

College Students and the Curriculum: The Fantastic Voyage of Higher Education, 1636 to the Present

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By adding student perceptions of the curriculum, we enhance the current history of American higher education over 5 decades. We draw from memoirs, short stories, notebooks, and legends to animate the story of students and the curriculum. The episodes depict historical events and cases that have shaped colleges, curricula, and students. The study is grounded in modern concepts and theories from psychology, sociology, and economics.

KEY WORDS: campus environment, college admission, education reform, general education, student characteristics

Introduction and Perspective

In this essay, we discuss the curriculum in American colleges and universities since their founding in 1636. Most curricular analyses are grounded in the formal reports and reform proposals drafted by faculty task forces or blue ribbon commissions appointed by external foundations. These documents are supposedly transmitted into a college's official catalog: for example, the famous *Yale Report of 1828* (in Hofstadter and Smith, 1963), the Harvard Faculty's "1945 Redbook Report on Higher Education in a Democracy" (*General Education in a Free Society*, 1945), federal reports such as *A Nation at Risk* (1983), and the periodic monographs published over the last 30 years by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Boyer, 1987). We think such landmark reports are important. However, our approach is to supplement the reports and the official catalogs by shifting perspective from that of academic officials to the thoughts and actions that students have expressed about the curriculum over time. In other words, we want to balance the top-down official depiction of the course of study with the grassroots views of students as consumers, scholars, and peers in association with other students.

Our intent is to animate the story of students and the curriculum. We draw from a varied and often unconventional supply of historical sources—student memoirs, fiction, short stories, notebooks, and legends—as well as from institutional documents and formal reports. Our focus is illustrated

by our serious attempt to uncover the dorm banner, "Don't Let Your Studies Interfere With Your Education," which was popular between 1890 and 1910. We provide a series of profiles or snapshots of historic episodes, presented in chronological order over 5 centuries. Each episode has been selected to depict a specific, actual historical event as well as illustrate a case study that has widespread implications for colleges, curricula, and students over time and place.

We have little patience with historical writing that is antiquarian and precious. Our aim is to make this topic lively and useful to NACADA members. Therefore, we ground our historical case studies in some of the thoughtful concepts and theories advanced over the past 20 years by scholars from a range of disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and economics. In addition, we specifically fuse the path-breaking work of psychologist Benson Snyder's hidden curriculum (1973), anthropologist Michael Moffat's *Coming of Age in New Jersey* (1989), sociologists Christopher Jencks and David Riesman's insights about socialization and certification as described in *The Academic Revolution* (1968), and literary critic Henry Seidel Canby's 1930s perspectives on ways in which college students create a world of their own; these sources are integral to our chronological survey.

The Roots of Student Consumerism

Colleges in the American colonies (and later the United States) have always operated under conditions markedly different from their counterparts in England, Scotland, and the European continent. Namely, American colleges usually rely on student enrollments and tuition payments to survive each year. Elsewhere, universities have had the advantage of subsidies from the crown, parliament, or other forms of central government. The self-contained residential colleges that comprise the universities of Oxford and Cambridge in England usually received large endowments from which they could pay bills and also acquire interest to finance future operations.

In America, the peculiarities of college building often created an abundance of institutions—most of which were small, underfunded, and faced a precarious existence. Hence, college boards of

trustees and administrators have had to balance simultaneously two very different obligations. On the one hand, college officials wanted their institution and curriculum to maintain standards of academic performance and student personal conduct. On the other hand, college officials and faculty members were keenly aware that their college must be attractive, competitive, and affordable. The result has been an interesting gyroscope of consumerism with postsecondary schools meeting demands of students and their parents while providing a valuable, even prestigious, degree that has legitimacy in American society.

The college was usually represented by a combination of admissions agent and fundraiser called “the college agent” who typically scoured the countryside in seek of paying students who could pass entrance examinations. At the same time, the agent canvassed local gentry for donations to the college (Keller, 1983, p. 6). This process often resulted in colleges that promised a little more than they could actually deliver. The custom became more pronounced, rather than diminished, in the 20th century with the advent of attractive printing and graphics on admissions brochures and view books.

