Remedial Education Under Attack

Controversial plans for the City University of New York

By William Trombley
Senior Editor

New York City

On a rainy spring afternoon in the Bronx, 15 students sat in a freshman English class at Lehman College, participating somewhat reluctantly in a discussion of a Langston Hughes short story.

Pacing back and forth in front of the class, a young part-time instructor named Mali Heded tried to elicit opinions about the story or about Hughes, one of the nation’s best-known black writers, or about race relations in New York City at the time the story was written (the 1930s). It was tough going. The students, mostly Latinos and African Americans, tried to answer Heded’s direct questions but they volunteered very little.

Technically, this was a regular, credit-bearing freshman composition class, not a remedial class that would have carried no credit. This is because Lehman, one of the 11 four-year colleges in the City University of New York (CUNY) system, has “mainstreamed” its students who have poor English reading and writing skills into the same classes with more capable students. But Heded said many of her students need remediation, especially in writing.

Many were among the two-thirds of Lehman freshmen who failed the CUNY Writing Assessment Test, one of three basic skills tests—reading, writing and mathematics—that all entering CUNY students take. Less than 25 percent of Lehman’s entering freshmen pass all three tests, despite the fact that the college requires a high school average of at least 75, in prescribed academic courses, for admission.

“I find this quite exhausting and emotionally draining,” said Heded, a 24-year-old doctoral candidate at Cambridge University in England, who was in her first and perhaps last semester of teaching at Lehman. “The adjuncts (part-timers) who teach this course are one of the more demoralized groups of people I’ve seen in awhile...these are sweet kids but (teaching them) can be devastating to a lover of literature and learning.”

Heded has ended the year with ambivalent feelings.

“Objectively, I’m very sympathetic to the notion of raising the level,” she said. “I don’t think students should be graduating when, in fact, what they are doing is ninth grade work. That said, however, I believe these people deserve an opportunity and I think we are better able to provide that (opportunity) than anyone else.”

Forty-year-old Gabriel Tirado, born in New York City of Puerto Rican parents, was one of Heded’s best students. After working for the New York City subway system for 23 years, Tirado quit to enroll at Lehman College, a City University of New York campus, finds teaching remedial students “emotionally draining.”

“Gents, whether we like it or not, we’re all in sales.”

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CHANCELLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON SYSTEM

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Marcia Filer, university relations director at the University of Minnesota, says “turn my office around so that marketing is really the engine that drives all of the public relations work.”

By Bob Beyers

Forget news. Try integrated marketing. That’s the “buzz” for public relations professionals in higher education.

Using tools honed in corporations and political campaigns administrators scurry to market their institutions to carefully targeted audiences. Dollars and scholars are the primary benchmarks.

“Guys, whether we like it or not, we’re all in sales,” Arthur K. Smith told academically robed faculty in his investiture speech as chancellor/president of the University of Houston System last year.

With a few exceptions, how well this approach works with students, parents and taxpayers remains to be fully tested. A few faculty and some journalists covering colleges remain skeptical, and scattered dissent still is heard among campus media managers. But marketing—the “Big M”—on campus—has enormous momentum.

Riding the wave

“You don’t do news. Nobody out there (in college) does,” Don Hale, university relations vice president at Carnegie Mellon, told 100 of his professional colleagues at a Washington D.C. conference sponsored by the Council for Advance- ment and Support of Education (CASE) last winter.

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Among his audience, those with titles in media relations, public relations, university relations, and public affairs outnumbered those in news or public information by a margin of more than two to one.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Hale recalled, “the idea of news bureaus resonated with faculty.” For administrators, “It was cheap and they loved it.”

Lots of people wrote press releases but continued on page 4

In This Issue

Janine Pease Pretty on Top (right), president of Little Big Horn College on Montana’s Crow Indian Reservation, shown with her sister Linda, is a leader of the tribal college movement. In the last 30 years the number of tribal colleges has grown from two to 30 and they have come to play a significant role in the lives of Native Americans. (See story on page 7.)
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Lehman, last January.

"My family thought I was crazy to leave a job with decent pay ($16 an hour) and good benefits," he said, "but I wanted to have a profession. I wanted to work with people at risk from substance abuse and alcohol. I've seen what a negative impact they can have on my people." Trinidad said Mal Hiedali's class has been helpful, "I've always been a reader," he said, "but she has given me more focus on certain problems I have with writing."

But the future of classes like this is uncertain, following adoption at late May of a new CUNY Board of Trustees policy that no student who has failed any of the three basic skills tests will be admitted to a senior college.

City University officials estimate that new enrollments at Lehman—first-time freshmen and transfer students—could be reduced by as much as 60 percent.

But the new policy, which has been described as the most important change in CUNY admissions standards in 30 years, is being phased in over a three-year period and will not affect Lehman until September of the year 2000. By then, college officials hope that intensive summer programs and better performance by local high schools will make more students eligible for admission.

"The potential loss is great," said Steven Wyckoff, director of freshman year programs at Lehman, "but a lot can happen to mitigate the effects before we get to 2000."

Many potential Lehman students might be diverted to Bronx Community College, several stops south on the 'D' subway line, since the two-year colleges remain open to anyone with a high school diploma or its equivalent. But Caroline Williams, president of Bronx Community College, said her 7,800-student campus is close to capacity and also would need more money to mitigate the effects before we get to 2000.

"If there are going to be significant increases in students, there certainly will be a need for additional resources," Williams said.

Bronx Community College is located in one of the poorest congressional districts in the nation. Forty-six percent of its students come from families with annual incomes of less than $15,000. Ninety-three percent are African American or Hispanic, and 55 percent were born outside the United States. About one-third are on welfare. Close to 90 percent take at least one remedial course.

As the semester wound round to a close, 15 freshmen, all African Americans or Latinos, were gathered in an "immersion writing class," devoted to the requirements of a four-year college curriculum. Their names are: Darnell, a rising sophomore from New York; Betty, a junior from Chicago; Jose, a senior from Los Angeles; and so on, to William, a senior from Stone Mountain, Georgia.

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At the end of the five-week period, students must be able to write a short essay that is graded by two outsiders. Those who pass can move on to the first freshman remedial class. Those who fail must repeat the remedial class which they may do as many times as necessary, although paying tuition for non-credit remedial courses is a luxury not afforded by the many single mothers in the class to pick up a youngster from child care.

"Most of these students have been out of school for awhile," he said afterward. "I spend a lot of time showing them how to be better students. Some of them just don't want to learn."
The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) jointly sponsored a June meeting on the role of public policy in shaping the higher education market.

The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education convened a “national roundtable” during a break in the June meeting. Participants included Gordon K. Davies, president of the Kentucky postsecondary education coordinating board, and Joni E. Finney, vice president of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, and Kristin D. Conklin, director of the Center’s Education at the University of Texas, El Paso; Ted Sanders, president of Southern Illinois University; P. Michael Timpane of RAND; and Michael Usdan, president of the Institute for Educational Leadership.

Later in April, the Center and the Knight Higher Education Collaborative convened a “national roundtable” in Santa Cruz, California, to discuss ways in which the worlds of public policy and higher education have changed in recent years. The results of these discussions are printed in an essay beginning on page 1A.

At a June meeting held outside Washington, D.C., Callan, Conklin and Finney joined ten others in a discussion of the role of public policy in shaping the higher education market.

The Center has sponsored or co-sponsored several meetings in recent months:

- An April discussion of ways to strengthen relationships between elementary and secondary education and higher education included Finney; Center President Patrick M. Callan; consultant Cal Frazier; Kati Haycock, president of the Education Trust; and Michael Kirst, professor of education at Stanford University.
- Also, Mark Musick, president of the Southern Regional Education Board; Arturo Pacheco, dean of the College of Education at the University of Texas, El Paso; Ted Sanders, president of Southern Illinois University; P. Michael Timpane of RAND; and Michael Usdan, president of the Institute for Educational Leadership.
- Earlier, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education included Finney; Michigan Kirst, professor of education at the University of London; Arturo Pacheco, dean of the College of Educational Leadership at the University of Texas, El Paso; Ted Sanders, president of Southern Illinois University; P. Michael Timpane of RAND; and Michael Usdan, president of the Institute for Educational Leadership.

Participants included Gordon K. Davies, recently named as president of Kentucky’s postsecondary education coordinating board; David D. Drill, professor of public policy analysis and education at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Peter T. Ewell, senior associate at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS); Dennis P. Jones, president of NCHEMS; and Sam Leiken, director of public policy and government relations for the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning.

Also, Aims C. McGuinness, senior associate at NCHEMS; Brian Roberty, director of the Washington office of Met West; Virginia Smith, president emerita of Vassar College; Alan Wagner, of The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development; and Gareth Williams, professor of education at the Institute of Education, University of London.
“nothing happened,” he noted. “I don’t know a single institution that built its name on publicity.”

“Public relations is (now) key to the future of the institution,” Hale said. “Marketers can be part of it.” PR should per- mecte the development, admissions, alumni and other “strategic” teams, he argued. In a show of hands, half of those attending said they met weekly or more often with their fund raisers.

