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The changing American college student: implications for educational policy and practice[1]

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Abstract. New students entering higher education institutions in the United States have undergone dramatic changes during the past two decades. This paper summarizes some of the major trends observed in these surveys and discusses possible implications of the findings for educational policy and practice.

Each fall since 1966 the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles has been conducting a national survey of new college freshmen. A typical survey involves 250,000 students and a nationally representative sample of 550 higher education institutions of all types. Between the late 1960s and the mid-1980s American college students became much more focussed on material goals and less concerned with altruism and social problems. These value changes were accompanied by dramatically increased student interest in business careers and a sharp decline of interest in school teaching, social work, nursing, the clergy, and other service careers. These changes are perhaps best illustrated in the contrasting trends in two values: 'being very well off financially,' which doubled in popularity during the period of survey and 'developing a meaningful philosophy of life' which was the top student value in the early 1970s but was endorsed by fewer than half as many students by the late 1980s.

During just the past two or three years most of these trends seem to have ended or, in certain cases, shown signs of reversing direction. At the same time, there is growing evidence that students are increasingly oriented toward social activism. Protecting the environment appears to be the single greatest concern among American college students at the turn of the decade.

American college students have undergone dramatic changes in the past two decades. This paper reports on some of these changes and discusses their implications for higher education policy and practice.

Each fall for the past twenty-four years I have been involved in surveying the incoming students at a large sample of colleges and universities around the United States. Each survey involves approximately 250,000 full-time freshmen representing the entering classes at a nationally representative sample of about 600 institutions of all types. When you string together the results of these annual surveys, it is possible to generate a very interesting and informative portrait of the changing character of the American college student. What I see in these trends is both fascinating and potentially disturbing. The scholar in me is fascinated by the complexity of the changes, and the possibility that they can be explained in terms of some social or political theory, but the educator in me is disturbed by how these trends may be affecting our higher education system and perhaps more importantly by what they suggest about how our society has been changing in recent years. Let me briefly summarize the major findings from the 24 surveys under two headings: career and study plans, and personal values.

Careers and study plans

How have the students' career and study plans been changing? By far the most popular career among today's entering freshmen is business, a field which has grown tremendously in attractiveness since the early 1970s (Figure 1). Growth has been greatest among the women, although both sexes have shown increasing interest in business in recent years. The two most recent surveys, conducted in 1988 and 1989, show a slight tapering off of student interest in business, so it would appear that we may have reached the end of this long upward trend.

Which fields have contributed all these people to the business field? The career which has suffered the most in popularity since the 1960s is that of school teacher (Figure 2). This career hit bottom in 1982 and has shown some recovery in popularity since that time, although it is still far below its level of twenty years ago. While the declines have been steepest among the women, the men have also shown a parallel drop of interest in teaching careers. The hardest-hit group has been secondary school teachers, whereas elementary school teaching has shown a more modest decline in popularity. Declining student interest in teaching has also affected aspirations for college teaching careers, which have shown more than a 50 percent decline in popularity. Careers in scientific research, which frequently involve employment by an academic institution, has also shown a decline in popularity.

As far as student interest in particular major fields of study is concerned, since the late 1960s we have seen a consistent drop in popularity among virtually all of the fields of the liberal arts and sciences. The humanities were the first fields to be hit by this decline, and they were joined in the mid 1970s by the social sciences. The natural sciences joined the decline in the 1980s and have shown especially consistent drops

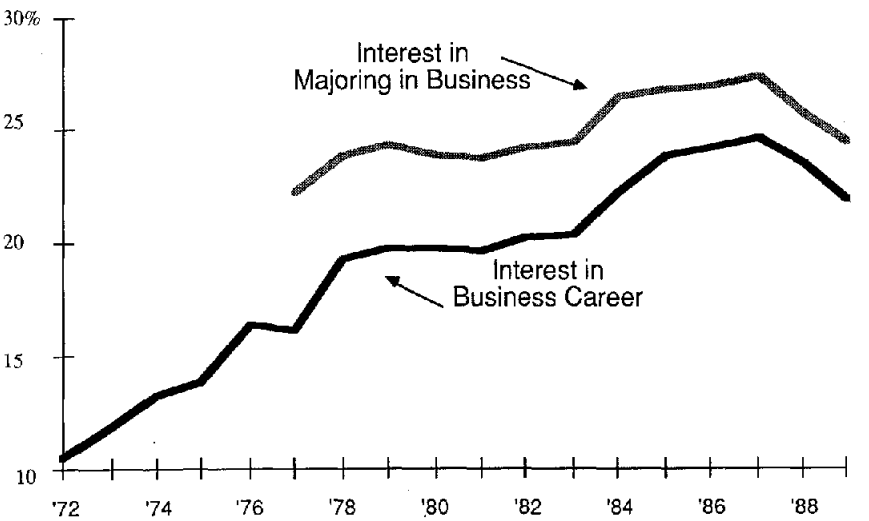

Fig. 1. Freshman interest in business.

