DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 025 998 HE 000 230

By-Heiss, Ann M.

Today's and Tomorrow's Students.

California Univ., Berkeley. Center for Research and Development in Higher Education.
Pub Date 13 Apr 67
Note-16p.; Paper presented at California Association of Women Deans and Vice-Principals Conference, San Francisco, California, April 13-15, 1967
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.90
Descriptors-*Educational Needs, *Higher Education, Intelligence Level, Student Alienation, Student Behavior, *Student Characteristics, Student Interests, Student Needs, *Student Subcultures, *Values

Today's student differs from his counterpart of the 1950's in character, aspiration, experience, and educational and family background. Generally more independent and mature, the students of the 1960's tend to involve themselves in any of 5 subcultures as a means of expressing their concern about a number of issues. The sorority or fraternity culture has lost its appeal except for a few that are shifting their interests from social to political issues. The vocationally-oriented group attends college as a step toward a career. The intellectuals, mainly humanities and social sciences majors, pursue knowledge as an end in itself. Some students in the Bohemian culture are intelligent non-conformists who adopt eccentric modes of dress and behavior, and others are political activists who regard the university as a political platform. The hippie culture claims rejection of all cultures and societies and is the most dynamic of the youth groups. The basic problem for the university is the conception of a unified program that satisfies the academic and individual needs of each group. In order to communicate effectively, educators should attempt to acquaint themselves with and understand the characteristics and concerns of today's students, for they represent our future decision makers. The values derived from a college education today will influence the attitudes of tomorrow's student population through their parents-to-be, or today's students. (WM)

TODAY'S AND TOMORROW'S STUDENTS

Ann M. Heiss

Center for Research and
Development in Higher Education
University of California, Berkeley

Few topics in higher education command as much attention or generate as much concern as the attitudes and behavior of today's college generation. Although that attention sometimes approaches an unwarranted degree of sensationalism, it is the belief of most researchers--including our staff at the Center for Research and Development in Higher Education--that our efforts to understand the college population have been substantively too superficial and often too late to be of practical use. In the absence of important basic data on the characteristics of current college culture, many institutions continue to approach today's student with programs or with counsel inappropriate to youth born and reared in an age of transcendental and revolutionary change.

In a recent issue of the Saturday Review of Literature, John Culkin pointed out that we are now dealing with the first generation to be born into a world in which there was always television. This means that we are dealing with students whose learning and experience has been shaped by three-dimensional, electronic communication media. They literally have been bombarded with the all-at-once sense world of T.V., films, recordings, and pictorial magazines as opposed to the one-at-a-time process (or book media of learning) experienced by previous generations. When we consider that

---

Paper read at the California Association of Women Deans and Vice-Principals Conference, April 13-15, 1967, San Francisco, California.

some parents of today's student--and many of their teachers--pre-date radio, we get some clue to the magnitude of the generation gap which young persons must attempt to straddle.

Although we are all to some degree victims of McLuhan's thesis that individuals perceive the preceding environment to be the present, those of us who teach or advise students cannot excuse ourselves from working to reduce this gap. Unless we keep ourselves au courant in respect to the problems, concerns, hopes, and values of the culture or environment perceived by students today, we shall fail to reach them or to understand their needs. If we continue to apply old answers to new problems or to plan programs that lack relevance for this generation, we shall widen rather than shorten the breach between us. And we shall continually be forced into confrontations which require--if not demand--precipitant re-action instead of reasoned responses.

Parenthetically, I should like to note that, in my judgment, it would be a mistake for teachers or counselors to assume that they must enter into and embrace the total environment of the young in order to understand or comprehend it. If youth distrusts all those over thirty, they have even less tolerance for those over thirty who pretend they aren't.

I do not wish to imply in any of my remarks that counselors, faculty members, or school administrators have been myopic about "where the action is" in their institutions or that they are unaware of "what the action is" in respect to the changes in attitudes among college age youth. Unfortunately, in their preoccupation with the deployment of resources to accomodate the large numbers who seek admission, college and university personnel generally have found little opportunity to examine the extent or degree to which

incoming students differ in character, aspiration, or life style from previous college groups. More importantly, very few institutions have been able to study the implications that these differences may have for educational revision or reform or for supporting education experimentation and innovation. Students on whom our research is based are often out of college before the results of our studies are in--or before recommendations can be approved or implemented. In addition, we can never be fully certain that what we learn about one student generation will be useful information in planning for the next.

