

THE NEW CLIENTELE FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

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The nature of the new clientele for postsecondary education over the next ten to twenty years depends largely on the role of higher education in the society. Because I think that the role of higher education is changing and will continue to change, I have chosen to address the question of the new clientele under two different scenarios. Scenario A posits major change in the role of higher education in the Learning Society, whereas Scenario B discusses the impact of the new clientele on relatively stable institutions of higher education. Perhaps Scenario A should be viewed as the long-range forecast--say twenty years in the future--whereas Scenario B presents the short-range picture--five to ten years in the future.

Scenario A

Most discussions of the new clientele for postsecondary education begin with the implicit assumption that higher education will be playing roughly the same role in the society of the 21st Century that it has played in the 20th Century. Under this assumption, there is a rather well accepted procedure for how institutions should go about identifying and recruiting

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the new clientele. It consists of asking a series of questions and answering them with an orderly set of procedures. The questions and answers go something like this:

Q. How can we determine the future market for postsecondary education?

A. Through demographic analysis of United States population changes.

Q. How can we determine the needs and interests of the new clientele?

A. Through conducting market surveys and community needs assessments.

Q. How can we attract the new clientele?

A. Through a) more effective marketing and more aggressive recruitment and/or b) development of new programs and services to meet consumer demand.

In the face of this eminently rational and widely accepted approach to the identification and recruitment of college students for the 21st Century, I want to take the heretical position of asserting that the "answers" proposed above are dangerously narrow and incomplete, and worse yet, the questions may not even be the right questions.

Take the first question, How can we determine the future market for postsecondary education? That question cannot be answered without a careful analysis of what role institutions of higher education will play in the 21st Century. I believe the role of higher education in the Learning Society will be dramatically different from what it is today. Much of the handwriting is already on the wall.

For some years now, education has been blending into the lives of people and into the organizations of society. By this, I mean that a college education is less and less likely to be an identifiable chunk in a person's life, and it is less and less likely to be associated with a given institution of education or a particular college campus. The old pattern of four years in residence as a full-time student on a college campus has already given way to part-time attendance at multiple institutions by commuting students with jobs and family responsibilities which are competing with education for attention. While academics still talk about FTEs, it is a measure divorced from reality in almost all community colleges and urban universities, and nationally the tilt is clearly toward a majority of older, commuting, part-time students who spend minimal time on the campus and identify with it only in loose and tangential ways.

The impact of the change in the attitudes and orientation of part-time learners toward a traditional value structure of institutionalized education is potentially great enough to change the role of institutions of education in the society. Much of the affective "value" of college resides in the ideal (not often attained these days) of the "community of scholars." Since that ideal is largely gone, institutions of education need to give some thought to the values that will replace it. Is there some value beyond the credential that students will associate with their college education?

If changing student attitudes don't challenge traditional college structures, changes in the educational providers of the society probably will. Although most academics are aware of the changing nature of the students in their classes, they remain blissfully unaware of how rapidly the delivery of educational services

in the society is changing. Consider these facts illustrating the dispersion of educational services from the single campus provider to multiple providers:

- Each year approximately one out of every three American adults participates in some form of organized instruction. Although 85 percent of these adult learners are high school graduates, postsecondary education (including all colleges and universities, vocational/technical institutes, and private trade schools) provides the instruction (credit and noncredit) for less than half (40 percent) of these learners (Cross, 1979a).

- Last year, the educational budget for AT&T employees was 900 million dollars, compared to 200 million dollars for MIT (Luxenburg, 1978/79).

- The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) has a continuing education branch with an annual budget of seven million dollars, used mostly for seminars, workshops, and the development of self-instructional materials for CPAs facing state relicensing requirements. The continuing education programs of AICPA are codified by 28 state licensing boards and are usually conducted independently of the professional schools of colleges and universities (Stern, 1979).

- In two airings of the PBS telecourse, Ascent of Man, 40,000 students received college credit from 420 colleges throughout the United States (Purdy, 1980).

