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The Image of the Private Junior College

K. Patricia Cross

In thinking about the changing outlook for the private junior college, I suppose one has to consider two factors -- the pressures from the outside which indicate change as well as those internal aspects over which you have more control. We can also approach the topic by looking at the role played now by the private junior college and the possible predictions for the future. But any approach, it seems to me, requires an earnest look at the characteristics of the private junior college as they exist in 1968.

Self-study programs and institutional research have become extremely popular activities for all kinds of colleges these days, and there are a number of ways of taking a look at your institution. Most of the self-study approaches differ only in complexity from the age-old ways we have at looking at ourselves as individuals.

The easiest way to see what we look like is to head for the mirror. The image we find there is not the real us, but through the property of reflection of other materials, the mirror is able to convey a rather accurate picture. A mirror for educational institutions is to be found in the reflection of the institution as it is conveyed through another kind of material -- namely the type of students it attracts and serves. It is now extremely apparent,

through educational research, that the image of the institution plays a crucial role in its future. If, for example, a college has a vivid image as a highly intellectual community of scholars, then it tends to become a self-fulfilling prophecy because bright students and faculty interested in intellectual pursuits are attracted by the image, and their presence on the campus tends to perpetuate and even increase it. A college having the reputation of a party school, on the other hand, has an extremely difficult time attracting serious students, and if it wishes to do so, it has to do something about changing its image. A vocationally-oriented college tends to attract students interested in job preparation, and to the extent that this image is vivid and accurate, it serves both the college and the student by making easier the match of student goals to college purposes. The image of the private junior college is to some extent subject to your own control.

But I understand also that one of your concerns is that the image of the private junior college is in danger of being distorted or swallowed up by the larger image cast by the extremely rapid rise of the public junior colleges. This is an external pressure that may have implications for a changing outlook. The junior college movement seems to have exploded on the scene so rapidly that it is extremely difficult to find research studies in which separate analyses are made for public and private junior college

students. Most investigators seem to feel that an overall category of the junior college student takes care of the matter. And yet there are some subtle and not-so-subtle differences between the students enrolled in private junior colleges and those attending the public junior colleges. And it goes without saying that there are measureable differences between junior and senior college students.

I thought that it might be instructive today to take the very little research data which exists and to try to hold up a mirror so that you might see the reflection of the private junior college next to that of the public junior college. Maybe we will find that they are more similar than you think -- or perhaps differences will appear in unexpected places -- or it's just possible that your image is already so cloudy that the students can't tell the difference, and the reflections as seen in the characteristics of the student body ^{are} highly similar for the public and the private junior college.

My data are simple, and some of you have undoubtedly participated in the study which I will quote. I am using the ACE's 1966-1967 surveys of some 250,000 students at over 300 colleges throughout the country. The 1967 two-year college population consisted of some 62 junior colleges -- 42 of which were public, 11 church related and 9 independent. Co-educational colleges as well as mens' and womens' colleges are included. The sample is not bad. The ACE two year colleges are a little short in the church-related area but otherwise it can be considered roughly a ten percent sample of the two-year colleges in the country.

All I can paint for you is a picture of how you look as a group when compared with groups of four-year colleges and public two-year colleges. As you probably all know there are greater variations between the individual colleges represented in this room than there are between private junior colleges and public junior colleges as groups of colleges. In other words, if this description does not sound like you, you must be one of those who is different. But to the extent that you share a concern with the image of the private junior colleges then the following descriptions must be considered relevant. I hope you will bear with a somewhat staccato report of the findings, but I think that I would rather use the limited time available to put the results before you than attempt to tie all of them together with the appropriate connecting remarks.

1. The students in private junior colleges tend to come from homes in which the parents are better educated than those of the students in the public two-year college. Whereas only 28 percent of the fathers of public junior college students have had at least some college work, 36 percent of your students have fathers with some college backgrounds. In order to put these figures in proper perspective, however, we should note that across all institutions of higher education included in the ACE survey, about 45 percent of the fathers have had some college study. On this index as well as on most of the others which I will mention this morning, your students fall between those attending public junior colleges and those who are freshmen

in a broad category of four-year colleges which includes everything from non-selective state colleges to the highly elite private liberal arts colleges. Despite the somewhat higher educational backgrounds of their parents, your students do not seem to come from notably higher income brackets than do students in the public junior colleges. Eleven percent of your students and 10 percent of the public junior college students say that the parental income is over \$15,000 a year. It is quite possible, of course, that there are fewer working mothers in your population and that this accounts for the small difference to be found in parental incomes. This hypothesis tends to be verified by the attitude of your students regarding the place of married women. Sixty-eight percent of your group think that married women belong at home, and this is quite the largest proportion of students at any kind of campus holding what is in these days a rather conservative viewpoint. Later, I will comment ^{farther} on the general conservatism of the private junior college student.