In spite of these problems, we do now have an impressive body of basic information on students across the nation on which we think we can postulate certain trends. From these data I shall try to offer some descriptive material which I hope will be relevant to the topic "Today's Student."

In a study of ten thousand high school graduates who were followed for six years, Drs. Medsker and Trent of our staff reported data which give a composite picture of the student who goes on to college, as he differs from his high school cohort who does not go on to college. The former is:

> more likely to be drawn from the high ability levels and from the top ranks of his high school class. His parents, who are predominantly of European stock and Protestant faith, are both living and are not divorced or separated. There are one or two other children in the family. The father tends to hold a professional or managerial position, to have had a college education, and to have married a college woman. The value system and the cultural background of the individual tend to be more important than his ability in determining his further education. Both the graduate and his parents own and read more books and magazines of wide cultural interest than is true of high school graduates following other pursuits.

In comparison with their non-college age cohorts:

> The college student appears to be more socially mature, intellectually curious and tolerant. He is more interested in manipulating abstract

> ideas, and may be said to have a higher theoretical orientation or scheme of values than his counterpart. Nevertheless, he is sufficiently practical to have made up his mind about the general area in which he hopes to make his life's work and his vocational aspirations and expectations are high. He has enjoyed his high school career, and with the active encouragement, advice, and emotional support of his parents, high school teachers and counselors, he looks forward to continuing his education. *

These data on family background have relevance for some comments I shall make later.

Other recent studies at the Center enable us to make some broad comparisons between students today and students yesterday--"yesterday" referring to the middle 1950's when the Center began its research on college students.

An essential difference between the student in the 50's and his current counterpart lies in the fact that the freshman who enters college today is basically better prepared academically and is more sophisticated in his outlook on life. His has been described as the "more" generation: he has more knowledge, more social awareness, more commitment, more independence, more ability to deal with ambiguity, not to mention more economic affluence (16 billion dollars was spent by or on the teenage population last year). Paradoxically, at the same time, he appears to be less sure of his role, less integrated with society as a whole, less clear about his goals, less willing than his older brothers and sisters were to accept traditional values and beliefs without challenge, less trusting of his adult models.

In contrast to many students in the 50's who had their military experience behind them--and who could therefore give full attention to the

---

* Leland L. Medsker and James W. Trent, The Influence of Different Types of Public Higher Institutions on College Attendance from Varying Socioeconomic and Ability Levels (Berkeley, California: Center for the Study of Higher Education, 1965), p. 58.

serious business of acquiring an education--today's male student lives constantly with the prospect of receiving a letter of "greetings" from his draft board if he fails in his studies or if, for any reason, his education is terminated.

The impact which the draft has on students in an all women's college where I served recently as a member of an advisory committee was very apparent in our informal discussion with students. Some girls remarked that if their boyfriends were called into service, they, too, would give up college and join either the Peace Corps, the Red Cross, or the women's military service--or they would take a position in deference to continuing in college. I think that we can ascribe a large part of the unrest among students today to this particular Sword of Damocles. To construe this uneasiness about military service as cowerdice or as a lack of interest in serving the country would be a gross misunderstanding of student values and beliefs. Their abhorrence of war is closely associated with their quest for greater humanism in interrelations with others.

These are the children and grandchildren of men and women who lived in the periods of the two most devastating wars in the history of mankind. They find little in their parents' description or in the chronology of these wars to inspire them to participate in another. On the other hand, they do not shirk from constructive service. Eight thousand University of California students gave innumerable hours to volunteer work during 1966. Your schools can, I'm quite sure, quote similar statistics.

Although many campuses have not yet experienced the movements of the more liberal student activists, there is, I believe, a general stirring among student bodies on all college campuses. Indeed, these movements often have

their beginnings at the high school level. Let me emphasize here that very often student unrest springs from legitimate causes and has positive dimensions. For example, the very exciting "Breakthrough" dialogue recently sponsored by the Mt. Tamalpias High School students grew out of the students' desire for a resolution of the problems of racial tension which they experienced on campus.

