

CROSS
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The Impact of Egalitarianism on the
Academic Community

by

K. Patricia Cross

Egalitarianism seems a simple enough concept. Webster defines it as "a social philosophy advocating the removal of inequalities among men." (Alas, in today's sensitized world, Webster would have to be branded a male chauvinist even as he attempts to define equality.)

In America, we like to think that we have always endorsed egalitarianism. And yet, no single trend of the future spells greater change for higher education than the renewed efforts to remove inequalities among persons. Education is regarded as the primary instrument of change for bringing about an egalitarian society. While education will not assure success to the possessor of a college degree, lack of education will almost certainly place an automatic ceiling on social and economic equality. If education is to remove inequalities existing in the larger society, we must first put our own house in order.

What impact will the practice of egalitarianism have on the academic community? It will bring non-whites into an educational system created by whites; it will bring college women into an environment dominated

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by men; it will bring adults onto a campus geared to youth; it will present low-achieving students with the learning tasks created for an academic elite; it will bring relatively conservative lower and middle Americans into the classrooms of politically and socially liberal faculty.

For each of these groups, the academic community as it exists now, presents a different problem. For the purposes of this discussion, I shall identify four groups of people who will be bringing new problems to the campus in the decade ahead. First, there is the group that I have called New Students to higher education--young people who, for a variety of reasons, have a record of poor school achievement (Cross, 1971). The most rapidly increasing segment of higher education consists of students who graduated in the lowest third of the high school class. Open admissions has been higher education's answer to their demands for equality of educational opportunity. Overlapping the membership of this first group, but presenting different problems, are the members of ethnic minorities. The third major group that will gain new opportunities through egalitarianism consists of women. They share the problems of conscious and unconscious discrimination with ethnic minorities, but once again, the problems are sufficiently unique to demand their own solutions. And finally, there is a group of people now gaining access to higher education who may well be the largest numerically of any group yet mentioned--the adults of the society who are ready and willing to capitalize on our idealistic verbiage regarding life-long learning.

New Students. Perhaps the greatest threat to the self concept that higher education has of itself is presented by New Students--students who are entering the mainstream of higher education primarily through the open door colleges. It can be documented that the primary barrier to college entrance during the 1960's was not socioeconomic status or race or sex per se but rather it was low academic achievement--as that achievement is nurtured and measured in the public school system (Cross, 1971). Prior to the mid 1960's, only a minute proportion of students graduating from high school in the lowest academic third even entertained thoughts of going to college. Today, over half of them plan to enter college and tomorrow, as we approach universal higher education, they will constitute close to one-third of the total college population. Two-thirds of these students are first generation college students; their fathers have never attended college. They are predominately the white children of blue-collar workers and, by and large, the academic community is downright hostile toward them and what they represent. For what they represent is a challenge to "academic standards" and a threat to "intellectual values." Their test scores and high school records are adequate testimony to their poor performance at academic tasks. But research also shows that their interests are noncognitive, their motivation for college is vocational rather than intellectual; and their attitudes are those of middle-America--a term frequently used in a pejorative way by college faculty. This particular group of young people is so

threatening to our academic self-concept that we refuse to look at how their entrance to higher education will change us. It is more comfortable to concentrate our efforts on changing them so that they become acceptable to traditional higher education. Unfortunately, I think, student personnel administrators have unwittingly permitted themselves to be used as the instruments of the attempt to convert New Students into the image of the traditional students that we know how to deal with.

It is through the personnel offices that New Students are recruited into special programs that are designed to "motivate" them to want what we have to offer. It is through counseling programs that they are encouraged to talk out their "hang ups" and to adjust to our ideas of achievement. It is through financial aids offices that we offer the aid packages that will permit New Students to spend the greatest amount of time possible at the academic tasks that they find onerous, while discouraging them from proceeding through school at their own pace combining study with practical experience in the labor market. It is highly unlikely that the practices that counselors and personnel deans have found effective with traditional college students will work equally well for New Students. Permissive unstructured counseling and maximum financial aid are examples of practices that may not be as useful with New Students as structured situations and a greater variety of activity during the school day. On many two-year college campuses, even the academic remediation programs fall under the direction

of the vice president for student affairs. Thus, the complicity of student personnel services is complete; the student is brain-washed into thinking his attitudes, his values, and his abilities are inadequate to the tasks that we have designed for a different student body.