Once in a while, undergraduates countered the administrative image. An excellent example is the description of student life at Yale College written by Lyman Bagg (1871, p. iii) of the class of 1869:

The erroneous and absurd ideas which very many intelligent people who have not chanced to experience it, entertain upon the subject of college life, have led me to believe that a minute account of affairs as they exist today at one of the chief American colleges would not be without value to the general public, nor without interest to alumni and undergraduates of other colleges as well as the one described.

Bagg’s detailed account was 733 pages long. It shows that in the latter half of the 19th century American undergraduates had created an elaborate, intricate world of student organizations, complete with a code of customs, values, rewards, and penalties. Although selected individual instructors were highly respected, the collective faculty often was viewed with contempt.

Contrary to a common criticism, undergraduates were not always pressing for fewer obligations, diluted curriculum, and expanded freedom. Indeed, abundant evidence suggests that students took the initiative to enhance the intellectual and creative content of the college experience. The rise of literary societies and debating clubs shows a dominant

form of student enterprise in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. According to historian Frederick Rudolph (1962, pp. 136–55), grass roots initiatives by undergraduates, often opposed by the faculty and administration, also included the creation of libraries, formation of discussion groups about politics, study of modern languages, and reading of contemporary fiction. Only after bouts of repression and repudiation did college officials eventually allow such student activities to exist, and in many cases, the administration belatedly legitimized the innovations by making them a formal part of the college offerings. In a study of campus problems a century later, Pressey et al. (as cited in Bragdon, 1929, p. 48) noted that colleges and universities offered little to help students develop leadership skills to contribute to the social and economic problems in their home communities:

Small wonder that these students turned in desperation to activities of their own making, not always admirable, but at least involving real doing, a certain relevance to common adult activities, vigorous give and take with other people—situations in which there might be real life, and an opportunity for character and personality to grow.

Serious Business: Old Dartmouth on Trial

Significant, albeit unusual episodes of on-campus student rebellion signaled a serious dissatisfaction with the shortcomings of the college curriculum. For example, in the late 19th century at Dartmouth College, undergraduates had pressed in vain for several years to persuade the president to bolster the curriculum by adding courses in the natural and physical sciences, laboratory work, and field studies. They also wanted faculty to recognize new, emerging fields such as history, government, and economics. Dartmouth’s long-time president, Samuel Bartlett, probably believed he was a guardian of standards in his refusal to entertain, let alone implement, students’ requests for curricular innovation and modernization. In contrast to the typical avoidance of each other, students and faculty members united in their shared campaign for academic upgrading. To strengthen the alliance, a generation of young Dartmouth alumni, who had made their fortunes and professional reputations in New York and Boston, recalled their own comparable dissatisfactions with the curriculum, and they lent money and support to the student movement. In 1881, the college community of students, faculty members, and alumni held internal hearings and lit-

erally put the president on trial (Tobias, 1982).

The student, faculty, and alumni efforts that an elder group viewed as insubordination was in fact salvation and revitalization for the historic college. Having dispatched the curmudgeon president, the alumni and students lobbied to select a new, forward-looking president. As a result, Dartmouth College was transformed from a stagnant, small college with limited funds and shrinking enrollments to one of the most vibrant institutions in the entire nation.

Campus Concessions to Consumerism

Unfortunately, the Dartmouth College case was exceptional. After the Civil War, many college presidents responded to declining enrollments by simplistic, misguided notions of consumerism. Rolling tuition charges, in which the price charged was reduced closer to the start of the academic year, were widely practiced. An applicant who opted to enroll and pay fees in May or June was charged full freight. However, in late August and early September, as the college agent and bursar noticed that tuition revenues were flat and dormitories were unfilled, they entered into a bidding war to attract late comers by lowering the tuition charges.

Admissions examinations as described in the official college catalog appeared to be rigorous. In fact, grading student entrance examination papers was fluid and pragmatic. If an applicant could afford to pay tuition, admissions standards were lowered. In many cases, a weak student was offered admission "with conditions." This meant the applicant could enroll but would be required to take remedial courses at an extra charge before matriculating as a degree candidate.

