



The Changing American Campus

For the first time in its history, the United States has in place a system of *mass* higher education, with 11 million people of all races and incomes attending some sort of college or university. This campus revolution has occurred during the 1970s while most attention has focused on declining overall enrollment, financial strains, and controversies, such as the *Bakke* case, over "affirmative action." Here sociologist David Riesman provides an overview; Martin Kaplan examines the old "elite schools"; journalist Larry Van Dyne analyzes community colleges, the newest wave; and economist Chester E. Finn, Jr. looks at the financial state of higher education.



BEYOND THE '60s

by David Riesman

In common parlance, "the 1960s" generally denotes the tumultuous period between the Kennedy assassination in 1963 and the beginning of Watergate in 1972. Like other stereotypical decades, the '60s are now seen retrospectively through a distorted lens. We forget, for example, that civil-rights activism, civil disobedience, and the antinuclear movement in the United States all began in the 1950s. By the same token, although American campuses achieved their greatest visibility in the press during the '60s, the 1970s are proving to be a more significant decade of change in higher education.

Consider these developments:

In 1972, in a move heralded by no banner headlines, Congress created the Basic Educational Opportunity Grants to pro-

vide tuition subsidies for needy students. Spiritual heir to the G.I. Bill, it was the most important piece of federal education legislation since Lincoln's day, when the Morrill Act established the land-grant college system. Basic grants (along with money from related programs) now provide some \$5 billion annually to 3 million American students.

These students are not admitted to college on the basis of national competitive examinations, as in Japan and many other industrial societies. Instead, the recent American pursuit of equal opportunity has led us to extend some sort of college education to virtually any taker, regardless of ability, willingness to pay, or quality of previous academic work.

Aided in part by federal aid (and legal pressure), in part by active recruiting by colleges and universities (with the elite public and private schools leading the way), both the proportion and the absolute numbers of minority students have risen dramatically in the 1970s. Black women for a long time had attended college (usually predominantly black colleges) in higher proportions than black men—often 100 percent higher. But during the 1970s, black males caught up with their female counterparts. There are currently more than 1 million black students in college, comprising 11 percent of total U.S. enrollment. The college-going rates for youths from middle- and lower-income black families are now actually higher than for comparable white families.* Race aside, women, for the first time in our history, now outnumber men in the freshman classes of U.S. postsecondary institutions.

Many of the new college students attend the growing urban universities. If we leave aside the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, King's College (which became Columbia) in New York, and a few others, colleges in the United States until the late 19th century were in small cities and towns, away from the

*Enrollments of students from Spanish-speaking families have risen less dramatically, however, in part because fewer of them are making it through high school. Although "Hispanic Americans" will be the largest officially designated U.S. minority group by the mid-1980s, in 1976 they made up only 4.4 percent of college students.

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alleged corruption of the metropolis.* Even after the land-grant colleges were established in 1862, most of the attention continued to go to rural areas.

Administrators Under Siege

During the last few years, the momentum has been in the other direction. The University of Massachusetts has opened a new Boston campus. The University of Missouri has taken over the once private University of Kansas City (and has also built a new branch in St. Louis); and the state system in Ohio has established Cleveland State University, taking over for this purpose the small kernel of Fenn College. One could go on. These new institutions may be seen as a second land-grant wave, belatedly reflecting a shift of the U.S. population to metropolitan areas.

Junior colleges—there were once 300 of them, mostly private, often for women only, frequently regarded as finishing schools—have been steadily supplanted by (mostly public) community colleges, many of them also urban, which now enroll one-third of all American college students. A thousand strong, the community colleges represent the kind of quick and enviable adaptation to consumer demand usually not associated with so entrenched an enterprise as higher education.

Finally, in the face of competing campus interests and government regulations, the task of being a university president is harder than ever before. The very nature of the office has changed; indeed, it may no longer be a job for an educator. In an earlier era, to be sure, those long-lived presidents who set their stamp on institutions, or created them *de novo*, were not universally popular. Woodrow Wilson had at least as many difficulties at Princeton as he did in the White House, and a look at the correspondence of Charles William Eliot during his 40-year tenure at Harvard reveals the many difficulties he encountered with faculty, governing boards, and influential Bostonians.

