

CHALLENGING THE SYSTEM: NEW STUDENTS
TO HIGHER EDUCATION*

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Your theme for this convention is an apt one: Contours of Change. In one way or another--in our personal and professional lives and in the lives of the institutions that we are a part of--we have all felt the exhilaration and excitement as well as the desperation and destruction that extremely rapid social change brings to both individuals and institutions. Such venerable institutions as church, school, and state are taking on new contours as they are shaped to the social milieu of the 1970's. The new shape of things to come is determined simultaneously in a number of ways. Rapid change is usually abrasive as when a rough new force clashes against the solid walls of the old foundations. Sometimes the foundations crack and at other times the sharp edges of the new forces are rubbed smooth. Today, we are seeing a little of each. Educational institutions are gradually taking on new contours, and the rough abrasive tactics of the revolutionary forces are maturing as it becomes clear that some of their sharp new thrusts lack the societal strength to make any real impact on the existing social order. As the contours

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of the old and the new begin to adjust to one another, the forces of change are less abrasive. There is smoother contact and more accommodation and adjustment between forces. But both the old and the new will emerge with changed contours. Hopefully, they will be contours that fit together harmoniously. Certainly education--from preschool through adult education--will be reshaped in the decade ahead.

In my three days with you, I should like to concentrate on the effects of the changes taking place in society that will I believe result in greater and more lasting change in educational practice than will some of the more dramatic thrusts that are so much in our consciousness today. Broadly speaking, the force that will change the contours of education is the force of egalitarianism--the notion that there is no longer a privileged class and that there will be equal opportunity for all. It is to be expected that the egalitarian mood should strike education first since in this country education is the pathway to almost all other opportunity.

This morning, I should like to trace the rise of egalitarianism in the college-going population. This can be talked about under three major headings. First, we must answer the philosophical question of who should go to college? Next, I shall take up the researchable question of who is going to college at present. And finally, when we can say who should go to college and who is going, we are in a position to make some predictions about who will go to college in the decade ahead, and what this should mean for education at all levels. My focus throughout the three days will be on students

and what the presence of what I shall call New Students to post-secondary education will mean to educators. In my formal remarks, at least, I hope to paint a broad picture of new educational contours, operating from my conviction that personnel administrators and counselors should be and will be drawn more and more out of what was once a narrow concern with the out-of-class activities of students into involvement with the total educational program.

Tuesday morning, I shall continue the discussion about the New Student to postsecondary education, and at that point, I will offer a proposal about how his presence should change education and with it the role of the student personnel administrator. On Wednesday morning, I shall conclude my consultation with you by providing a research description on the theme for the day--women.

Let us begin with an analysis of some of the social forces in the country that have made change in educational practices inevitable.

Who Should Go To College? Changing Philosophies

In the history of higher education in this country there have been three major philosophies about who should go to college. At the turn of the century, the majority of college students came from the homes of wealthy aristocracy. Students who attended colleges had money and family social status. Some also had academic interests and abilities; others did not. Basic to the aristocratic philosophy of college admissions, was the premise that the young

people who should go to college were those who could afford it and who needed it to carry out their station in life. The poor, ethnic minorities, and women, it was assumed, would not follow life patterns that really made use of a college education. The colleges that were developed to serve the aristocratic philosophy were private high-tuition colleges. Whether a boy would go to college was predictable from birth. It was a closed system, and some were "in" and others were "out."

Actually, colleges of the aristocracy probably did not give much thought to erecting barriers that would keep people out of college. It simply did not occur to anyone that a young man should attend college if he did not have the money to do so. The thesis is easier to understand when viewed through the meritocratic perspective of our times.

To many, if not most people today, it is unthinkable that a student should attend college if he does not have the ability to benefit from the instruction offered. Only in recent years have we started to question whether the "instruction offered" might change so that it would "benefit" a new segment of the population who wished to attend college. In an earlier day, those who challenged the assumptions of the aristocracy asked the same question, why couldn't colleges change so that a broader segment of the population could attend? And, of course, in the long run colleges did change. But it was not the old colleges that had been developed to meet the needs of the

aristocracy that changed first. The challenge came, not by breaking down the gates to the aristocratic colleges, but by opening new gates through which a new generation of college students poured so rapidly that the high tuition colleges no longer determined who would be college educated.

