

Serving the New Clientele for
Postsecondary Education*

K. Patricia Cross

Nationally almost nothing in higher education is the same as it was just one ^{two} short decade^s ago. It is difficult enough just to do the old things better or to do them for more people or at less cost, but it is understandably bewildering to discover that the goals of the 19~~60~~⁵⁰'s are no longer the goals for the 1970's. It now appears that we should not only abandon some of our old goals, but that we should try hard to improve in the opposite direction. Selective admissions and the demands for academic excellence have given way to open admissions and the cry for equality of educational opportunity. Attention to the training of intellectually elite graduate students has done an about-face, and our interest is now centered on educationally disadvantaged undergraduates. The fierce competition for distinguished faculty members at the professorial level has turned into a cool sifting through hundreds of applications to fill a job at the level of assistant professor. Institutional autonomy and competition has given way to coordination by state superboards. Faculty individualism is being replaced by collective bargaining. And the role of playing hero to a proud and adoring public has given way to defending ourselves to a critical public demanding accountability. As

*Prepared for the annual meeting of the North Central Association, Chicago, Illinois, March 27, 1973.

the saying goes, If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs, you don't understand the situation.

The situation I want to talk about this morning concerns the impact of the 180 degree turnaround from selecting students to fit the colleges we happen to have to creating colleges that fit the needs of the students who are walking through the open doors.

This national goal involves more than an answer to the pragmatic question of how to convert our elitist model of higher education into a system that will serve the masses. The fact that we are asked to do it represents a fundamental change in the purpose of higher education. When technology was young and educational resources were scarce, it seemed reasonable to use limited facilities to educate young people who had demonstrated intellectual promise. The expectation was that they would use their training and knowledge to raise the standard of living for everyone.

By and large we have not been disappointed. A relatively small number of well-educated scientists and businessmen have created a seemingly unending supply of the comforts and luxuries of technology. The problem we face now lies not so much in the further discovery and production of material goods as in better distribution systems, broader-based knowledge, and greater concern for the individual. The way to raise the standard of living in this country is no longer to train a few leaders but rather to educate the masses to their full humanity.]

But higher education was never designed to educate the masses. And so we face the national task of opening an historically elite system of higher education to new purposes. I shall attempt to demonstrate

through some recent research that despite some obvious blind spots and some pockets of resistance, we are beginning to do rather well at our new task. Five years ago I was convinced that new kinds of students were entering an old world of higher education; I am now encouraged that there are signs of an emerging new world out there, one that is more suited to the needs of our new clientele.

I shall confine my remarks this morning to two groups of students not previously served by higher education. First, there are the adults and part-time learners who are gaining entrance to college through nontraditional alternatives that promise to relax the procedural requirements of traditional education. Second, there are the low-achieving students who are gaining postsecondary opportunities through open admissions. Numerically these groups constitute the overwhelming majority of students new to postsecondary education, and they also represent groups whose problems are specifically educational rather than broadly societal. Part-time students challenge primarily the forms and procedures of traditional education whereas New Students, defined here as those with poor records of academic achievement, challenge the content and methods of traditional education. And, as we shall see, there are some messages in common that the new learners are trying to get across.

Adults and Part-time Learners

Let's look first at how well higher education is serving the needs of adults and part-time learners. 

Under our new philosophy of egalitarian postsecondary education, the barriers of age and part-time student status are falling right along with other class barriers based on race, sex, socioeconomic status, and academic achievement. The concept of lifelong learning is being implemented much more rapidly than we realize. Data collected by Educational Testing Service last spring indicate that almost one-third of the adults in a national sample of people between the ages of 18 and 60 had engaged in some type of formal learning activity in the 12 months previous to the study, and that does not include full-time students. Even more provocative than the data on present adult participation in educational activities is the prediction of Milton Stern (1972) who foresees compulsory education for adults in the very near future. He documents his prediction by pointing to legislation in the state of California requiring continuing education for practitioners to maintain or renew licenses in the fields of optometry, pharmacy, and veterinary medicine. A new California law, to take effect this July, requires 80 hours of further study every two years for accountants in public service.

Perhaps we better begin to ask ourselves how well postsecondary education is gearing up to meet the escalating demands for lifelong learning. Fortunately we have some recent research data that permit us to take a look at this question.