“The ideal PR shop is one that looks for the best news stories and uses them to market the university” said conference organizer Virgil Renzulli, associate vice president for public affairs at Columbia University.

Indiana University

In April 1996, Indiana University marked the 75th anniversary of its news bureau by closing it down and hiring a marketing professional from the faculty to lead the new Office of Communications and Media.

“What we didn’t say publicly was this: The communications staff would largely perform the same functions as always,” Indiana Vice President Christopher Simpson disclosed in the January issue of CASE Current. “We had no intention of abandoning our efforts to promote via the media.

“What changed is that research and strategic planning would now guide these media efforts…The most profound dif- ference is that we’re suddenly suggesting a variety of ways to attract more students or enhance alumni relations, for example.

Only a fraction of those methods involve the media.”

In 1995, focus groups and individual interviews showed that “few people re- membered reading newspaper stories on our steady graduation rates or drama- tically lower annual tuition hikes, for ex- ample,” Simpson said. “Even fewer could recall a positive television news story that dealt with anything but athletics.

“Although favorable stories appeared often, our most important audiences were not receiving the messages. It became clear that by promoting our university solely through the news, we were not reaching our key constituents.”

Indiana University President Myles Brand said, “Over one third of the people we surveyed, even though they thought highly of IU, could not name one strength. Not even basketball.

“Support was a mile wide and a half inch deep. The message was that once things go downhill… they’re not going to be with us because there’s not enough of an anchor in their thinking and atti- tudes to support us.

“The most effective means of getting our message out was TV, by a wide margin. Another surprise was billboards…They don’t have to look like Wendy’s or McDonald’s.

“Print media did not do the job for us. Direct mail worked quite well.”

Following a four-month $400,000 advertising campaign last year, the proportion of adults identifying IU with academic quality and job opportunities rose from 32 percent to 44 percent. Simpson said in an interview. More than half the public saw the commercials, and more than half recalled their slogan: “quality education, lifetime opportunities.”

Recruitment results

This year a $1.2 million campaign— coupled with new leadership in admissions, scores of speeches and 90,000 pieces of direct mail—raised the number of in-state applicants to the Bloomington campus more than eight percent by the beginning of May, when deposits were due.

After dropping about one percent annu- mally from 1994 to 1996, freshman enroll- ments increased by one percent last fall.

“When we had a news bureau, they never talked on a regular basis with ad- missions,” Simpson claimed. “Now virtually everything we do is linked to ad- missions. That’s uncommon at major uni- versities.”

A “small minority” of faculty opposed the shift toward marketing, but only one wrote a long, impassioned critique. “Five, 15 years ago there was a lot more cynicism. Now a lot of faculty do a better job of telling our story,” Simpson said.

“They see and feel the budget cuts; they hear the demands for accountability.”

The new marketing emphasis “has not been easy at all” for former news bureau writers, Simpson said. News releases have been cut 45 percent. Four or five staff members still handle media relations Simpson’s marketing and public relations staff totals about 40.

Barb Alpert, higher education reporter at The Indianapolis Star and News, sees relatively little change. “We get gobs and gobs of releases…They supply a lot of good stories and tips to generate our own pieces,” she said.

Prior to Indiana’s “Big M” switch, Al- pert did a major feature on paid marketing by private and public universities in Indi- ana. Some readers were surprised by the dollars involved, but otherwise there was n’t much reaction.

Ivy Tech State College, a two-year technical institution with 35 campuses, was “out front early with TV and radio, and enrollment is really increasing,” she said. “There’s a lot of competition for students among public colleges.”

In recent months, IU has had “terrific success” with a revamped Web site, according to Simpson. Since it substituted a button on “how to apply” for “a message from the president” on its home page last November, an average of 350 prospective students a week have answered a 22-item questionnaire while requesting more in- formation. The result is “a gold mine” for recruitment, Simpson said.

Half a dozen other universities have sent teams to see how Indiana does it.

Another dozen have requested consul- tations.

Responding to Indiana’s example in CASE Current, Larry Arbeiter, director of communications for the University of Chicago, said, “We can all incorporate marketing ideas without an expensive, high-profile revolution.

“For most of us, the best course is not to trade our news bureaus for marketing offices but to add some marketing meth- ods to our already established toolbox of good procedures.”

In an interview, Arbeiter added: “If you take marketing seriously, you need to think about your audiences. The last thing reporters want to get is calls from mar- keting. It pushes the bullshit meter up.”

“University media relations issues are different from corporations. Our public responsibility goes beyond our self- interest. If we are seen as biased or self- serving, we risk losing credibility.”

—JULIE PETERSON, DIRECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN NEWS SERVICE

Self-congratulatory signs line campus streets as part of Indiana University’s marketing campaign.

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CROSS

From Candor to Cheerios? 

College news bureaus grapple with a new emphasis on marketing

CALLING A MAJOR research university’s public relations office today is no different from calling a Fortune 500 firm.”

That comment by a Wall Street Journal reporter stunned me as Stanford’s news director in 1989. But it rings even more true today.

Many universities have shifted resources once devoted to reporting and editing to media relations, magazines and marketing. “The old focus was to tell it like it is,” said a veteran East Coast editor. “That’s not in fashion anymore.”

Independent journalists have identified three cases in the past year where respected news professionals at research universities were administratively shuffled, downgraded or transferred in favor of a more promotional approach. None of the principals involved in these situations returned repeated telephone calls.

Several other college public information officers declined to talk in detail about the shift, citing fear of losing their jobs or alienating their colleagues. Their bosses simply didn’t want to “rock the boat.” All demanded anonymity.

Over the years, at Stanford, Penn and elsewhere, award-winning, independent alumni magazine editors have departed quietly into the night. Loyal critics have no place on the management team. “It’s not easy seeing universities move toward the Cheerios model,” a one-west coast reporter lamented.

A 15-page UC Berkeley memo and goals statement proclaim, “The overarching goal is to become the acknowledged leader among professionals in the field of university public affairs/communication.” The statement promised that Berkeley “will adhere to the principle of transparency as possible to public scrutiny.”

Independent observers don’t see it that way. David Littlejohn, emeritus professor of journalism, said “Time and again in recent years, Cal ended up looking bad because the university did not respond honestly and candidly to public complaints or inquiries; or even go out of its way (as it did in the ’60s and ’70s) to make its problems known to the public.”

Dick Corton, who edited the independent Cal Monthly alumni magazine in the ’60s and ’70s, agreed. On his way out as director of creative services for the alumni association last fall, he told his colleagues: “In the ‘peaceetime’ era that recent years have finally brought to Cal and other colleges, the very calm that has allowed business to be conducted as usual has been accompanied by a fear of disturbing the calm, of alienating any source of the new prosperity, of rocking the boat in any way, no matter how minor.

“I’m no Eisenhower, politically or otherwise, but just as he let the presidency with a warning about potential harm from the military-industrial complex, I would caution greatest of campuses not to feel it’s safe to become as corporate as the world beyond these boundaries, because that inevitably result in cover-ups, glossing-over, and ‘PR’ instead of accurate information. It’s just human nature.”

Over the past five years, UC Berkeley cut its public affairs staff from 38 to 30. In what officials called a “deorganizational” last summer, several remaining public information staffers were moved out of central administrative quarters in Sproul Hall to share quarters with campus publications four blocks away.

The transition came while Berkeley was at the center of a major national controversy over affirmative action. Reporters were frustrated. “No one even answers our calls,” one complained. Reporters were astonished when:

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Northwestern University recently called a news conference to announce that its College of Arts and Sciences would be named in honor of a major donor family, but steadfastly refused to disclose the amount of the gift, at the donors’ request.

Northwestern said both the Chicago Tribune and San Francisco ran stories, but The Chronicle of Higher Education declined to do so without a dollar figure.

When Indiana University announced a major computer contract with Microsoft this spring, the university’s chief negotiator declined to cite a dollar amount at the company’s request. Reporters laughed, saying they’d file immediately for disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Christopher Simpson, Indiana’s vice president for public affairs, promptly disclosed the figure: $6 million. Microsoft, told reporters it was negotiating similar deals with other academic institutions.

Reporters trying to systematically “follow the money” rarely find easy going on campus.

Erik Larson, who wrote a Time cover story on the University of Pennsylvania’s finances last year, said corporate 10-K disclosures are easier to understand and more consistent than university accounts. While Penn claimed a deficit in its own annual report, Larson found its tax returns showed a $182 million surplus. After his expose, a dozen college newspaper editors called to say they had been “stonewalled” on campus budget stories, he said.

Many education writers said they found public universities and their presidents far more accessible and willing to talk to public concerns over college costs than their private counterparts.

No other issue generates more widespread, sustained controversy between college publicists and education reporters.

Duke University proved an outstanding exception. With very strong high-level administrative support, it opened its books to Chronicle of Higher Education reporter Kit Lively last year for a major feature on how tuition is set. Both the university and the newspaper were pleased with the results.

Every year, Lively and her Chronicle colleagues request copies of IRS forms 990 from 900 from colleges and universities. Required of all non-profits, these are public documents. They include the salaries and total compensation of the top five officers as well as the five highest paid individuals—often medical deans and “star” faculty physicians. (This year $2 million was tops, with several above $1 million.)