Yet university presidents today are required to spend more time managing than leading. They must contend with competing interests inside the university—among graduate schools and autarchic faculty members, unionized staff, and periodically mobilized students—that are as threatening as any pressures coming from the outside. Indeed, the external pressures sometimes seem relatively benign.

In my own view, for example, the fact that government

*Two Big Ten universities, Minnesota and Ohio State, are located in metropolitan centers; perhaps in Minnesota it was believed that, if heavily populated by Scandinavians, even a metropolis could be healthy.

bounty, on which virtually all schools depend, comes from more than 400 separate programs scattered through almost every federal agency (and overseen by over 100 congressional committees and subcommittees) is fortunate because no single jugular vein can be cut at the behest of an angry legislator. Yet the need to manage and keep track of funds from so many different sources, subject to different patterns of auditing and review, creates almost unmanageable problems for recipient institutions.

The sheer diversity of American higher education, so baffling to foreigners, baffles Americans as well. There were, at last official count, 3,075 accredited colleges and universities in the United States. Many of them have their own separate lobbies in Washington: the community colleges, the land-grant schools and other state universities, the former teachers colleges and regional state universities, the predominantly black schools, the private colleges. Not to mention women's schools and Catholic schools, and schools affiliated with dozens of other denominations. Higher education in this country has not evolved according to a master plan. Nor is there any kind of centralized federal ministry of education,* as there is in most of the rest of the world. (There are, however, central boards in many states to limit senseless competition by curbing, for example, the plans of a regional state college or university to establish a medical school or inaugurate new Ph.D. programs rivaling offerings at already established state and land-grant universities.)

A Hobbesian War?

Prior to the current economic crunch, the helter-skelter development, governance, and multiple financing of American colleges and universities was regarded as a great strength, an example of healthy pluralism. But in a time of "retrenchment," questions are being raised about the compatibility of pluralism and other values—for indeed, contrary to the American credo, good things are not always compatible. In a number of states, robust public institutions are continuing to expand even as academically distinguished private ones, with empty classrooms,

*In 1977, to honor a campaign pledge to the organized schoolteachers of the National Education Association (which has also been active in college organizing), the Carter administration proposed creation of a cabinet-level Department of Education. The hope was to give education greater dignity and visibility by separating it out from the mammoth Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. But many representatives of private higher education opposed the change, fearing especially that if specialized agencies such as the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Science Foundation were to be included in the new Department, dominated as it is likely to be by concerns for public schools, the tendency toward a "leveling" in quality, already evident in much federal and administrative practice, would be enhanced.

“BASICS” VERSUS “SOFTNESS”

Newspapers—and the Bakke case—have made us aware of the increasing numbers of minority students in college. But we are less aware of the growing numbers of white college students who once would not have thought of themselves as “college material.” Faculty members are only now beginning to seek ways to cope with a student body—both in community colleges and in four-year schools—that is academically less well prepared and less motivated than in the past.

Professors in many colleges and universities respond to the new generation by pressing for greater stress on basic skills and a “core” body of knowledge that every student is expected to master. At the same time, individual university departments—acting much like the community colleges—feel compelled to compete for these students in a campus “free market.” The end result is “softness”: larger rewards (grade inflation) or lesser demands (fewer homework assignments), with the professor often being judged as an entertainer.

teeter towards bankruptcy. Many of the private schools could accept students now attending public institutions if they were given the per-student subsidy (or even much less) that the state provides. In such a situation, between the private and the public schools, as well as among the public schools themselves, the stage has been set for a Hobbesian war of all against all.

In some ways, that war has already begun, and the side that has given up the most ground is the private sector. This is a mischievous development. Worse, in terms of those subtle counterweights that help us to maintain a broad and balanced sense of what educational “quality” really is, the mischief promises to be quite substantial.

