nation watched the ultimate sports drama reach its climax.

"Northeastern University," advertised the billboard.

"It was fortuitous timing," said Northeastern's Brian Kenny, with understatement uncharacteristic of a university vice president of marketing.

In addition to being a great stroke of luck, Northeastern's billboard inside Fenway Park was part of an aggressive and extraordinarily successful marketing campaign by a school whose very survival had been threatened, only years before, by a sharp drop in enrollment. It was also the vanguard of a new wave of marketing by universities and colleges—no longer just the ones that might be vulnerable to enrollment or financial problems, but also healthy institutions that had long looked down their noses at such things.

"I've seen 'marketing' change from a dirty word to a buzzword," said Michael Norris, director of communications and...
National CrossTalk is a publication of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. The National Center promotes public policies that enhance opportunities for quality education and training beyond high school. The National Center is an independent, nonprofit organization that receives core support from national philanthropic organizations, including the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Atlantic Philanthropies and the Ford Foundation.

The primary purpose of National CrossTalk is to stimulate informed discussion and debate of higher education issues. The publication's articles and opinion pieces are written independently of the National Center's policy positions and those of its board members.

Subscriptions to National CrossTalk are free and can be obtained by writing a letter or sending a fax or e-mail to the San Jose address listed below.

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NEWS FROM THE CENTER

Virginia B. Smith Award

DAVID S. SPENCE, president of the Southern Regional Education Board and former executive vice chancellor of the California State University system, has been awarded the Virginia B. Smith Innovative Leadership award for 2006.

As Cal State vice chancellor, Spence led the effort to develop a voluntary early assessment program (EAP) that enables high school juniors to identify weaknesses in their college preparation work in time to correct the deficiencies in their senior year.

“The EAP has made college readiness standards more concrete for schools, teachers and, most importantly, students,” said Patrick M. Callan, president of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. “Through his work with the program, David Spence has helped to connect these standards to the high school curriculum.”

The National Center and the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning jointly administer the award, which is named for Virginia B. Smith, President Emerita of Vassar College and longtime supporter of innovation in higher education.

Measuring Up 2006 will be Released September 7

PREPARATION of the “Measuring Up” reports published by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education has been guided by a team of higher education policy experts, shown at a recent meeting of the advisory committee in San Jose, California.

Back row (left to right): Sue Hodges Moore, vice president for planning, policy and budget, Northern Kentucky University; Peter T. Ewell, vice president, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems; Alan Wagner, professor and chair, Department of Educational Administration and Policy Studies, State University of New York at Albany; Richard D. Wagner, retired executive director, Illinois Board of Higher Education; Emerson J. Elliott, retired commissioner, National Center for Education Statistics; and Jane Wellman, senior associate, Institute for Higher Education Policy.

Front Row (left to right): Margaret A. Miller, director, Center for the Study of Higher Education, Curry School of Education, University of Virginia; Dennis P. Jones, president, National Center for Higher Education Management Systems; David W. Breneman, University Professor and Dean, Curry School of Education, University of Virginia; and Gordon K. Davies, director, National Collaborative for Postsecondary Education Policy.

Professor Wagner is a consultant on the project but not a member of the advisory committee. Another consultant, William P. Doyle, assistant professor at Vanderbilt University, was not present when the photograph was taken.
Charles B. Reed
Cal State chancellor strives to promote quality and diversity in the nation's largest four-year college system

By Kathy Witkowsky
LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA

T

HERE ARE TWO THINGS you need to know about Charlie Reed, chancellor of the massive California State University and one of the nation's most respected higher education administrators. For eight years now, Reed has headed the largest four-year system in the country, using his unique blend of political instincts, competitive drive and direct, plain-spoken manner to keep Cal State "on the move," as he likes to put it.

Number one, Charles Bass Reed loves to work. "I don't think anyone can out-work me," he said during a recent interview. This is not a boast so much as a statement of fact, one that comes up in nearly every conversation you have about Reed. "His biggest strength is his dedication to the system, his willingness to work unbelievable hours, and his tremendous energy," said Murray Galinson, immediate past chairman of the Cal State Board of Trustees.

Even non-fans—and there aren't many—concede that point. As president of the Cal State Faculty Association, the faculty union that has been in protracted and contentious negotiations with the administration for more than a year, John Travis has been one of Reed's harshest and most vocal critics. Nonetheless, Travis acknowledged, "Charlie has worked very hard to promote his vision. And I will give him credit for that."

Charlie Reed's vision, like the man himself, is at once both extraordinarily straightforward and extremely ambitious. He wants his 23-campus, 44,000-employee system to serve more students, because education is their ticket to better jobs and better health, which in turn will create a better economy. "That's what universities are supposed to do, is improve the quality of life of its citizens," said Reed.

And to do that, Reed says, Cal State must reach beyond its 405,000 students and into the state's K-12 classrooms, where many students aren't getting the education they need to succeed in college. More than half of all incoming Cal State freshmen need remedial coursework in English or math, or both.

Because Cal State prepares 55 to 60 percent of the state's public school teachers, it is in a position to improve that dismal remedial statistic. That is why Reed has been so focused on improving and expanding the institution's teacher training programs, which have grown 65 percent since he arrived. Cal State now graduates 15,000 teachers a year, but the state still faces a critical shortage of math and science teachers. So Cal State has undertaken a $2 million, five-year effort to double the number of math and science teachers it prepares, from 300 to 1,600.

But numbers aren't enough, said Reed: Cal State must also improve the quality of teaching. It has begun to offer a free 80-hour retraining program for math and English teachers. Next year, it will compare reading scores of Cal State-trained teacher classrooms to those of teachers trained elsewhere.

Also under Reed's leadership, Cal State has garnered national attention for innovative programs designed to help students prepare for college. One of the simplest is also among the best known: Cal State has distributed more than 70,000 copies of its free "Steps to College" poster, a Reed brainchild that spells out what middle school and high school students need to do to get there. It is available in five languages.

Meanwhile, more than 150,000 high school juniors have used Cal State's voluntary early assessment program, or EAP, which allows them to take an augmented version of a mandatory 11th-grade standardized exam so they can find out if they're ready for college-level work; if not, they still have a chance to catch up during their senior year. Should they choose, they can do so online, through tutorial websites Cal State has developed.

"He's one of the most important players in K-12 education," said Jack O'Connell, California state superintendent of public instruction, who refers to himself as chairman of the Charlie Reed fan club. "He's helped us break down the walls of all the segments of education."

Reed is trying to bust through racial and ethnic barriers as well. Fifty-five percent of Cal State students are minorities. That sounds like a lot, but the figure is still far less than it should be, said Reed, who wants the Cal State population to better reflect the population in the state's high schools, where more than two-thirds of students are minorities. So this year, Reed has stepped up the outreach, going beyond the public schools and into the communities of underrepresented students.

Top administrators from Cal State, including university presidents and Reed himself, have made presentations during Sunday services at 19 African American churches in Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay area to persuade potential students and their families that college is an important goal. Just seven percent of Cal State students are African American; only one third of these are male.

More than 30,000 people attended these two so-called Super Sunday events; afterwards, some people stood in line for nearly half an hour to collect the materials that Cal State was handing out. The enthusiastic response thrilled Reed. "If you've never had a grandparent or parent, brother or sister, who's been to a university, what the hell do you think you'd know about college?" he said. "They were starved for information."

The events garnered praise from the church pastors and congregation members. And Assemblyman Mervyn Dymally, who has been involved in politics for nearly half a century and currently chairs the California Legislative Black Caucus, called them, "an act of political genius."

"That was a coup," said Dymally. "I've never known a white college administrator to get into a black church."

Administrators from Cal State have also met with Vietnamese American, Native American and Hispanic community leaders. Cal State plans to continue the outreach, which will include two more Super Sundays next year.

In the meantime, Reed said, Cal State must also continue to improve articulation agreements with community colleges, the gateway for 55 percent of Cal State under-
from preceding page

keeping all those balls in the air," he said.

That he is able to do so makes him a rare talent, said David Ward, president of the American Council on Education. "He's without question one of the big thinkers about big solutions," said Ward. "As system president, he really does look at things from the broad social perspective rather than an institutional or campus perspective.

And he does that very, very well.

Reed is up at five o'clock and at his Long Beach office by 6:30, where he prepares two pots of coffee for his staff before he attacks his lengthy "working list" of priorities, which is updated every couple of months, and which he has whittled down from 56 when he first took the job to a mere 30 today. In his eight years as chancellor, Reed has never missed a single workday; what's more, he routinely works cellor, Reed has never missed a single school day, and if you make a mistake, you fix it. That's all you can do." Now 64, Reed has lived by that creed ever since his first year on the job.