In 1989, when the Chronicle first requested Stanford’s form 990, university attorneys argued that the newspaper should be required to pay a fee and a reporter to go to the campus to copy the information by hand. (It was photocopied and sent by overnight express.) Lively and the president’s office forborne Campus Report, Stanford’s internal weekly newspaper, from publishing individual salaries and perks of its vice presidents, even though The Stanford Daily, the student newspaper, already had the information.

About three years ago, the Chronicle’s disclosure of form 990 data for Adelphi University led to the president’s resignation and a major reorganization.

In the most recent Chronicle survey, Lively said, about 200 institutions sent their 990s promptly. Another 200 required extensive telephone follow-up. Student stringers got the remaining 101 in person.

Some colleges initially tried to “white out” individual names and compensation, Lively said. New federal law requires institutions to respond to written requests for copies of their form 990 within 30 days.

Another, less known law requires colleges receiving federal student aid funds to provide copies of their accreditation reports on request.

Larson and Lively have suggested tracking down indirect cost reports for more financial disclosure on research-related expenses. These public documents are filed with Health and Human Services, the Office of Naval Research, or other federal agencies and “instructions to respond to written requests for copies of their form 990 within 30 days.”

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“Universities don’t want to give you this stuff,” Larson said. “(At Penn), a very artful public relations guy put me off for months.” Larson obtained the data through a Freedom of Information request backed by Time.

Stanford President Donald Kennedy resigned in 1992 after publicly disclosing allegations the university had included a yacht, flowers, antique furniture and wine in its indirect cost pool. (Indirect costs include heat, light, building maintenance and other overhead costs related to research.) Two years later, Stanford reimbursed the government $1.2 million.


Across the country, science and medical research remain relative strongholds for straight news reporting by campus public information officers. (In 1990, when England’s venerable Oxford University started a public information program, the first person hired was a science writer.)

“Scientists not only have to do good research, they have to promote it,” said Art Page, news service director at the State University of New York at Buffalo. “We still operate in a journalistic mode. We put findings in context—more than just Buffalo.”

When New York Times national education writer Nancy Sharkey was asked to suggest an outstanding news bureau, Buffalo was her instant reply. Page had tipped her to the plight of Asian students in the U.S. after the economies of their home countries collapsed. The front page story made no mention of Buffalo. Page did not protest, and Sharkey did not forget.

In the San Francisco Bay Area, several reporters gave high marks to UC Davis as being very trustworthy and forthcoming, even with “negative” news.

Vice Chancellor for Administrative Affairs James Richardson called UC Davis Public Communications Director Maril Stratton “unbelievably helpful.” He complimented her “very open, accessible” style which he said mirrors that of her chancellor with his faculty and staff.

In contrast, Richardson who now is studying to be an Episcopal minister at Berkeley Divinity School, said Stanford comes across as “a closed, elitist institution that doesn’t want to deal with the press.” He referred to its leaders as “arrogant” and “impossible.”

At the opposite end of the prestige spectrum, the University of Phoenix, the University of Southern California’s satellite center in Sacramento and several niche schools “market like crazy, and (reporters) fend them off like mad,” Richardson said.

“Now big universities are looking over their shoulder and emulating them.”

—Bob Beyers
Midwestern Higher Education Policy Summit

**Marketeers continued from page 4**

“People are enamored of education. It’s like God. It’s our answer to everything,” Camper said. “If higher education leaders say ‘we’re a business, we’re going to market like a business,’ down the line people will think of you as a business, and education will lose the comparative advantage” it now enjoys with the public, he warned.

Julie Peterson, director of the University of Michigan News Service, agreed. “We’re still seen as the guys in the white hats,” she said. Peterson is a journalism professor at the University of Minnesota, which has a four-year history of doing marketing to businesses.

“University media relations issues are different from corporations,” Peterson said. “We have an obligation to share information. Our public responsibility goes beyond our self-interest. If we are seen as biased or self-serving, we risk losing credibility. We can’t transform ourselves into slick corporate marketing. We should jealously guard those differences.”

Peterson’s office produces a quarterly newsletter, Michigan Today, which has a circulation of more than 300,000. “Its readership is pretty high. It’s one of the few things alumni receive that doesn’t ask for money,” she said.

Linda Grace-Kobza, Cornell University News Service director, said “most universities are giving more attention to marketing. In our news service—knock on wood—the focus (still) is on undergraduates and research. We’re not into a marketing plan for news. We absolutely have to let the public know in a straightforward way. But others are less concerned about maintaining a line between news and marketing. I think we’ve been able to maintain that while driving all of the public relations work,” Marisa Fluer, university relations director at the University of Minnesota, told the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges last fall. Otherwise, you’re flying by the seat of your pants.”

“Marketing has to be research based,” she added. Minnesota’s market studies four years ago showed that more than 80 percent of citizens considered teaching to be the top priority in higher education.

“People will put up with fancy faculty research. They will listen and nod away when they hear every dollar in state support generates two dollars in grants. But you won’t get an extra nickel unless you meet the core expectations about teaching and reasonable access for students,” Fluer said in an interview.

University of Minnesota President Mark Yudof repeated that core message in 45 cities across the state for eight months. Helped by the strong economy, Minnesota got the biggest capital bond issue—$209 million—in its history, with an additional $36 million added to its budget base by the legislature.

While some Minnesota faculty still view marketing as evil, others had to be turned away from an informal campus communications forum on marketing this spring.

Last year alone, 39 Minnesota faculty took media training to become experts in fielding news inquiries, Fluer said. “Most of them will accept the fact that if they’re going to do media, they probably need some training to do it better, and that’s a good thing. But how do you teach your faculty that marketing is beneficial to them, because the ‘M’ word still sends some of them flying out the door?”

Even though most faculty are researchers, getting administrators and professors to accept—and act on—the results of market research is challenging. “Marketing has to change the product or it’s not going to work for us,” Fluer said.

**Budgets rise to $250,000 and $50,000 in the last two years**

“The only criticism we get is that we’re not doing more,” she said in an interview. “The faculty are aware not only of competition from other colleges but from distance learning, corporate training and other non-traditional sources.”

“Twenty years ago, you couldn’t use the term marketing unless you were talking about an academic department,” she said. “Marketing was something good universities shouldn’t have to do. It was bad form.”

While presidents and provosts might have worn masks to a meeting on marketing ten years ago, Adair said that they now flock to talks on “using the ‘M’ word, telling the university story.”

Building a common, university-wide marketing direction “is not rocket science,” Adair added. “It’s been done by corporations for years. Public support has come only recently.”

But whether it should be done by colleges and universities is another question.

Bob Beyer was director of the Stanford University News Service from 1962 to 1990.
Tribal Colleges
Native Americans take educational matters into their own hands

By Kathy Witkowski

CROW AGENCY, MONTANA

I MAGINE A NATION without its own university—or even its own library. A nation whose people have no formal course of study in their history, their language or their culture.

A small impoverished country in Africa or Central America? Actually, that was the situation less than 20 years ago on the Crow Reservation in southeastern Montana, which encompasses 2.8 million acres of isolated high plains and three mountain ranges and surrounds the Little Bighorn Battlefield.

With an unemployment rate that hovered around 70 percent, few Crow students could afford to leave the reservation for higher education. And more often than not, those who did enroll at universities in Billings or Bozeman returned home without a degree.

“We sent off our brightest and best to the universities and colleges, and almost to money, in 1981,” Crow educator Janine Pease Pretty on Top said. “Those failures, she said, were a combined result of culture shock, inadequate educational background, financial hardship and isolation from home.

So tribal leaders decided it was time to join the fledging tribal college movement developed by Native Americans to take educational matters into their own hands. Following the lead of the Navajo tribe, which in 1968 established Navajo Community College (now Dine College), other tribes founded their own higher education institutions.

Despite a dearth of both facilities and money, in 1981 Crow educators opened a two-year college as the impoverished town of Crow Agency, the reservation’s administrative seat. First located in an abandoned irrigation house, two trailer homes and a garage, Little Big Horn College soon moved to an abandoned tribal center and gymnasium. The building had been trashed, the windows broken and fixtures gone or smashed. Its only occupants were dogs and horses.

No matter, said Pretty on Top. The tribe couldn’t afford what she referred to as “an edifice complex.”

“Higher education is a relationship between a teacher and a student,” said Pretty on Top, who has served as president of Little Big Horn since 1982, and whose efforts on behalf of her students earned her a “genius” award from the MacArthur Foundation. “It doesn’t matter if we gather and learn under a tree or around somebody’s kitchen table. That learning is a primary function of the college. And we weren’t going to be delayed by the fact that we didn’t have a wonderful building, that we didn’t have elaborate laboratories, that we didn’t have world-class technology.”

The two-story stone building has since received a considerable facelift. Initially, 80 volunteers showed up to scrub it down for a week, and eventually the college’s buildings trading tribes students constructed offices, classrooms, furniture for the lounge area, and a library that houses 18,000 volumes, including an extensive collection of material on the Crow tribe. And there are computers, where students as well as tribal communities can access the Internet.

