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ABSTRACT

The possible use of fiction about colleges as part of the study of higher education is considered, based on analysis of 80 student-centered college novels written by authors who attended the depicted colleges. The novels used colleges as either the subject matter or setting. Three criticisms of the idea of using fiction are discussed, including the argument that novels are not intended necessarily to provide accuracy or facts and would be a dubious source of information about colleges and universities. Positive ways that college novels can be used are also addressed. It is suggested that college novels are an art form that projects distinctive images of undergraduate life. Specific novels that focus on college athletics and fraternities and sororities are briefly described as examples. Novels can also serve as sources of information about the impact of college on students and on how alumni perceive the college experience. College novels can also be informative about customs, rituals, jargon, and fashions within the American campus. It is suggested that fiction can provide an alternative or supplement to other sources of information about the college experience. (SW)

# FICTION TO FACT:

# COLLEGE NOVELS AND THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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## Introduction

"Keeping up with the literature in the field" usually means the task of reading articles in scholarly journals. For those of us committed to the understanding and study of higher education, however, there is another connotation: the opportunity, even obligation, to read the fiction which use colleges and universities as subject and setting. We are heirs to a rich legacy of "college novels" -- yet, unfortunately, this has had little incorporation or acknowledgement in the formal study of higher education. Our aim is to redress this imbalance, to anticipate both problems and prospects which come with using fiction as a source of information and insights about colleges and universities.

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Failure to do so is, we think, a grave sin of omission. The sheer bulk, popularity, and longevity of the college novel genre warrants our attention. One historic anecdote which illustrates its potency is the popularity of the "Frank Merriwell" stories in shaping the popular juvenile image of college life. Between 1896 and 1915 this fictional college hero appeared in 986 consecutive weekly stories and in 415 paper back novels -- with an estimated weekly readership of close to three-million! At the peak of the Merriwell publications, a total of 123,000,000 copies of his stories were sold in one year. Confirmation of the American public's insatiable appetite for college adventure stories, was that the author of the "Frank Merriwell" series (who himself had never attended college) used a second pseudonym during the same years to write a best-selling series of "Boltwood of Yale" boys novels.

Even if one discounts juvenile stories and mystery novels, the college remains integral to American literature. It has at one time or another attracted outstanding authors, including Sinclair Lewis, Willa Cather, E. B. White, Robert Penn Warren, Mary McCarthy, George Santayana, John P. Marquand, James Thurber, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Henry Seidel Canby, Bernard DeVoto, Joyce Carol Oates, Allison Lurie, Philip Roth, Vladimir Nabokov, Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, and John Barth. According to John E. Kramer's comprehensive annotated bibliography, in the century between 1880 and 1980 over 425 "serious" American college novels have been published.

Our intent is to make a case for the serious and systematic analysis of college fiction as part of the study of higher education. At very least this suggests an

alternative or supplement to over-reliance on questionnaire data which has characterized the bulk of the research effort on the college experience and on behavior within organizations. For example, Alexander Astin's annual survey of college student attitudes and values documents changes over time and within the college experience -- but it is the detailed and sharp eye of the participant observer who may best tell us how such changes actually take place within the campus walls.

We hope our paper will encourage triangulation as a research strategy -- in which fiction can serve as one important source to be checked and confirmed by tests for validity, accuracy, and significance in concert with a variety of other kinds of data, including institutional records, archival materials, as well as student and alumni memoirs and biographies. Our approach to fiction is two-fold: on the one hand, we have read and analyzed the novels about college life; second, we ultimately intend to connect our findings to the strand of scholarship in such fields as literary analysis, social history, and American Studies for models and inspiration as to how these different disciplines have respectively treated the college novel. Implicit is our contention that most mainstream higher education research projects have given scant attention to these scholarly methods or traditions.

Ironically, in the course of our research project we have come across an interesting phenomenon: the initial response of many researchers is to be skeptical about the approach; then, later and in a more informal setting, the same skeptic says, "By the way, have you read The Paper Chase?; It really captures the

pressure and trauma of Harvard Law School." There are some strange gaps. Journalist Tom Wolfe, whose articles probe virtually every dimension of American popular culture, received his Ph.D. in American Studies from Yale but has had little to say about the graduate school experience. To the contrary, he observed over a decade ago that there has been no great American novel about graduate school due to a conspiracy of silence among its participants . Apparently, few of the victims/survivors can bring themselves to reconstruct its peculiar combination of boredom, pain, and servitude! This social fact of organizational life alone ought usher in wholesale educational reforms within the academic profession!

