

THE DEAN AND THE NEW STUDENTS*

I find the theme of your conference, "Future Shock: The Incomplete Dean", an intriguing one. I think that my assignment of kicking-off some discussion about the Dean and the New Students is considerably easier than either of the other two questions to which you have addressed yourselves. As big and frightening as the task of preparing for New Students to higher education is, I believe that it is less an unknown quantity than coping with the question of the Dean and the Faculty, for example, where we have little concept of how collective bargaining, statewide super boards of higher education, and the new roles of faculty in the non-traditional studies movement will affect deans and faculty.

We do know the dimensions of our task in preparing for new students. In making that assertion, I don't mean to sound complacent, or worse yet, dull. I simply mean to imply that we know who the new students are and we know something about their needs and aspirations. Such knowledge removes the questions to which I shall address myself today from the realm of shock, but it places them squarely on the list of things to be accomplished. Such placement calls for strong and imaginative leadership--different qualities from those required of deans of students in the 1960's. Successful deans of those years which seem destined to go into the history books euphemistically labeled, the era of campus unrest, had to be flexible, cool under fire, and frankly

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uncommitted to long-range planning and program development. For the dean to have had a well-conceived plan with a time-table for implementation would only have resulted in frustration and the appearance of rigidity in an environment that demanded day-by-day readjustments.

I see a new order of priority for deans whose chief responsibilities lie with students. Of course, the job will still require men and women who enjoy working with young people and who relate well to them with flexibility and openness. But I believe that the successful dean of the 1970's must demonstrate a much stronger base of professional knowledge and expertise about human learning and development. Perhaps the idea is best communicated by calling for higher priority for long-range educational leadership and relatively less emphasis on day-by-day administrative organization.

I believe that we must play a new role as consumer advocates of education. We need to understand the needs and problems of students well enough--through solid research as well as through personal acquaintance--to design and implement the kinds of flexible educational programs that will serve them well. I don't want to push the consumer analogy too far, but we need to be concerned about false advertising, (degrees in the hands of two-thirds of the population won't mean nearly what it did when it was a scarce commodity). We need to give some attention to honest packaging--to make sure that college graduates can do what we say they can do. And we need to work very hard on the improvement of our product--quality higher education.

How do we go about doing these things? I suggest that we take an honest look at where we are now and where we want to be by 1980 with regard to providing valid educational experiences for students.

One of the things to which we have made a national commitment is making

postsecondary education available to all. This goal will bring groups of people into colleges and universities that we have not been especially concerned about heretofore. New students to higher education in the 1970's will consist of all those who have been underrepresented in the past-- ethnic minorities, women, people over the age of 25, and poor students, academically as well as financially.

It is important, I think, to try to understand the reason for the very strong pressures for universal higher education. There was a time when it was logical and efficient to raise the standard of living in this country through devoting our fairly limited resources to the education of a cadre of elite leaders. The major emphasis was on selecting those with the most obvious potential and betting, so to speak, that those winners would make life better for everyone through the use of their knowledge and training. In those years when a single advance of technology had worldwide repercussions, the plan was probably reasonably sound and efficient--even if unfair to individual careers. For it meant, of course, that those who had been most successful in the past were most likely to be given the opportunity for success in the future.

But the needs of the country have changed now. The training of an elite hoard of leaders is no longer the way to raise the national standard of living. It is not so much new knowledge, new ideas and technology that we need as it is broadly-based knowledge, better distribution systems and more concern for individuals. We now believe that the way to accomplish these ends is to provide education for as many people as we can persuade to take advantage of it.

I am going to assume that nationally we want to maximize the opportunities for very diverse types of students to get top value from their education. Campuses may differ in their emphasis on broad missions with maximum diversity versus distinctive missions to serve a targeted group of students. But I am going to address myself to the distinctive needs of four groups of students that create new demands on our national system.

The groups cannot be defined so that they are precise and non-overlapping but I have tried to group them by educational needs rather than by the more common demographic or sociological variables.

The first consists of a group that I have called New Students to higher education. I define New Students as those who have not been successful in education in the past for whatever reasons--disadvantaged home and school backgrounds, interests and talents that are not developed through traditional academic disciplines, different cultural emphases or whatever. The distinctive characteristic of the group is that they have experienced failure in the American school system, and that this has affected their concept of themselves and their future attitudes about learning. This group includes, but is not limited to, ethnic minorities. New Students are those gaining access to higher education through open admissions policies.