- In 1978-79, Courses by Newspaper offered ten courses and enrolled more than 50,000 students for college credit (Colburn, 1980).

- Sixty thousand attorneys in California are using video cassettes prepared by the Continuing Education of the Bar, a self-supporting organization established by the State Bar of California to keep lawyers abreast of new developments in their field (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1979).

● TELECON, a consortium of 35 Southern California community colleges has enrolled more than 170,000 students since 1970 in credit courses delivered through open-circuit television (Carlisle, 1978).

Demographic projections suggest that older students represent the major new market for higher education, but the above illustrations suggest--not necessarily that there is considerable competition from the other organizations of society for adult learners, although that is certainly likely--but that the arrangements for delivering education may be dramatically different in the next ten to twenty years. There will be far more consortial arrangements as institutions join together to produce courses and materials, and there will be more competition as well as more cooperation among the various educational providers of the society. How higher education handles the competitive and cooperative aspects of the "adult market" is probably the determining factor over the next ten to twenty years in who the new clientele for higher education will be.

A similar analysis applies to other potential new student markets. A recent ACE study (see attached summary from the Chronicle of Higher Education, April 21, 1980) suggests that large numbers of the new clientele could come from the lower socioeconomic classes of the society through increased high school graduation rates, increased college entrance, increased college retention, etc. Since most of the loss of this potential college material is due more to lack of academic preparation than to lack of money per se, whether these students constitute a new clientele for higher education depends largely on what colleges are able and willing to do for them.

Present state legislative trends seem to point in the direction of closing college doors to low achieving students--e.g., high school competency testing, newly instituted admissions criteria in community colleges, reduction of funding for remedial education at the college level, proposals for developing alternative routes for low achieving high school students. Should these trends continue, the result would more likely be a reduction in present students rather than an addition of new ones from these strata of the society.

These examples are sufficient to take us back to the original question. Instead of asking, How can we determine the future market for postsecondary education, higher education might better be asking, How can higher education provide the leadership in addressing the question of how a society can best prepare its citizens for lifelong learning--meaning who needs what kinds of education, and who should provide it?

This leads to the second issue raised in our initial set of questions, How can we determine the needs and interests of the new clientele? The assumption of market surveys and needs assessments is that "consumers" know what they want. The assumption would be more accurate if stated, consumers know what they want when they see it.

The point can be made clear through the use of an analogy. Suppose that fifty years ago, when daily ice delivery was the only answer to the preservation of food, General Electric had set out to respond to consumer demand by conducting a survey of what people said they wanted in the way of improved services. The answers, no doubt, would have been that the majority of respondents favored cheaper ice and more frequent deliveries.

There would have been no demand for electric refrigerators. Even if General Electric had suggested that a plug into an electric wall socket would deliver reliable and inexpensive refrigeration, there would have been no way to explain that option to survey respondents.

Market surveys and needs assessments, while undeniably helpful when properly used, are misleading and even dangerous when used as many educators and legislators are using them today. They help to destroy imagination and the creative development of new programs and services when educators who resist change can point to the "demand" figures and say, "See, there is no demand for new and innovative programs." A few examples will make clear the problems in the too-rigid interpretation of survey data.

● One of the most phenomenally successful programs in higher education to be launched in the last decade is Elderhostel which began with five colleges in New Hampshire in 1975 and has now grown to a network of 300 colleges and universities in 50 states. Elderhostel offers one week summer residential programs for people 60 years of age and older. These elders travel to campuses throughout the United States, live in college residence halls, and participate in classes, mostly in the humanities, taught by college professors.

The consistent finding from market surveys is that the elderly express less interest in education than almost any other identifiable group; they consider themselves "too old" to learn, and the difficulties of travel and expense to be the major barriers to their participation. College professors and academic lectures are among their least favorite ways to learn (Cross, 1979b). What folly then to launch a program calling for extensive travel,

classroom lectures on academic subjects delivered by college professors to the least likely market identified in the needs assessments. Had the founders of Elderhostel had a good research consultant in, they never would have started the program.