Whether clever or devious, the tragedy of such college tactics is that they did not work well and begged the question: What should an appropriate, attractive college education look like in the late 19th century? Another sign of institutional inattention and sloth is apparent when one looks closely at retention and degree completion. College catalogs typically published annual summaries of enrollment for freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, and degree recipients. However, the data were often bogus, at least by modern standards of fair practice and reporting. They were snapshots of attendance. For example, if one took the time to analyze an entering cohort of freshmen at a particular college in 1880 and then tracked them name-by-name over 4 years, he or she would find a markedly different profile than that put out by the school. Drop-out

rates and transfers were high. Some historic, once prestigious colleges commonly had graduation rates of less than 20%. So, although nostalgia for the cohesive college experience shaped by loyalty to alma mater conjures images of full-time residential students who stayed for 4 years to graduate, the reality and institutional differences were markedly more complex and puzzling.

One part of the problem, which may be of special interest to NACADA members, regards substantial attention given to monitoring student compliance with myriad and often petty regulations. In the late 19th century, administrators had little knowledge of genuine academic advising. To the contrary, the faculty often displayed counterproductive behavior in proctoring dormitories and in classroom teaching.

Consider the 1890s memoir of Henry Seidel Canby (1936) about undergraduate life at Yale, one of the most prestigious and established colleges of the era. College teaching emphasized daily recitations characterized by strict attendance rolls and a desultory pedagogy in which the instructor systematically grilled students in assigned seats about their mastery of the prescribed work assigned for the class meeting. The material could be a set of algebra problems or a translation of a passage from Ovid, Cicero, or Pliny the Elder (Who knew? Who cared?). The goal of the instructor was to trap a student in a display of public ignorance: a bungled translation, an unsolved quadratic equation. Such a failed outcome prompted the instructor to assign the dreaded "black mark." If a student answered correctly, the faculty member grudgingly designated the "plus mark." The ultimate contest in this continual game between teachers and students was conducted by students who created suspense by giving an answer that was neither clearly correct nor clearly wrong. Statements of equivocation and reasonable doubt were the ultimate triumphs for students held hostage in required courses. This battle to a draw was more satisfying to students than a clearly correct answer because it created suspense and questioned the expertise and authority of the faculty.

Unraveling the extent to which such cat-and-mouse games indicate a perennial war between the generations or expressions of genuine concern by students fed up with an insipid, fossilized course of study is a challenging task. However, in evaluating the situation, one should consider quotes from Yale year books in the early 1900s that indicated class competitions for earning the lowest level of academic achievement.

Useful Studies: The Land Grant Act of 1862

The difference between intended outcomes of formal plans and student response to curricular reform is highlighted in the reaction to the Morrill Act of 1862, which led to federal funding mechanisms for creation of the land-grant colleges. This landmark legislation both prompted and helped initiate and fund the practical arts in the curriculum: agriculture, mining, engineering, and military studies (i.e., the curricular features hailed as part of the A&M legacy).

On one level, the intent to modernize the college curriculum by offering useful arts and sciences would seem a great leap forward in providing an alternative to the maligned classical curriculum. However, the actual record of student enrollments and choices shows a more complex picture. Consider the candid comment by an undergraduate in 1899 when asked about using his college education as preparation for a career in farming:

"Well, sir," he said, "the fact is, I should be ashamed to go into farming. It is presumed that collegiate education fits for professional life, and lifts us above manual labor. It is a blunder, but then there it is, and I don't care to have my classmate, Judge S., and my other classmate, Judge M., ten years from now say, 'Hello, Johnson, how are turnips and what's the price of young pigs?'" I asked him if he really believed that college education led to a separation of that sort, and a scorn for honest work. "Well," he said, "will you count up how many of our graduates go into farming, or mechanical employments, or mechanical industries?" (Veysey, 1964, p. 270)

In fact, students of the era showed increased interest in attending liberal arts colleges (Axtell, 1971). Even at the state land-grant colleges, enrollments in the bachelor of arts curricula often surpassed those in agriculture. Civil engineering was probably the most attractive of the new professional fields. The great, large state universities would not really flourish until the 1920s, thanks in part to new federal appropriations for agricultural research. Meanwhile, the liberal arts degree enjoyed a surge of popularity.