2. As might be predicted from the educational backgrounds of their parents, the private junior college students have higher educational aspirations than the public college students. Student groups, of course, are notorious for showing higher educational aspirations than achievements. For example, 95 percent of the four-year college students say as freshmen that they hope to attain at least a bachelor's degree. As you know, somewhat less than half of them will actually complete four years of college work.

Almost three-quarters of your students say that they hope to attain a bachelor's degree and this may be compared with about 65 percent for the public junior college students.

3. The greater interest of private junior college students in higher education is also reflected in their investigation of possible admissions to other colleges. Most public junior college students (68 percent) did not apply to any other college. While about half of your students made no other applications, almost a quarter of them applied to one other college and the remaining quarter applied to two or more colleges. This concern with college choice is not as great as that shown by the four-year college student, but it is more than that displayed by students attending public two-year colleges.

4. It is of considerable interest to note that the private junior college students are more likely than students at any other kind of college to have been influenced by their parents in the college choice. Fifty-one percent of your students claim that parental influence was a major influence in their college decision. Friends are also an important source of influence as are your college representatives. Students entering public junior colleges are only slightly more likely than your students to be influenced in their college selection by high school teachers and counselors. Twenty percent of your students cite high school teachers as having been the major source of influence, compared with 23 percent of the students in public two-year colleges.

5. Your students show rather large differences from those in the public two-year colleges on the reasons they give for being attracted to your college. For the public junior college, the big attraction is the low cost. For private colleges, 35 percent cite the academic reputation of the college, with almost as many (33 percent) being attracted by the opportunity for religious affiliation.

6. You may be surprised to learn that private junior college students as a group have high school grades that are very similar to those in the public junior colleges. Thirty-four percent of your students had a high school average of B or better compared with 32 percent for the public colleges. For the four-year colleges the figure is 61 percent with a grade of B or better and at the upper level we would find 76 percent of the students attending private universities with high school averages of B or higher.

7. There is a very slight tendency for the private college freshmen to have had somewhat more experience in high school leadership posts than the public junior college students, but two-year college students in general cluster below four-year college students on a wide variety of high school achievements such as being elected president of a high school student organization or having had an original writing published in high school or editing the school newspaper or attaining membership in the scholastic honor society.

8. The objectives which students consider important form an interesting profile for private junior college students. There is a definite pattern

8 (continued)

to the ways in which they are like public junior college students and the ways in which they are like the four-year college students. In general, the public junior college students are more likely to reflect the striving for upward mobility through education that is typical of the lower socioeconomic backgrounds from which they come. As a group, the private college students are much more prone than public college students to value objectives such as helping others in difficulty, becoming a community leader, and developing a philosophy of life. On these non-materialistic values, they are more like four-year college students than they are like junior college students on the more intellectual interests such as writing original work or creating works of art or keeping up with political affairs they are more like public junior college students than they are like four-year college students who generally reflect a much greater interest in intellectual activities. Taking a broad look at all of the ACE data and placing it in the broader context of what we know generally about college students, it appears highly probable that private junior college students are more like four-year college students in terms of socioeconomic background and more like public junior college students in terms of intellectual interests.

9. One of the very important factors in evaluating the image of the private junior college is the consideration of how your students describe their college. As freshmen, surveyed before they had had very much experience on the campus, the students in private junior colleges had these observations to make:

a) As is typical of so much of the data, private junior college students rated their colleges more intellectual than the public junior colleges but less so than the four-year college students. For example, 17 percent of the students attending public junior colleges said that the atmosphere of the college could be considered intellectual; 27 percent of your students felt that this was a characteristic, and 39 percent of the four-year college students rated intellectual atmosphere as descriptive.

b) Although not many students anywhere consider their colleges victorian, private junior college students were more likely than any other group to rate victorianism as characteristic. Eight percent of your students, 4 percent of the public junior college students and 4 percent of the four-year college students felt that their colleges were victorian.

c) Private junior college students are much more likely than public to rate their college atmosphere as warm. Thirty-nine percent of the public college students but 68 percent of your students describe the college atmosphere as warm. For four-year colleges the figure is 66 percent.

d) Your students are more likely than students in any other kind of college to feel that the atmosphere is conservative. The only group

d) continued

that comes close are the public junior college students, only 33 percent of whom see their college as liberal. Less than one-fourth of your students would say that the term "liberal" applies to their college.