David Riesman contends that George Weller's Not to Eat, Not for Love (1933) is an excellent profile of the complexities of Harvard's growing pains, internal schisms, and diverse, disconnected constituencies as it evolved into a national university in the late 1920s (the era when Riesman himself was an undergraduate and editor of The Crimson newspaper). Or, as one colleague and reviewer advised us, "If you want to understand the Political Science department at Yale, you ought to read Tell The Time To No One." And, we are pleased (albeit discreet) to report that one well known contemporary researcher who emphasizes experimental design studies based on questionnare data is justifiably proud of the list of novels about colleges he uses for readings in his graduate course on "The College and University Professor."

Novels, then, can be a fertile, intriguing source about colleges if handled carefully. They are not a neat, obvious solution to the information problem about

describing college life. Rather, they stand as a puzzle in which the researcher's task is to decode the images, events, and symbols. They are to be connected to other sources of information, and ultimately are to generate insights and interpretations. We heed well historian W.E. Burns' warning, "Art mirrors life. The problem is that mirrors have the power to distort."

## Problems

Our topic and approach faces some predictable criticisms. We acknowledge these problems but see them as interesting complications rather than as an order to cease and desist.

* Complaint 1: "The genre of college novels is amorphous and unwieldy, not legitimate as a source of serious or systematic analysis. At worst, it is leisure reading masquerading as empirical research."

This need not be so. Thanks in large measure to two superb annotated bibliographies, along with our own categorization, we can bring bring a measure of order and coherence to the 425 American college novels. For example, we have "sliced" and cross-listed works within the genre into the folowing categories:

* Faculty -staff versus student centered plots
* Private versus Public institutions as settings
* Decade-by-decade chronology
* Land-grant college novels
* Novels about women's colleges
* Novels by authors who actually attended the depicted college

Since one can isolate themes, eras, and settings with great precision - one thus has an antidote to vague impressions and blurring over time and place. Our study, for example, focuses on the eighty student-centered college novels written by autnors who actually attended the depicted college.

* Complaint 2: "College novels are skewed to portray only a few campuses." Imbalance is neither good nor bad, but is important and intriguing as a social fact. This limit hardly is license to dismiss the novels. As Berton Braley wrote in the 1930s:

> It's general knowledge that many a college
> That's not very socially smart
> Has teams that can crush dear old Harvard to mush
> And take Yale and Princeton apart
> But gridiron heroes exclusively hail
> (In stories) from Harvard, or Princeton, or Yale!

Our own statistical analysis confirms Braley's lyrical observation. Within a cluster of 80 novels about students at specific institutions, the tally is as follows: 27 for Harvard, 12 for Yale, 7 for Princeton, 4 for Columbia (including Barnard), 5 for the University of Chicago, 13 for various large state universities, and the remainder scattered among assorted campuses. At the same time, we offer the reminder that coverage by Newsweek, Time, and the national press is equally skewed. A comparable trend holds as well among researchers in higher education. Institutional case studies by social and behavioral scientist also tend to focus on a relative handful of prestigious institutions.

Rather than use "imbalance" as an excuse to ignore the genre, why not try to figure out why this is so. We already have alluded to Tom Wolfe's contention

about the absence of novels about graduate students. A good puzzle for the 1980s might be, "Why hasn't the community college as a distinctive American institution spawned the Great American Novel?"

Also worth consideration is that novels deal with generic campuses and universal themes. The scholar is left with the interesting task of continually weighing between induction and deduction in the research act, distinguishing between specific and perennial features of undergraduate life.

* Complaint 3: "Novels are not intended necessarily to provide accuracy or facts. They are a very dubious source of information about colleges and universities."

Part of the attraction college novels hold is that they may unwittingly provide information and insights -- thus, fulfilling one of the favorable characteristics of "unobtrusive measures" outlined by Eugene Webb and other social scientists in the 1960s. There are some good ways to gauge the plausibility of a novel -- namely, by checking the author's background, and by triangulation with myriad other sources for signs of authenticity, accuracy, and significance. Historians accept this responsibility as a matter of course when they analyze the tone and context of any document.