At the end of World War II, approximately half of the 1.5 million college and university students in the United States were educated in private institutions, the other half in state or locally supported schools. Today, private colleges educate barely one-fifth of American undergraduates.*

Only in the northeast quadrant of the United States, where private education had a head start, does the appeal of such schools still outshine that of the state universities. By contrast, in Michigan, few private colleges even come close to the major state schools in quality. When one goes further west and to the South, the state institutions have near-total hegemony. One senses this in Willie Morris’s description, in *North Toward*

*This is just the reverse of the case in Japan, where a growing number of private colleges and universities now enroll about 80 percent of the students; however, with exceptions such as Waseda and Keio, the most distinguished universities are public.

Home, of the allure of the University of Texas to a graduate of Yazoo City High School.

There is a handful of exceptions all around the country, including not just major private research universities like Stanford, but outstanding smaller private colleges and universities as well: Reed, Whitman, Carleton, Oberlin, Emory, Rice—schools that, if they did not already exist, no one in these tough times would now be likely to invent. Here, the academic standards are rigorous and purposeful. But the number of students these and other private institutions draw are insignificant compared with enrollments at the great state institutions such as the branches of the University of California, which take students from the state's entire socioeconomic spectrum and to which a well-to-do family is as likely to send its children as to Stanford.

Thus, it is not simply tuition that has taken private schools out of the market, for inflation spreads its penalties—and windfalls—all too unevenly. There are still millions of Americans who have enough, could save enough, or could safely borrow enough to send their children even to the most expensive private college. Indeed, some recent evidence (which few parents or politicians are predisposed to accept) suggests that middle-class families' gross incomes are actually *outpacing* the rate of inflation.*

At the heart of the problem is the fact that, as our culture becomes "democratized," the idea of attending a private school has come to seem unnatural and anachronistic to many people. To be sure, in a country the size of the United States there remain a good many affluent and ambitious children and parents who are determined to seek "the best" in higher education—Jewish families particularly, and, increasingly, families of Irish, Oriental, and other backgrounds, lacking regional or strong religious loyalties. But such traffic feeds only the big or small "brand-name" institutions.

Among one group of victims of this egalitarianism—the exclusively private single-sex colleges—panic has been spreading since the late 1950s. Future anthropologists will be amused to discover that Americans threw young people at each other in an unchaperoned way and regarded this as if it were the order of nature. Yet sex segregation, which has existed in some form for adolescents in all societies, was denounced as "unnatural," not just as discriminatory. It has become an increasingly idiosyn-

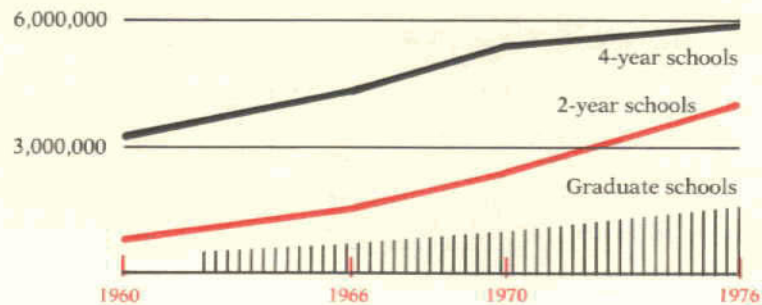
*According to the Congressional Budget Office, even when all taxes are subtracted, the median income of families with college-age students rose by about 75 percent between 1967 and 1976—just enough to cover the tuition climb of the same decade. The Congressional Research Service, however, has published rival findings suggesting that median income in fact lagged behind tuition by about 5 percent over the same period.