Prestige and Certification

Under the assumption that the interpretation of "the college experience" had fallen into the doldrums in the mid-19th century, a signal of recovery is embodied in 1876 Harvard when an academically indifferent student was talking to

patrician professor-historian Henry Adams. The professor, incredulous that such a person would want to enroll, probed the student. The student's perceptive, pragmatic reply was, "Why, a degree from Harvard is worth money to me in Chicago!" (Veysey, p. 270)

For whatever reasons, a college education as a source of prestige and leverage had gained a foothold in the American way of pursuing success. It may have disappointed the stately (and independently wealthy) Henry Adams, but it was a message not lost on either young students or college presidents over the next 150 years.

Almost 3,000 miles west of Harvard, another case demonstrated the importance and peculiarity of prestige. At the time, the conventional wisdom held that many children of recent immigrants who were first-generation college students sought practical courses that led to employment. Indeed, often this was true, but not always. In the San Francisco Bay area the Christian Brothers teaching order vigorously petitioned the Vatican for permission to supplement its traditional charter of teaching skilled crafts with the license to offer instruction and degrees in classical languages, especially at their St. Mary's College (Isetti, 1979).

The petition was strongly opposed by the Jesuits, who argued to the Pope that such a change would violate the rival Christian Brothers' mission of teaching children from the working class. The Christian Brothers countered successfully that American society demanded a markedly different conception of education and professions than did the tightly class-bound structures of European countries. In sum, for upwardly mobile children from the American working class, the most practical course of collegiate study was the impractical one of Latin and Greek. They argued that a classical college course provided entrée into the upper middle-class world of lawyers, businessmen, judges, and doctors who themselves had studied the classics. It was the coin of the realm in board rooms, bar associations, medical societies, and established clubs into which a degree in accounting or agriculture would not be adequate for a young man to be included. The Vatican agreed and henceforth the Christian Brothers assisted in harnessing higher education to upward social and professional mobility for a previously underserved constituency. Only in America! Here was confirmation of sociologists Jencks and Riesman (1968) that the combination of certification and socialization made going to college crucial to success in American life since the late 19th century.

The Elective System and Fields of Concentration

One of the great concessions to student choice (and responsibility) was the elective system, which was first implemented in 1869 at Harvard, in tandem with the requirement that students select a field of concentration or a “major.” For students, it was another opportunity to navigate the official curriculum and fulfill degree requirements while at the same time accommodate one’s own preferences for leisure, extracurricular activities, and self-determined levels of academic intensity. Students often responded with good-natured humor in the nicknames for various courses. A geology course that continually enrolled a large number of not-too-studious varsity athletes might be hailed in student lore as “rocks for jocks.” In the sociology department, students referred to a course on deviant behavior as “nuts and sluts” (Bronner, 1990, p. 43).

Student nicknames often immortalized their fondness and respect for professors who were inspiring lecturers (and, also generous in awarding students high grades). At Harvard, for example, the world famous historian of France, Crane Brinton, taught an early morning history course for 4 decades from 1923 to 1968 that was affectionately nicknamed “Breakfast with Brinton.” The nomenclature, of course, licensed students to bring coffee and pastries along with notebooks and pens for memorable class meetings. Crisis struck the undergraduate culture unexpectedly when the registrar changed the course’s starting time from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Fortunately, while American undergraduates may not always be studious, they are resourceful. Professor Brinton’s fame and lore were declared safe amidst such change when one ingenious student proclaimed that henceforth the legendary course would be known as “Brunch with Brinton.”

Concomitant with the increasing organizational complexity of colleges and universities was the changing demographics of the student body. Early 20th-century education professor Helen Bragdon (1929, p. 22) perceived that the economic, social, and geographic heterogeneity of the class led to different adjustment issues for matriculating students, resulting in concerns that

orientation may be crowded to the point of fatigue for the student; it may be “under-crowded” to the point of idleness; it may fail to appeal to motivate him; or he may receive no assurance that there is anyone in this whole new environment who is interested in his development as an individual.

The Life and Death—and Life—of the Large Lecture

Today a convenient scapegoat for the abuses of mass higher education is the practice at many campuses, especially at large universities, to rely heavily on large lecture classes for introductory undergraduate courses. Impersonality fostered by classrooms seating several hundred students as well as lack of dialogue between the student and the professor are just a few of the familiar complaints. The irony of these criticisms is that the lecture was once hailed as an important, laudable innovation in American higher education. The format provided an antidote of sorts to the confining format of daily recitations and mandatory attendance of the 19th century. It signaled that the instructor was a bona fide professor—an expert and published scholar in the field—who was informed and had something current to say!