Indeed, we are vigilant to ferret out hack authors who have contrived a formula for "college novels." Our screening criteria is indebted to the editors of the Harvard Lampoon who in 1906 compiled advice for outsiders attempting to write superficial best-sellers about Fair Harvard:

> It is well to begin by spending at least half a day at the University, jotting down the names of streets and buildings. You will depend on these for local color.

> Make your characters extravagant, financially and otherwise. Make them appear several times stretched in lounging robes before a blazing fire while the rain patters on the window panes -- and at least once in the front row at the Tremont.
>
> Make them drink frequently and variously, and smoke on every possible pretext. Put a bull pup in each chapter and a Morris chair on every page. Talk familiarly of the Regent, Gore Hall, and clubs . . . Introduce a girl who is innocuous and one or two who are not.

More serious is the charge that student authors present a distorted view of campus life. This is known as the "n=1" indictment of fiction as well as memoirs and biographies as sources of institutional information. This "complaint" is a non sequitor which ought not halt inquiry. The fact that a distinctive point of view is neither pervasive nor representative does not diminish its significance. Indeed, this is the very point of view which we need to leaven the tendency for aggregate studies to cut the sharp edges off depictions of life within organizations. A student author may have an axe to grind, but here the analyst's problem is to decipher this tone, not to merely discard the account. And, there is the fascinating possibility that the atypical point of view has something important to say about issues most fellow students either overlooked or were silent about.

## Prospects

Our resolution is that the preceding criticisms which some see as insurmountable obstacles are actually healthy caveats -- warnings which complicate and sophisticate analysis of college life. Having briefly responded to major reservations, let us shift to positive ways in which college novels can be used.

Here we draw first from the tradition of literary analysis and finally from the historian's craft.

* Image Making For the College Experience

College novels are an art form which projects distinctive images of undergraduate life. These images influence those who read the novels and later attend college by creating a set of expectations about what life in college will be like -- or, ought to be like. This is connected to what is called "anticipatory socialization" in college selection and admissions. If the expectations spawned by the novels are not met, a student may feel he or she has attended the wrong college -- perhaps it will be different elsewhere-- or, that "college ain't what it is cracked up to be." In both cases, the "art" of the college novel is influencing the life of the students.

So, although art imitates life, this coexists with the prospect that life sometimes imitates art. In either case, the residual question is, "What are the images of undergraduate life projected by novels?" Our salient finding is that the bulk of college student novels project a world in which the extracurricular activities dominate while the formal curriculum and faculty are peripheral. It is an institutional world at variance with that projected in most of the reform reports about higher education -- reports which emphasize the importance of formal studies and which pay little attention to the extracurriculum. Interesting, the novels are in harmony with historian Laurence Veysey's analysis of student life during the age of the emergence of the American university -- a study which

emphasizes the gulf between students and faculty, in which the of student motto was, "Don't let your studies interfere with your education."

Precisely which aspects of the extracurriculum emerge in the novels as being important? Not surprisingly, intercollegiate athletics are conspicuous. Such novels as Holworthy Hall's Henry of Navarre, Ohio (1914) or James Dunton's Wild Asses (1925) which detail the activities of several classmates of Harvard, or Erich Segal's Love Story (1970) set at Harvard in the 1960s, describe the intense enthusiasm students have for football and hockey -- all of which evokes tremendous spirit among the undergraduates and which inspires continued institutional loyalty among alumni.

Sports apparently are important to student social life. Being a college athlete almost guarantees a student's popularity. We see this in the novel, Rough Hewn (1922) by Dorothy Canfield. The central character, Neale Crittenden, is a student at Columbia in the class of 1904. Being a member of the football team gives meaning to his college experience. After football season ends during his freshman year, he thinks, ". . . what a vacuum! Nothing in life but classe! Holy smoke! It was fierce! What did the fellows do who hadn't anything but classes? How could they stand it?" (p. 216). Football becomes a collegiate religion; in the protagonist's senior year, we learn:

> The end of the football season was a door slammed in Neale's face forever. He had given four years of his life to football, flung them joyfully and proudly to feed the sacred flame. Now for the rest of his life, he was to be shut out fromn the temple of the only religion which had as yet been offered him. . . he woke to the knowledge that the aim of his life had been taken away. . . (p. 262)