The revolt against aristocratic philosophies of college admissions was led by those who maintained that a college education was an earned right, not a birthright. Advocates of the new meritocracy that was ushered in by the land grant universities felt that criteria for college admission should be based upon scholastic ability and the willingness to study hard; i.e., upon academic "merit." Much as the aristocratic colleges had assumed that what they had to offer was static and designed for an elite portion of the population, so the colleges of the meritocracy assumed that there was a certain fairly small portion of the population that had the ability to benefit from what they offered. Considerable attention was given in the late 1940's and early 1950's to the determination of the size of this group. The President's Advisory Commission on Higher Education of 1947 estimated that 49 percent of the population could profit from at least two years of post high school education and that at least 32 percent had the capacity for a normal 4-year college course. After considering this figure in conjunction with the observation that, "...most experts estimate that about 25 percent of the population can do college work profitably," Hollinshead's report for the Commission on Financing Higher Education concluded that, "...perhaps 35 percent of youth might

be expected to profit substantially from formal full-time post high school education of the kind given at present by such institutions" (Hollinshead, 1952, p. 138).

The rise of the meritocracy was regarded by almost everyone as a move that, in the best traditions of the country, led to the democratization of higher education. There is no little irony in the fact that while the advocates of the meritocracy were zealously breaking down the barriers imposed by the aristocracy they were quite consistently erecting their own barriers. And academic aptitude tests were the instruments that served both to destroy the old aristocracy and to erect the new barriers of the meritocracy. The "talent searches" of the 1950's were active campaigns to bring into the colleges those who did not meet aristocratic criteria but who were the epitome of meritocratic ideals. The very good student who was the son of the immigrant cobbler was the hero of the meritocracy--no money, no family social status, but lots of academic talent and a willingness to work hard.

Now once again we find ourselves in a period of philosophical transition regarding the question of who should go to college. Once again, there is pressure to democratize higher education by bringing it within the reach of a broader segment of the population. Once again there are demands for new answers to the old question of what proportion of the population the

colleges should serve. The egalitarian challenge to the meritocracy looks strikingly familiar. The nature of the questions raised as well as the patterns of instituting change are not unlike those of a century ago. A new sector of the public is being represented by new students in colleges and universities. This group of New Students to higher education are repeating history by entering the system, not so much by breaking down the barriers erected by the meritocracy, although there is some of that, but by flocking to a new kind of a college dedicated to serving a different clientele.

It appears that in 1970, the prevailing attitude in the country is still largely meritocratic, but there are signs everywhere of a straining at the barriers. The mingling of meritocratic and egalitarian philosophies is the occasion of considerable controversy among educators as well as in the popular press. The sign of the times is illustrated by a headline reading: "Open Admissions: American Dream or Disaster?" (TIME, October 19, 1970). At the same time that the formerly selective, tuition-free City University of New York was instituting egalitarianism by throwing open its doors to all 1970 New York City high school graduates, regardless of academic "qualifications," the 1970 President's Task Force on Higher Education was embracing meritocracy and attempting to clear away the last vestiges of the aristocratic era by recommending financial aid to "students of all races who have the desire and ability to profit from

post high school education..." (emphases added). John Gardner has asked, can we be equal and excellent too? Can egalitarianism and meritocracy coexist? What happens to the value of the college degree when everyone has one? Is there some fixed concept that represents "college" that will permit us to say who should attend? Should higher education serve those who can "profit" from traditional offerings or is there an obligation to change the offerings to meet the needs of those who wish to attend college?

Almost everyone wishes to attend college today--a simple fact of life that means most voters want college education for their children. On the eve of the egalitarian phase of college admissions, we find ourselves concerned about how to get young people into college rather than about how to keep them out.

As a matter of fact, in the decade just past, we have given considerably more attention to the procedures of getting New Students into college than we have to the educational questions of what to do with them once there. When colleges maintain the right to select who shall study with them, an educational "match" can be made by choosing students who fit the college. When colleges forego the right to select, the match has to be made by designing educational programs to fit the students. To date, we have concentrated on making New Students over into

the image of traditional students so that they may be served by traditional education. Our concern has been the creation of access models to education.¹ We have devised all kinds of ways to make New Students eligible to participate in traditional higher education. Remedial courses are designed to remove academic "deficiencies"; counseling removes motivational "deficiencies"; financial aid removes financial "deficiencies."

If the answer to the question, who should go to college, is to be an egalitarian response of "everyone," then the task ahead will involve the recognition that educational systems will have to be designed to fit the learning needs of New Students. Who are the New Students? Under an egalitarian philosophy of 14 years of schooling for everyone who wants it, New Students will be high school graduates who are not now continuing their education. Research provides some information about who is going to college now, and this enables us to look at the reservoir of New Students--those who will be entering some form of postsecondary education in the 1970's.