The attraction of the lecture to students was many-fold. If one had an interest in the topic, the lecture was a way to acquire state-of-the-art information on the topic. If indifferent, the student could sleep or listen as much (or as little) as she or he wished. At each campus, certain professors gained fame and following for their magnificent, well-prepared lectures. Even after World War II, the large lecture course taught by a nationally or internationally known scholar was a deliberate, conscious pedagogical decision made by university faculty and administration. In a 1948 cover article featured in *Life* magazine, the dean at the University of California, Berkeley, explained to journalists that he believed it preferable to have 500 students listen to a lecture by an outstanding scholar rather than to have a small class whose instructor was a less established scholar in the field (Crane, 1948).

The dean’s logic may have been persuasive and pervasive around 1950. However, a decade later disgruntled undergraduates at Berkeley and elsewhere decried such practices as inhumane and insulting. Their response was to wear badges proclaiming, “Do Not Fold, Bend or Mutilate,” which referred to the impersonality of the multiversity, and to encourage small seminars, honors programs, independent studies, and field studies.

The undergraduate reforms resulted in an ironic end for the reform-minded cluster colleges of the late 1960s. Their ultimate fates were mixed. Some survived; some failed. Most converged on a compromise model. Many were founded on the presumption that undergraduates truly wanted to accept responsibility for planning a unique and coherent course of study. In fact, only a small percentage of

entering students had both the inclination and ability to do so. Large lecture classes did not disappear. Rather, they coexisted in a new mix with a variety of teaching formats. Indeed, one of the big challenges facing department chairs in fields such as history, sociology, political science, and English in the early 21st century is to attract and hire new professors to take the place of the retired faculty members praised for their mesmerizing lectures, which would serve as a magnet for attracting large numbers of students in an age of enrollment management and keen awareness of tuition revenues.

Student Evaluation of Courses and Instructors

In the late 20th and early 21st century, the end-of-semester practice of students filling out evaluation sheets for the instructor and course is taken for granted. This policy was imposed in the late 1970s by provosts and deans as a measure to assure faculty accountability, but few realize it was rooted from a student-initiated pursuit quite outside the formal structures generated by the faculty and administration. "Insider's" guidebooks, written by and for Harvard students, surfaced as early as the 1920s. They provide a testimony about the complexities and uncertainties of the elective-system labyrinth and the strong tradition of students relying on their peers for reliable advice about professors and programs.

Another underground movement of student enterprise also evolved: Elaborate networks of note takers in lecture classes sold the notes to a new cohort of undergraduates who were willing to pay for sound information that would increase their own odds of academic success. For example, the long-lasting Fybate Lecture Notes enterprise in Berkeley was initiated by students in the decade after World War II and ultimately flourished as an incorporated business.

More recently, technological advancements have democratized exchanges among students, allowing access to opinions and information about professors and courses to those without formal memberships in student organizations or social connections created by living on campus. Many students review their faculty on-line at sites such as www.ratemyprofessors.com, one of *Time* magazine's 50 best Web sites of 2008. Students post their anonymous ratings of instructors' average clarity, easiness, and helpfulness (scale of 1-5), noting the course number, the semester enrolled, if attendance is mandatory, as well as the textbook required and how much it was used. "Just for fun" (reads the Web site), students can also score a pro-

fessor's appearance as "Hot" or "Not."

In another form of electronic communication, some students use the social networking service www.Twitter.com. "Twittering" is a form of micro-blogging—an exchange of real-time, short, text-based posts. One can post a question ("who has notes from Brit lit 2day?") or an update ("my brain hurts"), and those who also use Twitter can respond ("tweet") if they like. Jones (2008) suggested that Twitter provides both social and academic advantages, including chatting with other students in and out of class, collaborating on a project, and getting inside information about other teachers and classes. While some professors encourage tweeting during class, even using it as a pedagogical device to stimulate class discussion, others find it disruptive. Internet blogs offer students an additional venue for sharing information with peers, including discussions of course content or the instructor. In 2008, a New York University student critiqued her "Reporting Gen Y (a.k.a. Quarterlifers)" course in her blog entry "Old Thinking Permeates Major Journalism School," sparking conflicting views on whether students should acquire the instructor's permission prior to blogging about the class (Glaser, 2008).