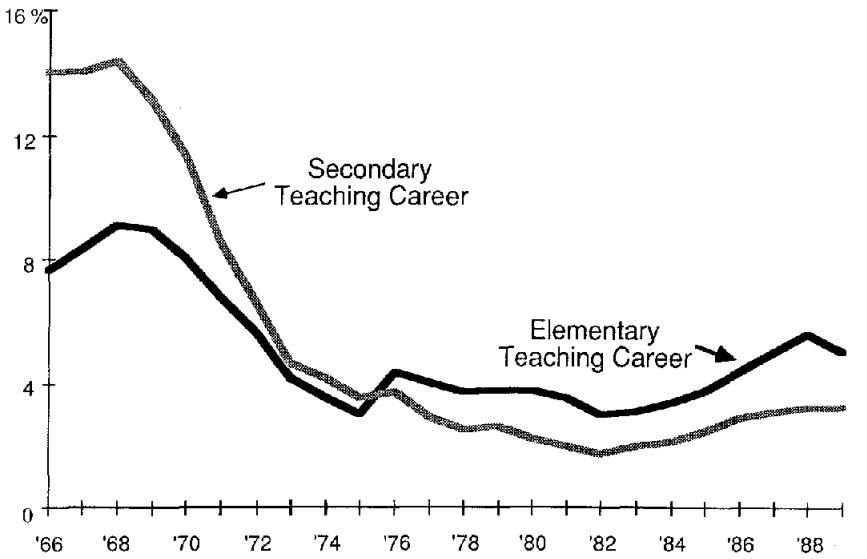

Fig. 2. Freshman interest in teaching careers.

in popularity in the past few years. At the same time, we have seen a decline in student interest in virtually all of the human service occupations in addition to teaching: nursing, allied health, social work, and the clergy.

Personal values

Each year our survey has included a list of 15-20 items describing various personal values or 'life goals.' The value which has shown the strongest upward trend is 'being very well-off financially.' (Figure 3) During the past dozen years student endorsement of this value has increased dramatically from less than 40% to more than 75% of the entering freshmen. The value showing the most precipitous decline in student endorsement is 'developing a meaningful philosophy of life.' This value was the most popular one in the early 1970s (83%), but has now dropped to ninth on the list at less than 40% endorsement. Note, however, that these two values have changed little in the past two years.

Although one can only speculate about the reasons for the contrasting patterns shown by these two values, it is possible that they reflect a common underlying shift in student values during the past decade. More specifically, it could be argued that accepting the goal of making a lot of money obviates the need for some students to 'develop a meaning philosophy of life.' Indeed, it may be that some students view the making of money as a kind of 'philosophy of life' in itself.

Changes in and other value questions reflect similar trends. For example, most of the values showing large increases in recent years are concerned with money, power,

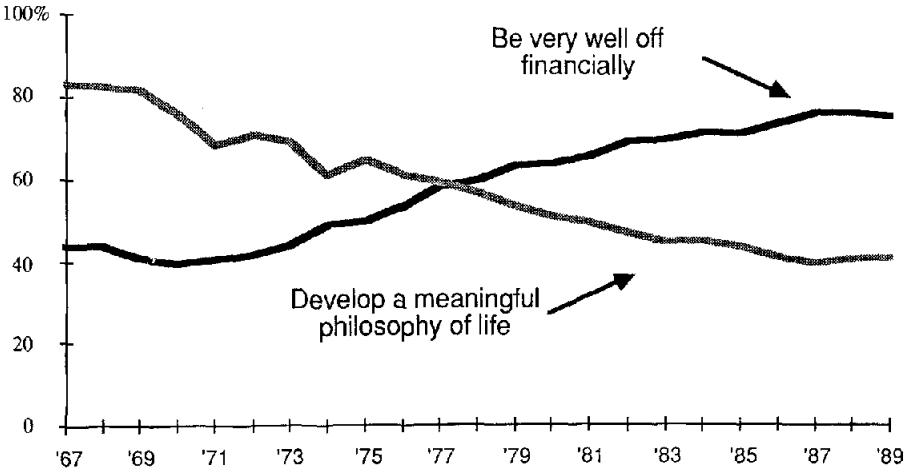

Fig. 3. Contrasting changes in two values (rated as 'essential' or 'very important').

and status: being very well-off financially, being an authority, having administrative responsibility for others, and obtaining recognition. Today's students are also much more likely than ever to say that a major reason for attending college is 'to be able to make more money.' At the same time, in 1989 the traditional liberal arts goal of attending college in order to gain 'a general education and appreciation of ideas' reached its lowest point in the history of the survey. Considering the change in students' major fields noted earlier, such a result is hardly surprising. These contrasting patterns of value changes are highly consistent with the changes in student majors and career plans discussed earlier. Increased student interest in business is accompanied by a strengthening of materialistic and power values while decreased student interest in education, social science, the arts, the humanities, nursing, social work, allied health, and the clergy is accompanied by declining altruism and social concern.