As much as Charlie Reed loves to work, he hates to lose. And that's the second thing you need to know about him. "He will never lose," said Catherine Reed. "It might appear that he loses, but he'll be back." And back. And back. And back. Until eventually, she said, "he'll win.

Reed developed his competitive instincts on the gridiron, where he played both offense and defense. First he was quarterback and lineback for his high school football team, which he led to the state finals. Then he played halfback and defensive cornerback for George Washington University, which he attended on a football scholarship, majoring in health and physical education, and where he later earned his master's degree in secondary education and an Ed.D. in teacher education.

Reed honored his political skills as education policy coordinator for former Florida Governor (and later U.S. Senator) Bob Graham, who came to value Reed's dedication and political instincts so much that he eventually promoted him through the ranks to chief of staff. Before Graham traded the governor's office for the Senate, Reed accepted the position of chancellor of the Florida State University System. He held the job for an unprecedented 12 and a half years in a state where, as Reed describes it, "universities are a political sport.

And as a game he learned to play exceptionally well. "Football shaped his competitive, blunt personality," said Graham, who considers Reed a close friend. "He was not just a football player, he was a linebacker, which meant when the runner got through the defensive line, his job was to be at the right place at the right time and knock the guy's head off. That's kind of the way he works."

Just ask Carol Liu, chair of the state Assembly's Committee on Higher Education, who ran smack into Reed during his tenure as football coach.

Reed had arrived one afternoon at his second home in North Carolina for some rest and relaxation with his wife, only to turn around and head straight back to California at five o'clock the next morning when he heard that a key legislative bill might need his attention. "I couldn't rest in Carolina," Liu said.

That was not the case with Carol Liu. She still believes that the bill was a mistake, and that the new degree will suck precious resources from Cal State's undergraduate programs. "This is an end run by Charlie Reed to get around the Master Plan," said Liu, who saw herself as its protector and was pleased that the UC administration abandoned the fight. "It's the camel's nose under the tent."

Exactly, said Reed, adding that it's about time the Master Plan was revisited. After all, that was adopted in 1962, U.S. Census statistics had been changed a few times, too. "It's time to reexamine our assumptions," Reed said.

Reed does not receive such high marks from some Cal State faculty and the Cal State unions. But the days of faculty pickets and votes of no confidence—in Reed's first year on the job, they were passed by more than a dozen campus faculties, incensed over what they perceived as his disrespect for them—are long gone.

Still, there's no love lost between the Cal

continued on page 7

Reed has been focused on improving and expanding Cal State's teacher training programs, which have grown 65 percent since he arrived.

California State University

Students: 405,000
Campuses: 23
Faculty: 22,500
Total employees: 44,000
Percentage of students who are minorities: 55
Ethnic breakdown of students: 45 percent Caucasian; 26 percent Hispanic; 15 percent Asian American; 7 percent African American; 5 percent Filipino; less than 2 percent Native American or Pacific Islander
Average age: 25
Percentage of undergraduates who are first-generation college students: About 30
Percentage of freshmen who need remedial classes: 55
Number of annual graduates: 82,000, about half of all the bachelor's degrees and a third of the master's degrees awarded annually in California
Average annual cost: $3,164

focus on providing undergraduate education to the top one-third of the state's high school graduates; it also offers master's degrees. The bill was staunchly opposed by UC, which already had joint Ed.D. and Au.D. programs with Cal State, and by Liu, who also chairs the advisory committee for the School of Education at UC Berkeley.

But at the eleventh hour, Reed persuaded UC President Robert Dynes to remove his opposition to the bill if it was limited to the Ed.D. and did not include the Au.D. That was part of a calculated strategy on Reed's part. "The idea was to get as much as we could, but we said if we have to give up something, we'll give up the Au.D.,” he said.

"I don't think of it as a horse trade so much as the best way to go about it,” Dynes explained. “And once we got our eggs out of the way, we both came to the same conclusion,” he said: that it made sense for Cal State to offer the Ed.D., that UC, with its medical facilities and health care expertise, should continue to partner with Cal State for the auditory degree.

After an intense lobbying effort orchestrated by Reed and the bills' sponsor, state Senator Jack Scott, chair of the Senate Committee on Education, it passed out of Liu's committee on a 5-2 vote. "I expected it to be a very hard fight. And it was a very hard fight," said Scott, who, as was subsequently named one of two "legislators of the year" by Cal State. "Later, much to Scott's delight, the entire Assembly and the Senate approved it by overwhelming margins. "[Reed] knows how to get things done politically," said Scott, who, like Reed, is a veteran of both politics and higher education (he served as president of two community colleges). "He’s quite indefatigable in the pursuit of things."

People who know him say the deal was quintessential Charlie Reed.

"The average college administrator, the best you can get is Poly Sci 101," said Assemblyman Dynasly. As chair of the Assembly’s Budget Subcommittee on Education Finance, he has been impressed with Reed's accessibility, responsiveness and savvy: "He’s Poly Sci Pragmatic 101."

"He's a consummate politician," said California Secretary of Education Alan Bersin, who also counts himself among Reed's many fans. "Even when you end up being in a big dispute with him, he's a good competitor. He could persuade you that something was in your interests even when you knew it wasn't."

"That was not the case with Carol Liu. She still believes that the bill was a mistake, and that the new degree will suck precious resources from Cal State's undergraduate programs. "This is an end run by Charlie Reed to get around the Master Plan," said Liu, who saw herself as its protector and was pleased that the UC administration abandoned the fight. "It's the camel's nose under the tent."

Exactly, said Reed, adding that it's about time the Master Plan was revisited. After all, that was adopted in 1962, U.S. Census statistics had been changed a few times, too. "It's time to reexamine our assumptions," Reed said.

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Still, there's no love lost between the Cal
the errors of the College Board may seem ironic but, in fact, it is emblematic of the group’s history. From its start in 1986, FairTest has played the role of outsider in the clubby, often opaque world of standardized testing. It has specialized in prickling the reputations of the College Board and other institutions, arguing that their much-feared tests are often faulty by design and, more often than not, fail in their primary mission of predicting student success.

Upstairs, in the remaining office, Schaeffer said the reprieve has given FairTest the chance to continue offering its contrarian services. “There’s always been certain groups who have been attracted to us because we offer the other side of the story,” he said. “If you want a non-industry, non-establishment view of the testing industry, we can provide it. Frankly, there’s no one else who can do that.”

Over the years FairTest and its allies have made notable gains in their struggle with the industry. The testing process now have made notable gains in their struggle with the industry. The testing process now available to the public. Test questions contain less bias. And the SAT and its midwestern rival, the ACT, have been stripped of some of their fearful power by the acknowledgement of test makers that test scores are not immutable but can be altered through coaching.

Throughout, FairTest has proved difficult to ignore because of its aggressiveness and in-your-face style. When the group announced its founding in 1986, for example, it did so at the College Board’s biggest event of the year, the College Board Forum, where it proceeded to lambaste the SAT for various alleged biases against minorities and low-income groups.

And just recently, when Schaeffer appeared opposite Gasper Caperton, president of the College Board, at a New York state hearing on the SAT scoring scandal, Schaeffer told legislators that the breakdown in scoring proceeded from the fact that the testing industry “has no enforceable quality control standards and lacks basic accountability to students, teachers and the public.”

“The truth is, there is stronger public oversight and control over the food we feed our pets than for the tests administered to our children.”

—ROBERT SCHAFFER, OF FAIRTEST

Laura Barrett, FairTest’s board chairman, thinks college applicants should be judged on their overall performance, not just on test scores.
Educator Deborah Meier says FairTest can “keep the testing companies honest—there’s no one else who does that.”

from preceding page

the question now gets raised as to whether we are reaching a tipping point where the numbers start to mushroom.”

The implication of the test-optional movement—that the SAT and ACT are expendable—has clearly hit a sensitive nerve within the industry, and there has been at least one attempt to erode its significance.

In 2002, the College Board assigned two researchers to conduct a study of FairTest’s list of test-optional schools which conclud ed that FairTest had skewed the list, exaggerating its size.

At the time, the list contained 390 schools. The College Board claimed that 52 of the institutions on the list did not belong on the list because, in fact, they required admissions tests for all students. “Clearly, the FairTest list...is misleading,” the study said, and later concluded, “It is imperative that the number of SAT/ACT-optional institutions not be overestimated.”