Last spring the Commission on Non-traditional Study commissioned a large-scale research project supported by the Carnegie Foundation and the Educational Foundation of America. One major element of the design consisted of a national survey of the learning desires and experiences of adults. This questionnaire study was conducted by Al Carp and Dick Peterson of ETS (Carp and Peterson, 1973). A second study was a survey of institutional provisions and plans for nontradi-

tional alternatives directed by JB Hefferlin for the Center for Research and Development in Higher Education at the University of California in Berkeley (Ruyle, Hefferlin, et al, 1972). A comparison of the wishes of American adults between the ages of 18 and 60 with the offerings of some 1200 two- and four-year colleges and universities furnish the data for my analysis today.

The first question to be answered is, Are we offering the content that appeals to adult learners? And the answer is, Not quite but we are moving in the right direction.

The first choice of learning options among adults across a wide array of educational backgrounds is occupational and career education. Apparently in response to this market, nearly two-thirds of the institutions offering anything in the way of nontraditional study provide occupational and career training. As a matter of fact, it is the most common option offered to nontraditional students by all kinds of colleges and universities--two-year and four-year, public and private.

After this considerable consensus on the importance of occupational education, adult priorities and college offerings show a wider gap. Understandably, perhaps, the second most common offering of the colleges is the traditional curriculum taught off campus, occasionally by innovative methods, but more frequently in the conventional classroom format. But the traditional academic fare of the social, biological, and physical sciences come off rather badly in adult preference rankings--not I suspect because they are inherently dull or uninteresting subjects but because they are typically taught as preparation for professional scholars, and not many of the new clientele have any interest in becoming professional scholars. Humanities, however, is an important interest of college-educated

women, ranking right up there with crafts and gardening! Fine and visual arts are popular with college-educated men, holding revered status below investments and sports but just above home repairs and physical fitness. It must be admitted that our success in instilling a lifelong appreciation of the academic disciplines among college graduates is somewhat underwhelming.

Higher education, however, is not giving up on raising the level of educational sophistication of potential students. A rather substantial number of the nontraditional programs offer courses in general or liberal studies, and more than one-fourth emphasize the study of social issues. Certainly the liberal studies curriculum does cater to adult interests--especially to those of women--and one might wish that social issues had more appeal. Unhappily, learning more about public affairs ranks quite low in adult priorities. While college graduates are somewhat more interested in these important problems of our times than less well educated people, the differences are not dramatic.

The most obvious discrepancies between learner preferences and institutional offerings occur in recreation and leisure time activities. Only 9 percent of the institutional programs emphasize these learning activities whereas 63 percent of the people who say they'd like to learn more about something would like to learn about such things as crafts, sports, travel, and the performing arts. Among college-educated adults, the interest is even higher--probably because they are the group with the leisure and the money to pursue recreational activities. While many educators will reject recreation topics as inappropriate for postsecondary education, we cannot escape thinking about the questions raised by the prospect of increased leisure.

The learning preferences of American adults can be characterized as personal and pragmatic. They are primarily interested in learning how to perform better those tasks that face them in their daily lives--job competencies, home and family responsibilities, and the constructive use of leisure time.

At the present time, most colleges and universities are perfectly sincere in wanting to take their education to the people, but there are serious questions about what it is that we should take. If we take the traditional academic disciplines, we will be catering to a very small minority, and nontraditional education will become more elitist than traditional education. On the other hand, most educators feel some responsibility to attempt to raise the level of educational sophistication, and the question is whether we can do that and also give people what they say they want. It seems there is much to be done in making education more interesting and meaningful to adults. There is no obvious reason why topics of interest to adults cannot incorporate the accumulated knowledge of the ages into exciting and worthwhile educational experiences.

To date, the challenge of the nontraditionalists has appeared to center on questions of credit and instructional methods, but the data indicate that the public is better satisfied--or at least more accepting--of traditional methods than of traditional content.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the conservative tastes of the American public regarding methods of instruction fit very well the generally conservative approach of higher education. Lectures and classes are the preferred method of learning for the largest number of adults, and they are the most common form of teaching even in non-

traditional programs. It is interesting that college graduates are more enthusiastic about lectures than any other group. One can't help wondering whether they know what they like or whether they like what they know.

Incidentally, this is a question that can also be asked of the reaction to the use of the new media. While the use of new media by nontraditional programs is not exactly overwhelming, there is some attempt to introduce the public to new ways of teaching and learning through experimentation with talk-back television and the use of audio and video cassettes. It may be that these new media will catch on with people when they have more experience with them. Right now, however, only a miniscule one or two percent express much interest in the new media as a vehicle for education.