Students are the primary witnesses to faculty teaching performance, and new technologies illuminate the relatively private domain of the college classroom. In contrast to the official course and instructor evaluations at the end of the term, some of these informal, electronic sources of student opinions can be posted at any point throughout the semester and be available to multiple audiences long after ratings are entered. Higher education critics Kors and Silvergate (1998) would likely applaud these innovations, as they encouraged students who experience abuses of power on campus to challenge "loudly and publicly" (p. 359). They quoted Supreme Court Justice Brandeis: "Sunlight is the most powerful of all disinfectants" (p. 359).

The Curious Case of MIT and the Hidden Curriculum

Support services professionals enjoy an interesting vantage point to observe and understand the animated character of the curriculum. One of the most fertile case studies came about from psychologist Benson Snyder, who provided counsel to students at MIT (the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Over time he noted and tracked a distinctive syndrome associated with the internal culture of MIT and the powerful construct of "the hidden curriculum" that could be applied and explored elsewhere. Whatever

the admissions brochures or course catalogue said, the culture of MIT dictated that professors were demanding, emphasized advanced research, and expected students to combine high intelligence with academic dedication. The inductive power uncovered by Snyder in his case study was shown by each college or university acquiring and transmitting its own hidden curriculum. Each new student bore the burden to decipher the distinctive ethos of one's institution and department. Snyder's model of analysis opened the door for exploring the diversity of academic life among numerous institutions whose catalogs and degree requirements may have looked more or less alike on paper.

Novelist Irwin Shaw's account about post-World War II America in *Rich Man, Poor Man* shows a variation of the MIT hidden curriculum identified by Snyder. Shaw opens his story with the classroom setting at a small liberal-arts college in the Northeast. Many of the students enrolled in the economics class are on the GI Bill. Their instructor, Professor Denton, emphasized in his lectures that the salient feature of the American economic system was its capacity to perpetuate social class inequities by means of a stilted tax system that favored the wealthy. The instructor and students all agreed on the information and its importance. However, their respective processing of it was markedly divided. The professor was sounding a call for reform in legislation and policies dealing with regulation of business. The students internalized it as a clarion call to action and enthusiastic participation. As one student, Rudolph Jordache, recalled:

The effect on the class, as far as Rudolph could discern, was not the one Denton sought. Rather than firing the students up with indignation and a burning desire to rally forth to do battle for reform, most of the students, Rudolph included, dreamed of the time when they themselves could reach the heights of wealth and power, so that they, too, like J.P. Morgan, could be exempt from what Denton called the legal enslavement of the electorate body. (Shaw, 1969, p. 282)

Unlike the late 19th-century recitation session, the students depicted by Shaw (1969) were not indifferent to the lessons. Rather, savvy undergraduates' careful notes and attention to Professor Denton's insightful lectures were "not those of a disciple, but rather those of a spy in enemy territory" (Shaw, 1969, p. 283). The professor's earnest lessons perpetuated the system he had intended to reform.

Conclusion: The Benefits and Challenges of Diversity

American higher education has been (and is) characterized by diversity. The nation can claim several thousand degree-granting institutions. The matrix of choice is both bewildering and tantalizing. To sweeten the deal (or to complicate it), undergraduates have an array of choices within the institution they choose. Lewis (2006) discussed critically the American undergraduate curricula by invoking such terms as a "cafeteria curricula." In a similar vein, Kerr (1963) referred to the modern American university as a "service station." Historian James Harvey Robinson noted that taking courses merely to acquire enough credits to complete a degree equates to having had a boil—an experience to endure as "quickly and easily as possible and preferably with no after effects" (as cited in Bennett, 1933, p. 71). Questions of quality and accountability have bedeviled some reform groups such as the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, which between World War I and World War II was preoccupied with bringing both standards and standardization to the sprawl of American higher education.