Courses have little influence or effect upon Neale; in fact, only one course ("General European History") is mentioned as stimulating or inspirational. Football connects him to college and develops his sense of maturity and responsibility. Although Neale initially has only minimal involvement in college life apart from football, he eventually is recruited into a fraternity and is elected captain of the football team: recipe for becoming a "BMOC." College athletes in novels are treated as Big Men on Campus. This is true for Dink Stover at Yale in 1910 as well as for Love Story's Oliver Barret IV at Harvard of the 1960s. In a more humorous vein, we have Eino Effllukkinnenn at the University of Minnesota whose character illustrates both the image of the dumb jock as well as the BMOC. As Max Shulman describes the transformation and elevation into campus life at the University of Minnesota in the 1930s in Barefoot Boy With Cheek:

> Four years earlier he was an unknown boy roaming around the North Woods precariously keeping body and soul together by stealing bait from bear traps. Then a Minnesota football scout saw him, lassoed him, put shoes on him, taught him to sign his name, and brought to the university to play football. And last year Eino was an All-American! All American! (p. 42)

Although written over forty years ago, this description of athletic recruitment comes close to revelations of college recruiting practices published in reform reports of the 1980s. Interesting to note is that the "dumb jock" was found in elite, private institutions --not just at the large state universities. In James Farrell's My Days of Anger (1943) one student offers the following profile of the captain-elect of the football team at the University of Chicago in the 1920s:

> He's taking a geology course. They pass rocks around for the students to examine, and Mike doesn't know what to make of the rocks. So he tosses them out of the window. The geology department has lost all its stones and is in a dither. Dr. Shafton is reorganizing a field expedition for Geology students to hunt for his rocks on campus. (p. 382)

In Rough Hewn (1922) Columbia's football players also are seen as "dumb jocks." Grant, the tutor, speaks to Neale, the Columbia player:

> 'What did you flunk?'
>
> 'I didn't flunk anything,' Neale admitted, half-ashamed that he might be considered a grind.
>
> Grant jumped up. 'What, nothing? and on the football squad, too.' He stared hard at Neale as at a strange animal, and conjectured aloud, 'Well, you must be a dub, of course. Never knew a Varsity man whose brain-cavity wasn't stuffed with cabbage leaves.' (p. 225)

Later, Neale assesses his teammates: "The other men on the football squad -- well, they had been his blood-brothers during the season, but after the season they were mostly illiterate young rakes without a single mental spark even when they were drunk." (p. 247). The paradox is that we have athletes portrayed as highly visible, influential campus figures yet simultaneously ridiculed as dumb jocks, a peculiar mixture of admiration and derision by fellow students. Those most admired on campus are those least equipped for classroom success. Their popularity is consistent with the picture and proportions of successful college life depicted in the novels: three-fourths extra-curricular and one-fourth academic.

Fraternities and sororities -- the Greeks -- are another important part of extracurricular life which emerges from the college novels. Membership in a

fraternity or sorority usually signals popularity, a necessary passport to full social life on campus among the traditional age full-time college students who are not "grinds" or "townies." Roderick Thorp's Into the Night (1961) emphasizes Cal Torrenson's efforts to become president of his fraternity at Cornell. According to his code, to not belong to a fraternity would be intolerable. It is the Greek system, not the curriculum, that keep him there. Similarly, David Pope, a fictional student at Cornell in the 1950s (in Charles Thompson's 1957 Halfway Down the Stars) is acutely aware of the social gap between himself and the fraternity men and sorority women. When invited to Greek parties because of his popular and socially savvy girl friend, David is awkward and commits social blunders that clearly stigmatize him as an outsider, a non-Greek.

Dating -- and thoughts about the opposite sex -- consume much of the undergraduate's time in college novels at single-sex colleges -- e.g., Come Join the Dance (1962), Wild Asses (1925), Bachelor -- of Arts (1933) -- or, at coeducational campuses -- e.g., Barefoot Boy With Cheek (1944), and Into the Night (1961). Undergraduates who do not date usually are portrayed as very shy or socially at ease with their college mates. As illustrated by Oliver Barret IV in Love Story, BMOC's are popular with women and date frequently.