Other results from our most recent surveys indicate that students are becoming increasingly concerned about getting into top-ranked colleges. Multiple applications are at record highs. Yet, the percentage of students who report that they were able to get into their first-choice college is at an all-time low. Student ambition and aspiration is also at an all-time high: more students than ever are pursuing doctoral degrees. As a matter of fact, in the 1989 survey the percentages of students pursuing doctorates, masters, and law degrees all reached record high levels. That the popularity of the doctorate may be a reflection more of rising status need than of interest in particular careers is suggested by the fact that the two careers most suited to the Ph.D. – science and academia – are at record lows in popularity.

Other evidence from our recent surveys suggest that students may be feeling the emotional effects of this extreme competitiveness and the pressure to get higher degrees and attend the top-ranked colleges. More students than ever are saying that they frequently feel depressed and overwhelmed by all they have to do. It may be

that these student tensions are also being exacerbated by financial issues. Since 1980 student reliance on federal grants has declined steadily and reached record low levels in the most recent survey. At the same time, students have had to rely more on summer work, parental support, and aid from their institutions to make up the difference.

Looking to the future

So far I have been talking about past trends, but the real issue is whether there is anything that we in the education community can or should do to try to affect these trends in the future. Perhaps the best way to show how educators and policymakers can influence the shape of things to come is to speak for a moment about what is probably the most fashionable topic in education these days: the notion of *excellence*. All of us who work in academe inevitably adopt some perspective – at least implicitly, but hopefully explicitly – concerning what we regard as 'excellent' education. For some time now I have been arguing that our traditional notions of 'excellence' in higher education do not serve us well. There are two favorite approaches which have dominated higher education policy over the years. The 'reputational' approach, which equates excellence with an institution's ranking in national polls and surveys, amounts to a kind of popularity contest which may or may not tell us anything about the effectiveness of an institution's educational program. Americans love to do competitive rankings of just about everything – from athletic teams to corporations to television shows – and our universities are no exception. The 'resource' approach, which equates excellence with such things as the endowment, average faculty salaries, research grants, and the SATs of the entering freshmen, assumes that having a lot of such resources automatically guarantees an excellent educational program. These two traditional approaches are, of course, mutually reinforcing, since having a good reputation brings in additional resources and having abundant resources helps to enhance an institution's reputation. Unfortunately for the advocates of these traditional views, research on college student development shows that having a great reputation and a lot of resources does not assure an effective educational program; indeed, some of the most effective undergraduate education occurs at institutions with only modest reputations and resources.

Recently, I have been arguing that these traditional ways of defining excellence should be replaced by one which directly reflects the institution's effectiveness in educating its students – I call this the 'talent development' approach. Basically, the talent development approach argues that true excellence resides in the ability of an institution to have a positive influence on its students' intellectual and personal development. In talent development terms, an 'excellent' institution is one that develops the talents and abilities of its students to the fullest extent.

In certain respects these three approaches to excellence offer an interesting parallel to the changing patterns of student interests and values that we have been observing in recent years. The reputational and resources views, for example,

parallel the increasing student interest in money, power, status, and in careers in business. In contrast, the talent development view parallels student concern for others and for the society and careers in the human service occupations. Under the reputational and resources approaches, the institution devotes its energies to enhancing its power, prestige, and possessions. Under the talent development approach, the institution invests its energy and resources into helping students develop their talents and abilities to the fullest.

I want to emphasize that my support of the talent development approach is not intended to suggest that institutional reputations and resources are not important. Institutions obviously need resources to operate and they need reputations to atttract both students and resources. The problem is really the relative emphasis that we give to these different conceptions, our tendency to treat reputations and resources as ends in themselves, and the naive assumption that the talent development problem will take care of itself. Research on student development shows that being prestigious or having a lot of resources by no means guarantees a high quality educational experience (Astin 1977; Bowen 1977).