Who Is Going To College? Some Barriers to Attendance

Who are the young people who are entering college today? And as the corollary, who are the young people who are not entering college? Most laymen recognize that bright high school

1 For a discussion of some alternatives, see Cross, 1971.

graduates are more likely to continue their education than those who have had to struggle for grades throughout high school, that doctors' sons are more likely than laborers' sons to attend college, that whites are more likely than blacks, and men are more likely than women to seek further education. These elements of the folk wisdom about who goes to college can be cast into more precise and accurate information through research.

Two dimensions that researchers have been able to measure seem to hold primary roles in explaining who goes to college, where they go, and even how long they stay. Socioeconomic status (SES), which includes measures of family occupation and parental education, and academic ability are the two most powerful measures we have of who goes where to college.

Some of the most important data extant on the interrelationships between SES and ability in college attendance rates have been presented by Schoenfeldt (1968) for Project TALENT high school graduates of 1961, and by Dr. Thomas Hilton who analyzed ETS Growth Study data for 1967 high school graduates using the same scheme of tabulation.

TABLE 1

Probability of High School Graduates in 1961 and 1967
Entering Some Form of Postsecondary Education

Ability Quarter	Socioeconomic Quarter							
	1 - Low		2		3		4 - High	
	1961	1967	1961	1967	1961	1967	1961	1967
<u>Male</u>								
1 - Low	21	48	28	55	30	40	51	65
2	37	57	47	58	51	69	61	79
3	47	74	52	77	66	79	82	88
4 - High	69	82	83	89	87	93	93	94
<u>Female</u>								
1 - Low	14	39	25	41	26	55	39	60
2	26	40	27	44	41	64	57	76
3	38	52	51	58	54	77	76	86
4 - High	58	69	66	77	84	88	91	95
Sources: 1961 graduates, with 1962 follow-up, Schoenfeldt, 1968. 1967 graduates, with 1968 follow-up, ETS Growth Study data analysis by Hilton.								

Table 1 shows the two sets of data side by side. The two sets of data were not designed to be comparable, but we can be rather certain of some things. For example, the probability is extremely high that the son of a surgeon who has been an A student in high school will continue his education. For young people ranking in the top quartile on both SES and ability there is little difference between the two sets of data. Almost all of this group enter college, there has been little change over the past decade; i.e., it has reached the saturation point. The 6 or 7 percent of this highly privileged group who don't attend college may be prevented from doing so by illness or other unusual emergencies. In 1970 the fact is that very few additional college students are to be expected from among high school graduates high in both academic aptitude and socioeconomic status.

At the other extreme are the doubly disadvantaged, those scoring in the lowest quartile on both SES and ability. The lowest probability for college attendance occurs in the cells in the upper left hand corner of the tables. For example, in the 1961 TALENT sample, 21 out of 100 lowest quarter SES males who also scored in the bottom fourth of the class on a test of academic ability entered some form of postsecondary training following high school graduation; for women it was only 14 percent.

At the beginning of the decade of the 60's we could predict with fairly reasonable accuracy the probability of continued education for young people in the extreme cells of Table 1. For men, for example, we would have been correct 93 times out of 100 in predicting that a high-ability, high SES student would enter postsecondary education; we would have been correct 79 times out of 100 in predicting that a low-ability, low SES student would terminate his formal education with a high school diploma.

The effectiveness of the meritocracy of the 1960's is clearly evident in the 1967 ETS Growth Study data. We can predict that an extremely high percentage of boys who make high test scores will embark upon postsecondary training--almost all of them in 2- or 4-year colleges--in the 1970's; 82 percent of the males in the top ability quarter of the ETS sample continued their formal education after high school graduation in 1967 even if they ranked in the lowest SES quartile. The handicap of low socioeconomic status was not as serious for boys in 1967 as the handicap of low academic ability. If a boy met meritocratic standards of above-average school achievement--as measured by traditional academic aptitude tests--he was very likely to continue his education. Over 80 percent of the boys who ranked in the upper half of the class academically were going on to college.