This is hardly the way to go about maximizing the student development that is presumably the special charge of student personnel administrators. Certainly one can defend the correction of weaknesses as an essential aspect of personal development. But think for a moment of how much you would grow and develop in your job with helpful big brother looking over your shoulder to constantly alert you to your deficiencies? Given the multiple problems of inadequate preparation, poorly developed academic interests, and constant stress on deficiencies, it is not at all surprising, I think, that the dropout rate is one of the gravest problems of the new egalitarianism. Love us or leave us, but don't change us.

I think New Students will change higher education. If for no other reason, they'll change us because all efforts to change them in the direction of our preconceived models are failing. The Office of Economic Opportunity has just completed a thorough study of performance contracting with younger more pliable students than the college-age group that are of concern to us. What they found was that the application of the newest technology and efficiency and teaching skill that modern industry could furnish failed to make notable improvements in academic performance. These results support those of prior evaluations of Head Start. The nationwide survey

published by the United States Commission on Civil Rights (1967) concluded that "cultural enrichment, better teaching, and other needed educational services can be helpful to disadvantaged children. The fact remains, however, that none of the programs appear to have raised significantly the achievement of participating pupils, as a group, within the period evaluated by this Commission (p. 138)." A later study (Cicarelli, 1969) compared first, second, and third graders who had attended Head Start programs with those who had not. This report concluded that, "The most significant conclusions reached on the basis of this study are that summer programs are ineffective and that full-year programs appear to be marginally effective (p. 245)." To date, Sesame Street, which has a rather single-minded goal of teaching numbers and letters, seems to be the one bright spot in an otherwise dismal picture (Ball and Bogatz, 1970). These evaluations have led some to the conviction that genes play the primary role in educability (Jensen, 1969), while it has spurred others to renewed efforts to understand very early psychological development--preferably before the child is two years of age (Hunt, 1971).

These evaluations of early childhood learning are related to an audience concerned with higher education because unless we understand the stubbornness of the problems we are dealing with, we are likely to devise naive programs with an indefensibly high potential for failure. Such failures will result in reinforcement for the belief in genetic inferiority and will induce discouragement and apathy regarding extremely serious social problems that education has an obligation to help solve.

Counselors, for example, who introduce group "rap sessions", sensitivity training, and other counseling experiences should have some objective in mind. All too frequently such programs are launched because we don't know what else to do. Unless the treatment is specifically designed to raise the grade-point-average, counselors should not permit evaluation to be made on GPA. A quarter of a century of research on the effectiveness of counseling to raise the GPA of low achievers has produced no convincing evidence that this is a likely outcome (Cross, 1972a). The obvious lesson is that in an era of accountability, counselors would be well-advised not to sell their programs for New Students on the grounds that it will improve their grades. This does not mean, however, that counseling is useless for New Students or that the solution is as simple as abolishing grades. Some form of evaluation and some "standards" of performance are, I believe, essential to growth and development. Criterion-referenced testing and non-competitive grading (where the student is evaluated on his ability to perform a given task rather than on how well he compares with others) seem to have great potential for overcoming our obsession with the time-and space-bound learning that is represented by the GPA.

Interestingly enough, it will probably be the concepts of credit-by-examination and the external degree that will do more than anything else to focus attention on evaluation based on performance. We have known for a long time that real learning is more likely to take place outside of the classroom than in it. We have just never let such knowledge influence our concept of "education."

Fortunately, there is a fresh breeze blowing through the musty halls of academe. Traditional students as well as New Students are pressing hard for learning that is more alive and relevant to the real world. They will soon have powerful allies in the form of adults who are returning to college. Higher education is just beginning to extend its opportunities for learning beyond the classroom and off the campus.