In our large complex institutions, it has become increasingly evident that more and more students are demonstrating their convictions and ideals through various forms of involvement. The idea of involvement, like the idea of relevancy, is now an important "in" concept for the younger generation. While the large majority of students still have a deep-seated fear that they may "blow their cool" if they join a protest demonstration, many do care about issues of social or political justice. They attempt to express this concern by raising questions which they are willing to argue about, challenge authorities about, or do something concrete about, if the matter touches them deeply.

Dr. Paul Heist of our Center believes that, while only 3 to 5 per cent of Berkeley student body are willing to be all-out activists in the sense that they will sit-in, make speeches, or suffer arrests for a cause in which they have convictions, another 20 per cent are willing to involve themselves in marches or in less risk-taking forms of protest. The remainder are more or less passive, though this does not necessarily imply indifference.

On a large campus like San Francisco State, Wisconsin, or the University of California, "involvement" takes various forms of expression ranging from new art forms in dress or the organization of counter-institutions which press for greater student power (such as the Students for a Democratic Society

who ultimately would like to eliminate all existing forms of student government) to the 8,000 University of California students who last year worked in the Peace Corps, in hospitals, prisons, Head Start programs, or in one of fifty or more volunteer agencies.

If we must have our rebels--and I believe we must if we, and they, are to develop--it is comforting to note that most of today's rebels are rebelling about something more significant than the food in the dormitory. A critical and sobering fact for us to remember is that a student's outside involvement with issues or ideals may change and develop him more than does the college program which we so carefully plan for him.

For example, in my class of doctoral students is an intellectually committed and intense young man age twenty-three who served two years in the Peace Corps during which he assumed a major responsibility in organizing the total resources for over 5,000 inhabitants in a primitive village in a remote area of South America. Here he saw thirteen and fourteen year old boys and girls assuming adult responsibility. This young man has little patience with the notion that the college or university stands in loco parentis. His experience prompts him to believe that by handing the student a too ready-made educational program, the institution prevents him from developing self-reliance or from earning his personal freedom.

Increasingly, the role of the college administration as a parental surrogate is being challenged by college and university personnel in this country. Because they find this generation far more independent and mature than the students of former generations and because many who enter college had freedom as high school students, some authorities view it as psychologically unsound for institutions of higher education to "regulate" those who should

be learning to regulate themselves. By continuing to superimpose college student government on the high school model, most of the current forms of student organization have failed to encourage the developmental process; hence, these organizations are rejected by the college student who finds them unappealing at his present stage of maturity.

In a study of 177 students who were randomly selected and surveyed during the 1964 Sproul Hall sit-in, Dr. William Watts of our staff found that a significant number of the sit-ins came from academically elite families. Twenty-six per cent of the fathers and 16 per cent of the mothers of his subjects held M.A.'s or Ph.D.'s. On the basis of these and similar data, Nevitt Sanford predicts that we can expect more rather than less student activism and involvement in the future. He believes that many activists have a high degree of social awareness because their college educated parents were concerned about social issues and transferred this concern to their offspring.

Dr. Watts reported further that the average age of his Free Speech Movement group was 20.3 years, that 50 per cent were social science majors, that business and engineering students were under-represented, and that women students were over-represented. Whereas women make up 38.6 per cent of the Berkeley student body, they comprised 57.1 per cent of his FSM sample. Contrary to the charge that most activists are academically disinterested "beatniks" and to the countercharge that the FSM type is academically superior, Dr. Watts found no significant difference between the grade point average of his FSM sample and the grade point averages achieved by a random sample of non-FSM students at Berkeley.

Among his FSM sample, formalized religion wielded less influence in their lives than it did in the lives of a cross section of students on the

campus. In this respect, it is interesting to read about the religious or spiritual overtones in some of the new youth groups who refer to themselves as the "love generation." In claiming to respond to St. John's admonition, "Little children, love one another," some practice a communal life in which sharing plays an important role.

The Center's research on college students in over two hundred institutions reveals that college youth comprise not one major student culture but a very diverse group of subcultures and a wide range of ability levels. Although student cultures are in a dynamic state and tend to shift as fast as they can be identified, they can be divided essentially into four or five major subcultures. These include:

(1) The sorority or fraternity culture which is composed of members and of others who accept the values of these organizations. This culture is dwindling in size and has lost much of its original vigor on the American campus. In a few cases, the goals of these organizations are changing as in the case of the Inter-Fraternity Council at Berkeley which has switched its interests from purely social to political issues. (This year, the Inter-Fraternity Council brought Robert Kennedy, Stokely Carmichael, and others to the campus.)