The research question raised by the images of college life is thus: "Is undergraduate life portrayed in this way because things are this way? Or, is undergraduate life like this because it has been portrayed as such in novels and movies? i.e., are students acting out their expectations fostered by art forms? Does campus life imitate art? These images demand an important warning. They

come from novels about institutions which have traditional college students (i.e., ful-time, white students between 18 and 22 years old). Many undergraduates today do not fit this profile. Therefore, these images would seem to be irrelevant for the "new learners." But are they? We contend that even though the characteristics of the majority of today's college students have changed from those depicted in the novels, today's students still are influenced by and aware of the traditional fictional images. A good illustration of this phenomenon is Rodney Dangerfield in the movie, Back To College (1986). Most contemporary students have been conditioned to believe that college life is (and, therefore, ought be) 75% extracurricular and 25% academic. The challenge for us as faculty is to make that 25% as meaningful and influential as possible so ast oa create extracurricular activities which are co-curricular. We would be remiss to ignore the existence and power of these fictional images. Also, bear in mind that often the novelist as commentator describes but does not necessarily endorse the extracurricular imbalance.

* Novels as Sources of Alumni Opinion

Since the novels we studied were written by authors who actually attended the depicted colleges, these works can provide invaluable perspective on how alumni belatedly perceive the college experience. There is no single or universal response, as depictions range from nostalgia to critical dissection. Often a "college novel" is an immediate, intense reaction -- i.e., the author wrote the book during or immediately after attending college. Illustrative works in this category include the following: Peter Kindred, written in 1917 and published in

1920, was the work of Robert Nathan who attended Harvard from 1912 through 1915; This Side of Paradise, published in 1920, was the work of F. Scott Fitzgerald, who attended Princeton sporadically from 1913 through 1917; The Fume of Poppies, published in 1958, was written by Jonathan Kozol who graduated from Harvard that same year; Barefoot Boy with Cheek was published in 1944, written by Max Shulman who graduated from the University of Minnesota in 1942.

Sometimes the novels provide thoughtful assessment of the distant college experience. College Days: Harry's Career at Yale, published in 1894, recounts life at Yale in the eary 1870s by John Seymour Wood, Yale Class of 1874. High Hurdles, published in 1923, looks back almost two decades to reflect upon author Joseph Husband's Harvard days in the first part of the 20th century. Young and Healthy (1931), set at Harvard in the early 1900s, is the work of Donald Henderson Clarke, who attended Harvard from 1904 through 1906. A Yale Man (1966) describes a freshman year at Yale in the early 1930s -- and is the work of Milton White who, in fact, attended Yale for a year in the early 1930s. Class Reunion (1979) provides detailed reconstruction of the lives of four Radcliffe students of the class of 1957 -- the work of Rona Jaffe, a 1951 Radcliffe alumna.

Works by James Farrell provide an interesting example of two looks at an institution attended by the author. Farrell attended the University of Chicago from 1925 to 1929, but did not take a degree. His first college novel, My Days of Anger, published in 1943, traces the life of one Danny O'Neil during the years Farrell himself was at the University. Farrell's second novel about the University of Chicago, The Silence of History (1963), follows another "factional"

student (Eddie Ryan) at the University of Chicago in 1926. In both cases, the main character is an outsider, a working class Irish-Catholic commuter student who depicts himself as "an unimportant atom on the edge of college life." Instead of eventual integration into campus life, the main character continues to feel isolated and unhappy -- except in the classroom! In an ironic complement to the BMOC novels, the formal curriculum provides the challenge and rewards for the student who is rejected from the extracurricular activities; it is an experience which leads the author as student to reflect: "He had gone to the U to learn, and college had completely unsettled his mind in less than two quarters. He didn't know what to think and believe any more" (My Days of Anger, p. 157). The same theme is reinforced in Farrell's The Silence of History, as the protagonist muses:

> But the three quarters at the University had awakened my memory and stimulated it into alertness. My personal past was becoming more rich than I could have believed possible or understood a year before. I was beginning to draw upon it for understanding, and to find in any experience, thought which helped me to learn, and which added to the basis of much understanding." (p. 267)

Here are graphic testimonies to the potential of the college experience -- both its academic and extracurricular sides -- which provide an interesting accompaniment to such social and behavioral studies as Nevitt Sanford's The American College (1961) or Alexander Astin's Four Critical Years (1978).