HIGHER EDUCATION: KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

INSTITUTIONS¹

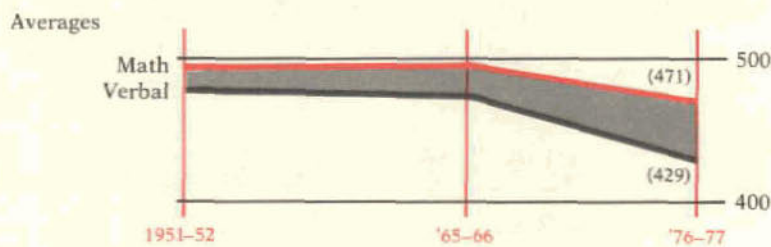
| | 1950 | 1960 | 1966 | 1970 | 1976 |
|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Public | 638 | 721 | 806 | 1,101 | 1,467 |
| Private | 1,221 | 1,319 | 1,446 | 1,472 | 1,608 |
| For women | 258 | 259 | 283 | 193 | 125 |
| For men | 222 | 232 | 232 | 154 | 109 |
| Co-ed | 1,379 | 1,549 | 1,737 | 2,226 | 2,828 |
| Religious | 717 | 807 | 910 | 817 | 785 |
| 2-year | 527 | 593 | 685 | 897 | 1,147 |
| 4-year | 1,332 | 1,447 | 1,567 | 1,676 | 1,928 |
| Total | 1,859 | 2,040 | 2,252 | 2,573 | 3,075 |

The number of colleges and universities (above) continues to climb, but the number of religious and single-sex colleges has fallen from its 1966 peak. Big gains were made by community colleges, which now enroll one-third of the nation's 11 million college students (below). Of those attending community colleges, less than one-fourth go on to four-year schools, with figures ranging from 9 percent (Hispanics) to 26 percent (whites).

STUDENTS¹

Average pre-college Scholastic Aptitude Test scores for all students have declined, with the biggest drop in "verbal" scores (below), even as college enrollment has doubled since 1965. Of every 100 American youngsters in the fifth grade in 1948, 58 later graduated from high school, 15 from college; for 1968 fifth-graders, the figures were 75 and 24 (projected).

S.A.T. SCORES²



Sustained enrollment gains have raised the proportion of college graduates from 17.3 percent of the 22-year-old population in 1962 to 23.4 percent in 1976. In 1976, colleges and universities awarded nearly 1 million bachelor's degrees, more than 300,000 master's degrees, and about 35,000 Ph.D.'s. In both numbers and percentages, blacks and other minorities (below) now share increasingly in these rewards, although gains for Hispanics have not been dramatic.

MINORITY ENROLLMENTS³

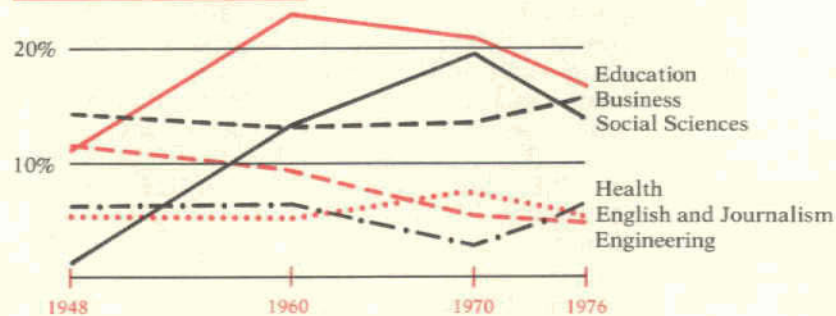
(Thousands of students and percentages of total undergraduate enrollment)

| | 1970 | | 1974 | | 1976 | |
|------------------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| Blacks | 345 | 6.9% | 508 | 9.0% | 605 | 10.2% |
| American Indians | 27 | 0.5 | 33 | 0.6 | 38 | 0.6 |
| Hispanics | 103 | 2.1 | 158 | 2.8 | 264 | 4.4 |
| Asian-Americans | 52 | 1.0 | 64 | 1.1 | 103 | 1.7 |
| Total | 526 | | 763 | | 1,011 | |

RELIGIOUS DISTRIBUTION⁴

| | UNIVERSITIES | | COLLEGES | |
|----------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|
| | High ranking | Low ranking | High ranking | Low ranking |
| FACULTY | | | | |
| Protestant | 59.9% | 69.3% | 64.7% | 67.1% |
| Catholic | 13.2 | 16.7 | 13.4 | 23.8 |
| Jewish | 17.2 | 7.2 | 13.2 | 3.3 |
| Other | 9.7 | 6.8 | 8.7 | 5.8 |
| UNDERGRADUATE | | | | |
| Protestant | 43.2 | 57.0 | 65.2 | 57.2 |
| Catholic | 26.7 | 29.8 | 17.6 | 33.7 |
| Jewish | 20.1 | 7.9 | 10.1 | 3.7 |
| Other | 10.0 | 5.3 | 7.1 | 5.4 |