(2) The culture of the vocationally oriented who see college education as a means to a career or a profession.

(3) The intellectuals who make a serious commitment to the pursuit of knowledge as an end in itself. Many aspire to academic careers. They are found largely in the humanities and the social sciences.

(4) The Bohemian culture may be subdivided into those who move freely

in and out of the intellectual culture and those best described as "anti-establishmentarians" or political activists. The on-campus Bohemians consist of non-conformists and experimentalists who may profess their alienation from the existing social order by affecting bizarre dress and behavior. Among these are dilettantes who want to be "in" the university but not "of" it. To this end, they acquire an identity as intellectuals by taking one course or by living on the fringe of the campus where they can enjoy its environment and interact with its personalities.

The political activists include several types. Basically, they can be subdivided into those who are active in existing political organizations, such as the Young Republicans, Young Democrats, and Young Socialists, and those who want to establish new political forms. These groups attract intellectuals and anti-intellectuals, many of whom regard the university as the vehicle for effecting social change. Thus they use it as the platform from which to pronounce, promote, polarize, and protest social and political issues. The group which presses for new political alignments prefers confrontation politics to discussion or dialogue and is often intransigent when any attempt is made toward conciliation, compromise, or settlement.

Essentially, the political group has a primary interest in gaining power--party power or student power as the organization may value. Some of its members are so intensely enamoured of this prospect that they drop out of school to devote their time to becoming full-time organizers. This has the effect of taking

campus leadership and organization control out of the hands of students per se. The actions of this culture often provide fuel to the fire of those who wish to use the university as a political issue.

(5) The "hippie" culture which rejects both the ends and the means of all societies or cultures and designs its own may be found on the fringe of the college campus and in some sophisticated urban centers. It includes drop-outs from a wide variety of societies. An interesting aspect of this group is the fact that it often takes on the very characteristics it originally decried. It is they who currently get most of the newspaper headlines. Hippies attract great attention because they are outside of both the existing adult and student cultures. Some may be described as nihilistic, but many profess to belong to the "love generation." This is probably the most dynamic of the youth groups. It seems to be shaped and reshaped on the basis of the publicity it attracts.

It is the latest "tourist attraction." As such, it is difficult to know whether we are observing hippies or tourists when we visit their Haight-Ashbury or Telegraph Avenue habitats. It will be interesting to study the change and survival chronicle of this colorful group.

In my judgment, we have often "lost our cool" in responding to the various Bohemian cultures on the campus and particularly in our response to political activism. Many now believe that by failing to assimilate politically activated groups into the university as one more form of student extra-curricular activity--in the same measure as we have tolerated some of the

questionable antics of the fraternity-sorority culture--we have given the activists a whole new set of issues with which to confront us. We have provided the bases on which they can charge us with authoritarianism, obscurantism, and reactionism. By failing to see their acts as developmental, in our response to their requests, we often denigrate what we profess in the classroom about democracy and the value of involvement in one's growth toward maturity. By interpreting the aphorism, "We shape our institutions and afterwards they shape us," in the first person, we fail to acknowledge that students have an active adult role to play in the governance of many of those institutions.

To include the student in governance involves risk-taking. I am not nearly so much concerned about the risks the institution takes or the errors the student may make as he learns to live his role, as I am about the public's tolerance of the institution's right to take these risks. I would also like to see the public more reflective and honest about its own youthful behavior. Colleges and universities in the future will have to redouble their efforts to protect freedom of expression and to design standards of conduct which will safeguard the normal function of the university without making it the butt of the charge that what's wrong with the modern youth can be laid squarely at the door of our institutions of higher education.

The basic problems which these diverse cultures pose for the educational institution is how to provide a sense of unity in the program and a sense of community in the environment which might satisfy the intellectual needs of each segment.

In varying degree, each culture encourages its peers to keep all their antennae out in their search for answers to the problems that perplex them.

In the process of identification with their set, many are not content with absorbing the values and practices of their group piecemeal. On the contrary, they enter deeply into the culture and respond to it through all of their senses much as the anthropologist does who learns about a group by living with or in it. A recent sign on a Berkeley campus bulletin board may be illustrative. It read: Wardrobe for Sale. Size 9. Hardly worn. Going beat.