Recently, I have been giving a lot of thought to *why* we have tended to favor the resource and reputational approaches to excellence and why the talent development approach – which seems so consistent with our educational mission – has not been more widely accepted and adopted. In large part I think the ultimate answer to this question lies in the larger society and the particular philosophical or value perspective that holds sway at any point in time. I guess what I am really talking about here is our world view: our concept of the fundamental nature of human beings and of societies. The more I think about these issues the more I am tempted to conclude that there are two fundamentally different world views that one can adopt in looking at educational as well as societal issues. For simplicity let's characterize these as the *competitive* view and the *cooperative* view of human nature and of society.

Some views of America maintain that our greatest achievements as a society are the result of our intense competitiveness and that it is only through our competitive spirit that we have been able to achieve greatness as a society. Well, free enterprise is certainly a competitive view, where individuals are given the maximum opportunity to compete with each other for the best largest possible share of the resources and the rewards in the society. This competitive world view has deep roots in the history of western civilization, but the rise of Darwinism – with its emphasis on competition among species and the survival of the fittest – provided a scientific framework in which to view the development of the human species as a competitive enterprise. In Darwinian terms, the human species was able to survive and develop because we were more 'fit' than any other species. This competitive word view, I might add, also provides the basis for what the British sociologist Michael Young called the 'meritocracy.' In a pure meritocracy, the rewards and resources of the society are allocated in proportion to the abilities of each individual. 'Rewards,' in this context, are the social equivalent of survival. The more able persons get a disproportionate share of the resources and privileges, whereas the least able people get the smallest slice of the pie. It might be worth noting in passing that this competitive world view

has implications not only for how we view education and the larger society, but also for how we approach international relations and foreign policy.

A cooperative world view provides a vastly different frame of reference. Under this view, human progress and the development of the society is seen as depending upon the ability of individuals and groups to cooperate with each other. The survival and evolution of humankind is seen not as a victory in the struggle with other species or as a conquest of the environment, but rather as a manifestation of our ability to work cooperatively with each other toward common goals and to live in harmony with the environment.

It has become increasingly apparent to me that many of the issues that plague higher education these days can be better understood when viewed in terms of this cooperative-competitive framework. Take, for example, the different conceptions of excellence. The reputational approach is inherently competitive, since it fosters competition among institutions for higher and higher places in the pecking order. And the most obvious manifestation of this competition takes place in the arena of resources, where institutions compete with each other for the largest possible share of the resource pool. If my institution manages to improve its position in the pecking order by recruiting some of your faculty stars or National Merit Scholars, then your position in the reputational pecking order is proportionately diminished. In pursuing the resource approach to excellence, institutions inevitably compete with each other for funding, faculty stars, and students. Even within a single institution, the resource view breeds competition: academic departments compete with each other over faculty positions and other resources, academic personnel compete with student affairs personnel over a finite resource pie, and trustees and administrators compete with faculty for control over the resource allocation decisions. Claims for a larger share of resources are frequently buttressed by arguments about maintaining or enhancing quality or excellence. In short, it seems clear that both the reputational and resource approaches to excellence are manifestations of a competitive world view.

The talent development approach to excellence, on the other hand, symbolizes a very different value perspective. To this view, all institutions share a common purpose in trying to maximize the educational and personal development of their students. When an institution succeeds in its talent development mission, this success in no way diminishes what any other institution can do. Indeed, institutions can learn from each other by sharing information about their educational success and failures. Under such a cooperative arrangement, the success of any one institution benefits and contributes to the success of all others.

What is particularly ironic about our inclination toward competitiveness in education is that the very institution that should be the most competitive in its mentality – American business – has been recently talking a lot about *cooperation.* Recent research suggests, for example, that one of the most striking features of an effectively managed business organization is its capacity for getting employees to work cooperatively toward common organizational goals. They see uncontrolled competition among employees as potentially destructive, particularly when it discourages teamwork and encourages employees to curry favor with higher

management by making their peers 'look bad.' The key ingredient to developing a truly cooperative work environment, of course, is to develop a sense of trust among employees at all levels of the organization.

In my judgment the capacity to be a good team member and to work cooperatively with co-workers should be one of the 'basic skills' that we try to develop in our general education programs. Even in an academic setting, these qualities are becoming increasingly important. The expanding knowledge base, for example, has served to intensify the competition among disciplines for a piece of the curricular action, simply because there are now so many 'worthy' items of knowledge to be learned, and because it is possible to make a plausible case for requiring almost any of these new items in a core curriculum. Clearly, the need for a cooperative approach has never been greater.