Women have not yet emerged from the aristocratic era of college admissions. Their probability of college attendance is influenced as much by socioeconomic factors as it is by the achievement factors of the meritocracy. The greatest discrepancies between the college-attendance rates of men and women exist among high ability students who are below average in socioeconomic measures. A bright but poor male has a better chance of continuing his education than has his equally able sister. Much of the difference can be attributed to parental attitudes. Census Bureau interviewers found that the higher the educational level of the parents, the less they were likely to distinguish between the educational needs of sons and daughters. For example, 73 percent of the mothers with a grade school education wanted college for their sons, but only 60 percent expressed the same desire for their daughters. Among mothers who had attended college, there was virtually no difference in the education desired for males and females--98 percent wanted sons to go to college and 97 percent wanted college for their daughters (Froomkin, 1970). The large increases in college attendance for women are now coming from the ranks of above-average students from all socioeconomic levels, as women continue toward the peak of the meritocratic era in college attendance. For men, the meritocratic phase has passed its peak and in the decade of the 70's, the major increases in college attendance will come from lower-ability men.

As we move into the egalitarian phase of college admissions, the remnants of the earlier aristocratic and meritocratic phases can be observed. Both SES and academic aptitude have powerful influences on who goes to college. The effect is especially potent when they occur in combination. Young people, men and women, in the upper half in both ability and SES have a high probability of continuing their formal education--at least three-fourths are doing so. Young people in the lower half on both ability and SES are not as likely to continue their education, but for boys, over half are embarking upon some form of postsecondary training; for lower-half women about four out of ten high school graduates are pursuing further education.

Who Will Go To College? New Students To Higher Education

The decade from 1965-1975 is likely to be highly significant in the annals of education because it provides the perspective from which we can identify the aristocracy as outgoing, the meritocracy as prevailing, and egalitarianism as the mood of the future.

National statements of policy formulated in the 1960's support the prevailing meritocratic criteria for determining who shall have the opportunity for postsecondary education by phrases such as "...identify qualified youths of financial or cultural need with an exceptional potential for postsecondary educational training

and encourage them to complete secondary school and undertake postsecondary educational training" (Public Law 90-575, October 16, 1968, emphases added). But federal programs have also launched the beginning of an egalitarian era with programs for the disadvantaged which "are designed to generate skills and motivation necessary for success in education beyond high school" through the provision of special or remedial services for students "of deprived educational, cultural, or economic background or physical handicaps, [who] are in need of such services to assist them to initiate, continue, or resume their postsecondary education" (Public Law 90-575).

The emphasis of the 1960's was on access. The goal was to move young people toward traditional postsecondary education through supplying money, incentive, and remediation of past educational deficiencies so that New Students would have the same educational opportunities as traditional students. Partly because of the success of this effort in the 1960's, the task of the 1970's will be accommodation of education to the needs of students who gained admission through access programs. The emphasis will change from moving students toward higher education to moving education toward students. The 1970's has brought the realization that success at academic tasks in the past is not an infallible predictor of success in the future, especially when past

opportunities for learning have not been equal for groups of differing locales, ethnic backgrounds, and socioeconomic status.

The press is strong for an egalitarian philosophy of access to postsecondary education. Egalitarians maintain that anyone who has the desire to pursue further education should be helped to do so, regardless of economic resources and regardless of past academic achievement. If the meritocracy is ebbing and egalitarianism is on the rise, who will go to college?

The description is not quite accurate, but it is generally conceded that we have, in this country, a system of universal secondary education wherein young people who are physically and mentally able to attend high school do so. In reality only about 80 percent of the young people graduate from high school. If we assumed that universal higher education existed when it became as common as high school graduation is today--i.e., when 80 percent of the high school graduates continued their education--then we might construct a hypothetical egalitarian form of Table 1, wherein every SES-ability cell had an 80 percent postsecondary education attendance probability. Eighty percent of those in the top quarter on both SES and ability would continue their education, and 80 percent of those in the bottom quarter on both indices would also continue in some form of post-secondary education.

Table 2 shows the reservoir of potential New Students to higher education. It is obtained by subtracting the percentages in each cell of Table 1 (the reality) from 80 (practical egalitarianism).

TABLE 2				
The Hypothetical Reservoir of Potential Students for the Attainment of Egalitarian Postsecondary Education				
<u>Ability</u>	<u>Socioeconomic Status</u>			
	1 - Low	2	3	4 - High
<u>Male</u>				
1 - Low	32	25	40	15
2	23	22	11	1
3	6	3	1	--
4 - High	--	--	--	--
<u>Female</u>				
1 - Low	41	33	25	20
2	40	36	16	4
3	18	12	3	--
4 - High	11	3	--	--
Source: 80 percent minus the percentage in each cell of the 1967 ETS Growth Study data presented in Table 1.				