● Coast Community College in California has enrolled 50,000 students in a telecourse in introductory psychology since the course was first offered in 1975 (Purdy, 1980). Yet the use of new media rarely attracts more than one or two percent of the survey respondents (Carp, Peterson, and Roelfs, 1974; Cross and Zusman, 1979). The acceptability of new delivery systems in education is directly related to people's experience with them. A California study (California Postsecondary Education Commission, 1979) showed that four out of five enrollees in telecourses would like to study again by that method.

● Hundreds of colleges have started highly successful weekend colleges--yet surveys are unanimous in showing that very few adults (less than 5 percent) are willing to devote weekends to classes (Cross and Zusman, 1979).

There are explanations behind these apparent miscues (See Cross 1979b), but the point is that the answer to the question, How can higher education determine the needs and interests of the new clientele does not reside solely in the "demand" figures generated by needs assessments. Only a dying and unimaginative industry would attempt to build its future based on consumer demand. Consumers cannot respond beyond their experience; thus responding to consumer demand usually means getting yesterday's answers to tomorrow's questions. The new clientele will be attracted to higher education to the extent that we can formulate new programs, perhaps undreamed of by potential learners, that strike people as a better way to do things.

My answer to the third question, How can we attract the new clientele, has been largely answered in my analysis of the first two questions. Better marketing and recruitment will certainly help, provided there is something good to market, and I have no argument with the need to develop new and better services, although I question whether these should be geared to consumer demand.

The new clientele for higher education in the long run will depend largely on what the role of higher education is in the Learning Society and on whether we can fill that role with imagination and broader vision than is suggested by the series of questions to which higher education is currently addressing itself--which seem at best self-serving, and at worst to indicate dangerously narrow tunnel vision.

My recommendations for what the Kellogg Foundation could do with respect to planning for the new clientele for postsecondary education throughout the remainder of this century would include the following:

- More support for the study of cooperation--or in some cases competition--among the educational providers of the learning society. The new ECS program on coordination of community resources is a step in the right direction, but there is a need for conceptual study as well as experimental programs.

Cy Houle's work on continuing learning in the professions lays an important foundation for one of the potentially important issues to be raised about the future role of higher education. In the state of California there are already some 600,000 adults under statutory educational relicensure requirements.

to participate in education continuously throughout their careers. As far as educational "markets" go, that represents a potential gold mine to educational providers--from independent entrepreneurs to professional associations to colleges and universities. On this issue, support for some model cooperative arrangements between professional associations and professional schools seems indicated.

- The question of what society is going to do about the education of the undereducated remains a challenge to everyone and every social organization interested in equal opportunity and a more equitable society. Right now there appear to be a number of trends inimical to the education of the disadvantaged of all ages. State legislatures seem to be taking a hard line on funding; there is considerable debate on where the responsibility for poor educational achievement should lie; some spokespersons for "quality" in higher education are taking the narrow view of raising admissions standards instead of improving instruction. These are my impressions, but they suggest the need for careful monitoring of decisions, made at any level, that affect the educational opportunities of the less privileged members of society. Such a study needs to span all ages and all educational providers of the society.

- More support should be given to the creative thinkers in higher education, both those who can conceptualize a problem and those who can implement a solution. Research tends to focus on narrow topics lying within a disciplinary specialty. Who puts this all together remains largely ignored. There is insufficient attention to training graduate students to think across disciplinary lines about broad social issues, and there is also insufficient reward and support for established professionals capable of offering the broader vision that will be required in the Learning Society.

Scenario B

The alternative to Scenario A, which predicts a changed role for higher education in the 21st Century, is the more conservative Scenario B that foresees a new clientele for existing institutions of higher education. The research supporting Scenario B describes the characteristics of groups of people who are increasing in the population and who are underrepresented in higher education. The list is almost endless--women, ethnic minorities, midlife career changers, the elderly, the handicapped, blue collar workers, low achievers, poor people. The list can then be subdivided into five or six distinctly different groups of potential women students, three or four major ethnic groups, the young-old and the old-old, and on and on.