10. I was quite amazed to see how well the rest of the data supported your students concepts of campus conservatism. Perhaps the one thing that sets your students apart from any other students attending junior colleges or the various categories of senior colleges and universities is their generally conservative point of view. In part, this may reflect an historical tradition. But it may also reflect an interest of conservative parents wanting their children to begin their college careers in a private junior college. This may or may not be a problem for you, but the image of a private college is probably such that parents have some reason for believing that their college-age son or daughter will have somewhat greater attention and supervision than is offered in either the public junior college or in a four-year college.

This image is supported to some extent by the findings that your students were more likely than any other group to have been influenced in their college choice by their parents. The fact that there is some tendency for the students themselves to see the college as victorian may also offer modest support for this image. Remember that the students answered the survey before they had been at the college very long. I'd like to spend

a little time on this image of conservatism because it may have important implications for your future. By conservative I am not referring essentially to a political stance. I'm using the word in the sense of Webster's definition which is, one who is disposed to the maintenance of existing views or a cautious or discreet person.

Perhaps I can make the picture clearest by picking out the items on the ACE questionnaire on which your students are at an extreme end of the continuum among all types of colleges surveyed.

Students at private junior colleges are more likely than any other group of college students to:

- 1) Have chosen their college because they perceive that other students there were like themselves.
2. Feel that their beliefs are similar to others
3. Feel that married women belong at home.
4. Feel that scientists should not publish findings without considering the possible consequences.
5. Feel that colleges are too lax in dealing with student protests.
6. Feel that the college has a right to ban a controversial speaker.
7. Feel that student publications should be cleared by college officials.

The picture conveyed by the fact that your students seem to stand out from all other groups of college students on these attitudes is subject to several interpretations. But before I make any of them let me remind you

that we're not talking about how much conservatism, we're talking about the proportion of students who endorse particular attitudes. In other words, it doesn't mean that your students are necessarily more conservative than others -- it means that you have a larger concentration of cautious students who are not eager to mix with new and different people and to confront new ideas.

From the nature of the statements used, you can make the prediction that you are very unlikely to have to deal with student protests. Your students are generally accepting of college authority and furthermore, they are not very eager to bring new or controversial ideas onto the campus. And this is the interpretation that could raise a warning flag to you.

In most of our research on college students, we are finding that those who seek a comfortable environment with people like themselves around them and with no outside forces to disrupt their tranquility show some rigidity and lack of openness to new experiences that makes it extremely difficult for new learning to take place. In this kind of environment it is difficult for the college experience to make much difference. They leave the college, hopefully knowing a little more, but otherwise unaffected in terms of attitudes and values. In general, highly able students at the prestige four-year colleges are the most adventuresome of all young people; They are the most eager to meet new people and to cope with new ideas. They are also the most likely to show change in the direction of greater flexibility, increased tolerance, more interest in ideas, and greater objectivity as they progress through college. One could also observe,

I suppose, that they are the most likely to cause trouble for their parents and college administrators, with their independent and sometimes immature thinking.

Nevertheless, the selective four-year colleges are showing increasing interest in the adventuresome student who has done something out of the ordinary. You may or may not want to take extra steps to expose your students to new experiences in college (remember that the parents may not be looking for this). From everything else we know about students, it is likely that your students who transfer to four-year colleges are somewhat more open than those who do not. But it is worth noting that your typical student might anticipate some difficulties in adjustment when plunged into ~~the~~ a different atmosphere ~~at~~ most four-year colleges.

I don't know how much of this is new to you. While it should not be considered ~~ix~~ the final word in the description of the private junior college student, it does raise some questions which might be worth discussion, and personally I would hope that it would be possible for you to test out some of these hypotheses in your own research.