Harvard it’s not. But the 35,000 square foot, self-contained campus, augmented by two converted trailer homes, an archival facility and a converted sewer plant, houses an educational success story—one that a recent report by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching calls “the most significant development in American Indian communities since World War II.”

“More than any other single institution,” the report says, the nation’s tribal colleges “are changing lives and offering real hope for the future.” They are doing so by offering educational opportunities that are accessible, affordable and sensitive to tribal culture, said Paul Breyer, the report’s author.

And the colleges are run by educators who are familiar with the needs and customs of tribal members, not by outside agencies like the Federal Bureau of Indian Affairs. And that, according to Pretty on Top, is revolutionary in Indian country. The 30 tribal colleges that belong to the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) are located in 12 states west of the Mississippi. Most tribal colleges offer two-year degrees, but seven also offer bachelor’s degrees, and two have master’s degree programs.

The highest form of discrimination is invisibility. And Native Americans are virtually invisible in the grand educational enterprises in this country.”

—JANINE PEASE PRETTY ON TOP

President Janine Pease Pretty on Top of Little Big Horn College is shown near the campus in southeastern Montana.

Tribal colleges distinguish themselves from the nation’s other junior colleges and universities with a radically different agenda. They are less interested in preparing students to be global citizens than in preparing them to be tribal citizens—though “they’re not really that different,” pointed out AIHEC president Dr. Gerald Morgan has been working since 1991 to incorporate Navajo tribal language, philosophy and knowledge into all classes—even such traditionally “Western” courses as earth science, chemistry and ecology.

“We say that the earth lives, earth has a consciousness; earth has a culture,” explained Morgan. “So a course in ecology might concentrate on sustainability or an environmental class would concentrate on the cycles in nature.”

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Tribal colleges are accessible, affordable and sensitive to basic needs of the community. Nursing, business and computer studies are among the more popular majors. All tribal colleges offer some vocational training and general education classes.

Historically, attempts to educate Indians concentrated on assimilating them into mainstream culture. Indians were forbidden to speak their own languages and practice their own religions and traditions. Tribal colleges, on the other hand, place tribal language and culture at the heart of their curricula. Along with biology, computer studies, American history and business, students at tribal colleges also learn about their heritage.

According to its mission statement, Blackfeet Community College (BCC) in Browning, Montana, for instance, tries to "achieve a balance between educational advancement and cultural preservation." That includes requiring BCC students to take 18 credits of Blackfeet language, philosophy or history.

However, some have not always seen the wisdom in such a policy. College president Carol Murray said she had to battle a lot of skeptics—including many elders—to get Blackfeet courses included in the curriculum. "They asked: 'Why should I learn Blackfeet? What kind of a job is it going to get me?'" she recalled.

But Murray, herself a BCC graduate who felt she had benefited from discovering her culture as an adult, stood her ground: "I wanted everyone to experience that feeling of inner strength, and I thought: Even if I have to force them to do it, I will," she said.

At Little Big Horn, students fulfilling their Crow studies requirement can take a course in Crow socio-familial kinship, or study the history of the Crow chiefs.

The highest form of discrimination is invisibility," said Pretty on Top. "And Native Americans are virtually invisible in the grand educational enterprises in this country. Tribal colleges and tribally controlled schools are just a few outposts where those images exist in the classroom. These sorts of courses improve the self-esteem of Indian students. But they also serve a very practical purpose, Pretty on Top added. "This is more than 'feeling good about who I am,'" she said. "This is about: 'What information do I need to make a living, to live in this society, in this countryside? What information has come to me over thousands of years from the scholars of this tribe?'"

So only do tribal colleges teach different subjects; they teach differently. They may integrate traditional knowledge into their courses or structure their classes to reflect Indian values or learning styles.

Saltik-Kootenai College in Pablo, Montana, hired two tribal elders to teach a year-long Cultural Leadership Program that concentrated on language and cultural knowledge. To indicate that such skills are valued as much as “Western” knowledge, the college paid the program’s instructors the same as those with master’s degrees.

At Dine College, which serves 2,000 students on two main campuses and five satellite campuses in New Mexico and Arizona, curriculum specialist Frank Morgan has been working since 1991 to incorporate Navajo tribal language, philosophy and knowledge into all classes—even such traditionally “Western” courses as earth science, chemistry and ecology. "We say that the earth lives, earth has a consciousness; earth has a culture," explained Morgan. "So a course in ecology might concentrate on sustainability or an environmental class would concentrate on the cycles in nature."

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continued next page
example, they learn that the Navajo refer to igneous rock as tsé níi oii, or "rock that goes into the ground." The phrase is not only descriptive; it helps Navajo students understand the tribe's world view: that everything is interconnected.

Students also learn the traditional Navajo practice of talking to things before removing them from their home environment. Recently, for instance, students participated in a range management study. Before they collected their plant samples, they spoke to the vegetation and explained what they were doing and what they hoped to learn.

These teachings place the school in a somewhat problematic territory. Some students dislike learning native traditions from non-native teachers, Morgan said. At most of the tribal colleges there are more non-native than native instructors, but the schools are trying to deal with this problem by offering more teacher education.

In addition, a small minority of devout Christians, said Morgan, have resisted what they perceive as a religious aspect to the Navajo approach. "Somewhere along the way they're taught that Navajo knowledge is antithetical to Christian knowledge, and that they shouldn't deal with it," he said.

But Morgan characterized the Navajo teachings as philosophical, not religious. "There's no concept of religion in the Navajo way," he said. "It's harmony; it's balance. That's what you learn about." Meanwhile, fourteen tribal colleges are participating in a $400,000 project funded by the National Science Foundation that seeks to integrate native teaching and learning styles into environmental science curricula. This is one of several dozen projects NSF has funded in an attempt to encourage Native Americans to enter the sciences, where, along with other minorities, they are vastly underrepresented.

"Traditionally, environmental cleanups have been done by outsiders," said Karl Topper, co-director of the project and an associate professor of environmental restoration at Mesa State College in Grand Junction, Colorado. "We want to empower the American Indians to be able to do this work themselves." That may be as simple as applying a hands-on approach to learning, with an emphasis on a non-competitive process rather than the usual linear, result-oriented model. The project also encourages students to mine the vast wealth of knowledge their tribe has amassed over centuries on the land.

Students might be encouraged to interview tribal elders about the environmental history of the reservation, Topper said. In part, this is an effort to stimulate renewed interest in Native Americans' own cultures, he added. But it also is a genuine effort to find non-traditional solutions to environmental issues.

"One of the problems we have is reconciling native beliefs...with what is good science," said the NSF's Donald Jones, who oversees Topper's project.

There is no such thing as "Western science" or "Native science," Jones said. "If we cannot test what we know and determine from that whether something is likely or not likely to be true, then it's not something we're interested in supporting." But Jones said Native Americans do claim a body of legitimate, useful scientific knowledge and that is what NSF hopes to tap.

Karl Topper takes a more radical approach, suggesting that "science" does not always solve problems. He suggested that prayer might be an appropriate part of a Native American science curriculum.

Controversial? Perhaps. But the cultural sensitivity demonstrated at tribal colleges appears to be paying off. Nearly 88 percent of tribal college students surveyed by the Carnegie Foundation said they felt comfortable at their college because it reflected the values of American Indians.

"Finally, for instance, plays an important role in Native American culture, so teachers have to be flexible. "I've made allowances in the way I do my grading and set up my course for [students] to be absent for obligatory cultural type things—funerals and family problems—so that they can come back and get caught up," said Richard Stiff, who teaches biology at Little Big Horn.

Stiff said he also has learned to be patient, since parenting and other familial obligations, as well as financial hardships, often mean students "stop out"—a term used to describe a temporary leave from school. Many—if not most—tribal college students take more than two years to finish an associate's degree.

"They spoil you," said Ronya Hoblit, a 1994 graduate of Dull Knife Memorial College on the Northern Cheyenne reservation in Wyoming. Now at the University of Montana, where she is scheduled to graduate in December with a double major in Native American Studies and Psychology, the 45-year-old Hoblit said she really needed that extra attention when she returned to school after years working as a journeyman carpenter.

"Growing up in South Dakota, Hoblit said, "I always wanted to go to school." So why didn't she? "Too busy drinking and raising my child," she admitted, adding to a pervasive situation among Native Americans.

Not only did the tribal college give Hoblit the confidence and remedial education she needed—it also gave her a chance to learn something about her culture, she said. Hoblit believes she eventually would have gotten an education even if the tribal college hadn't existed. "I would have made it," she said. "I just would have cried more."

Native American students often are overwhelmed by the size and anonymity of a four-year university, said Hoblit, who serves as co-director of the University of Montana's Bridges to Bachelor's program, which tries to ease tribal students' transition to four-year institutions. For many, it is the first time they have been away from their families and the first time they have experienced minority status.

Tribal colleges also wrestle with the inadequate educational background of many tribal students. A recent survey showed that Indian high schools in Montana consistently posted test scores that ranked among the state's worst.

More than 300 Little Big Horn students have earned degrees since the two-year college opened in 1981.

According to a survey by the Carnegie Foundation, many tribal college presidents say one third or more of their students need remedial classes. The president of Lac Courte Oreille Ojibwa College reported that many freshmen arrive reading at a third-grade level.