I have suggested elsewhere (Cross, 1972b) that student personnel administrators are uniquely qualified by experience and interest to play an active teaching and administrative role in the extended classroom. Students are eager to participate in what they see as relevant learning processes through working with people in the community. Administratively, people are needed to work between the campus and the community in establishing mutually beneficial programs. Educationally, people are needed to assist students and teachers in the application of the principles of psychology and sociology to real problems. Professors who feel secure within their established role of lecturer and purveyor of academic information often feel extremely insecure in the application of their field to the real problems of people. Student personnel administrators would be welcomed by both students and faculty if they established the contacts and the expertise to build the bridges to the community that are needed for the extended campus.

Ethnic Minorities. Much of what I have already said about New Students applies equally well to ethnic minorities who are over-represented among the New Student population. But ethnic minorities have made much more progress than New Students in convincing us that

adjustment to their presence in the academic community is a two-way process. Ironically, the fact that they look different has, for the first time in history, proved an advantage in their struggle to find identity. Black is beautiful, and it should be noted that black is not white or even gray. Black studies, black history, black poetry, and black music have succeeded in enriching the campus culture. Blacks have taught us some things we didn't know, and a mark of their progress lies in the fact that to understand the language of the ghetto is now considered a mark of sophistication in the academic community. The Mexican-Americans, the Puerto Ricans, and the American Indians are having a more difficult time establishing their identity, partly because of their smaller numbers but probably also in part because they find it more difficult to make us aware of the differences that serve as unique strengths.

The battle of full opportunity for ethnic minorities is far from won, despite the fact that the educated community is a little ahead of the broader society in making full use of the capabilities of this group of citizens. Although the educational aspirations of ethnic minorities are slightly higher than those of the majority culture, their socioeconomic plight still bars their entrance to college. Furthermore, ethnic minorities are still likely to be treated as a class of people instead of as individuals. And once again, student personnel administrators are as guilty as anyone else in the academic community of perpetuating ethnic stereotypes. Thomas Sowell (1970) takes admissions directors to task for what he calls the "short-term expediency motives" of selective white

institutions that pass over well-qualified blacks in their search for black students with poor academic records in the belief that they are "authentic ghetto types."

While Sowell is speaking primarily to the special admissions practices of selective institutions, another black writer's criticisms apply to the "helping" professions generally. William Trent (1970) observes that, "Unfortunately, when predominantly white institutions or white individuals do begin to assist the black community or individual, they tend to overassist. This act of benevolence often becomes repulsively condescending in the eyes of the student or degrading to his ability" (p. 6). Counselors and others in personnel work may find this a real problem until they feel secure enough with minority students to demand of them their best performance.

I do not know the record of student personnel administration in attracting members of ethnic minorities to the staff. Observation leads me to believe that we are somewhat ahead of the teaching faculty in this regard. While I don't believe that it is necessary or desirable to assign minority counselors to minority students, it is necessary to take full advantage of the perspectives, understandings, and skills that ethnic minority staff members can bring to the academic community.

Women. The egalitarianism that advocates removing the inequalities for women on the campus won't make nearly as much difference in the academic community as most people think it will. This is quite different from saying that the problem is not more serious and the solution more difficult than most men, and some women, believe it to be.

It is a fact that there is a substantial negative correlation between academic prestige and the participation of women. The higher in level one goes--from undergraduate, to graduate student, to faculty member--the fewer the women. Likewise, the greater the academic prestige of the institution, the fewer women it has. Discrimination against women is deep in the heart of the academic community, and the greatest obstacle to its solution lies in the community's refusal to take this egalitarian trend seriously. The next time you are in any group where the women's rights movements are under discussion, clock the time elapsing before the first joke. Psychologists tell us that laughter is one way of releasing tension, and the full equality of women on the campus and in the society does induce tension--in women as well as in men.

If the statistics regarding the full participation of women in the academic community are poor and the prognosis not altogether favorable, why then do I say that the ultimate effects on the academic community of this egalitarian trend will not be great? Mostly because women present no realistic threat to the academic self-concept, despite their obvious threat to male egos. Higher education does not really have to change what it does to accomodate women. As a matter of little-known fact, women are somewhat more academic than men as measured by the usual criteria. From grade school through college, the grades of women are quite significantly above those of men. On tests of academic aptitude, women ordinarily have higher verbal scores while men score higher on quantitative measures. But the required college courses, and indeed the heart of the academic curriculum, call mostly

for verbal abilities. Perhaps this is one reason for the better grades of women.