* The Impact of College on Students

Several novels in our study make explicit statements about the effect of "going to college" and the essence of a college education. For example, after the fictional Alec Hamilton who gradutes from Columbia in the early 1930s reflects:

> So here he was, educated! Or if not educated, at least well shaken up. No question which seemed important had been solved and whre one problem had befogged him, at least two others now thickened the darkness. He had mastered nothing, and he had learned of life chiedfly this, that it is confused." (John Erskine, Bachelor -- of Arts, 1933, p. 331)

Advocates of "content-based" testing for seniors to determine the "value added" dimension of the college experience might decry such an effect. After all, it cannot be readily measured or tested. And, by the "value added" criteria, the student's college experience might be considered a failure because he apparently "learned little." On the other hand, this highly personal reflection provides college officials with a warning about an educational fallacy: simplistic reduction of the college experience to literal knowledge acquired. Those who view an educated person as one who knows how little he or she knows would applaud the student's self-appraisal -- and conclude that he has been "educated," and the undergraduate experience was, indeed, successful. The theme is repeated in James Farrell's quasi-autobiographical novel about student days at the University of Chicago, as one student character recalls:

> You find out that getting an education is not -- not necessarily, anyway -- being as you were before and merely knowing more than they did, the way in which one person knows more than another about an automobile engine and how it runs, its mechanisms, and principles and whatever else you could learn about autmobile engines. No, it wasn't like that. (James Farrell, The Silence of History, 1963, p. 220)

In both examples, the fictional students' memoirs indicate that going to college has made a difference in their thinking. College novels, then, alert us to these kinds of transformations without providing final answers about the phenomenon.

It is left to us as social and behavioral researchers to determine the extent of such differences

* Historical Context and Organizational Ethnography:

Connections with the Social and Behavioral Sciences

College novels can be useful for alerting us to customs, rituals, jargon, fashions, and rounds of life within the American campus. For example, the 1922 novel, Rough Hewn, goes on at length about the details and symbolic importance of Flag Rush at turn of the century Columbia. Student novelists provide glimpses into classrooms -- once again at Columbia, the 1933 novel, Bachelor--of Arts, describes seating arrangements and teaching styles -- a parallel to the factual memoirs, e.g., of Henry Seidel Canby's 1936 classic, Alma Mater: The Gothic Age of the American College.

Novels hint at institutional practices often overlooked in official reports. For example, several novels indicate that long before women were formally admitted to Harvard as degree they were permitted to attend some classes and even could enroll in the summer school. At the same time we learn that "regular" Harvard students looked askance at (and avoided) the summer session. Distinctions within the curriculum also spring to life in novels. George Santayana's The Last Puritan (1936) provides readers with hints about the lore of prestige within Harvard: in the 1880s the medical school was viewed as a "last chance" haven for socially prominent students who could not pass the College's entrance examination, in

marked contrast to the status accorded admission to graduate professional schools in recent decades.

Indeed, several novelists open the lid on Harvard's underworld of academic deficiency by describing the elaborate network of tutoring schools which flourished in Cambridge at the turn of the century. Apparently the "knowledge industry" included an enterprise which for a substantial price could salvage the "Gentleman C" from tumbling to the "Gentleman F." According to the novels, is that only the wealthier students could afford such assistance while the University itself provided few academic support services. In similar vein, we learn from novels about social class schisms with the controversial appearance of university-operated dining halls and dormitories. The "student union" becomes the haven for "greasy grind" commuter students. The student novelists are the chroniclers of these landmark events and structures which altered the chemistry of undergraduate life.

One of the finest dissections of the anatomy of a college's distinctive "inner life" comes from Owen Johnson's Stover at Yale (1912), a seemingly innocent saga which critically probes the structure and ethos of the famous "Yale System." In addition to describing the traditions and ideal of Yale College student life, the novel focuses on incidents which suggest the high pressure system of reward had been subject to erosion and abuse. In fact, careful checking of primary sources, presidential reports, and trustee investigations in the Yale archives suggest that the student-as-novelist was on the mark. The episodes were both historically accurate and significant.

The residual message is that novelists often point us to historic innovations and episodes which otherwise might be overlooked or ignored. For example, the publisher's foreward in the 1925 Harvard novel, Wild Asses, indicates that the federal government provided some funds for students who were World War I veterans. Certainly we are all familiar with the G.I. Bill of the post-World War II college era, but when have we heard about precedents from World War I? The novelist serves as athe memory and conscience of the institution.

