are instituting, and sometimes requiring, courses on non-Western cultures -- with occasionally mixed receptions in the college community. Certainly such educational offerings need to make their way beyond controversy to acceptance as important contributions to the education of citizens of the world community. It goes without saying that such courses should be exceptionally well taught, not from the perspective of tit-for-tat -- I've learned about your culture; now you learn about mine -- but so as to challenge students to think of themselves as members of the world community. Some colleges already celebrate their diversity by featuring special events. The celebrations are frequently based on cultural traditions that offer entertainment as well as educational value -- demonstrations of rich variety in food, dance, art, and literature. Womens' studies and feminist scholarship are making significant contributions to the education of both men and women. All of these exposures to the

7. It will never compromise on quality or standards, and it will encourage everyone in the community to demand high performance of themselves and to expect it from others.

The message that I have tried to deliver tonight is that the key that we have been using to open the door on a future dramatically different from the past has been only moderately successful, and it will be even less successful in years to come. The changes to higher education to accommodate the new student populations have been mostly add-ons -- new services, curriculum, and facilities added to a core that remains relatively unaffected.

The change that lies ahead might be likened to education itself. Real learning consists, not just of **adding** more knowledge, but of new knowledge **interacting** with old to transform the whole.

We need a vision of the future that will enable people to give to, as well as to receive from, an education designed for diversity.