In *Coming of Age in New Jersey*, anthropologist Michael Moffat (1988) observed that the major challenges and learning experiences of college are quite apart from the content or substance of courses. Rather, the experience offers the opportunity and imposes the requirement that a student learns to navigate a complex bureaucracy. This important survival skill certainly is useful in adult life: If a student can harmonize his or her interests and goals with the complexities of the curriculum, the American campus can be a combination academic playground and cornucopia. It serves the intense, informed motivated pre-med student at the same time it accommodates the individual who wants a good time and future business contacts—that is, as long as she or he satisfies the iron clad rule of the university: "Three C's and a D and keep your name out of the newspaper."

One cautionary note concludes our analysis: We have tended to emphasize the collective and group behavior of undergraduates. Our limited focus tends to mask or blur the great individual stories of the impact of college studies on students and the role of great books, dedicated professors, and academic advisors to help students discover for themselves the power of advanced learning. Historian Charles Homer Haskins noted this oversight in 1925 in his lectures and classic book on students in medieval universities, *The Rise of the*

Universities. After analyzing numerous documents and institutional records from universities at Bologna, Paris, and elsewhere in 13th- and 14th-century Europe, Haskins noted that the serious student seldom gets mentioned because he or she lacks the drama or controversy that attracts novelists, journalists, or (more recently) film makers (pp. 89-90). The pervasive diversity of American higher education in its institutions, fields of study, and composition of enrolled student bodies, whether in 1636 or 2009, encourages the transmission of knowledge and is a prompt for students to consider values.

A salient theme emerges from this review of grassroots curricular shifts: College students actively influence their academic experiences in significant ways. Their requests, protests, actions, and reactions contribute to organizational changes. We have looked at formal and informal ways that students voice their desires and displeasures within organizations known for their glacial rates of change. Distinctive characteristics of colleges and universities that deter rapid changes are well documented (Kezar, 2001). Complex bureaucracies, most institutions of higher education lack a clear, agreed-upon mission that can be used to hold educators accountable, and the stakeholders, including educators, have multiple and sometimes conflicting goals. Moreover, the authority structure is decentralized and often ambiguous. Higher education scholar Robert Birnbaum (1988, p. 28) noted, "The authority of various constituents to participate in or make decisions is often unclear and frequently contested," and the collegial committee structure impedes efficient communication. Yet despite the inertia of tradition, students have found ways to insert their views and at times transform the form and function of their educational experiences.

Tierney (1997) proposed that new members influence an organization by the ways in which they make sense of the culture. Thus, the process of socialization involves more than the unilateral movement of students discovering and assimilating the norms of the college community; rather a give-and-take (Tierney, p. 6) characterizes the relationship between students and the college or university as informed by students' unique backgrounds and the current context of higher education. Phrased differently, in successful socialization, students do not merely acquire the knowledge of how to participate effectively in the university, they play important roles in re-creating the culture of the institution. In this postmodern perspective, the culture of a college is transformed by the interactions

of mutually dependent actors. In the examples we discuss, those actors include students, administrators, faculty members, alumni, and presidents. Technological developments such as the Internet, E-mail, and distance learning can be considered aspects of the broader context of higher education, as could the perceptions of potential employers and the general public regarding the value of a college degree.

Organizational theorists Amir Levy and Uri Merry (1986) classified two kinds of organizational shifts: first- and second-order changes. First-order change, also known as "organizational development," is characterized by incremental adjustments to part of the organization, but the core of the institution remains intact. In contrast, second-order change reflects a deeper and broader organizational transformation in which the underlying values, culture, or structure is altered. Second-order change is irreversible, multidimensional, and multilevel. Most of the important curricular innovations would be considered first-order changes, reflecting college and university evolutions in response to internal and external forces. Additional first-order changes include the emergence of service learning programs, learning communities, and professional-advising staff roles.

Recognizing an environment increasingly characterized by technological advancements in communication among college and university faculty members, staff, and students, we conclude our survey of college students and American higher education from 1636 to the present by urging higher education advocates and leaders to heed Tierney's (1997, p. 14) suggestion: Namely, mutually dependent actors of higher education should work together "toward innovation and change rather than the status quo." Although difficult to distill the examples and data of more than 5 centuries of academic life and student cultures into a single insight, our extended exploration leads us to urge a contemporary and new generation of academic advisors to be informed and aware of the history of higher education because the past is the prologue to an exciting present and future for American colleges and universities.

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