Unlike the New Students to higher education discussed previously, women as a group, do express what academe would term the "right" attitudes and values. On the four personality dimensions of the Omnibus Personality Inventory (OPI) that contribute most heavily to "the potential for behaving intellectually", women tend to score higher than men on fondness for working with ideas and abstractions (Thinking Introversion) and on esthetic appreciations (Estheticism); men score higher on theoretical and scientific interests (Theoretical Orientation); and there is no difference between the sexes on flexibility and tolerance for ambiguities and uncertainties (Cross, 1971). Granting women full equality as undergraduates graduate students, faculty members, and top echelon administrators will in no way dilute the standards or compromise the mission of higher education.

But I don't mean to minimize the problems. There is a large gap between the real and the ideal equality espoused by egalitarianism. The latest figures for women in chief personnel officers in community colleges, for example, is six women to one hundred men (DeCabooter, 1972). And counseling and education are fields that are very attractive to women--granting far more graduate degrees to women than any other field (Chase and Burnett, 1972). Surely some of these women must be qualified and interested in holding major administrative posts in higher education. We cannot have real community when the development of one group of people is limited by restrictions that are irrelevant to the ability to do the job. Younger women who have grown up with the societal pressures pushing

constantly toward equality will be less tolerant of arbitrary limitations on the uses of their talents than older women. The academic community must surely see the handwriting on the wall. To those who hesitate to adopt the strong affirmative action that is necessary to insure the full participation of women in higher education I can only say "Try it; you'll like it."

Adults. The egalitarian trend of the future that has the greatest potential for inducing massive change in the academic community is one that has, to date, moved quietly, swiftly, and without substantial opposition. It is the growth of educational opportunity for adults. It may, in the long run, have more impact on educational practice than New Students, ethnic minorities, and women combined. For it will change the shape and the form, and certainly the community, of academe.

As recently as 1965, most students were pursuing education in what has been called the educational "core" i.e., the regular school system from the primary grades through graduate school. By 1970, the number of students in the educational "periphery" (all organized structured learning situations outside of the regular school system such as churches, businesses, government) exceeded the number in the core and by 1976, it is estimated that 53 percent of the learning force will be pursuing education outside of schools and colleges (Moses, 1970). Although the predictions were made as recently as 1970, I suspect that colleges and universities and state systems of education are moving so rapidly that they will meet the competition, modifying their own offerings to meet the needs of a new and very rich market.

The most publicized version of egalitarian education for adults is British Open University--perhaps because it was established in the heat of political battle. It was widely publicized as "Second Chance" university for adults who had been denied a university education. And remember that in England's elitist educational system, 85 percent of the people do not have a first chance at a university education. Overnight, Open University became the second largest University in England with 25,000 students studying quite traditional fare via correspondence, radio, and television, with materials and assistance available in some 250 local study centers situated throughout the United Kingdom. A one-week residence summer school provides the nearest thing to "community" that Open University offers. The educational program of Open University may best be described as a new combination of existing elements rather than a new approach to education. The point is, that educational opportunity has been put together differently in order to meet the needs of a student body not previously served by higher education.

The reality of education as a life-long process is spreading rapidly in this country. The forms devised to accomplish it may consist of nothing more than a counseling center that helps students through the hurdles of a thoroughly traditional residential campus that offers courses in the evening. Or it may represent quite radical departures on any of a number of variables. Some models may emphasize community and some may ignore it completely. At the one extreme is the University Without Walls model where students, faculty, and administration design the total learning program, emphasizing continuing dialogue among

the members of the community. At the other end of the continuum are plans such as that offered by the New York Regents degree which will award bachelors degrees solely on the basis of examinations. The rationale for the examinations model--which can vary all the way from credit-by-examination for a single course to credit for the equivalent of four years of traditional study--is that it doesn't matter how or where you learned or how long it took you. If you can demonstrate that you know the subject matter, then you are certified. The assumption, of course, is that the important gains of the educational experience are cognitive and that they can be measured. The university does not attest to the moral fitness of the graduate nor to his desirability as a potential employee. It simply certifies what he knows--which is about all any other university can do. As a matter of fact, it may be more than most colleges do. In reality all we really know about most college graduates is that they persevered through 128 credit hours that varied enormously in quality and in intellectual demands. We can't say what or if a student learned anything from rubbing shoulders with fellow students or from the impersonalized attention students are accorded by most faculty.