It is not surprising, then, that many of the students have attended other colleges and dropped out. Tribal colleges believe it is their job to overcome those previous failures. They offer open enrollment to anyone with a high school diploma or its equivalent—and then they extend a helping hand.

"Anybody could teach the students at MIT—I mean, you could throw them a book and those guys would learn," said biology teacher Stiff. "But here, you see these people coming in who can't do it, and then when they leave, they're just there! They might not be great college students, but they're legitimate college students, and that's pretty exciting."

Stiff said he likes to think that this level of success is achieved through inclusion. "You know, when you go to a standard college or university, there are lots of classes that weed people out who aren't serious," he said. "Here, we try not to weed out anybody. We want them all to make it through if they can."

That sort of caring attitude translates into high marks from tribal college students. A recent survey showed that Indian high schools in Montana consistently posted test scores that ranked among the state's worst.

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Continued on page 9
A national roundtable examines the role of public policy in shaping higher education

In higher education, nearly everyone is a policy expert, or so it seems. For half a century, colleges and universities in the United States have looked to their capitals—local, state, and national—to help set institutional agendas, to provide capital as well as operating funds, and to increasingly supply the loans and grants that students require to pay the tuitions they charge. America’s colleges and universities have been in turn grateful, angry, even frightened—but they have never been disengaged or disinterested in the workings of public policy.

Now the worlds of both public policy and higher education have changed, and not necessarily for the better. There are fewer issues capable of rallying public support, and even less willingness on the part of institutions to trust their futures to the process of public deliberation. Higher education’s sources of funding are more diverse and more diffuse, as the workings of increasingly competitive markets for enrollments and research support determine the financial health of most colleges and universities. The sudden emergence of an aggressively financed, rapidly expanding network of for-profit providers has further complicated the question, raising in some quarters the specter that higher education has come to be regarded more as a discretionary budget item than as an essential public good.

We begin this essay with the notion that the strength of American higher education lies in its very public nature. America’s colleges and universities—both public and private—are public assets providing public services, and as such they require a public agenda. Letting the market become the sole determinant of the shape and function of higher education would mean diminishing both institutional capacity and individual opportunity. But we also understand that times and circumstances have changed—the market is real, its discipline exacting. Its capacity to reward those who supply its needs now readily apparent.

Convened as a national roundtable by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education in conjunction with the Knight Higher Education Collaborative, our purpose was to take account of the changing context for the making of public policy. We asked questions inherent in the definition of the word “policy” itself. What courses of action—expeditious, practical, in fulfillment of the public good—should those who direct the levers of civic purpose consider now and in the future? What kinds of public objectives can the forces of policy bring about most effectively? What objectives can the workings of the market best fulfill?

How should the tools of regulation, resource allocation, assessment and quality assurance be applied to ensure that American higher education fulfills broad public purposes, serves the particular aspirations of individual students, and supports the aspirations of public and private institutions as both creators and conveyors of knowledge?

How can policy help these institutions adapt effectively to change rather than being caught unprepared by it?

The Assurance of Markets

The asking of these questions makes clear just how much the context for public policy has changed during the past two decades. Largely discarded is that sense of an all-encompassing public agenda capable of determining the missions of institutions and the distribution of students and research support among those institutions. There is a diminished sense that policy in itself can satisfy the public’s appetite for high-quality educational programs made available at low cost to consumers. Diminished as well is that commitment to a broad social agenda that characterized public discourse in the 1960s, beginning with civil rights and equal employment opportunity and culminating in local, state and federal programs of affirmative action.

For 30 years now, public policy at both the state and federal levels has sought to fulfill one overarching objective—that of access to higher education. The strategy for achieving this policy has been essentially that of institutional support, through a combination of direct appropriation and student financial assistance. Yet as the competition for public resources increases, the societal commitment that powered that vision of broad access and choice has been subjected to the same abridgment that produced welfare reform and made balancing budgets a top priority. Where policy was once the trigger for finance, finance has become increasingly the trigger for policy.

Within both institutions and legislatures, there is a growing sense of “getting policy without making policy”—allowing what was once a clear, guiding framework for public initiative to be nibbled away by budgetary constraints. The shift from grants to loans as the primary means of providing publicly funded student financial aid occurred, not as the result of major policy change in Washington or the state capitals, but through successive years of responding to budgetary limitations at the margin, each of which transferred a little more of the cost burden to students themselves. The evolution of a near-open market for federal research funds followed a similar pattern; out of the daily need to balance priorities and resources, new rules were adopted that led most of the nation’s research universities to alter incentives to faculty as well as change the ways in which they responded to federal initiatives.

What most often replaces public policy as a means of expressing public needs is simply the cumulative action of higher education markets. They are markets powered by the consumers of higher education’s services, including students and their families who seek a postsecondary education, by the federal government and others who contract with institutions and their faculty for projects of sponsored research, and by the fact of heightened global competition and employers’ demand for workers trained in the skills necessary to perform current tasks. The prevalence of market forces also has been occasioned by the willingness of government to let the purchasing power of public demand play more of a role in shaping public policy. Congress displayed this willingness, for example, in allowing students, “voting with their feet,” to distribute federal dollars to institutions in the form of need-based portable grants, without regard to the institution to be attended, the field to be studied, or—with minor exceptions—the academic merit or performance of the student.

Today’s markets for higher education have accorded new importance to educational outcomes. Matching this push for accountability are the cumulative effects of a growing, changing technological presence, which is altering the definition of institutions and sending a message that acquiring a postsecondary education in a specific area need not entail a lengthy or rigidly defined process.

It is equally important to note what the markets for postsecondary education are not: They are neither free nor unregulated. Acquiring a higher education is not like purchasing a new car, despite the proclivity of presidents of institutions to compare the prices they charge to that of a Ford or a Chevy.

Acquiring a higher education is not like purchasing a new car, despite the proclivity of presidents of institutions to compare the prices they charge to that of a Ford or a Chevy. Last one forgets, these markets owe their existence as well as their current shape to the substantial price subsidies that federal, state and local governments provide in the form of direct appropriations, student financial aid, local tax levies, and tax laws that allow individual deductions for gifts to colleges and universities and that decline to tax the assets of those institutions. One of the stories and perhaps the most important ones institutions and public agencies is that the public expects both the range of choice that markets provide and the subsidies that make the price of a public higher education less than the cost of its...
provision. Just how important this subsidy remains for consumers of both public and private higher education was again driven home by an opinion survey conducted in February 1998 by Public Agenda in behalf of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. While a sound majority of respondents (77 percent) believes that students appreciate the value of a college education only when they have some personal responsibility for paying its costs, the survey results also make clear the expectation that government should bear an equal or greater part of that burden. Seventy-five percent of the survey's respondents, for example, believe that the state and federal governments should more often give tax breaks to help students and their families pay for college.

**Access to Success**

Since the end of the Second World War, assuring personal opportunity through access to postsecondary education has been the rock on which higher education policy has stood. It is the very point that in the last analysis makes higher education the single most important apparatus for the growth and development of community colleges, the creation of Pell Grants, and the provision of federally guaranteed loans—has shared. At one level, the nation, its individual states and its citizens have every right to declare victory in an achievement. No other nation has succeeded in creating a system of higher education that offers greater access to a college, university, or other provider of postsecondary education. And no other nation has provided the range of second, third, even fourth chances for students to achieve their educational goals. While providing access to a higher education has been the defining goal of the public investment in higher education, it is a political, bureaucratic, and practical policy question: How much of an investment in educational opportunity should be made in behalf of the public purpose of higher education. That discussion must necessarily begin with a broad, explicit consideration of the relationship between the individual return and the larger good that results from public investments in higher education. In the nation at large as well as within individual states, this need to balance access to more market-driven education and to public accountability. What will remain constant is the importance of money and the centrality of the questions first posed by the Carnegie Commission three decades ago: “Who benefits? Who pays? Who should pay?” In more modern dress, these questions become: How can the public subsidy best ensure that the markets for postsecondary education yield the greatest possible fulfillment of the public good—providing more options to students with clear educational goals and more efficiency in service to those market fields characterized by rapid growth? In an era in which public agencies devise and fund incentives that encourage institutions to be both market smart and mission centered, the public subsidy becomes an ever more important mechanism in its own right, while collectively they point to the same conclusion: What is the core mission of higher education in a time of markets and changing horizons.

In pursuit of that reconsideration, we offer five propositions as points for discussion. Our propositions are addressed to the public at large, to those responsible for higher education policy, and to those leaders, faculty as well as administrative, who are responsible for institutional practice. While there is an order to our propositions—we begin with questions of price—there is no implied prioritization. Each is important in its own right, while collectively they point to the same conclusion: What is most required now is a public policy that is both mission centered and market smart. 1. State legislative bodies need to understand better the interplay between markets and the provision of public appropriation and subsidy. Given the public’s clamor for lower, more affordable college tuitions, the temptation is always to mandate that result by legislative fiat. It is a temptation that ought to be resisted. In most regions of the country it is the independent sector in combination with for-profit providers that will set the market price for higher education. When a state sets public tuitions below that market price, it essentially faces two choices. The first is to provide public appropriations on a per-student basis roughly equal to the difference between the market price and legislated price. The other choice a state can make is to limit both tuition and appropriations, assuming that public institutions can become more efficient simply through the expedient of having less money to spend. In fact that outcome is seldom achieved. Instead, institutions denied both tuition revenue and public appropriation pour more of their energies into those activities that do not have legislated tuitions—special courses and contracted services to businesses being two of the most popular—while achieving the necessary budget reductions by squeezing resources out of their core programs. The result is public institutions that are both less competitive and more disengaged from their core missions.