The second group placing new demands on higher education consists of part-time adults. By part-timers, I mean anyone whose major responsibilities consists of something other than attending school or college. Under this definition, an 18 year old army private has adult educational needs whereas a single 30 year old full-time graduate student does not. These students are gaining access to higher education primarily through non-traditional studies that deemphasize the time and place requirements of traditional education.

The third group I want to talk briefly about are the so-called traditional college students. They consist of all those that we used to think of as "college material"--young people whose families have traditionally sent their relatively high-achieving sons and daughters off to primarily residential colleges. These students predominate in selective admissions colleges. They are, of course, not new to higher education, but they are making some new demands of colleges. And it is important to take a look at their dissatisfactions and suggestions for reform.

The fourth group cuts across the other three but consists of those who have been discriminated against by educational institutions--primarily ethnic minorities and women. The educational needs of ethnic minorities have much in common with those of New Students; the educational needs of women are likely to fall with traditional students or with adult part-timers. But it is important to recognize that conscious and unconscious discrimination still hinders academically well-prepared ethnic minorities and women from full participation in educational opportunity. The distinctive educational needs of this group are to overcome all forms of discrimination based on the color or shape of one's skin. They are gaining access to higher education through consciousness raising and affirmative action plans.

I have written extensively elsewhere about the characteristics of these various groups as they are revealed through research. Time does not permit recounting those findings here, so what I have tried to do is to put together in my own head what we know about the characteristics and needs of each group and to distill for you what I think the implications are for higher education.

New Students to higher education--defined here as low academic achievers--are not necessarily black or brown or red; most of them are the white sons

and daughters of blue collar workers. The greatest single barrier to college admission in the 1960's was not ethnic identity or socioeconomic status per se. Rather it was lack of demonstrated academic ability--as that ability is nurtured and measured in the schools. Open admissions has changed this. We now have an enormous influx of students into higher education who are not prepared to do college work. It really has not yet occurred to us that it is possible to challenge the meaning of "college work". Our task, as we see it, is to try to make New Students more like the traditional students that we are used to serving so that they can profit from what we happen to offer.

Under this interpretation of our task, one of the major "problems" with New Students is that they lack the motivation for college work--by which we mean that they fail to be interested in subject matter that seems to have a life and sanctity of its own without any clear relationship to the outside world. If New Students had the proper motivation for college, they would appreciate learning for its own sake and not express crass desires for concrete applications of learning to life's problems. And so we launch counseling programs designed to help New Students adjust to college as we know it.

A second problem is that New Students have what we have come to label somewhat pejoratively "non-intellectual" interests and abilities. They prefer fixing a car to reading about how to do it; they prefer interacting with people to studying about them in psychology textbooks. Nevermind that the crying needs in society are for well trained and well educated technicians and people to work with people. College and faculty are so accustomed to defining college in terms of the curriculum and procedures that they forget to

look at fundamental purposes which must be defined through the impact of education on students. We seem unable to view a college-level education that is oriented toward developing the unique strengths of people. What seems not to have occurred to us in our single-minded emphasis on remedial education and counseling programs for New Students is that narrow definitions of academic education are totally inadequate to the tasks of mass higher education. The new goal, after all, is not to place all our bets on the development of an intellectual elite but to use education to improve life for everyone. A narrow hierarchial academic system that by definition results in above-average and below-average people just doesn't do the job. Why can't we define college-level work as outstanding achievement and excellence in diverse accomplishments that capitalize on the talents of individuals and that are useful to the society. I suggest that the lowering of standards that concerns the opponents of open admissions, is not a factor in preparing higher education to meet the needs of New Students. Quite the contrary; we need to raise our standards but to broaden the opportunities for more people to attain high levels of achievement in diverse areas.

I urge you as deans and advisors to students to take a long hard look at where your major energies are going. If you have a staff notably oriented to helping students adjust to college and not one that is qualified to make professional recommendations for helping colleges to adjust to students then I suspect that you may be headed for future shock.

If that is the case, you may wish to join the second group of students new to higher education--the growing numbers of adults who are seeking higher education for a great variety of reasons. They seek to learn new jobs or how

to do old ones better, to use new-found leisure time through learning hobbies or sports, or for personal satisfaction and cultural enrichment. What do we need to think about in higher education in order to accommodate the needs of this new group of students?

Primarily we need revisions in the form of higher education rather than the content that I emphasized so strongly for New Students. We need new methods of delivery to take education into prisons, into homes, and into industrial plants. We need new measures of competency that acknowledge that what is learned rather than how it is learned is the true measure of education. And we need new flexibilities that can begin to make life-long learning a reality.