Diverse religious groups are represented as percentages of total faculty and undergraduates in U.S. institutions (above, with "ranking" of institutions derived from the 1967 Gourman Report). Catholics, 25 percent of the U.S. population, are still "under-represented" in high-ranking schools, but future increases seem likely. Freed from pre-war discrimination, Jews (2.8 percent of the U.S. population) now make an outsized contribution to "elite" schools. The changing percentage of bachelor's degrees awarded in each field (below) partly reflects shifting job opportunities.

B.A./B.S. DEGREES¹

Sources: ¹National Center for Education Statistics, *Department of Health, Education and Welfare*

²College Entrance Examination Board

³U.S. Office for Civil Rights

⁴Adapted from *The Academic Melting Pot* by Stephen Steinberg, © 1974 by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

cratic choice to attend the few single-sex schools that remain. One element of American diversity is thus being lost—as is an opportunity for some young people who would benefit, for a time, from not having to compete *with* or *for* the opposite sex. Yet opportunity to choose is supposed to be one of the very essentials of democratization.

Another precariously perched group of private schools are the Fundamentalist Christian colleges, which combine Biblical literalism with the kind of high-powered education that is geared to “this-worldly” success. Many of the Fundamentalist institutions are in the South, such as Bob Jones University in South Carolina (which regards even the neighboring Southern Baptists at Furman University as heretics), or Harding College in Arkansas, which seeks to foster “a strong commitment to Christ and his kingdom” and forbids “drinking, gambling, dancing, hazing, obscene literature and pictures,” and smoking by women.*

Smallness vs. “Giantism”

Many of these schools—including Billy Graham’s alma mater, Wheaton College, in Illinois—have tough academic standards along with a driving sense of purpose. In times of trouble, they take comfort from their very belief that they are fighting a rearguard action against modernity (which, in many very sound ways, they are). But this sometimes leads them into costly confrontations with the insufficiently differentiated regulations of state and federal governments, and the prejudices of “enlightened secularists” who believe themselves to be apostles of tolerance.

Advocates of public higher education claim that there is virtually no innovation to be found in the private sector that cannot also be duplicated in the public sector. And indeed, the public schools are less monolithic than is often thought. The University of California, with its eight campuses, offers students everything from small-college clusters in rural settings of great natural beauty (Santa Cruz) to large urban universities (Los Angeles). And Evergreen State College, begun 10 years ago in Olympia, Washington, is more avowedly experimental than most private colleges.

Yet an important difference remains: Private colleges, and (with such exceptions as Northeastern and New York Univer-

*Fundamentalist religion does not necessarily mean political conservatism, however. At Michigan’s Calvin College, run by the Dutch Reformed Church, and far more traditional than anything found in the Netherlands, many of the faculty campaigned for George McGovern in 1972.

THE (UNCERTAIN) LEGACY OF BAKKE

The question of "reverse discrimination" in the case of Allan Bakke was resolved by the Supreme Court on June 28, 1978, but it remains very much a question in many other cases. The 38-year-old white engineer contended that he had been denied a place at the University of California-Davis medical school because of racial quotas that reserved 16 out of 100 openings for minority applicants. (Bakke entered the school last September.)

So finely balanced was the high court decision—Justice Lewis Powell voted with one bloc of four justices to award Bakke a place, then sided with the other four justices to uphold the consideration of race (but not explicit quotas) in the admissions process—that most lawyers regard it as an ambiguous precedent, not the last word on the legal complications of affirmative action in education.

Reverse discrimination suits, which have been cropping up in lower federal courts for some time, will no doubt continue. During the past year, judgments in lawsuits charging reverse discrimination or racial quotas have gone against Virginia Commonwealth University, the Georgetown University Law Center, the University of North Carolina, and Alabama State University, with the judge in the Virginia case expressing concern lest the rights of individual students or teachers be "flattened by the civil-rights steamroller."