In setting market-smart levels for public tuitions, a state legislature needs to make three

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No other nation has succeeded in creating a system of higher education that offers greater access to a college, university, or other provider of postsecondary education.

In setting through this challenge, one of the most salient elements is the fact that the market for higher education is projected to more than double in size over the next 20 years. It will, however, be a different mix of seeds and nutrients from that which produced higher education’s expansion in the 1950s and 1960s. That era of growth was brought about almost entirely by public funding, publicly proclaimed and allocated as investments in common pursuits. Today, when the workforce is smaller, less costly government, those investments will more likely be private: venture capital, gifts and bequests, and tuitions, all in pursuit of more personal agendas.
additional judgments:

- how much of its appropriation should go to providing general price subsidies, and how much should be targeted, either in support of specific classes of individuals or specific classes of programs;
- whether to insist that all public institutions change the same tuition regardless of the demand for their programs; and
- whether to establish a per-student appropriation and then let public institutions set tuition in accord with their own sense of mission and their market position.

2. States and institutions need flexibility when making mission-centered investments in social programs and opportunities. The answer to the core worry now roaming around is remedial education in the City University of New York and elsewhere is not to deny the need, but rather to find imaginative ways of financing programs specifically designed to make sure all learners are advanced. The challenge is to ensure that students attain the necessary mastery of gateway competencies, principally the fundamental learning tools of numerical and verbal expression. Too many students graduate from high school without acquiring college college. Feeling a sense of confidence in their past achievement and future potential, only to learn that they must begin their college study in a remedial program.

There are many ways to help ensure that more of an institution's matriculants persist and succeed. Research has shown that when at-risk students come to attain threshold mathematics and language skills, their chances of educational success are virtually the same as those of all other students. University or college programs created with a modest investment of resources have provided students with an early sense of belonging and achievement through close peer interaction, common academic experiences, and skillful and sensitive advising. Another intriguing possibility is for the state to fund these efforts separately as modified voucher programs that would allow students to purchase the requisite skill training in an open market. In fact such a market exists today, for the most part serving students of minorities who have trouble learning to read or who later seek help in improving their SAT or ACT scores. Why not make the same learning skills available to students who need that attention to succeed in college, whether or not their families can afford the full tuition? Indeed, Towson University in Maryland is experimenting with just such a program, having successfully trained students in high school classes in mathematics. The cost to the university is not much greater, and the match between resources and program is better, since those providing instruction have been trained to do so and see the helping of students through learning gateways as their prime mission.

Our point is a simple one: Specify the need, let the market or institutions identify the best vendors; provide sufficient public funds to make good the promise of educational attainment. We understand the dangers inherent in such an approach. Institutions will feel threatened as well as impoverished, having lost appropriations they had hitherto used to support such programs. The more students an institution enrolls in its courses, the more money it gets—regardless of the costs only to the degree that the student had demonstrated mastery of the subject? Such a market system the best, or so it seems, are actually those responsible for funding public institutions: It provides a simple, convenient, easily quantified way of distributing money. The more students an institution enrolls in its courses, the more money it gets—regardless of what the student learned.

Would changing the mechanisms by which public funds are distributed be that difficult? If what the public wants are results, why not make funding more dependent on demonstrated outcomes? What would happen if an institution were reimbursed for the costs only to the degree that the student had demonstrated mastery of the subject? Such a reimbursement system would require that a state or some other agency establish the necessary standards and outcomes and ask, “What do you know and what can you do?” For most of this century, seat time—the accumulation of academic credits through the taking and passing of courses—has served higher education well. It has been simple, quantifiable and largely uncontentious. The credit hour model, however, does not measure what the student can do, with or without the benefit of instruction. Seat time does not have much meaning for self-paced distance learning in which the student first learns and then demonstrates his or her newly acquired competency. More generally, the focus on the accumulation of course credits contributes to the fragmentation of the curriculum and the discontinuity of elements even within individual courses, reinforcing the notion that it is teaching rather than learning that matters, placing the emphasis on how well the instructor performs as opposed to the process by which the student acquires, tests and applies knowledge.

Here it is helpful to think back to an old model. Oxford’s and Cambridge’s use of external examiners raises the question of having a body or mechanism external to the institution certify student learning and performance. Systems employing external examiners and examinations forge partnerships between students and instructor, sharing the risks and penalties associated with failure. When the process of learning is separated from its certification, the instructor becomes more of an advocate than a judge—indeed, he or she becomes something of a co-conspirator in the student's search for academic mastery. What a system of external examination accomplishes, as well, is a renewed focus on outcomes—on what the student is supposed to know and can be expected to do. External examination can only proceed if the aims of the learning experience are well specified and if the goals of the course or program of study are known in advance. Not so coincidentally, specifying the outcomes is what distance and self-paced learning require.

Administratively, it is certainly easier to leave the certification of learning to the instructor—it becomes part of his or her workload, thus avoiding the problems inherent in establishing and managing any system of external examination. Those who like the present system the best, or so it seems, are actually those responsible for funding public institutions: It provides a simple, convenient, easily quantified way of distributing money. The more students an institution enrolls in its courses, the more money it gets—regardless of what the student learned.

Would changing the mechanisms by which public funds are distributed be that difficult? If what the public wants are results, why not make funding more dependent on demonstrated outcomes? What would happen if an institution were reimbursed for its costs only to the degree that the student had demonstrated mastery of the subject? Such a reimbursement system would require that a state or some other agency establish the

agencies reinforce or distort the shape of institutions by their use of the subsidy: a state policy that prohibits the granting of student aid to part-time students, for example, will have an effect on the structure and motivations of higher education institutions. Ultimately, however, if a given state wants a more diversified set of postsecondary programs—without letting the market be the sole determinant of who and what is taught—then the state will have to become an active partner in those new ventures, supplying much of the necessary venture capital.
necessary mechanisms of external examination. We suspect, however, that most states—or more likely, regional consortia—will find themselves in that business as they come to certify or credit courses taught on the Web or other forms of mediated learning that physically separate student and instructor. In this connection, the experience of the fledgling Western Governors University will supply important lessons to all of higher education.

S. Ultimately, higher education's success requires students to take more responsibility for their own learning. Students may avail themselves of the most dedicated and skillful instructors, the most carefully wrought and effective curricula, the most sophisticated learning environments and technologies—and yet the learning that occurs will be minimal without a commitment to expand their own knowledge and abilities. The truth is that today too many students are minimalists in this regard. They are likely to be more aggressive, even dogmatic, in the search for easier courses and better grades than they are in the quest for learning itself. Several factors have contributed to the lengthening of average "time to degree": the absence of stringent articulation between two-year and four-year institutions, the inferior quality of much academic advising, a shortage of seats in required courses, and students' need to work to meet the costs of their education. But it also is true that many students do not seem to be in too great a hurry. It is somewhat alarming to note that faculty who are too quick to label their students as lazy actually overestimate by as much as one third the amount of time their students spend on homework assignments. The problem is not so much that students are not hard workers as that too often they are working on other things.

Taking more responsibility for their own learning also means becoming better educated consumers—even shoppers. When markets matter, as is increasingly the case in higher education, the range as well as the quality of products is often a function of the skill of the consumer as a "knowing shopper." Much of the dysfunctional nature of the educational market today derives from the fact that most students and their parents are too quick to mistake prestige for quality, too little aware of the importance of their own role in students' need to work to meet the costs of their education. But it also is true that many without a commitment to expand their own knowledge and abilities. The truth is that today or more likely, regional consortia—will find themselves in that business as they come to provide reliable consumer information—or, better yet—to create a climate of assessment.

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students believed their professors were among the most caring and understanding. Twenty-five per cent said their professors understood the problems facing the students.

“Professor said they still refer to when no one else does,” one student responded, echoing an attitude found throughout the survey results.

A random sampling of students at Little Big Horn College revealed similarly positive attitudes. It is, in fact, nearly impossible to find anyone who will say anything bad about the place.

“The college is like a buffer,” said Tony Torralba, a student at Little Big Horn. “You’re not just a number here. They really care. They know your family. They know what you’re going through,” he said. Torralba attended Montana State University in Bozeman until he lost his financial aid as a result of academic probation. At Little Big Horn, he is raising his GPA so he can transfer back to MSU and finish his degree.

In part, tribal colleges are able to offer that one-on-one relationship because of the small class size—rarely more than 30 students, and usually far fewer. But the relationship between the faculty and students seems to go beyond what you’d find even at most small colleges. Biology teacher Stiff, for instance, says he might stop a student in the hallway and ask about a missing assignment. Skeptics might suggest that such personal attention crosses the line from encouragement to enabling. But the approach seems to be working.