College novels describe the mores and customs of their times. Certainly this is true in depictions of dating, social behavior, and etiquette. Although most formal institutional histories have little to say about exclusion and discrimination, numerous novels provide graphic and subtle accounts of anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism, gender discrimination, tracking, social snobbery -- the differentiation which takes place within the campus and usually outside public scrutiny. Louise Blecher Rose illustrates this sequential relation between the student as novelist and as institutional historian. In "real life" she was an undergraduate in the 1960s at Sarah Lawrence College -- an experience which provided the basis for her 1974 novel, The Laughing of Barbara Fabrikan. The novel deals with aspects of being a Jew at a socially prestigious women's college. Shifting back from fiction to reality, in the 1980s author Rose taught at Sarah Lawrence College and was commissioned by the Board to write that institution's 50th anniversary official history. In the course of her research she came across files which showed evidence of Jewish quotas at Sarah Lawrence in the 1930s -- quotas which college officials had publicly denied; her refusal to omit such materials from her college history led her to be fired from her teaching position

and to lose her commission as institutional historian. We suggest that such episodes suggest how novelists have been far ahead of social and behavioral scientists in focusing on the "dirty little secrets" of organizational subcultures.

College novels at best complicate rather than simplify our notions of the college experience. For example, a familiar feature of institutional research for years has been for alumni to fill out questionnaires for a 10th or 25th annual reunion. Such questionnaires become the basis for how we assess the college experience. John Marquand's award winning novel, H. M. Pulham, Esq. (1940 ) uses the incident of a Harvard alumnus filling out his class report to illustrate the misleading limits of questionnaires. The alumni survey format shapes and reduces his responses into predictable phrases which trivialize the memory of the college experience.. Meanwhile, he drifts off into recollection not only of his college days but also ensuing adult life -- triggered by the college questionnaire, but never articulated or expressed on the reply sheet. This is the riddle of recall and reconstruction which we must acknowledge.

In conclusion, then, perhaps one of the most useful functions of the college novel is its service as a "Distant Early Warning" system to higher education officials and policy analysts about life within a complex organization. We submit that some of the major concepts and themes in the social and behavioral study of colleges and universities were preceded by graphic, thoughtful depictions in college novels. Here we have in mind such themes as the "hidden curriculum," the "cooling out function,"the notion of tracking and discrimination within an

institution, sexual harrassment, and cleavages and subcultures within colleges, and the distinctions between "locals and cosmopolitans."

## Conclusion

Our comments have dealt primarily with undergraduate life. There is, howver, an equally rich tradition of college novels which focus on the organizational life of faculty members, administrators, and board members. For skeptics who still distrust "college novels" as vague, light reading unsuited to critical research, let us shift momentarily from college fiction to the ultimate realities -- death and taxes. Specifically, we bring your attention to a key volume in every professor's working library, at least between January and April: Allen Bernstein's 1987 Tax Guide for College Teachers, which notes:

> College teaching is one of the most misunderstood professions that exists today. Most people do not understand the difference between the job of teaching elementary or high school and that of teaching college. They do not understand that many college teachers must do more than just teach their classes, consult with students, and serve on administrative committees. College teachers are expected to keep abreast of advances in their field by reading journals, attending seminars, traveling to conventions, etc. Furthermore, in many colleges and universities, faculty members are required to be scholars in their own right. They must do original research and communicate their results by publishing articles in journals, writing books, giving colloquium and seminar talks, corresponding with colleagues, discussing topics with their fellow teachers and graduate students, etc.
>
> College teachers often incur expenses in doing their research. They may spend money on attending meetings in their specialty, subscribing to journals, buying books, buying equipment or supplies, etc.

> Fortunately, the tax regulations now specifically recognize the integral part that research plays in the duties of many professors. This was not always the case... (p. 381)

And, fortunately, we add, thoughtful novelists in their respective roles as student, as faculty member, or administrator have used fiction as the vehicle to describe and interpret what it means to have gone to college or to have been a member of the academic profession. Novels remain an excellent source for glimpses at behavior within a presidential search committee, or for snapshots of a departmental tenure review. One adage in higher education is that academic politics are especially sinister because the stakes involved are so low. Novels about faculty and administration expand, elaborate, and interpret this theme so as to bring the observation to life.

When Gertrude Stein was on her death bed a friend asked her with urgency and finality, "Gertrude, what is the answer?" This prompted Gertrude Stein to sit up and respond, "What is the question?" And so it is with thoughtful college novels. Certainly they provide no final answers about the character and content of higher education, but at very least they prompt us as scholars and professionals who study colleges and universities to ask in an interesting, significant way, "What is the question?"

## CRITICAL ANALYSES OF COLLEGE FICTION:

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