But FairTest officials say it was the College Board study, not their list, that contained the error. “There were no 52 colleges that didn’t belong on the list,” said Schaeffer. “We review the list all the time, and we are vigilant about pulling off any colleges that get placed there by mistake. I’m not saying they fabricated their list, because I don’t know how or why the mistake was made, but their claim just wasn’t true.”

Schaeffer’s complaint appears to have some justification. The names of the 52 institutions were not supplied by the study, but the College Board made them available to National CrossTalk after a request. A random spot check of five colleges on the list revealed that all five have test-optional programs in one form or another, and all five had them at the time of the study.

When FairTest rented its first office just off Harvard Square in 1986, its future impact on the education world would have been hard to predict. Among other things, it was the product of a political odd couple who shared almost nothing except a deep suspicion of standardized testing of all kinds.

John Weiss, a college drop-out and left leaning political operative, had first become involved in the test reform movement in the late 1970s, when he worked for Massachusetts Congressman Michael Harrington. Those reform efforts eventually fizzled and Weiss repaired to Maine to work in community organizing.

Weiss was still in Maine when, one day, he was approached by a private detective. The detective told him he had been sent by a man named Patrick Rooney who wanted to talk about standardized test reform. The detective gave him Rooney’s phone number.

“Rooney and I talked and at first I said I wasn’t interested. I didn’t want to start a new organization. I was burned out, that’s why I went to Maine,” said Weiss, who is now publisher of the Colorado Springs Independent, an alternative weekly, and a member of FairTest’s board. “Then I got curious and asked how much money was available. Rooney said $750,000. Well, that was a lot of money back then. So I thought for a minute and said, maybe I am interested.”

Rooney, it turned out, was the founder of the Golden Rule Insurance Co. of Indianapolis, a wealthy man and politically eccentric conservative who also had championed civil rights throughout his life. Rooney’s company aimed many of its products at blacks in the midwest, and his interest in standardized testing was piqued when he discovered that white insurance salesmen were passing the licensing exam in Illinois in large numbers but black salesmen were not.

The exam infuriated Rooney. “In my judgement the (Illinois) testing was used for discrimination purposes,” he said. “The construction of the questions had a disparate impact on minority people, and I believe it was intended.”

Rooney sued Illinois and the Educational Testing Service, which provided the tests for the state. The result, which is still known as the “Golden Rule Settlement,” committed the state and ETS to reform the way questions are formulated for its licensing tests.

When Rooney called Weiss, his objective was to expand the reforms he had won in the lawsuit to cover all types of standardized tests, from college admissions to K–12 and employment testing. It was an ambitious plan. At one early point, after Weiss had recruited Schaeffer to join him, the two constructed a back-of-the-envelope organization chart that showed they would need a staff of nine to advance their cause on all three fronts.

They never quite made it. Rooney contributed several million dollars to FairTest’s operations over a five-year period, and he was followed by grants from the Ford, Joyce and McInroy Foundations. The group hit its high-water mark in the late 90s when the staff grew to seven persons occupying two floors of the current office building.

Laura Barrett, FairTest’s board chair-

man, said that, even then, the struggle with the large test makers was hardly a battle of equals. “On one side you have these very large institutions that make a lot of money from testing. And they spend it on promoting their products. On the other side you have this small organization that represents the constituency of people who have concerns with testing, but nobody makes money from that. So it’s been tough.”

Soon it would get tougher yet. By fall 2005 all three of the supporting foundations had dropped their support and FairTest was surviving on crumbs. Several members of the board made personal donations that allowed them to keep the doors open temporarily, and it was decided to give Neill and Schaeffer several months to generate some backing.

No one is certain why the foundation support dried up but Neill believes part of the reason lies with George Bush’s No Child Left Behind legislation that mandates K–12 testing across the country.

“It’s affected the foundations in the sense that they perceive there’s a national consensus about No Child Left Behind and that more K–12 testing is inevitable,” Neill said. “They see Ted Kennedy and George Bush in alliance on this, and they’re asking themselves why they should fund this small group (FairTest) that’s saying no, no, it’s not going to work, it’s bad news.”

The FairTest leaders also acknowledge a more difficult truth: their group is well known for what it stands against—standardized testing in most of its forms—but less well known for what it supports.

Diane Ravitch, education professor at New York University and senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, said she agrees that standardized tests have their issues but that FairTest has never met a test it liked. “In my experience, FairTest is opposed to all standardized tests,” she wrote in an email. “I don’t know of any that they think is ‘fair.’”

This view, not rare in the education world, may also have hurt the group in terms of foundation funding. Foundations often prefer to fund organizations that pursue a benign course toward their goal. FairTest, in the words of one critic, may present to the foundations as “too edgy, too negative.”

But, in fact, FairTest has long promoted its own voice of the way student assessment should work. That approach—whether applied to college admissions or the K–12 arena—resembles the “portfolio” method used at some colleges, whereby students present a multi-layered profile of their high school careers both inside the school and out.

FairTest would have K–12 teachers evaluate students individually for their proficiency in various subjects, and the portfolios would include samples of essays, projects and other work that revealed their talents or deficiencies.

Though any individual evaluation would involve some subjectivity, Neill says, the evaluation of an entire school of students under this system would prove far more reliable and revealing than the single multiple-choice test now used by many school districts.

Barrett, who once served as executive director of the group, says this type of student assessment has been tried successfully by a few districts but the effort has not drawn much attention. “It’s hard to explain, it’s complicated and you can’t reduce it to a number,” she said.

At least one member of the FairTest board argues that the rap about negativity is a red herring and the group should not apologize for playing the role of critic. Deborah Meier, a founder of progressive
Four Seasons, and then we expect you to use our products," but the connection nonetheless gets made.

"FairTest is valuable because they are addressing the other end of that equation. They face a Sisyphic task in many ways, but they are making gains."

And what of the future? Camara, the research vice president at the College Board, predicts that the movement to diminish the role of the SAT and ACT will be limited by the realities of the admissions process, especially at large schools.

Camara told the story of a visit he paid several years ago to the admissions office at UCLA. That year, he said, UCLA had approximately 4,500 spaces in its upcoming freshman class and received more than 40,000 applications. Of those, about 10,000 applicants had high school GPAs of 4.0 or higher.

“So UCLA was looking at 2.5 applicants with 4.0s for every available spot,” Camara said. “In a situation like that, how are you going to make the decision about who gets in? Do you flip a coin? Or do you use the SAT or ACT?”

Laird is not so sure that the tests would be the best way to solve that dilemma. When the UCLA story was described to him, he laughed. “At Berkeley we had years where our situation was more extreme than UCLAs. But I’d say, yes, you certainly could make the decision without the SAT.

“You look at each applicant, not just in terms of their numbers, but in terms of their range of accomplishments and the environment they come from. What course load did they take? What was their high school like? What kind of community did they come from? You can get a comprehensive picture of that. I think the kids achieved versus what was available to him or her. That’s what we did at Berkeley, and it worked extremely well.”

For Laird, the growing perception of the limited usefulness of the SAT suggests that its greatest days might have passed. “I think the College Board is probably preparing for the day when the SAT is no longer its most profitable vehicle,” he said.

As for the future of FairTest, prospects have improved, but a return to flush times is far from guaranteed. The group received several small grants this spring, and the influx of private donations means that the present, scaled-down operation can continue into next year.

But Neill and Schaeffer would like to see the organization return to its former size of seven or so staff members. “I feel like we’ve moved out of critical care and now we’re ready for rehabilitation,” said Schaeffer.

That will require a several-year commitment from a foundation or private patron. The group’s request for funding is now being considered by several foundations, and decisions are expected within several months.

There is another issue that faces FairTest. Both Neill and Schaeffer have worked at testing reform for decades now. And what of the future? Camara, the research vice president at the College Board, predicts that the movement to diminish the role of the SAT and ACT will be limited by the realities of the admissions process, especially at large schools.

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A Lefty Under Every Lectern

Conservative crusader David Horowitz pushes his "Academic Bill of Rights"

By Susan C. Thomson

FRESH FROM A NUMBER of self-proclaimed victories, conservative culture warrior David Horowitz and his troops are massing for what is shaping up as their broadest attack yet in his campaign to, as he likes to put it, “take politics out of college classrooms.” Their battle flag is an “Academic Bill of Rights” Horowitz drafted as an antidote to what he disparages as the pervasive political indoctrination of college students by leftist professors.

For three years now, conservative culture warrior David Horowitz has been on a higher-education offensive.