The instructional methods that rank second only to traditional classes in the preferences of students as well as the offerings of institutions are internships, cooperative education, on-the-job training, and field work. These methods call for the integration of learning with life. Education is talking about approaching an ideal of lifelong learning without seriously engaging the question of how to make formal learning an integral part of living. We've moved from the bucolic countryside to the teeming city, but we have not really moved from the ivory tower into the lives of learners. All kinds of learners and potential learners are asking for relevance in education. It is one topic on which radicals and conservatives can agree. Radical reformers are likely to talk about social relevance whereas the general public may be thinking about on-the-job training, but the notion of applying education to the solution of real problems is a common thread calling for expanded definitions of education. On-the-job

training, internships, and problem-oriented seminars and workshops are methods that put educators in touch with problems to be solved. I believe that these integrative approaches to learning represent the wave of the future.

But before lifelong learning becomes a reality, we have many hurdles to clear--both to enable institutions to offer attractive programs and to enable people to participate. Adults who say they are interested in learning find many obstacles hindering further education. Cost is the single most important barrier. While men's problems in finding money for education seem roughly related to their economic status and educational background, women's do not. Women, regardless of educational background, perceive cost as a major barrier to further study--even though as a group they profess somewhat greater interest in continuing their education than men do. The greatest differential between men and women on the barrier of cost occurs amazingly enough among college graduates. Only 27 percent of the college men feel that further education would be too expensive, compared to 52 percent of the women. Maybe Women's Lib will change that, but even women who hold professional jobs of their own are twice as likely to be inhibited by cost as professional men.

Institutions, as well as students, are worried about cost. Lack of funds ranks number one among obstacles to the development of special programs on the part of colleges. Only one-fourth of the institutions operate their nontraditional programs with institutional funds, while 40 percent expect the program to be self-sustaining through student fees and grants. To make matters worse, fully one-third of the institutions have absolutely no form of financial aid available for part-time students.

Now is the time to take a hard look at arrangements for the funding of programs for part-time learners. If we're not careful, we may find that what we are establishing is a white, upper socioeconomic, male-dominated system of continuing education. The only deterrent to this future at the present time is that high status men claim that their absorption in their jobs prevents further education.

Time of course ranks as a large barrier to adults who have job and family responsibilities, and I guess there isn't much that higher education can do about offering no-effort learning. But looming third on the horizon of barriers to learning for adults is a perceived discrimination against part-time learners. Over one-third of the adults who say they'd like to engage in further learning say they are stopped from taking a course because they don't want to go to school full-time. Now this is something that institutions have done something about; the overwhelming majority of institutions now offer a degree to part-time students. They just don't tell people about it. Only a little over half of the programs even have literature available, and only about one-third attempt to recruit through the most popular learning area--occupational contacts.

As a matter of fact, it looks as though there are rather substantial information gaps in a number of areas. A surprising number of adults say that courses they would like to take are not available, and there are also complaints that there is no information available about the courses that are offered. Some part-time students still maintain that classes are not conveniently scheduled. Other excuses that people give for not continuing their formal learning that seem based on misunderstanding or are easily corrected are the red tape involved in getting enrolled and the strict attendance requirements.

As for the reasons that institutions give for not offering non-traditional alternatives, the barriers seem largely internal rather than external to the institution. Most institutions, for example, perceive a ready market for nontraditional programs. Very few think that recruitment of students or faculty would be any problem, nor do they think there is a lack of need or that students are not ready for such alternatives. While accrediting agencies, licensing standards, employers, and graduate schools are sometimes blamed for the unwillingness of colleges to experiment, our respondents did not see these external agencies as a threat. Fewer than 10 percent of the colleges thought they posed obstacles to the development of nontraditional alternatives. Rather, the difficulties they see are internal--faculty resistance, institutional concern about academic standards, and the difficulty in assessing non-classroom learning.

An ideal of the domain of learning that constitutes a college education exists in the minds of educators. It is this image, consisting largely of specific knowledge of the academic disciplines, that makes the adjustments in procedures, that we seem willing to make for part-time students, seem minor when compared with the threat of change in content. Yet most of the new learners, young and old, express some dissatisfaction with the content of traditional education. Adults want to be able to see the immediate applications of education--to careers, to family life, and to leisure-time activities. And on this issue, younger students walking through the newly opening doors of colleges agree.