Unlike the complacent and silent generation of the 50's, today's college student is moving more in the direction of independence in his educational development. He poses significant questions for his instructors and is overtly critical of those who evade questions or who equivocate by offering platitudes as answers. The growing number of publications like the Slate Supplement (to the General Catalogue at Berkeley) or the Harvard Crimson's Student Guide to Courses at Harvard bear testimony that this generation of students is far from mute.

Some groups have decided to voice their ideas by completely revamping the traditional programs in higher education. Some have developed their own blueprints of organization, designed their own curricula, and selected their own faculties. At San Francisco State, for example, the Experimental College is more or less a student generated protest against what they describe as the "irrelevancy" in much of their course work. And at Ann Arbor, New York, and other major university centers, students and ex-students of the New Left organize their "Free Universities" in response to their felt need for "unstructured interaction and individual initiative." Some of these organizations have been short-lived; some are in deep trouble; a few may survive.

A small minority of youth opt for a kind of educational dream world

where, through the use of so-called mind-expanding--or contracting--drugs, they retreat by taking "trips" with one another and, on returning to "reality," make extravagant claims about their new ability to think globally. (As one non-student described his journey: "When you go way out, you know you've been there when you return.") This is a group on which much fiction but little hard data or reliable information exists. In many ways, it is the most pathetic and unimaginative group. In order to broaden their outlook, its members require external stimuli or "props" in the form of chemical compounds or euphonistic slogans ("tune in, turn on, drop out"). However, in responding to these stimuli, the individual must give up his individuality (and independence) because a trip should never be taken alone. In forfeiting these, he may lose infinitely more than he momentarily gains.

When we talk about college students today, it is important to point out that there are still many colleges in the country that have completely or almost completely homogeneous student bodies who accept with "gratifying docility" the paths laid down by their elders. Many institutions remain almost completely unaffected by student unrest. Many find solace in the fact that the Berkeley problems did not break out on their campus. Others wish that they could evoke some degree of the Berkeley excitement. Those who take comfort in saying that "what happened at Berkeley couldn't happen here" may be in deep, deep, deep trouble as far as their intellectual vitality or future institutional growth is concerned.

Our research at the Center and that of Nevitt Sanford points to an increase rather than a diminution in the younger generation's struggle for identity, acceptance, and influence as a person. The probability is that, if we have successfully faced this struggle in our own lives and have learned how to accept ourselves, we shall have less trouble understanding the struggles

of the youth with whom we work.

I'm sure that we would agree with T. R. McConnell who states that, "The college experience should be basically unsettling and should stimulate change." We would probably also agree with his recommendation that, "...the college should not deliberately set out to demolish a student's values without helping him to find new ones to replace the old. Neither should faculty members attempt to inculcate a ready-made set of values. The only values we should take as given, the ones the college should inculcate, are those of the free mind and the free society, both of which need careful definition." The college can help the student to develop his own value system, by exposing him to the universe of ideas and by giving him the right to test new ideas and, if necessary, the courage to fail--plus the support to sustain him if he does fail.

In conclusion, I would like to take the position that the current popular description of modern youth as a "super generation which got that way all by itself" is not only nonsense but also repudiated by youth itself. Those who diagnose the "alienation" of youth from their parents' generation as if this were a new phenomena have forgotten their own youth or have taken a romantic view of their own generation. It is new principally because they outnumber us and to the extent that we measure their independence against our own authoritarianism. If this is a superior generation, history will show that it is so because of two factors: (1) succeeding generations have bequeathed it a wealth of knowledge, experience, wisdom (sometimes sorely tested), and wealth, and (2) youth in the 60's added to and reshaped this heritage to make it stronger for its own progeny. It is a well known sociological theory that young persons--especially teenagers--do not really

learn step by step but embrace almost wholly the idea systems of those whom they most admire or most want to be like. Let us hope that as they look around for their models to admire or to emulate, they will see something of value in us.

As counselors of youth (and who is not?), it seems to me that it is incumbent upon us to make every effort we can to know and to understand the characteristics, concerns, and aspirations of youth, for it is they who will maintain or modify our institutions, set or reshape our values, and, in the not too distant future, occupy the decision-making positions which we now hold in academic and non-academic communities alike.