In late 2003, when the ink was barely dry on the bill, the American Association of University Professors went on record as supporting the “non-indoctrination principle” but taking vehement exception to other features the association said could pose “a grave threat” to traditional academic freedom by leading to quantitative standards for political diversity, requirements to teach discredited theories, and intrusions on faculty autonomy by courts, administrators and legislatures.

Last year, however, under threat of legislation, higher education leaders in Ohio and Colorado agreed to some of the bill’s more palatable points. Horowitz claimed victory in both states and in Pennsylvania, where the General Assembly established a special committee that held hearings on the political environments for teaching and learning in the state’s public colleges and universities—the most extensive public airings so far on Horowitz’s issues. The committee has yet to produce its report.

The Academic Bill of Rights has also found favor at the federal level, notably with U.S. Representative Jack Kingston. In 2003 the Georgia Republican floated a “sense of the Congress” resolution featuring the bill’s language almost word for word. The resolution didn’t succeed, but similar wording found its way into early proposals for the House version of the higher education reauthorization bill.

The softer final version, merely endorsing campus free speech and students’ rights to express their beliefs without fear of reprisal, resulted, in part, from behind-the-scenes lobbying by the American Council on Education, the chief advocacy organization for the nation’s colleges and universities.

Those generalities are consistent with ACE’s “Statement on Academic Rights and Responsibilities,” published last year in obvious, though indirect, response to Horowitz and his “bill of rights.” It proclaims, “Neither students nor faculty should be disadvantaged or evaluated on the basis of their political opinions.” The document also defends “intellectual pluralism and academic freedom” and the “free exchange of ideas” on campus while insisting that not all ideas “have equal merit” and that government should respect colleges’ and universities’ need for autonomy on academic matters.

A more direct criticism of Horowitz came from Jamie Horwitz, spokesman for the American Federation of Teachers: “We think his writings and a lot of his remarks have been filled with mischaracterizations and outright deceptions.”

Thirty higher education organizations—among them, the American Dental Education Association, the College Board, the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities and the National Collegiate Athletic Association—signed the milder American Council on Education statement.

Terry W. Hartle, ACE’s senior vice president for government and public affairs, said that the general endorsement of free speech on campus and of students’ rights to express their beliefs without fear of reprisal is “a satisfactory solution to a complicated problem.” But, he acknowledged, “There are still some people in the higher education community who are unhappy with our supposedly giving David Horowitz legitimacy. He is legitimate. David Horowitz is taken very seriously by higher education officials around the country.”

And he’s not going away. When asked to detail his immediate plans, though, he declined. “I don’t really want to telegraph, because my opposition is so well funded, where I’m going to pop up next,” he said.

Horowitz insists that legislation isn’t his main objective. At the same time, however, Brad Shipp, field director for a Horowitz-sponsored organization called Students for Academic Freedom that claims chapters or contacts on more than 180 campuses, said, “Any time a lawyer contacts us, we will assist them in any manner they want… We’ll support legislation if it has to come to that.”

Students from the SAF chapter at Florida State University testified for a proposed Academic Bill of Rights in that state last year. But, said chapter chairman Matt Sarrar, “The legislation was only meant to open the eyes of the universities all across the state.” He sees the organization’s emphasis as shifting now from the legislatures to the campuses themselves. “The future of this is going to be dealing with individual universities,” he said, with an emphasis on “helping them develop a grievance process” for conservative students who believe they have been wronged by leftist professors.

As that process stands at Florida State now, Sarrar said, only individuals can file grievances, and his group of between 50 and 65 members has been unable to intercede for students who claim professors have invited them to drop courses or threatened them with failing grades or expulsion from class for their conservative views.

SAF’s national office encourages all campus chapters to report incidents of alleged abuses and collects them in a “complaint center” on its website (studentsforacademicfreedom.org). Also posted there—under SAF’s logo, which features three monkeys in academic gowns and hear-no-evil, see-no-evil and speak-no-evil poses—is a copy of the organization’s student handbook, detailing how to start and organize a chapter, collect and document complaints and get publicity.

The organization’s goals include, according to the handbook, persuading universities to adopt the Academic Bill of Rights as policy, and getting student governments to pass resolutions supporting a Student Bill of Rights. Horowitz’s rewriting of his academic bill from a student perspective.

Horowitz said one of his immediate
goals is to put the student bill “in the hands of students” so that they are aware of “their rights to a professional non-political education.” According to SAF’s national office, campus chapters have yet to succeeding a single university but have scored with at least a dozen student governments.

On some campuses, chapters of College Republicans have led the charge. This was the case in April at Princeton University, where undergraduates approved the Student Bill of Rights, with 51.8 percent in favor. Horowitz described this result as an “historic victory” for his principles.

Students for Academic Freedom has chapters on both public and private campuses, but the issues they and Horowitz raise loom largest and most menacing for the public ones. That’s because they get public money, said Shipp. “When you have a taxpayer-funded institution that is allowing its employees the ability to discriminate against students there for any reason, their political ideology or religious beliefs, you have a real problem.”

Horowitz casts the potential consequences in economic terms. “The greatest threat to state funding (of public universities) is the one-sided political domination of the left” on campus, he said. And yet, he claims that, rather than being out for any professors’ jobs, he wants only to expand political dialogue on campus and stop classroom proselytizing. Whether that’s of the right or left, “I couldn’t care less,” he said. This is a rare protestation of neutrality from a man whose personal, out-front political views have always been anything but disinterested. On most of today’s issues, Horowitz comes down hard on the right. His website, frontpagemag.org, promotes the military and the Iraq war, cautions against the threat of “global Islamism,” and promotes references to the “very basis of a democratic education.”

Ward Churchill, an ethnic studies professor at the University of Colorado who is notorious for calling victims of the September 2001 attacks “little Eichmanns,” debated Horowitz in Washington, D.C., in April.

In his latest book, Horowitz argues that college faculties are infested with leftover 1960s lefties who went to graduate school to avoid the Vietnam draft.

“Academic Bill of Rights,” but the raising consciousness that incorporates some of Horowitz’s “Academic Bill of Rights,” but the resolution failed. Horowitz laughed and shrugged their shoulders as if to ask, “What was that about?” And then they went their separate ways.

The conference panelists and speakers, most of them Horowitz disciples, decried, among other things, speech codes, mandatory sensitivity training and a general lack of, and respect for, conservative thought on campus. Students told stories of being continued on page 14
Of all such exclusions, by far the most visible and contentious involves Islamic scholar Tariq Ramadan. In the summer of 2004, when he was based in Geneva, Ramadan had been offered, and had accepted, the Henry Luce Professorship in the Joan Kroc Institute at the University of Notre Dame. His furniture had already been sent to South Bend, Indiana, and his children were enrolled in school there for the fall semester. Having been a frequent visitor to the United States, and a popular lecturer at Harvard, Dartmouth, Princeton and other campuses in recent years, Ramadan assumed that his permanent entry this time would be routine, and that he could plan on taking up his new academic post in the fall semester.

 Barely a week before his planned departure from Geneva, however, Professor Ramadan was informed by a U.S. Embassy official that his visa had been revoked. Both he and Notre Dame sought an explanation for this extraordinary action. They were told only that the revocation reflected concerns under a section of the USA PATRIOT Act that barred foreigners who had used “a position of prominence within any country to endorse or espouse terrorist activity.” Although Ramadan’s grandfather had apparently been a founder of an organization that some considered to have preached terrorist rhetoric, nothing in his own academic career or his published writings or teachings could be deemed to cross the suspect line.

 Protests from U.S. academic groups—notably a letter from the American Association of University Professors to the Secretaries of State and Homeland Security—were consistently ignored. Persistent and probing inquiries by the Chicago Tribune—which had taken up Ramadan’s cause—also produced no satisfaction. Editorially, the Tribune observed that the Henry Luce chair at Notre Dame was hardly a place where one would expect to find a dangerous terrorist. In mid-December 2004, Ramadan and the university had essentially abandoned hope for any redress of the position he had planned to assume.

 Homeland Security responded with uncustomed alacrity, declaring the matter to be moot by reason of the resignation. As a less appealing alternative, it instead took a nontenured teaching post at Oxford. Meanwhile, many U.S. institutions and academic organizations invited him to speak and, hoping he might be able to accept, he renewed the visa application in the fall of 2005.

 When no action or official response followed, the American Civil Liberties Union filed suit in January 2006 on behalf of Professor Ramadan and several organizations that had sought Ramadan’s presence as a speaker or visiting lecturer. The American Academy of Religion, AAUP, and the PEN American Center now claimed not only that they had a valid legal interest in Ramadan’s visa status, but that the “ideological exclusion provision” of the PATRIOT Act which had apparently triggered his exclusion was in clear violation of the First Amendment’s protection for freedom of speech.