The non-traditional studies movement arose in answer to these needs, and its rather phenomenal growth can be attributed to timelines on several dimensions. It came into being under the egalitarian philosophy that proposes to improve life in America through education of the masses. Its goal is to abolish discrimination on the basis of age, geographical or physical isolation, and part-time student status. But it also came into being as colleges with tight budgets and leveling off of enrollments noticed a new market out there--with the money, the motivation, and the capacity for college study. A third factor that enhances the growth of non-traditional alternatives is the demands for accountability. Non-traditional education is a bold attempt to challenge many of the false assumptions of traditional education, primarily those related to time and place requirements. No one can put forth a very strong argument that four years, chopped into 120 credit hours delivered to people who can present themselves physically in a room set aside for "classes" makes much sense as the major strategy of education.

The almost frightening challenge of non-traditional alternatives is that education will eventually be measured in terms of competencies rather than in terms of pathways traversed. As soon as we develop the capacity to measure education as a characteristic of student achievements instead of college offerings, we will have a new definition of higher education--one that centers attention on the learner. Someone said it long ago, "One can no more say that something has been taught when nothing has been learned than that something has been sold when nothing has been bought."

The third group of students that deans and advisors must be concerned about are the so-called traditional college students. The most elite of this group have become so disenchanted with the institutions of American society that they have formed a counterculture. And one of the targets of the counterculture is higher education. The student counterculture has voiced their demands for change through confrontation tactics, and when that hasn't been effective, they have occasionally tried pressure within the system, or failing all else have dropped out. Strangely enough these vocal and articulate critics are just the kind of students that traditional higher education was designed to serve. But today these young people, whose college educated parents have been able to give them material advantages as well as an intellectual heritage, claim that higher education is no longer relevant to their personal needs or to those of society.

What do they want? Well, what they say they want is--you'll pardon the expression--greater relevance. One can quibble over the inarticulateness of that word, but I think it is fairly clear that they are asking for problem-oriented education. They want to be able to answer questions--about what to

do to make the world a better place for human beings and about themselves and their role in life. The world seems beset with problems that our great faith in knowledge leads us to believe can be solved. We need a cure for cancer; an answer to the too rapid use of the world's natural resources; individual and collective attention to the problems of the despoiling of the environment. And we desperately need better ways of dealing with the problems of the widening gap between the have's and the have not's. This generation of traditional college students--young people who come from the type of families that historically have sent their sons and daughters to college--have grown up free of pressing worries about material matters. They have been given everything their relatively affluent parents can buy with money, and the problems they see are human and social.

Most young people, rich or poor, want a better life than that of their parents, and for many traditional college students living in suburbia that means less dependence on tranquilizers and alcohol, closer human relationships within the family, less rigid class distinctions between men and women, between blacks and whites, and between the country club set and the family across the tracks. For students interested in those questions, we do indeed seem to be lecturing on navigation while the ship is going down.

Finally, let me say something about the fourth group of new students that deans and advisors to students must be concerned about--those who have been systematically denied full equality of educational opportunity through discrimination on the basis of race, sex, or age. These categories cut across the other three that I have discussed. Individual black students and individual women, for example, will be helped by the reforms suggested for New Students, part-time learners, or the counterculture. And affirmative action plans now have teeth plus consciousness-raising value. But the role

of deans who work with students is extremely complicated with respect to the assimilation of these previously excluded students. So far, personnel deans have taken the leadership (or it has been thrust upon them) for developing the programs that will help students adjust to the college as it exists. The offices of the personnel deans has been the mechanism for turning new students into traditional students through remediation and counseling programs. While deans and counselors prepare ethnic minorities to adapt to the majority culture and help older women to arrange their lives around the procedures of colleges, colleges ease their consciences and continue traditional offerings and practices designed for different students in different times. Only recently have offices of minority affairs started to push hard for changes on the part of the colleges. Admittedly, deans and counselors are in a delicate position. The value of a college education will be enhanced by changes on the part of individual students as well as colleges. Which should modify their ways in a given matter is a problem calling for perspective and judgement. Too often, I fear, the underlying philosophy of the counseling profession has been to accept the need for individual adjustment as a given. In the educational setting, counselors can do more to change the environment than counselor training programs admit. My plea is not to stop helping students find answers to their problems in the environment in which they find themselves. But if most women or most blacks find the same old problem over and over and over again, then it may be that the problem resides in the environment and not in the individual.

In summary, I have tried to present for discussion this morning what I regard as the important dimensions for change in the roles of deans and advisors whose primary concern is students. While I believe that massive

- change is called for, I think we are in for no real shocks. We know the dimensions of the task, what we need to do is to change from the reactive stance of the 1960's to an active role in the 1970's.