There is no doubt in my mind that the trend of the future is away from community--except for those few institutions that wish to make a special feature of it. Unlike some of my colleagues who are looking at cluster colleges, living-learning units, and campus environments, I see an enormous increase in commuter community colleges, urban universities, campus outreach programs, off-campus living, examining

universities, external degree programs, and the multiversity. I take a dim view, I'm afraid, of student personnel administrators who entertain thoughts of the profession serving as the experts in establishing the learning environment of the campus. That's fine for colleges that can afford to offer the expensive luxury of residential and/or community experience. But even assuming we knew how to create a stimulating learning environment and were willing to be held accountable for it, it is too narrow a base on which to build a profession.

The challenge of the new egalitarianism to the profession of student personnel administration is to know our students and the education that will meet their needs. This will require more than the usual platitudes such as the familiar, "We work with students, and we know what they want." I doubt that we do know what the numerous subgroups of students new to higher education want. At least, we're no better informed at present than faculty, administrators, or students who purport to speak for students. I believe that the professional future of student personnel administration lies in good research on students and most particularly in the implications of research findings for educational practice. This means that we will need more careful attention to the needs of specific subgroups of students. The challenge comes not so much in doing the research (which is not nearly as esoteric as most nonresearchers have been led to believe) but rather in identifying subgroups of people with common needs and in devising particular programs to meet those needs. Some students may need new curricular offerings, some new time

flexibilities, some new teaching methods or new delivery systems. Others may need special counseling programs (and we should not forget that peers, paraprofessionals, and faculty all may serve important counseling functions). Some may need close association with fellow students and faculty while others will do best in independent study. Some may thrive in the traditional classroom while others want to use the world as their classroom. Some may wish to push through college in three years and need only the financial assistance to enable them to do so, while others may be severely handicapped by a total scholarship when their needs would be better served by a work-study experience. We don't really need a grand "reform" movement that will bring a better tomorrow for everyone; we need lots of little reforms that will meet particular learning needs. It seems to me that student personnel administration has a professional future cut out for it if it can rise to meet the need.

If it is to do so, however, recruitment, training, and professional leadership will have to undergo some rather drastic changes. While I am sure that there will continue to be an increasing need for good counselors, I do not see counseling as the backbone of the profession. Counseling has grave problems of its own. Up until the days of the tight budget, counseling was relatively free of criticism because it was thought to lend a nice human touch to compensate for the enormous expansion in numbers. It has been said that "Counseling, like kissing, is so intrinsically interesting and satisfying that few bother to examine it critically." (Thoresen, 1969, p. 264). While kissing will

undoubtedly survive the test of accountability, counseling that continues to show no difference between the counseled and the uncounseled probably will not.

The leadership of the personnel profession will, I believe, come from intellectual and dedicated educators whose major concern is the matching of educational experiences to student needs. The new professional role I would suggest for student personnel is that of consumer or educational advocates--by which I mean that personnel deans would understand student learning needs and educational opportunities well enough to press for a maximum match. To do this we need much more knowledge--verifiable and respected research knowledge--about subgroups of students. The needs of a 35 year old housewife returning to college are certainly not those of the 17 year old black student from the ghetto, and the differences in their needs cannot be dealt with through recognizing their individuality in counseling nor through living-learning units in the dormitory. I believe that the future of student personnel administration lies in the application of research about students. This does not necessarily mean student personnel workers need to conduct the research. It does mean that they need to know how to ask educationally meaningful questions (a major failing of researchers) and to assume leadership in the interpretation and implementation of the findings in the educational offerings of the institution.

I predict that those who are unwilling or unable to exert real leadership in this direction will fill the numerous important but low-level counseling and administrative posts that will continue to

exist. But neither they nor the profession will make much impact on education until locally and nationally there exists a cadre of professionals well-versed in the application of research to educational problems.

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