Quite clearly, most of the New Students would come from rows 1 and 2--the lower half of the class academically. There would be almost no additional males from the upper half of the class, but there would be a fairly large number of women who stand in the top half of the class academically--almost all of them from the lower half of the socioeconomic scale.

Who will go to college? New Students to higher education will be students whose performance at academic tasks in the past has been below average. Low academic ability, as that ability is traditionally nurtured and measured in the schools will be their distinguishing characteristics. We need to turn our attention to the complicated problems of designing educational programs that will educate those who have been relatively untouched by instructional programs of the past. Institutions of higher education are not now prepared to teach New Students. Nothing in our experience of designing educational programs has prepared us to think about whether the present meritocratic goals--i.e., high academic achievement--are compatible with egalitarian access. Do we plan to admit everyone, but graduate only those who meet meritocratic standards? Perhaps the place to start conceptualizing the enormous task before us is with achieving a better understanding of the characteristics of New Students.

For the past year, I have been engaged in writing a book describing the abilities, attitudes and interests of New Students. For the purposes of the research description, New Students were defined as those scoring in the lowest third of samples of high school seniors on traditional tests of academic aptitude. A brief capsule profile of the characteristics of New Students would read something like this:

Most New Students are Caucasians whose fathers work at blue-collar jobs. A substantial number, however, are members of minority ethnic groups. The great majority of fathers have never attended college and the expectation of college is new to the family. Those who constitute the New Student pool of high school graduates have not been especially successful at their studies in high school. Whereas traditional college students (upper third) have made A's and B's in high school, New Students tended to make mostly C's. Traditional students are attracted primarily to 4-year colleges and universities, whereas New Students plan to enter public community colleges or vocational schools.

Fundamentally these New Students to higher education are swept into college by the rising educational aspirations of the citizenry. For the majority, the motivation for college does not arise from the anticipation of the joy of learning the things they will be learning in college, but from the recognition that education is the way to a better job and a better life than that of their parents.

The most poignant description of these New Students, perhaps, lies in their past experiences in school. (What follows is a brief summary of research data from Cross, 1971.) Moving through the American school system is a very different experience for students who are in the bottom of the class academically than it is for those who rank in the top third. In the colleges, we have been used to teaching traditional college students who have always been successful in school. Research that traces the development of youngsters from seventh grade through high school graduation shows that about half of those who graduated in the bottom third of the class have been in the bottom third all the way through school, but the other half were in the middle third of the class in seventh grade. Because it is usually the least successful students that drop out of school along the way, average students and below-average students keep falling lower and lower in class standing relative to their more successful classmates. In a sense, there is always room at the bottom. When the last drops out, the next-to-last takes his place. For those in the top third of the class, the experience is quite different. It does not matter much who drops off of the lower end of the scale, the top third remains the top third throughout the school years. In other words, one of the most vivid lessons learned in school is one's relative standing in life. New Students learn gradually that they are "below average" and many learn that they are "failures".

We are just beginning to recognize the all-pervasive effects of these experiences with failure early in life. The research shows clearly the personality syndrome of individuals who are constantly

in the bottom third of the class. These students are more likely than successful students to state that they feel nervous and tense in class and that teachers "go to fast" in class. If given a list of activities with the instructions to check those on which their performance is "above-average", many New Students find no activity--in school or out-- that they can say they do well. For all young people, school is their major business, and the school record is a more public rating of competence that is likely to exist at any other period of life. Half of us, after all, may in any absolute sense be "below-average" on any single dimension, but we have a wide range of options open to us. Some people can be good mothers, some good typists, some good researchers, some good executives, etc. Today's young person has to be a good student, as we define that ability. Is it any wonder that many young people have a sense of failure and futility about them?

There was a time when young people who didn't do especially well in school could leave the scene of their failure and attain adult status and prestige in a variety of other ways. This escape hatch no longer exists, and students are locked for longer and longer periods of time into what has to be a hostile environment. The low-achieving student graduating from high school today is trapped into what psychologists have called an avoidance--avoidance situation in which neither alternative looks very desirable. He doesn't really look forward to more years of study and neither does he want to mortgage the rest of his life

by not continuing his education. Most are opting for the lesser evil--continuing their education. The impact of many thousands of these New Students on postsecondary education has not really been faced by educators. I should like to look at the problems ahead and to propose some possible new directions for institutions and for deans tomorrow.

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