In many respects the undergraduate years are the ideal time to explore value issues such as cooperation versus competition, or materialism versus spiritualism. If you ever find yourself entertaining the fantasy that there is any such thing as a 'value-free' curriculum, recall Alan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind* or the recent flap over changes in the Stanford undergraduate curriculum, when then-Education Secretary Bennett attacked the Stanford faculty for 'selling out' the Great Books tradition and for caving in to pressures from 'special interest' groups such as women and minorities. While I do not fancy myself as a curriculum expert, I think it would be a useful exercise for each of us periodically to take a hard look at our curriculum with the following question in mind: To what extent does our current curriculum content reflect an awareness of and concern with issues such as environmental degradation, racism, poverty, world hunger, social justice, arms control, or world peace, and to what extent does it merely reflect a miscellaneous conglomerate of the faculty's specialized disciplinary and research interests? And what about curriculum objectives? While we hear a lot these days about developing such things as critical thinking and communication skills, I think that we have not yet given enough attention to the *social* and *value* implications of such curriculum objectives. In the area of communications skills, for example, most of us focus on the improvement of writing and speaking, but few of us talk about the art of good *listening*. This neglected skill is not only of great practical importance in many career fields, but it also epitomizes for me the essence of the cooperative spirit. Being able to listen to and understand the thoughts and feelings of others is of vital importance in developing the trust and empathy which is so necessary for cooperative living.

The implicit curriculum

But most of us are inclined to forget that curricular content represents only a small portion of the 'values education' that goes on in academe, and that our most important 'teaching' may be independent of course content. This 'implicit curriculum,' as I like to call it, includes the process of establishing a curriculum, the teaching methods we use, how we grade and test our students, how we run our institutions, and how we treat each other as professional colleagues.

Let's now consider the extent to which this implicit curriculum fosters the development of such qualities as cooperation, trust, social responsibility, and good citizenship. Does the implicit curriculum teach students the value and necessity of teamwork and cooperation? Does it show them *how* to cooperate? To what extent does it foster the development of contrary values, such as individualism and competitiveness?

Let's first look at one of the hottest topics in contemporary higher education: assessment and accountability. It is my strong impression that the true values of an institution are revealed in the information that it collects about itself and to which it pays the most attention. After working in this field for nearly three decades I am persuaded that the assessments about ourselves that generate the most interest are essentially competitive and are derived from the reputational and resource conceptions of excellence (Astin 1991).

The emphasis on resources is obvious: we are constantly preoccupied with our success in fundraising and in increasing the size of our applicant pool (which translates, of course, into income). I have been the trustee of several private institutions and am amazed at how much time trustees are willing to devote to issues of fundraising and enrollment as opposed, say, to issues of educational effectiveness or talent development.

The reputational approach is reflected, of course, in our preoccupation with assessments such as the annual reputational poll done by *U.S. News and World Report*. Research universities, of course, have been very preoccupied over the years with the several assessments of 'quality' of graduate departments that have been carried out by national associations.

But by far the most closely-watched index of both reputation and resources is the standardized admission test scores of the entering freshman class. Many faculty, administrators and trustees regard the average test scores of the entering freshmen as the most important single index of 'excellence.' If the scores go up, we are supposedly becoming more excellent, if they go down, our excellence is assumed to be slipping.

Contrast these traditional views about assessment and accountability with what we might find if we were to adopt a talent development conception. Rather than looking merely at the *entering* college student, we would focus instead on how much students learn, grow, and change over time. Only by studying student development over time does it become possible for us to gauge our true educational effectiveness. Unfortunately, very few institutions today engage in such longitudinal assessment, although the 'assessment movement' may well encourage more institutions to adopt such an approach (Astin 1991).

In short, it would appear that our approach to assessment and accountability is a highly competitive one where we are focusing primarily on what we *have* (in the form of money or students) or what others *think* of us (in the form of reputational polls). All of us are competing with each other for higher and higher places in the pecking order and for larger and larger shares of finite resources.

What about pedagogical technique? Most lower division teaching, especially in our larger universities, still uses the traditional lecture format. Several national

reports have criticized this traditional model of instruction on the grounds that it assigns students too passive a role, thereby reducing involvement and inhibiting the learning process. It has other serious deficiencies as well: it leads students to view learning as a solitary process, where each student works independently of every other student. Indeed, not only do students work independently, but also they are encouraged to compete with one another. This emphasis on competition is reinforced by the grading system, which is basically comparative or relativistic. The practice of grading 'on the curve' does not tell us much about what a student has actually learned in a class: rather, it merely ranks students relative to one another. Under these conditions, one student's success signifies failure for some other student.

What is most regrettable about this heavy dependence on the traditional lecture format is that it ignores a growing body of research which suggests that 'cooperative learning' models – where students teach each other or work together on joint projects – are clearly superior to competitive approaches. But the most important thing about cooperative learning is that it facilitates the development of teamwork skills and encourages the individual student to view each classmate as a potential helper rather than as a competitor. Under cooperative learning, students learn to work together toward common goals.