Of 300 Little Big Horn graduates, 87 percent are living—and working—on the Crow reservation. Ninety-three percent of South Dakota’s Oglala Lakota College graduates—including 21 of 26 instructors at a local high school and 50 percent of the nurses at the local hospital. The Crowpoint Institute of Technology’s 1995 placement was close to 90 percent.

These statistics challenge the myth that there is a lack of jobs on reservations. While unemployment rates on reservations typically range from 40 to 60 percent, there are, in fact, often jobs available—at tribal hospitals, schools and administrative offices. But to get those jobs, one needs an education. “It’s a professional and paraprofessional workforce,” said Janine Peatty Preston on Top: “It’s not a high school graduate work force. If you have expertise, there are jobs for you. And we have been able to see that illustrated in the years since we began graduating students.”

“People are very practical institutions,” said Paul Boyer, author of the Carnegie Foundation report. “I think you can look at them and say changes have been made in society which otherwise would not exist.”

American Indians still lag behind educationally. Nationally, an estimate of only 27 percent of American Indian college freshmen were still in school two years later, compared to 41 percent of all freshmen. And only 30 percent of Indian students completed a bachelor’s degree within six years of matriculation. Even within reservations, statistics on tribal college graduation rates. But of those who do graduate, the transfer rate is often 35 percent or higher—substantially above the estimated 22 percent transfer rate from the nation’s junior colleges, according to the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, which represents the nation’s 30 tribal colleges. Of 29 students who graduated at Little Big Horn College last year, ten transferred to four-year institutions.

These figures are all the more striking when you compare them to statistics in the days before tribal colleges. For instance, between 1935 and 1976, only 41 members of Montana’s Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes earned college degrees. Since Salish-Kootenai College opened in 1976, more than 400 have done so.

That is good news for 22-year-old Rhea Beatty, a 1995 graduate of Little Big Horn College. Beatty, who attended Montana State University at Billings in the fall to complete her bachelor’s degree in computer studies. This fall she will leave home for the first time (not counting visits to relatives in Oklahoma), to work as an intern at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico.

Like the majority of Little Big Horn’s students, Rhea is a mother. The tribal college gave her the opportunity to live with her parents while getting her academic feet wet. “The reason why I want to finish school is because of my daughter,” said Rhea. “I don’t want to have to struggle.”

Native American students often are overwhelmed by the size and anonymity of a four-year university. For many, it is the first time they have experienced minority status.

It is a sentiment shared by her parents. Frederick and Rachel Beatty. They both did manual labor to support the family. “We kind of want her to use her brain instead of her back,” said Frederick. “You’re going to get left behind if you don’t have an education nowadays.”

More and more Native Americans apparently agree. In the last decade the tribal college population has doubled to more than 24,000 students. And numerous other tribal colleges are in the fledgling stages.

Meanwhile, an increasing number of tribal colleges are working in conjunction with other institutions of higher education—through research and distance learning. Such programs aren’t meant to be just a one-way street. Soon tribal colleges will be able to send courses as well as receive courses from long-established institutions, said Paul Boyer.

“For many years, with some important exceptions, higher education did not take tribal colleges seriously,” he said. Today, that attitude has changed.

The impact of these academic successes according to college administrators, is greater than the sum of its parts. Most tribal college students are first-generation, so they serve as role models to their entire extended family. “We may have 35 graduates, but we’ll have twelve-hundred people come to celebrate with those graduates,” said Little Big Horn’s Pretty on Top.

“Once a person tries it, then the rest aren’t so leery,” said Blackfeet Community College student Dana Pemberton. Three of Pemberton’s sisters, a brother and two nephews also have attended the college.

While most tribal college students are older—in their upper 20s or early 30s—tribal colleges also are beginning to attract recent high school graduates. “It’s a defi- nite asset to this community,” said Laura Sundheim, a counselor at Hardin High School, on the border of the Crow Reservation. “Since it opened, a greater number of our students have started college right out of school.”

Most of the Hardin students who go on to Little Big Horn are Indian, but that’s not always the case, Sundheim said. Tribal colleges are serving an increasingly diverse population. In 1996, the last year for which figures are available, 39 percent of tribal college students nationwide were non-native.

Of the many obstacles facing tribal colleges, first and foremost is a lack of money. Federal funding today remains at half the $5,820 per student that Congress authorized in 1988. Students who responded to the Blackfeet Foundation survey lauded their instructors, but they also complained about facilities. Their requirements were generally basic: better bathrooms, comfortable furniture, more places for students to gather and study. Many asked for recreational facilities, which few tribal colleges offer.

Nevertheless, tribal colleges offer educational opportunities for a fraction of what other institutions charge. Full-time fees and tuition for a semester at Blackfeet Community College, for instance, costs $467—about one third of what it costs to attend the University of Montana.

And facilities at tribal colleges, however outdated, still offer opportunities for Native Americans. Many are the center, not just of their students’ lives but of the community as a whole, serving as a community library and meeting hall, and offering computer facilities as well—an important asset, since few Indian families can afford their own computers.

All educational facilities face financial difficulties. The plight of tribal colleges is compounded by the fact that 85 percent of the students live in poverty, and there is virtually no tax base to support the schools. BCC President Carol Murray, in fact, says some students attend BCC for one reason to get their Pell Grant. Once tuition and fees are paid, she says, they figure they might have some money left over to help feed and clothe their families.

Tribal colleges support themselves through a combination of federal monies and private grants. Few receive any funding from their tribes. “They say very nice things about us,” said Murray with a demure smile, when asked if the Blackfeet foundation supported the college.

That lack of financial support is a double-edged sword, said American Indian Community College president Monette, who said that while tribal colleges need more money, the fact that they are not tribally funded means they can function autonomously. Nevertheless, Monette said, the era of low-tech education is coming to an end—and that means tribal colleges need an infusion of money to keep pace. “I’m not sure how long the movement can continue if high quality education out of their facilities,” he said.

Ironically, the need is further exacer- bated by the colleges’ success. “I think the appreciation and knowledge of the worth of higher education is far greater now than it was 15 or 20 years ago, and that’s an indication that tribal colleges and others in education are doing their job,” Monette said. While characterizing the tribal college movement as a “success,” he added, “We still have a long way to go.”

“Who took a hundred years to build in legity is not going to be healed in a mere 20 years,” said Pretty on Top. “People think just because we have an open door to a college that everybody will come roaring in. Well, there’s a hundred years of reasons why they won’t.”

But thanks to Pretty on Top and her colleagues in the tribal colleges, there are at least 30 years of reasons why they will. ♦

Kathy Witkowski is a freelance writer who lives in Missoula, Montana.
CUNY’s remedial instruction is relatively inexpensive to provide because much of it is done by part-time faculty who earn only $3,000 to $4,000 per semester course and receive limited benefits.

Remedial Controversy continued from page 2

However, Cal State Chancellor Charles B. Reed said this will only happen “if the public schools change a lot.” If high schools will “teach reading and writing through the 12th grade” and insist that college-bound students take algebra 2 and geometry, “I think we could see a miraculous turnaround in three or four years,” Reed said. “If this doesn’t happen, I’m not optimistic.”

Eventually, Reed would like to shift most remedial instruction to the community colleges. This is how it is done in Florida, where Reed was head of the state university system before taking over at Cal State last March.

“The community colleges do this better, they do it less expensively and our faculty don’t like to do it all at,” the chancellor said.

In most of the 106 California community colleges, remedial education, or “basic skills instruction,” as it is called there, is a major enterprise.

Last fall, course enrollments totaled 427,956 (many students took more than one remedial class, and system officials do not know how many individuals were enrolled) and the cost was more than $221 million. “Basic skills instruction is clearly a part of our mission,” as spelled out in the State Education Code, said Rita Cepeda, system-wide vice chancellor for educational services and economic development.

There is occasional grumbling about the large number of students enrolled in these classes, and their cost, but there has been no serious attempt to curtail remedial instruction in the two-year colleges.

Florida

Since 1984, most remedial instruction (called “college prep”) has been assigned to Florida’s community colleges. Entering students at the nine campuses of the State University System who fail one or more of the reading, writing and mathematics entrance tests may remain on the rolls of a four-year institution but must take their remedial work at a community college.

(continued on page 15)
The Kiss of Death? 
An alternative view of college remediation

By Clifford Adelman

Before anyone seals any more decisions on the future of remedial courses in colleges and community colleges, it might be advisable to consider lessons from some national data on the relationship between remediation and degree completion.

The data come from the college transcripts—which don’t lie about such matters—of the national high school class of 1982, which was followed through higher education by the National Center for Education Statistics in 1993.

That long-term history allows people plenty of time to finish associate’s or bachelor’s degrees, and it is degree completion that is the Dow Jones Industrial Average of U.S. higher education.

There are five lessons from these data: 1) The amount of remedial work matters; 2) the type of remedial work matters even more; 3) the proportion of students requiring remediation in college varies widely by geographic region and urbanicity of high school; 4) the orange lights on future students in need of remediation start flashing in high school—and in the context of students’ coursework, not grades; and 5) we can fix some of the secondary school coursework problem, and thus begin to shrink the remedial empires in higher education.