New Students

Let me turn now to the needs of the ~~the~~ New or open admissions students. Contrary to popular belief, the major barrier to higher education in the educational meritocracy of the 1960's was not race or socioeconomic status per se, but lack of academic achievement as that achievement is nurtured and measured in the American school system. True, ethnic minorities are over-represented among this group of low academic achievers, but the majority of what I have called New Students (Cross, 1971) are the

white children of blue-collar workers. Ethnic minorities have been done an injustice by the popular tendency to equate remediation with skin color. Numerically, most young people scoring in the lowest third of the high school graduates on traditional tests of academic achievement are white, and most students enrolled in remedial programs in community colleges across the nation are white (Cross, 1971). Open admissions and a national network of public community colleges have opened the doors of postsecondary education; we now have new kinds of students with new needs on our doorstep and we aren't quite sure that we know what to do with them. By definition, these are students who are not prepared to undertake traditional college study, and remediation has been our typical answer. It may be easier to change the students, we reason, than to change the system.

Research shows that as a group these New Students differ in consistent and significant ways from the students that higher education has served in the past. They differ in interests, abilities, and expectations from traditional college students, and there is little reason to think that if we could correct what we choose to interpret as their deficiencies, traditional higher education would serve them well. Many are trying to tell us that, while they want the credentials and stamp of approval of traditional education, they don't necessarily want the type of education that we have been offering for 100-years to traditional college students.

For example, most of us would probably feel reasonably well-served by a college having the following characteristics:

"At this college there are many good students who try to get top grades. Professors expect them to study a lot, but frequently are willing to discuss such things as current world affairs and other serious topics outside of classes. The students enjoy going to concerts and lectures given on campus."

The New Students to higher education are not much attracted to this college. In the SCOPE study of high school seniors, only 9 percent of the low achievers selected it as the college they would most like to attend (Cross, 1971). Rather, they preferred the following college description which was, incidentally, largely rejected by high achievers:

"At this college students are preparing for a particular job or career. They are mostly interested in courses which train them for occupations they have chosen. Many of the students are working part-time to pay for their education."

There are other differences too. New Students prefer interacting with people to interacting with ideas; they prefer the manipulation of concrete objects to the manipulation of abstract symbols. And their self-ratings indicate that they believe they have ability in these areas (Cross, 1971). But as desperate as society is for people with interpersonal and mechanical skills, we have given young people very little opportunity to develop or to demonstrate these strengths anywhere in the educational system.

Gradually, colleges are recognizing that New Students may have different--not simply lesser--talents than traditional college students. Data collected last spring by Richard Peterson of Educational Testing Service for the California State Legislature's Joint Committee on the Master Plan for Higher Education show that the California community colleges are emerging with a distinctive sense of mission--one that is pulling the colleges toward the interests and expressed needs of the New Students they serve. Peterson (1972)

administered the Institutional Goals Inventory (IGI) to faculty, students, administrators, trustees, and citizens of the local communities of 116 public and private colleges in California. Sixty-nine public community colleges were included in the study that asked the various groups to rate their college as it is and as it should be on 20 different educational goals. Peterson's study demonstrates, I think, that we are beginning to implement a new philosophy of postsecondary education for New Students.

Let's look first at what students attending community colleges say they would like their colleges to do. The three goals that students think their college should give top priority to are 1) vocational preparation, 2) individual personal development, and 3) the creation of a sense of community, cooperation, and trust on campus. And very significantly, community college faculty, administrators, and trustees agree with them that these should be the three top priority goals.

A college with those goals would look something like this if we tried to capture its flavor from the IGI goal statements.

In an atmosphere of mutual trust and cooperation, the community colleges would concentrate on helping students decide upon personal and vocational goals and would provide specific occupational training as well as opportunities for self-exploration and the development of self-confidence and interpersonal skills.

There has been much concern over the last few years about the increasing homogenization of institutions of higher education--of community colleges becoming more like four-year colleges and four-year colleges aping the universities. These data seem to represent an encouraging turnaround from that trend. Certainly, the model of the community college that is desired by the people most concerned with it does not look anything like the present University of California as viewed by its constituencies.

Peterson's data show that students, faculty, administrators, and regents of the University of California are in virtually unanimous agreement that the three top goals of eight campuses of the University of California presently are research, graduate training, and knowledge in the academic disciplines. It should be noted, however, that the constituencies of the University of California are not necessarily happy with this stereotype of the University. They too want some changes. While they are not as united on where they want to go as the constituencies of the community colleges, it is reasonably clear that they want the primary emphasis on intellectual and aesthetic development and the creation of a stimulating community of scholars. This represents a different and, I think, appropriate emphasis from that desired by students and others closely associated with the community colleges.