The limitations of competitive classroom learning are compounded by the fact that professors must grade students as well as teach them. The conflict of interest generated by the professor's dual role as mentor and judge was recognized many years ago by Robert Hutchins, who believed that the learning process should be separated from the testing and grading process. As president of the University at Chicago, Hutchins established the 'Examiner's Office,' where students could go when they felt ready to be tested or examined on some subject. Long since abandoned at Chicago, the Examiner's Office remains a largely untested concept which offers some real potential for effectuating a greater sense of trust and cooperation between professor and student.

What about collegial relations? Although students usually do not participate directly in faculty personnel actions, they are usually aware of the criteria used in hiring, promoting, and tenuring faculty. The peer review process provides a concrete example of how faculty members relate to each other. Since undergraduates are likely to see their professors as authority figures and even role models, the manner in which personnel actions are carried out helps to shape students' impressions about the nature of peer relationships among professional colleagues.

First, let us consider the criteria used. We are all familiar with the 'publish or perish' syndrome. In effect, this dictum gives the greatest weight to a candidate's research and scholarship, relegating the functions of teaching, advising, colleagueship, and public service to second-class status. Scholarship is, of course, a highly competitive and individualistic activity, and the most productive scholars are accorded significant professional status and recognition. While some articles and books have multiple authors (signifying a cooperative or joint effort), such publications generally get *less* credit in the review process than do single-authored pieces. In other words, the process does not encourage scholarly collaboration.

Volumes have been written about how this skewed reward system negatively affects the quality of teaching, so I will not belabor the point here. Suffice it to say that under this system, professors have the strongest incentives to pursue their professional self-interest (publication and scholarly visibility) at the expense of both the student and the institution. While the scholarly and professional success of its faculty may further the reputational and resource 'interests' of the research university, resulting in greater national prestige and increased access to research grants and contracts, this emphasis compromises the university's undergraduate teaching mission.

But the publish-or-perish philosophy exacts even higher costs. The typical faculty review process gives almost no weight to what might be termed 'good colleagueship.' My experience as a university professor and my many visits to collegiate institutions of virtually all types persuade me that good colleagueship is one of the most important, but least appreciated, talents that a faculty member can have. Besides service on departmental or institutional committees and task forces, good colleagueship is manifested in many ways. Some professors are excellent technical consultants, able and willing to confer informally with colleagues on a wide range of disciplinary issues. Others make themselves available to serve as trouble shooters or mediators. Still others simply provide positive and constructive input at meetings and in their daily interactions.

The point of all of this is that there is no way we can shield our students from the value implications of how we run our institutions and how we treat each other as colleagues.

Cognitive or affective?

When we talk about cooperation or about the student's values and beliefs we are, of course, dealing with so-called 'affective' outcomes. Educators have tended to shy away from discussing such outcomes because they are felt to be too 'value-laden.' However, as I've already suggested, the very act of deciding on a curriculum is itself a value judgment, and if you take the time to read through a few college catalogues it becomes clear that the concept of a liberal education is typically rationalized in terms of 'affective' outcomes such as character and citizenship. The very idea of good citizenship in a democracy like ours necessarily includes the notion of an *informed* and *involved* electorate. Democracy is, I might add, based fundamentally on a *cooperative* concept of governance. Yet recent national elections in the United States suggest to me that our citizenry is probably not very well-informed and certainly not very involved in the democratic process. If I were able to effect just one change in our curriculum and our implicit curriculum, it would be to put much greater emphasis on the importance of producing graduates who appreciate the importance of being well informed and active participants in the democratic process.

Some of our higher education policy makers and leaders have recently become concerned about the extreme competitiveness of our students and our institutions

and are openly advocating a greater emphasis on promoting cooperation, good citizenship and other affective outcomes. The Campus Compact Project, for example, is a consortium of some 200 institutions that are working together under the sponsorship of the Education Commission of the States to establish community service programs for undergraduates. In my own state of California the legislature has passed a law requiring each campus of the university and the state university to establish some kind of volunteer or public service program for undergraduates.

In his report to the Board of Overseers a few years ago, Harvard president Derek Bok said that 'universities should be among the first to reaffirm the importance of basic values such as honesty, promise keeping, free expression, and nonviolence... [and] there is nothing odd or inappropriate... to make these values the foundation for a serious program to help students develop a strong set of moral standards.' Bok also notes that 'students must get help from their universities in developing moral standards or they are unlikely to get much assistance at all.'

These trends would suggest that our political and higher education leaders are implicitly suggesting that social responsibility and concern for others are among the qualities that higher education institutions should try to foster in their students.