 This lawsuit was as novel as it was potentially significant in the challenge to U.S. treatment of scholarly visitors. Yet there were possible precedents, and the case drew the attention not only of the media but of federal Judge Paul Crotty, who it had been assigned to in the Southern District of New York.

 During a hearing before the judge in mid-April, the government insisted that it had never really barred Ramadan’s access, since he had resigned his Notre Dame faculty position before any final action had been taken on the initial visa application. His renewed application was still under review, the Justice Department said, adding that subsequent inquiries and interviews had raised new and “serious questions” about his eligibility to obtain a visa. Specifically, the government noted that during one recent interview Ramadan had openly admitted that his grandfather had apparently been a founder of an organization that some considered to have preached terrorist rhetoric, nothing in his own academic career or his published writings or teachings could be deemed to cross the suspect line.

 The Ramadan suit is not the only pending court test of the government’s treatment of foreign visitors. The ACLU also filed suit in federal court, under the Freedom of Information Act, seeking detailed information about the broader grounds upon which various applicants, mostly foreign scholars, have been denied U.S. visas. The “espousing terrorism” provision has been used as a subterfuge for the exclusion of invited (and otherwise acceptable) academic visitors who have simply criticized or publicly attacked U.S. policy in the Middle East or elsewhere, the suit contends. However, it remains to be seen how far national security concerns may blunt or limit the scope of such a request.

 Evidence of apparently mounting hostility toward foreign visitors is not hard to find.

 Who had planned to attend an international conference in Puerto Rico of the Latin American Studies Association, was denied the visa that would have enabled him to deliver a keynote address at the Latin American Studies Association annual meeting. That same spring, a Miami University geographer who had planned the weeklong return visit of a Cuban scholar to his campus lamented the denial of a visa to his putative guest, noting that the exclusion of such colleagues represented a “disturbing sign of the many impacts of the ‘war on terror.’”

 Of all such exclusions, by far the most visible and contentious involves Islamic scholar
One other suit, filed in June 2006, focuses on the outgoing rather than the incoming side of foreign academic exchange. A group of U.S.-based Latin American scholars brought suit against the Treasury Department to challenge regulations, substantially modified in 2004, that have severely inhibited travel to, and study in, Cuba. The plaintiffs claim that such constraints abridge free speech and academic freedom, in that they effectively prevent American scholars and teachers from accompanying their students who take part in the handful of surviving Cuban study-abroad programs (a tiny residue of what were once more than 200 such academic exchanges).

If Florida lawmakers have their way, things might even get worse. In mid April both houses of the Florida legislature approved a bill that would bar the state's colleges and universities from using public or private funds to pay for student or faculty trips to Iran, Libya, Sudan, North Korea or Cuba.

Meanwhile, an even more ominous Florida proposal would “redirect” some $8 million in state funds originally committed to supporting incoming foreign students into need-based student aid for Floridians. That bill’s sponsor insists that “we’re not saying anything nasty to foreign students,” but rather declaring that “we want to take care of our own kids first.” Not surprisingly, both measures have evoked strong opposition from Florida’s public universities and their faculties, and from international students and scholars.

While the focus of such concerns has centered mostly on specific foreign nations, and on those visiting scholars whose disciplines have obvious national security import, the effects of this apparent hostility have been felt more broadly. In April 2006, the eminent cellist Yo-Yo Ma testified before a U.S. House committee on the issue of cultural exchange. Official fears about admitting terrorists, he lamented, have also managed to bar many musicians and artists from coming to the United States. Government policy has created “extraordinarily high” barriers to bringing foreign artists to this country, Ma said. “Many of our friends still come, but there certainly are many people who decide they don’t want to.”

The latest news in this field is not, however, entirely bleak. There are at least two encouraging signs of rapprochement between the academic community and the Bush Administration. After several years of worrisome declines in applications from, and enrollment at, U.S. universities by foreign graduate students, 2005-06 surveys revealed an encouraging reversal of these trends. The Council of Graduate Schools reported that applications from international students had risen a healthy 11 percent, year over year—a trend which the Council’s president attributed to “sustained efforts by both the federal government and graduate schools.”

Though the application rate is still 23 percent below that for 2003, the recovery is expected to continue to increase. Major credit on the government side goes to vigorous efforts by the Departments of State and Homeland Security to expedite the processing of visa applications for foreign students and visitors. Meanwhile universities have also intensified their own recruitment programs and have added new incentives for foreign graduate students.

Confirming these trends, but also warning that more remains to be done, NAFSA: Association of International Educators issued a major report in June 2006. While the report praised the ameliorative government efforts, it noted with alarm that, in an increasingly competitive world environment, the U.S. is losing its long dominant role as the nation of choice for foreign students and scholars, and urged the framing of a new national strategy to address this challenge. Especially heartening in this regard are such initiatives as a pending Senate bill that would increase the time during which a foreign student may continue to work in the U.S. after receiving a degree, and that would also exempt such students from current limits on the number of green cards issued in particular fields.

The other piece of good news comes from a very different sector. Early in the summer of 2005, the Commerce Department shocked university scientists by threatening an expanded view of the “deemed export” doctrine that would effectively compel research institutions to obtain export licenses simply to employ many foreign graduate students and visiting scholars to work on certain sensitive projects in U.S. laboratories. The licensing requirement would be tied not to a scholar’s current nation of residence, as it had been in the past, but rather to the nation of birth. The outcry from the academic research community was immediate and intense. Higher education groups protested that any such burden would not only compound already intrusive record-keeping and data-gathering tasks, but would also deter many foreign scholars from ever seeking places in U.S. laboratories.

Imagine higher education policy being shaped in a political environment dominated by the possibility of national annihilation.

Early in 2006 the worst features of the proposal were withdrawn, and late in the spring, Commerce officials announced a one-year postponement of what remained of the feared policy, along with the creation of a study group to reassess the need to apply the “deemed export” policy in so draconian a fashion.

Then in mid June the Commerce Department announced the cancellation of the “deemed export” concept as applied to laboratory scientists. For once, in an extremely sensitive arena of academic research and scholarship, there were clear signs that the Federal Government seemed to have recognized the urgent needs of academic science, as well as the national security implications of barring or discouraging foreign scholars from U.S. laboratories.

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However ill-prepared, who can scrap up the tuition. Competition is fierce for entrance to top-ranked universities like National Taiwan University (NTU). On the eve of the crucial national entrance examination, secondary school students post red slips of paper at the temples, appeals to Buddha or Confucius to grant them a top score. One result, as a dean from a less prestigious university bluntly complained during my visit, is unequal access to the best schools.

As in the U.S., wealthy students, whose parents can afford to give them advantages like top-notch cram courses, go to the top-ranked institutions, while those from poorer families wind up lower on the academic totem pole. Not only do public universities have a near-monopoly on prestige, but because tuition is half what private schools charge, well-off families typically pay less than poor families for their children's college education. That too is a common American lament—as the recent Chronicle of Higher Education report on access confirms, inequities in access are much greater on this side of the Pacific.

More and more, competition for students has become international. Taiwan has long seen its best Ph.D. students head to the U.S., many of them for good, and it is trying to change that. A few institutions are developing graduate programs, with some courses taught in English, to attract foreign students, and the top universities have partnerships with overseas counterparts, which bring a handful of exchange students. But the student flow is mainly in the other direction—countries such as Australia and, increasingly, China, are poaching undergraduates. So far, foreign institutions haven't set up shop. But if the international negotiations over “services” like high tech—and higher education—mean “trade barriers” must come down, then such institutions as the University of Singapore or the University of Phoenix may well open branch campuses.

Across the globe, there is heated competition for star professors. It was big news when Taiwan's one Nobel laureate, chemist Lee Yuan-teh, returned to his homeland in 1994, after spending most of his career at Berkeley, to head the country's foremost research center. And National Taiwan University, listed among the top 200 research universities internationally in Shanghai Jiao Tong University's influential rankings, has recruited some overseas scholars. But comparatively low faculty salaries and a flat pay scale have meant a long-term brain drain, especially to American universities, which can offer luminaries fatter paychecks and more lavish research facilities.

NTU has managed to remain a player in the international league despite the fact that it spends just a third as much per student as the University of Singapore and just a tenth as much as the University of Tokyo. Three other Taiwanese universities are ranked among the top 500 research institutions worldwide despite having even fewer resources.