If the community colleges are to move toward the distinctive mission that is desired by constituents, some changes will have to be made. We can get a feel for student perceptions of where improvements should be made by looking at the discrepancies between what students think their college should be doing and what they think it is doing. The experience with "is" and "should be" ratings is that, in absolute terms, people almost always think that the college should be doing better than it is. But if we assume that with limited time and funds, attention to goals is a matter of priority, then it is the relative position of goals that is of interest, and that is what I am talking about this morning.

Perhaps the greatest single source of student dissatisfaction is found in what they perceive to be a relative overemphasis on the importance of academic development, which is defined by the IGI as the acquisition of the specific knowledge of the academic disciplines and the preparation

of students for advanced academic work. Students across the 69 community colleges say that academic development ranks first in emphasis whereas it should rank ninth among the 20 goals. As a matter of fact, students in all types of colleges feel that there is an overemphasis on the acquisition of academic knowledge, but the community colleges are the only segment of the California colleges where the power structure--faculty, administrators, and trustees--agree with students on the desirability of a substantial deemphasis.

This criticism of higher education's obsession with the traditional academic disciplines, however, should not be interpreted as anti-intellectual. There is another IGI goal that is labeled Intellectual Orientation, and it is concerned with the development of attitudes about learning--helping students to develop the competency for rational analysis of problems, a commitment to lifelong learning, and a desire to engage in self-directed learning. Students feel that not enough attention is given to the development of these attitudes. And community college faculty and administrative officers agree that failure to provide students with the attitudes and skills of learning is a second major shortcoming of present education. With such substantial agreement on desirable directions, it appears that the community colleges in California should be able to move away from emphasizing the acquisition of specific knowledge toward the development of attitudes that support the appreciation of continuous learning.

A third area of student unhappiness with their college experience concerns the lack of attention given to individual personal development. Students in all kinds of California colleges feel that not nearly enough attention is given to helping them understand themselves. At this particular stage in their lives, young people would like more assistance in the development

of self-confidence, in setting and achieving personal goals and in improving their relationships with fellow human beings. Community college faculty and administrators are much more likely to feel that developmental goals such as these should take precedence over other goals than are university faculty and administrators. Thus if we are to be responsive to student desires to grow and develop as persons, we may have to start in community and private colleges where the goal of student development receives the most support from the power structure.

Despite the popularity of the prevailing gloom about the vitality and flexibility of postsecondary education, Peterson's study gives us cause for optimism and excitement about the future. Dissatisfaction with the present is a necessary condition for change. The IGI data suggest, however, that we may be emerging from our self-critical phase to reach a second level of change--one that indicates substantial agreement on new directions for the future. If we can find the ways to implement the goals expressed at a verbal level on a research instrument, then we can begin to look for substantial change in postsecondary education. Whether colleges serving New Students in other parts of the country are willing to strike out in bold new directions is hard to say without research data. I see no reason to think, however, that the community colleges in California are vastly different in goals and objectives from those of the community college movement elsewhere.

The new learners--young and old alike--sometimes look unsophisticated to us, and we are arrogant enough to think that when they understand our academic traditions, they will value what we value. But I think the handwriting is on the wall; we are the ones who need to examine our attitude about education. We just might conclude that New Students, traditional students, and part-time learners have every right to expect that higher education will teach them to be better people and more productive citizens. We claim that over time a college education will accomplish the high purposes we have in mind. But we of the older generation of rational analysts are not notably successful in demonstrating the power of good education through research, and the younger generation of feeling humanists are frank to say they don't "feel" the power of education reaching them. It is time to look for a better approach. The challenge ahead is not to convert the new learners to traditional learners, but to convert traditional education to a new education that will serve all of us better.

REFERENCES

- Carp, A., Peterson, R. E., & Roelfs, P. Survey of adult learning interests and experiences. Prepared for the Commission on Non-traditional Study. Berkeley: Educational Testing Service, 1973.
- Cross, K. P. Beyond the open door: New students to higher education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1971.
- Peterson, R. E. Goals for California higher education: A survey of 116 academic communities. Prepared for the Joint Committee on the Master Plan for Higher Education, California State Legislature. Berkeley: Educational Testing Service, 1972.
- Ruyle, J., Hefferlin, JB, L., Geiselman, L. A., & Kirton, A. Non-traditional programs and opportunities in American colleges and universities, 1972. Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1972.
- Stern, M. R. A view from the fifteenth century. Presented to the NUEA Joint Regional Conference, San Francisco, November 1972.