Recent student trends

Even the students seem to be reflecting some recent dissatisfaction with the status quo. It is important to realize that the rather depressing trends toward excessive materialism and competitiveness seem to peak out a couple of years ago and have either remained level or even regressed somewhat during the past two years. A number of other findings from our two most recent freshman surveys suggest that we may be seeing the emergence of some very different student tendencies. For example, we see that the most current crop of college freshmen appears to be more protest-prone even than students in the late sixties (Figure 4). Not only have more of them participated in demonstrations in high school, but more of them anticipate getting involved in protests during their college years. In the same vein, during the past two years we have seen a resurgence of student interest in influencing social values and changing the political structure (Figure 5).

What specific issues are the students concerned about? Perhaps the single biggest issue for students these days is the environment. Interest in the environment bottomed out during the later years of the Reagan Administration, but has shown a substantial rebirth during the past couple of years. Although the level of interest and likely involvement is still below the environmental heyday of the early 1970s (when the first 'Earth Day' was held), projecting these recent trends into the future suggests that the environment is going to continue growing as a popular issue for students.

Two other items showing much greater student concern in the past few years are the development of a national health care plan and abortion rights for women (Figure 6). Support for legalized abortions has remained steady during the years when we have asked the question, with the exception of the most recent year which witnessed a sharp increase in student support. This one-year change may well be a

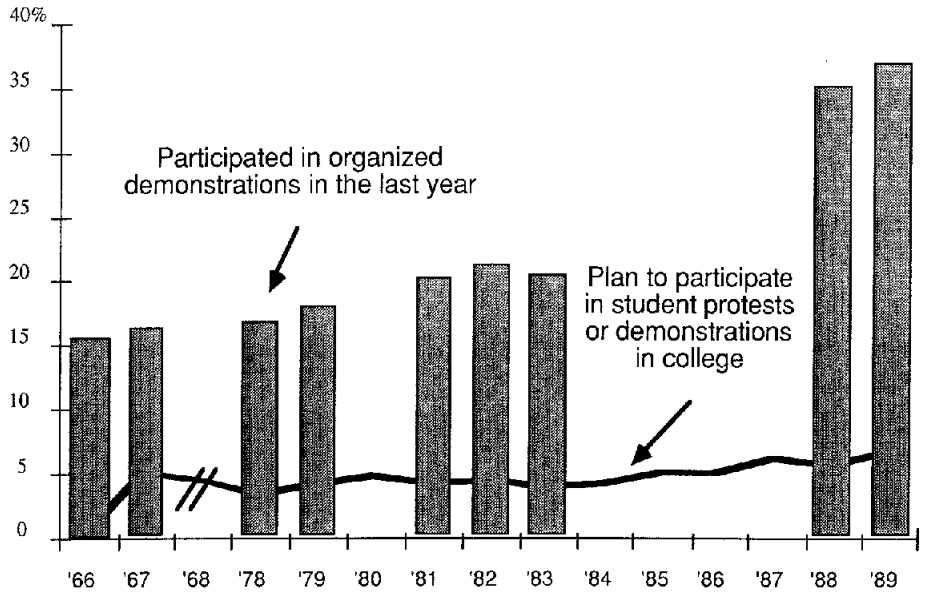

Fig. 4. Freshman interest in protest.

reaction to the U.S. Supreme Court's 'Webster' decision. It seems likely that some of the students who were mildly opposed to legalized abortion in prevous years may have jumped over to the support side when they began to realize that their right to an abortion may indeed be taken away by the courts.

The past few years have seen increases in three other areas: Student altruism, support for school integration through busing, and interest in promoting racial understanding appear to be on the rise. These trends, together with those just discussed (Figures 4-6) suggest that we are witnessing the emergence of a small but rapidly growing minority of students who are concerned about a variety of social issues and who are inclined to become actively involved in working with these issues. Considering that the strong majority of students is still heavily focussed on business careers and on making money and achieving power and status, it is interesting to speculate on what is likely to happen on our college campuses during the next few years. Apparently, we have a rapidly growing minority of students who may well challenge the majority viewpoint on a number of political and social issues.

Conclusion

Considering that we are looking here only at two-year trends that have been preceded by two decades of contrary changes, it may be wishful thinking to believe that America's long romance with greed and competitiveness may be beginning to reverse itself. But there *are* other signs on the horizon. The fall 1990 election showed