For the practical purposes of educational reform to serve the new clientele, I see little point in continuing to refine the subgroups in the interests of obtaining ever more accurate "target" groups. I believe that there are two major groups in terms of educational needs. In my own research, I have described the two groups as New Students and nontraditional students. New Students are those of any age or circumstance who, for whatever reasons, are underprepared to do college work as it is presently defined. They tend to be educationally dependent, requiring a great deal of personal attention, academically as well as personally. Nontraditional students are part-time, older adult learners who, at the present time, are mostly educationally independent, well-motivated, and above average in academic ability. Their major need is for greater flexibility in schedules, locations, and curriculum.

The one requirement that both of these groups have in common is the need for more flexibility in adapting to personal situations--New Students because their learning handicaps are highly individualistic, nontraditional students because their circumstances and goals are individualistic.

Both of these groups are present in large numbers in community colleges now, and most four-year colleges are interested in increasing their share of the market. I believe that the diversity of the present and future student clientele is the major problem to be faced by institutions of higher education--and I don't think that higher education knows much about dealing with diversity in the classroom. The basic pattern of teaching and learning in higher education is to convene a group of students, pitch the content and pace to the mythical average student, and try to get them through a common course in the standard time of one semester. The major way in which traditional education handles diversity now is to permit vastly different levels of student achievement. Student performance can vary from A through F, but content, time, and teaching method are constants for any given class. As diversity increases, the average student becomes harder and harder to find, and group education becomes less and less feasible.

For this scenario, my recommendation to Kellogg would include the following:

- Support for structural change in the teaching and learning patterns of higher education. The fixed time frames of semesters and quarters seem less and less able to accommodate the needs of either New Students or nontraditional students.

- Support for proposals to seek new funding patterns that permit greater flexibility in responding to student diversity.
- Since structural change will be difficult and slow, support for experimental and individualized teaching programs designed to address the problem of student diversity in the classroom.

12 Ways to Win More Students in the 80's

Strategy	Potential Increase	
	Full-time and part-time	Full-time equivalent
1. Increase high-school graduation rate to 80 per cent from the current 75 per cent.	83,000	61,000
2. Increase percentage of high-school dropouts taking tests for high-school credentials to 9.6 per cent from the current 7.6 per cent.	22,000	12,000
3. Increase college enrollment rates of young people from lower- and middle-income families to current rates for income groups \$5,000 higher.	566,000	413,000
4. Increase high-school graduation rates of minority-group youths to 80 per cent from the current 69.8 per cent.	102,000	74,000
5. Increase the enrollment rate in the 18-to-24 age group to 27 per cent from the current 25 per cent.	503,000	367,000
6. Cut attrition after first and third years of college by 25 per cent.	161,000	118,000
Attract into four-year programs 25 per cent of those who complete two-year programs.	146,000	107,000
7. Increase enrollment of persons aged 25 and over because of growth in older population group.	629,000	352,000
Increase enrollment rates for persons aged 25 to 34 to 8.7 per cent from current 7.7 per cent and for persons aged 35 and over to 2.4 per cent from the current 1.4 per cent.	230,000	129,000
8. Increase enrollment rate of women aged 18 to 34 from the current 14.5 per cent to 17 per cent, the rate for men in the same age group.	1,230,000	689,000
9. Increase enrollment rate of men aged 35 to 64 from the current 1.1 per cent to 1.7 per cent, the rate for women in the same age group.	314,000	176,000
10. Increase enrollment of graduate students.	178,000	100,000
11. Enroll in colleges 2 per cent of persons enrolled in courses offered by industrial employers.	800,000	136,000
12. Increase enrollment of foreign students.	280,000	204,000
Total potential increase, 1990 over 1980		1,098,000

SOURCE: AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION

Source: The Chronicle of Higher Education, April 21, 1980

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