In Taiwan as in many countries, government funding has not kept pace with the expansion of higher education. Tuition at public universities has remained low because of pressure from students and parents, and private donors are still a rarity (remember those contributions to the temple). The president of one major university told me he had raised just a million dollars in 2005.

Public universities, which have depended entirely on government for research support, are increasingly signing substantial long-term contracts with high-tech firms. That is a way of raising money, to be sure, but it's not necessarily a way to promote the academic mission or to raise universities international visibility. Industry's focus is on the bottom line—that is what the market values—and this means underwriting projects that promise a quick payoff, rather than more speculative science. One highly ranked university boosts two new science labs, paid for by a high-tech firm. But because the company has some influence on the research agenda and the market is the strategy. But reliance on the market, and the winner-take-all competition that it generates, is a decidedly imperfect strategy for the U.S. It's no cure-all for Taiwan.

Taiwan's great accomplishment has been the dramatic expansion of higher education. Few other countries have been remotely as successful in creating a mass system. Whether America is the model and the market is the strategy. But the student flow is mainly in the other direction—countries such as Australia and, increasingly, China, are poaching undergraduates. So far, foreign universities haven't set up shop. But if the international negotiations over “services” like high tech—and higher education—mean “trade barriers” must come down, then such institutions as the University of Singapore or the University of Phoenix may well open branch campuses.

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NCLB approaches, a vast number of children who need help in school have vanished from attention entirely. And these children are likely to be racial or ethnic minorities, special education students, or students with limited English proficiency. This may seem surprising, given that NCLB proponents have relentlessly touted the law’s requirement that results be considered separately for ethnic and socioeconomic groups, for students with disabilities, and for those with limited English proficiency. Each school must calculate, for each grade, subject area and student group, the percentage of students who are proficient according to the state’s federally approved standards. If even one of these groups, in a single grade and subject area, does not attain the targeted proficiency rate, the school in question will be labeled as having failed to make AYP—adequately yearly progress. Or that’s how it’s supposed to work.

From the very beginning, though, there has been an out the “minimum n,” or minimum group size. If the number of the students in a particular group falls below a minimum, the school is off the hook, because the results for that group do not count in AYP calculations. (These students are still included in the overall school results, but they are, in fact, “hidden in averages,” the very situation NCLB was supposed to prevent.)

In April 2006, the Associated Press estimated, based on its own analysis, that nearly two million students were not being counted because of this loophole. Even more troubling was the fact that minority students were seven times as likely to be excluded as white students. In response to the AP analysis, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings said, “We ought to do more about that,” adding that the issue will be addressed during the reauthorization process.

So how did this disturbing situation come about? In their NCLB plans, states were asked to propose a minimum n—the number of students below which a group’s results wouldn’t count. These minimum group sizes, along with the rest of the states’ accountability plans, had to be approved by the Department of Education. Although there was some variation, most states initially set minimum group sizes of 30 to 40 students. But in 2004, the states were invited to initiate changes to their NCLB plans, resulting in a flurry of state requests for amendments and exceptions.

The many modifications to state accountability policies have drawn the attention of a number of agencies, including the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the Center on Education Policy (CEP), an independent research organization, and the Harvard Civil Rights Project, all of which have published reports on this topic. According to a November 2005 CEP report, 23 states asked for and received amendments to their minimum n rules in 2004 or 2005. Some states have now received approval to use minimum numbers as large as 100 or 200 (e.g., Florida and Virginia respectively).

As the CEP report notes, “Many states have responded [to the difficulty of making AYP] by raising the minimum subgroup size, so that more students with disabilities can be excluded from school-level AYP calculations.” For example, Alaska obtained permission from the Education Department to increase its minimum group size from 20 to 40 for students with disabilities, and for students with limited English proficiency. The motivation for Alaska’s request, according to an October 2005 CCSSO report, was that 65 of the state’s schools had failed to make AYP because of missed targets for students with disabilities.

In addition, some states have received permission to use “confidence intervals” in making AYP determinations. According to the CEP, 31 states included these in their original plans, and 27 states were granted permission to amend or add a confidence interval procedure in 2004 or 2005.

Confidence intervals are widely applied in many statistical analyses, including political polls. How do they work? Suppose a pollster seeks to estimate the percentage of U.S. adults supporting Candidate X. We’ll never know the true percentage since we are not contacting all US adults. Based on a random sample of 1,000 people, the pollster reports that the percentage supporting the candidate is 47 percent, plus or minus three percentage points. (A slightly more rigorous way of describing this result is that this procedure will lead to an interval that brackets the true value 95 percent of the time.) The interval ranging from 44 percent to 50 percent is called a 95 percent confidence interval for the true percentage of voters supporting Candidate X.

A similar idea is behind the use of confidence intervals for NCLB proficiency rates (although the situation is somewhat different, in that a school’s estimated proficiency rate is not based on a random sample of students). Suppose a school’s proficiency rate for a particular category of students is 47 percent, with a confidence interval ranging from 44 percent to 50 percent. If the school’s target rate is 50 percent, the school is considered to have met the target, even though its actual rate is lower, because 50 percent is included in the interval. This may not seem particularly troublesome in this example, but the confidence interval for a small school would be much wider than six percentage points, which means that a school with a proficiency rate much lower than the target could escape accountability.

Confidence intervals “automatically” take into account the fact that, all other things being equal, a proficiency rate based on a smaller group of students is less precisely determined than a rate based on a larger number. While the computation of confidence intervals is a well-established procedure, the inconsistent application of this approach in NCLB compounds the inequities resulting from the lack of uniform minimum group size rules. Confidence interval rules essentially supersede minimum n rules—even if the minimum n has been met, the confidence interval provides a further route through which a group can be exempted from AYP calculations. If two states have the same minimum n, but one uses confidence intervals, the confidence interval state is, in effect, imposing a less stringent standard.

To further complicate things, the confidence interval procedures adopted by the states vary in their confidence level (and in other technical respects). In AYP calculations, 95 percent or 99 percent confidence intervals are typically used. For a given proficiency rate and number of students, a 99 percent interval will be wider, which, in effect, gives the state additional leeway.

To better understand the effect of differing policies involving minimum group sizes and confidence intervals, consider a hypothetical example involving four schools, one in each of four states. Suppose the target proficiency rate in, say, grade four math for all four states is 50 percent. Now let’s focus on a particular student population—say, students with limited English proficiency. For simplicity, we’ll assume there are exactly 30 such students in each of the four schools. Suppose that the schools have met AYP standards for all other student groups, so their fate rests on the determination that is made regarding the math proficiency of grade four students with limited English proficiency. Let’s say the percentage of such students who are math-proficient is 49 percent in School one, 35 percent in School two, 30 percent in School three, and 25 percent in School four. Under very realistic conditions, we could find that School one, with the highest proficiency rate, did not make AYP, while the other three schools did.

How could that happen? Suppose School one is in a state that uses a minimum n of ten, like Louisiana. In that case, its math proficiency rate of 49 percent for grade four students with limited English proficiency counts toward the AYP decision and, although the rate is close to the 50 percent target, it falls short.

School two, with a proficiency rate of 35 percent, is located in a state that uses 95 percent confidence intervals, like Illinois. Because the interval (which I calculated using the proficiency rate and the number of students) stretches from 17.9 percent to 52.1 percent, the school’s proficiency rate is deemed indistinguishable from the state target rate of 50 percent, and the state is in the clear.

School three, with a proficiency rate of 30 percent, is in a state that uses 99 percent confidence intervals, like Mississippi. Here, the interval ranges from 8.4 percent to 51.6 percent, so again, the conclusion is that the school’s proficiency rate is not statistically different from the state target rate.

Finally, School four, with a proficiency rate of only 25 percent, has not jeopardized its AYP status because the state in which it is located uses a minimum n of 40 for students with limited English proficiency, like Minnesota.

Now, it’s not bad that NCLB is flexible in its implementation. No one who cares about education would argue for rigid adherence to a one-size-fits-all policy for all aspects of the legislation. But the variation across states is troubling from two perspectives. First, some state actions—like Alaska’s request to raise the minimum n for students with limited English proficiency and for students with disabilities—are clearly attempts to evade the law’s intended focus on student groups that have historically been ignored. Students who are excluded from NCLB group-level calculations are, of course, likely to be those from smaller groups such as ethnic minorities. Second, the government’s decisions about what policies to permit seem to be quite haphazard, resulting in an odd patchwork of inconsistent guidelines.