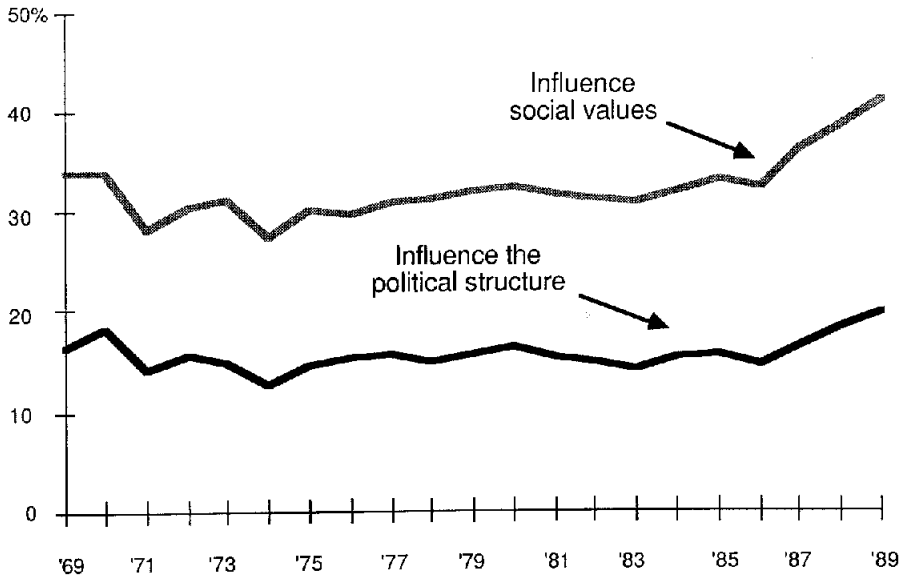

Fig. 5. Freshman goals (rated as 'essential' or 'very important').

that many people in the United States are fed up with politics as usual, and that a groundswell of public reaction may be developing against 'the best government money can buy.' Such sentiments have been fueled by a growing awareness that the much-maligned 'tax and spend' politics of the left has been replaced by a 'borrow and spend' politics of the right, which has really served to exacerbate rather than shrink existing disparities between rich and poor. There is also evidence of a growing national (and international) consciousness about the plight of the planet's ecosystem. Indeed, the environment, more than any other single issue, appears

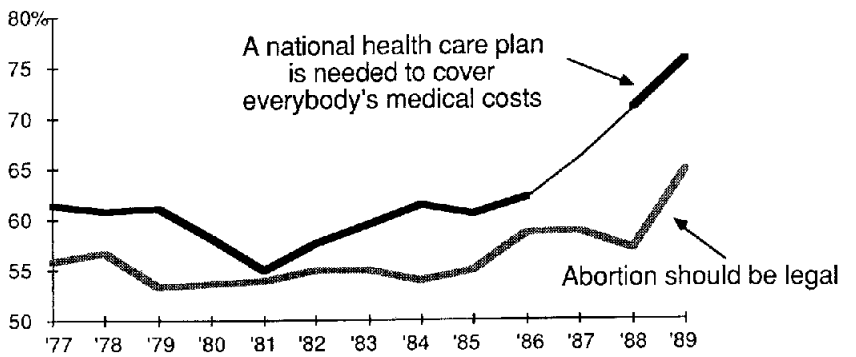

Fig. 6. Attitudes toward health and social issues (rated 'strongly agree' or 'agree somewhat').

capable of galvanizing the most student interest and actual energy over the next decade.

Whether higher education is going to encourage such trends or merely continue its mindless pursuit of resources and reputation will depend in large part on what we in the academy do. American academics are fond of complaining about 'governmental threats to autonomy,' but the fact remains that we still retain control over most of the decisions and policies that really matter: whom to admit and on what basis, what to teach and how to teach it, how we test and grade students, how we hire and reward our professors and administrators, and how we structure our 'implicit curriculum.' Perhaps most important of all is whether we are going to continue giving the raising of money and the enhancement of our reputations greater priority than the development of our students' talents, and whether we are going to continue ignoring the so-called affective talents that seem to be so crucial to effective living in a multicultural and multinational community.

As I look around me everywhere I see the great achievements of the intellect: atomic energy, genetic engineering, modern agriculture, modern medicine, and computers and other electronic marvels of every conceivable type. It is truly astounding. And at the same time I see the great affective and emotional and spiritual divisions that threaten our very existence: religious fanaticism and hatred, racial prejudice, nationalism and other political divisions, widespread criminal behavior in the land of opportunity, and massive poverty and starvation in the face of unprecedented affluence. What this tells me is that it is time to redress the balance. It is time to begin shifting some of our educational interest and energy in the direction of our affective side – to begin concerning ourselves much more directly with the development of beliefs and values that are going to heal our divisions, and which will help to create a society that is less materialistic and competitive and selfish and more generous and cooperative.

Note

1. Portions of this talk were given at the January 6, 1989 meeting of the Commission on the University of the 21st Century, Council of Higher Education, Richmond, Virginia: portions have also been adopted from an earlier article in *Change* magazine (Astin, A. W. 'Competition or Cooperation', September/October 1987).

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