Nor is the confusion limited to education. Similar suits have involved unions in New Orleans, police in Detroit, and city employees in Berkeley. How *Bakke* will shape future Supreme Court decisions is far from clear. Shortly after its decision in the case, the Supreme Court found in favor of the American Telephone and Telegraph Co. and its federally-approved system of "numerical goals" for hiring and promoting women and members of minority groups.

sity) most private universities as well, are on average far smaller than public ones. And while small size is not necessarily a virtue, it often is, particularly insofar as it continually reminds the sprawling public campuses that "giantism" may itself be a deformity. I am inclined to believe that, in the absence of the private model, state colleges and universities would never have sought to create enclaves of smallness. Clark Kerr (a graduate of tiny Swarthmore) has said that it was the model of the small, private Claremont Colleges that made Santa Cruz possible.

As noted above, private schools were the first actively to seek recruitment of minority students. Private colleges have also in fact (though by no means universally) possessed a somewhat greater degree of academic freedom and autonomy than public ones. Sheltered from the whims of angry governors and legislators, they set a standard for academic freedom and non-

interference that the public institutions can—and do—use in defending themselves.

State university officials recognize the importance of maintaining a private sector. State pride is a factor here. The state universities of Michigan and Texas, of Illinois and Indiana, Virginia and North Carolina, Washington and California all want to be world-class institutions on a level with Stanford, Chicago, and Yale, and they use these private models as spurs to their legislative supporters and beneficent graduates. They have even been able to maintain some selectivity, shunting those students with less demonstrable ability to the growing regional state colleges and universities.

These latter institutions, Avis-like in their resolve, hope to rival the state “flagship” campus. They have their own levers in our Hobbesian war. Most of the students beached by the 1960s demographic bulge swelled the enrollments of these colleges—not primarily those of the central university. The regional state colleges and universities are now large and well established. Given the sudden decline in funds and enrollments, and the general egalitarian temper of the times, these schools have no qualms about going to the mat for state money with the older, more prestigious parent campuses. The ineluctable, if not immediately perceptible consequence is that of “leveling.”

Spoiled Heirs

We have already seen how, in an effort to cut costs and avoid duplication, many states have established governing coordinating bodies whose task it is to allocate expenditures at each of the once relatively autonomous public universities. How does one now defend the superb library of the University of Illinois at Urbana—a world resource—when Southern Illinois University is forced to dismiss tenured faculty? How does one defend the eminence of the University of Wisconsin at Madison against the claims of the branch university in Milwaukee, the state’s largest urban center?

With leveling comes an erosion of student choice: If one institution is nearby, then why apply to any other since it is likely to be no different? In fact, most students today make no choice. Some two-thirds of “first time in college” freshmen apply to only one school, and they get in.

Even so, the decision is never irrevocable: American higher education offers students of all ages a second—indeed, a third and fourth—chance. Unlike the British (and Soviet) system, where a student is “tracked” by the age of 11 or 14, the American

system allows students to change their minds, drop out, transfer, take jobs, and come back without overmuch anguish.

Colleges, too, have second chances. They can adapt or react to the times; they can make an about-face in curriculum or in the type of student they hope to attract. There has always been room for innovation and fresh starts in American higher education, even if this freedom, which rested partly on expanding enrollments and funds, is more circumscribed now than it has been in many years.

What is really lacking is strong and visionary academic leadership. The democratization of search committees, the prospect of endless bureaucratic struggle, and the requirements of broad "sunshine laws" often make able candidates unwilling to offer themselves to universities. Many institutions wind up with conciliatory, faceless presidents, incapable either of vision or of the imaginative kind of planning required for what economist Kenneth Boulding has called "the management of decline."

But "decline," after all, is relative. Most of the rest of the world's universities are understaffed and overcrowded. The grumbling and querulousness common in American universities—serious complaints notwithstanding—resemble nothing so much as the moans of a spoiled heir still on a plateau of affluence.