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Chair of the marketing committee at Centre College in Kentucky, whose fragile size—it had only 700 students when Norris started there—made it, like Northeastern, a marketing pioneer. “Colleges and universities large and small now have marketing teams, marketing plans, and growing budgets for paid advertising.”

But while it may be far more widely practiced than before, marketing by universities and colleges also seems widely misunderstood, or at least underestimated. It has come to be about more than billboards or brochures, websites or updated logos. It entails nothing less than changes in the structure of universities themselves, their campuses, and their curricula, based on what best serves a target audience—prospective students and their parents, mainly, but also alumni. Or, as universities are slowly beginning to consider them, the customers.

Colleges and universities have been marketing themselves since Harvard put up the statue of John Harvard in Harvard Yard,” said Rodney Ferguson, senior partner in the Washington office of the higher education marketing consulting firm Yard.” “What’s relatively new is that they’ve discovered that they are in a very competitive marketplace for attracting students, faculty and donors, and that those things are not going to happen if they’re sitting on their hands. What you’ve seen is the development of a consumer marketplace.”

This is a shift as revolutionary as it has been largely overlooked. Like consumer product manufacturers, schools including Northeastern and DePaul now conduct marketing analyses before adding new academic programs. In the name of marketing, they’re beefing up premier departments, trimming weak ones, transforming their facilities, reducing class sizes, lining up high-profile speakers to attract attention, even changing their names. They are turning to a fast-growing industry of consultants to help determine how to price and deliver higher education—though they quickly add that they would rather avoid using the term “higher education,” because it doesn’t test well in focus groups. (“Colleges and universities” tests better.) Marketing administrators are being elevated into the policymaking echelons.

The classic definition of marketing is product, place, promotion and price; Harvard refers to the Yards, Ramparts magazine the name of market- ing, they’re beefing up premier depart- ments, trimming weak ones, transforming their facilities, reducing class sizes, lining up high-profile speakers to attract attention,甚至 changing their names. They are turning to a fast-growing industry of con- sultants to help determine how to price and deliver higher education—they quickly add that they would rather avoid using the term “higher education,” because it doesn’t test well in focus groups. (“Colleges and universities” tests better.) Marketing administrators are being elevated into the policymaking echelons.

The classic definition of marketing is product, price, placement and promo- tion—the 4Ps,” explained John Lip- pincott, president of the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, or CASE. “When people talk about mar- keting in higher education, they’re often talking about that fourth P promotion, when in fact if you are truly engaged in marketing, you have to look at the prod- uct. To apply marketing to higher educa- tion is to be willing to ask questions about the very product itself, and whether indeed it is responsive to the people the institution is dedicated to serving.” Or, as outgoing Northeastern President Richard Freeland put it: “Before you tell your story, you have to have a good story to tell.”

It seemed within the realm of possibility that Northeastern’s story might come to an end in the early 1990s, after what was once the nation’s largest private university suf- fered several consecutive years of enroll- ment declines. An urban commuter school that started out by offering evening classes at the YMCA in 1898, it had raised its tuition too high to continue to attract the children of blue-collar families once drawn by its trademark co-op program, which put them into long, paid internships in their chosen careers at local companies while they were still in school.

Northeastern’s rivals were more respec- ted, better-known, shinier private institu- tions such as Boston University, and near- by public universities that charged far less. So it set out to remake its image—not just by hanging billboards, but by recognizing how the school itself would need to change in order to compete.

“We always believed that the central

HOROWITZ
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Horowitz started there—made it, like Northeastern, an “academic bill of rights” program, which put them into long, paid internships in their chosen careers at local companies while they were still in school.

Northeastern’s rivals were more respec- ted, better-known, shinier private institu- tions such as Boston University, and near- by public universities that charged far less. So it set out to remake its image—not just by hanging billboards, but by recognizing how the school itself would need to change in order to compete.

“The classic definition of marketing is product, price, placement and promo- tion—the 4Ps,” explained John Lip- pincott, president of the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education, or CASE. “When people talk about mar- keting in higher education, they’re often talking about that fourth P promotion, when in fact if you are truly engaged in marketing, you have to look at the prod- uct. To apply marketing to higher educa- tion is to be willing to ask questions about the very product itself, and whether indeed it is responsive to the people the institution is dedicated to serving.” Or, as outgoing Northeastern President Richard Freeland put it: “Before you tell your story, you have to have a good story to tell.”

It seemed within the realm of possibility that Northeastern’s story might come to an end in the early 1990s, after what was once the nation’s largest private university suf- fered several consecutive years of enroll- ment declines. An urban commuter school that started out by offering evening classes at the YMCA in 1898, it had raised its tuition too high to continue to attract the children of blue-collar families once drawn by its trademark co-op program, which put them into long, paid internships in their chosen careers at local companies while they were still in school.

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“We always believed that the central

HOROWITZ
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Horowitz claims that he wants only to expand political dialogue on campus. But on most of today’s issues, he comes down hard on the right.

Horowitz started the Center on an annual budget of $100,000. By 2004, according to the latest available tax return, it had ballooned to $3.9 million, of which $845,000 went to fundraising and $337,000 to his salary. A combination of such sources as events, books, subscriptions and mailing list rental brought in revenue of a little over $500,000; the rest of the money came from contributions, the return shows.

The bulk of the Center’s financing comes from a base of 57,000 individual supporters, of whom maybe 1,000 give around $1,000 at a time, Horowitz said: “I think the majority of my donors are $50 donators. That’s my strength.” And he stressed that none of the money comes from corporations.

According to other public records, the Center’s biggest contributors, donating in chunks of as much as $25,000 at a time, are the Sarah Scaife Foundation Inc., the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation Inc., the Randolph Foundation, and the recent- ly shuttered John J. Olin Foundation. All are known for backing conservative causes.

Separately, the Randolph Foundation funded a study, published last year, which concluded that “a substantial shift to the left in party identification and ideology” has taken place in academia since the mid-1980s. The foundation’s evidence is a sur- vey showing that 72 percent of teachers at American colleges and universities identify themselves as liberal, compared with 15 percent who describe themselves as cons- servative, with the liberal tilt greatest at elite schools and in humanities and social sciences departments.

The popular image of academia as a bastion of liberal to leftist politics is of long standing. And complaints about it have erupted from time to time ever since the 1930s.

Contrary to that survey, Howard Brick, a professor specializing in intellectual histo- ry at Washington University in St. Louis, believes the last three decades have actually witnessed “considerable moderation” toward the right in the campus political cli- mate. There’s little evidence of political indoctrination or suppression of debate, he said. Most faculty whom I would recog- nize as of the left make a decided effort to be fair, welcome debate and refrain from making their classroom presentations a matter of polemics.”

Nor, according to a study published last year in the Personality and Social Psycho- logy Bulletin, are professors as a general rule punishing conservative students by giving them lower grades. Conservatives and liberals get comparable grades in soci- ology, cultural anthropology and women’s studies courses, and conservatives get higher grades than liberals in business and eco- nomics, the study found.

Horowitz, however, deals not in general rules but specific cases, like that of Ward Churchill—an example whose usefulness to him may be running out. In May, a commit- tee of University of Colorado faculty members found the controversial professor guilty of multiple violations of scholarly standards in his research. At press time, the committee’s report was working its way through the university bureaucracy. Phil DiStefano, interim chancellor at the university’s Boulder campus, has started pro- ceedings to fire Churchill, but the final decision rests with the Board of Regents and university President Hank Brown.

Meanwhile, Horowitz has taken up a new case, a positive example from his perspec- tive: Sean Allen, a conservative Colo- rado high school student who recorded his geography teacher making what advocates describe as a distribute against George Bush in class. Allen took his evidence to conser- vative radio and television commentators, who made a hero of him. So did Horowitz, who presented him with the first “Sean Allen Award,” to be given annually to a student who exposes political advocacy by high school teachers.

Horowitz intends to open a new, pre- college front in his campaign. Samuel E. Rohrer, a Republican state representative in Pennsylvania, signed right up, pleading to hold hearings there on an academic bill of rights for elementary and secondary school students.

Susan C. Thomson is a former higher edu- cation reporter at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.
The story had to be that this is a first-rate university,” Freeland said. “[But] if we’re going to claim excellence in this arena, we’d better be excellent in it. Whatever story we told to the outside world had to be one that our community had to be able to rest with a straight face and a pure heart.”

The university settled on spotlighting the one thing that most differentiated Northeastern from its competitors: the co-op program. Nearly two-thirds of its students are offered jobs by the employers that take them on as co-op interns. They have a leg up in a competitive hiring market over counterparts from less fortunate schools. This would set Northeastern University apart. “The central theme has been what we call the value proposition for Northeastern, which is to say, Northeastern is a first-class institution that has the added value of co-op education,” Freeland said.

This also meant that “co-op,” as it has been nicknamed, would have to live up to the hype.

“I wouldn’t say that the plan at the center of our marketing drove us to make sure we were doing this as well as we can,” said Freeland. “It was more the other way around.” The bottom line, he said, is that “you can become a used-car salesman if you want, or you can become an effective communicator about what’s terrific about a place. You have to know what your message is going to be, and how you can express that in a few short statements. And those short statements can’t just be a product of your PR department.”

Northeastern put its money where its mouth was. Conscious that prospective students were influenced by universities’ facilities—a study this year by the Association of Higher Education Facilities Officers confirmed that students make their decisions about which college to attend based largely on the quality of facilities—it has spent $477 million since 1992 upgrading its once-drab inner-city campus, replacing parking lots with grassy quadrangles and building new classrooms, a sparkling fitness center, and seven striking new dorms. Panoramic views showing lots of green surrounded by innovative new buildings began to pop up on the website.

“The physical changes in the campus have played a huge role in the repositioning of Northeastern,” Freeland said. “As we became aware of that, we incorporated it more and more into our marketing: You get a first-class campus environment, and on top of that you get co-op education.”

What Northeastern got in return was a rebound in undergraduate enrollment to 14,492, up from 10,747 a decade before. Applications more than doubled, squeezing the acceptance rate from 85 percent to 47 percent, which makes Northeastern more selective in admissions than Boston University. The average SAT score rose from 1008 to 1224. And the onetime commuter school saw the proportion of its students who came from outside Massachusetts jump from less than half to more than two-thirds.

This kind of success has gotten the attention of other universities. While they might not have the enrollment problems that spurred Northeastern into action, they do foresee a dropoff in the number of high school graduates beginning in 2009. They also fear the inroads being made by for-profit companies like the University of Phoenix, by universities abroad, and, for that matter, by schools that are ahead of them in marketing. Public universities, meanwhile, face continuing declines in support from legislators and taxpayers; state spending per student on higher education has fallen 13 percent since 1991.

It is also a factor that today’s prospective students, who have been marketed to since birth, are trained to respond to the language of marketing. Their parents are influenced by universities’ marketing and advertising, preferring to call what they do to promote themselves “institutional advancement” or “image enhancement.” When Norris arrived at Centre College 27 years ago, he said, “You didn’t really use the word marketing. You might talk about enhancing the school’s reputation, or ways to get the word out or increase name recognition. But not marketing.”

In a meeting of faculty one day, Norris spoke of some impressions, apparently erroneous, that students had of his school. “I said, ‘Well, we need to address those because, as we say in marketing, perception is reality.’”

“I always thought reality was reality,” huffed a physics professor sitting next to him.

“I responded,” Norris recalled, “that the customer’s perception is the reality on which he or she will act.”

There remains resistance, said Ferguson, the consultant. “But that resistance has fallen off precipitously in the last three or four years, because the places that have not paid attention to how they are perceived in the mind of the market have seen falling enrollments, falling donations, and falling attention among their various audiences. In those things happen, the resistance falls away pretty quickly.”

Tom Hayes compares the discovery of marketing by colleges and universities to what happened in the healthcare industry.

“Every single thing in healthcare marketing—every single thing—was coming from consumer products marketing,” said Hayes, a professor of marketing at Xavier University in Ohio, editor of the Journal of Marketing for Higher Education, and founder of the American Marketing Association’s Symposium on the Marketing of Higher Education. “For universities, this involves the concept of segmentation, of not trying to be all things to all people, just as hospitals had to do when they found they had too many beds for the demographics to support. They had to decide if their business was really to provide healthcare to everyone in need. Doctors thought this was a philistine concept, and it’s the same with faculty.”

But it is well under way. Many schools now require market assessments before approving new programs. “In a world of innovation resources you shoehorn major or a program until you’ve done a market analysis. What’s your break-even, what’s your competition?” Hayes said.

DePaul, for example, has an elaborate process worked out between its marketing group and academic affairs office to include a marketing analysis, a marketing plan and an enrollment plan jointly with the curricular plan for any new program. The process is drawn without apology from consumer products marketing. “We could find ample evidence of great ideas and great new products brought to market that failed, much of which was tied to inadequate assessment of the market opportunity,” said David Kalsbeek, vice president for enrollment management.

New programs at DePaul are generally turned down if they are not expected to make a return on the investment, if the market doesn’t exist, or if the university cannot compete on price with rival schools. “At an institution that is over 90 percent tuition-dependent for its financial resources, it makes sense for the marketing strategy to be mostly focused on student enrollment issues,” Kalsbeek said.

There are occasions when DePaul approves a program that isn’t necessarily going to attract a new market. One example is Islamic Studies, which the university decided served an important purpose. More telling was the addition of a master’s degree in social work after market analysis showed it was the field most in demand in Illinois that DePaul didn’t offer. “Everything gravitated toward the support of a master’s in social work, and our market analysis gave that confidence to invest in new faculty and to differentiate our program from similar programs in the market,” Kalsbeek said. He calls this “a bipartisan partnership” between marketing and academics.

Marketing by universities “is more a way of thinking than it is merely an adding of promotional tools to gain attention,” said Texas Christian’s Lauer. “It’s the thinking and the research that goes into positioning an institution in the marketplace. Whatever you imagine to be your product, how you distribute it, how you price it, and how you deliver it should be thought about simultaneously.”

Next comes the part of marketing the public sees: the billboards, the viewbooks, the hype.
Advancement and Support of Education.

“There’s always going to be nervousness about applying marketing techniques to higher education, says John Lippincott, president of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education.

Babson College hired Digital Influence, a marketing agency, to design a website on which prospective students can post profiles of themselves and correspond with others who have similar interests or who live nearby; the goal is to create a sense of community that makes students feel connected to the school. A lot of colleges and universities have realized that they need to communicate with their prospective students with an authentic voice and not the voice of adults trying to sound like teenagers,” said Ferguson, of the consulting firm Lipman Hearne. “So a lot more colleges are using their students to communicate with younger students—not just to visit with them on campus day, but to run blogs and to be more involved in sending out real-time communication on the web.”

Northeastern has moved, in the mid-Atlantic states, in the southwest and on the west coast—places from which it doesn’t get a lot of students. To generate buzz among alumni, it has moved from reunions to networking events, having learned that its career-oriented alumni prefer this.

The University of Maryland is entering its 150th anniversary year with a campaign called “Fear the Turtle,” featuring, among other things, 30 fierce-looking temporary Terrapin statues on the campus and 20 more around the state. It’s only one way Maryland is trying to get attention. According to the minutes of a meeting of the university’s marketing team, the head of marketing “would like to make sure that the campus gets some high-profile people on campus in the coming year.”

Case Western Reserve University, whose research showed the name was a mouthful and its shorthand acronym easy to forget, became, simply, “Case.”

Tiny Centre College in Kentucky launched “the Centre Guarantee,” promising every student the chance to study abroad, complete an internship, and graduate in four years, or else get an additional year tuition-free. (“We’ve heard from parents particularly that it’s an attention-getter when you use the word guarantee,” said Norris.)

Higher education consultant Rodney Ferguson believes “colleges and universities have been marketing themselves since Harvard put up the statue of John Harvard in Harvard Yard.”

“We in higher education have to come down off our collective hilltops and work with the public, with business and community leaders, and proactively demonstrate our value to the larger society, using methods and language that are easily understood,” said Syracuse University Chancellor Nancy Cantor, chair of the ACE board of directors.

Among taxpayers, support for universities is “a mile wide and an inch deep,” because so many people think it’s for the betterment of the individual and not for the betterment of society,” said Spence. “Once you flip the paradigm that colleges and universities are there to benefit society—that they’re a solution machine for America—the dam breaks.”

As a marketing tool, college rankings might be overstated: A survey found that prospective students do not pay nearly as much attention to them as universities seem to think. And the public “need to believe in each other again,” he added.

Back at Northeastern, President Free-land still shakes his head about that World Series-year billboard inside Fenway Park. (The university has renewed the lease annually.) “It seemed counterintuitive to me that the watchers of Red Sox games were similar to kinds of families who apply to Northeastern,” he said. “But I can’t tell you how many comments I got from alumnus or parents or faculty or staff telling me it really felt good to see Northeastern out there. It conveyed a sense of an institution on the move, that if Northeastern is doing this, there must be some interesting things going on there.”

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