Let us focus only on those students who earned more than ten credits and attended two-year and/or four-year colleges, thus excluding incidental students and those who attended only trade schools (There is too much statistical noise in these groups for a clean analysis). What is the highest undergraduate degree they earned by age 30?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No remedial courses</th>
<th>Earned Bachelor’s</th>
<th>Earned Associate’s</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One course</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two courses</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three or four courses</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five or more courses</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three or more, including reading</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first lesson, then, is that one remedial course affects both bachelor’s and overall degree completion rates a bit, but there are more serious consequences for students taking more than one remedial.

If a student has a bad Algebra 2 course in high school, both four-year and two-year colleges can fix the problem in one semester, maybe two. Even if the student evidences a writing problem, one semester of high-intensity instruction can do the job—two semesters for students whose native language is not English, since writing is the last of the four language skills people learn when they study a new language.

An allied lesson of this little table is that remediation is more of a way of life at community colleges, where it is not a serious impediment to associate’s degree completion among those who make the effort.

The first lesson commands us to ask what kind of remediation is at issue. Among students who had to take remedial reading, 66 percent were in three or more other remedial courses, and only 12 percent of this group earned bachelor’s degrees. Among students who were in remedial reading for more than one course, nearly 80 percent were in two or more other remedial courses, and less than nine percent earned bachelor’s degrees.

No matter what the combination, the conclusion makes unfortunate sense: If you can’t read, you can’t read the math problem either (let alone the chemistry textbook, the historical documents or the business law cases).

The community college environment was more supportive for remedial reading students, as 16 percent of them earned an associate’s degree. But for those community college students who were stuck in remedial reading for more than a year, the associate’s degree completion rate fell to less than five percent. This, too, is no surprise, as more than half of the long-term remedial reading students in community colleges also were enrolled in mathematics courses below the level of algebra 2.

Our third lesson involves the geographic concentration of remedial students in terms of their high school origin. Where did those who took more than two remedial courses in college come from, by census division and urbanicity of high school?

The reason we ask the question is that if we are going to fix the problem in the pre-collegiate years, we have to know where to take our toolboxes. The most disproportionate contributions to the national pool of remedial students were from the following areas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographic Region</th>
<th>Proportion of Remedial Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Atlantic, suburban</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific, suburban</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Atlantic, urban</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East North Central, urban</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Atlantic, rural</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West South Central, rural</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No doubt this table defies the conventional wisdom that only the vast numbers of kids from inner city high schools need remediation. The real “vast numbers” of U.S. college students graduated from suburban high schools, and suburban America exhibits a good deal of variance in its socioeconomic composition and quality of schooling.

Knowing where to take the toolbox is but the first step. Knowing which secondary school performance indicators are the best guides to the most effective use of the tools is a second.

In this respect—as in so many others—the nature of students’ high school curriculum (not grades or class rank, not test scores) is the best advanced warning sign.

Consider only those high school seniors who continued on to college. If we took the top 40 percent of these students on each of three performance indicators, it is obvious that class rank or academic grade point average will feed you far more than the other indicators if you want to estimate the incoming college population that is likely to wind up in remediation.

Besides, there’s not much your toolbox can do to fix grades or class rank. On the other hand, we can work on the intensity of curriculum (e.g. the amount of math instruction and, more importantly, getting students beyond algebra 2), and on increasing the proportion of non-school time that students use to work on that curriculum.

The bottom line of this brief excursion is that “remediation” in higher education is not some monolithic plague that can be cured with a single prescription. Determined students and faculty can overcome at least mild deficiencies in preparation; and students whose native language is not English certainly should be allowed the same extra time and assistance in writing skills that I would expect if I went to school in a non-English-speaking country.

But when reading is at the core of the problem, the odds of success in college environments are so low that other approaches are called for. For example, every college and community college can establish a community technology center in its service area, where high school students can come after school, in evenings and on weekends to work with intelligent systems or CDs delivering reading tutorials at computer workstations. And total immersion summer programs employing group reading of dramas also would prove a productive approach.

Both of these strategies involve peer support and interaction. These are the keys to student engagement and involvement, and, ultimately, to the demise of remediation. But until that happy day, let us be more sensible about the way we sort the problem—and the type of alternative investments we make in its solution.
I
sane institution have any interest in admitting such students?

strong negative connotations. Just as in medicine one gives a “remedy” to cure an illness, so
social and economic problems than almost any other action we could take.

system which dispenses privilege on the basis of measures—the GPA and standardized test
scores—that put our two largest racial minority groups at a competitive disadvantage.

failing are so smart! But if our students are not so smart, then this reflects poorly on us.

Being “smart”

What is a “remedial” student?

“Remedial student” and “remedial education” are basically social constructions that have
strong negative connotations. Just as in medicine one gives a “remedy” to cure an illness, so in
education there must be something “wrong” with the student who needs to be “remedied.”

There are at least three aspects of the “remedial” concept that are misleading. First is the
use of categorial terminology to describe a phenomenon that is relativistic and arbitrary. Most remedial students turn out to be simply those who have the lowest scores on some sort of normative measurement—standardized tests, school grades and the like.

But where we draw the line is completely arbitrary.

Second, the “norms” that define a “low” score are highly variable from one setting to
another. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the problem with the concept of the remedial student is that there is little if any, evidence to support the argument that these students are somehow “incapable” of learning that they have markedly different “learning styles” from other students, that they require some radically different type of pedagogy, or that they need to be segregated from other students in order to learn.

The individual and the institution

Just as individual citizens have responsibilities as well as rights, so do academic institutions. And just as excessive materialism and narcissism can interfere with the individual’s ability to be a good citizen, so can an academic institution’s preoccupation with acquisitions and self-aggrandizement interfere with its ability to be a “good citizen” in the community of institutions and in the larger society.

Just as our preoccupation with materialism, individualism and competitiveness makes it
difficult for us to be responsible citizens who work cooperatively for the collective good of all citizens (especially the least advantaged ones), so does higher education’s preoccupation at the institutional level with resource acquisition and reputational enhancement make it difficult to appreciate the critical importance of effectively educating all students, and especially those who are underpre-
pared.

Since most of us have managed to isolate ourselves physically from our less advantaged fellow citizens, most of them have little or no contact with us. Similarly, in higher education we man-
age to avoid contact with most underpre-
pared students through selective admissions, by tracking them into community colleges, by hiring outsiders to teach them, and by continuing to support grading and norm-based testing practices in the lower schools that almost guarantee that large proportions of them will be discouraged from even considering further education beyond high school.

Being “smart”

While do underprepared students make us so uncomfortable? While our beliefs about the importance of resource acquisition and reputational enhancement are consciously acknowledged by most academics, there are other, closely related beliefs that are more “hidden,” even though they can have profound effects on how we view the issue of remediation and underprepared students.

One such belief, which is virtually never acknowledged, much less examined critically within academia, is what I like to call “the importance of being smart.”

Much of our fear of remedial students and much of our unwillingness to get involved in
educating them can be traced to our uncritical acceptance of this belief and to the fact that most of us are not even consciously aware of the power and scope of its influence.

Most of us clearly favor our brightest students, not only in admissions and the award of financial aid, but also in the classroom. The real problem here is that we value being smart much more than we value developing smartness.

The real problem here is that we value being smart much more than we value
developing smartness. In our relentless and largely unconscious preoccupation with being
smart, we forget that our institutions’ primary mission is to develop students’ intellectual
capacities, not merely to select and certify those students whose intellectual talents are
already well developed by the time they reach us.

This preoccupation with being smart is part of the reason why we continue to support a grading system and a standardized testing industry that are geared to ranking and rating students rather than to reflecting how much they are actually learning. We have inflicted this same “normative” system of testing on the lower schools, such that politicians and the public now assess the “quality” of schools simply on the basis of which ones have the “smartest” students, rather than in terms of which ones are the most effective educa-
tionally.

Institutional selectivity, of course, is intimately tied into our obsession with being, and being seen by others as, smart. In the culture of academia, simply being admitted to or
employed by a selective institution is a mark of individual smartness. In much the same way that people living under a monarchy routinely judge each other’s quality in terms of their bloodlines, so are educated people in the United States inclined to judge the quality of others on the basis of where they attended college.

This discussion highlights still another problem that stems from our preoccupation with institutional selectivity: Using a simplistic yardstick like an SAT or ACT score or the selectivity of one’s institution as the principal indicator of a person’s ability or smartness not only distorts and misrepresents the wonderful diversity of abilities and talents of our students and ourselves, but implicitly diminishes the great social and cultural importance of “citizenship” talents such as empathy, self-understanding, honesty, responsibility, and the ability to work collaboratively.
Defending selective admissions and tracking

Selective admissions is, in certain respects, the process by which we admit only those students who already know what we’re supposed to teach them.

Selective admissions is frequently defended on the grounds that the tests and school grades that are used to exclude underprepared applicants “predict” performance in college. This is equivalent of saying that a hospital or a clinic should refuse to admit or treat the sickest patients because their condition “predicts” a poorer outcome than would be the case for patients with less serious illnesses.

Selectivity in admissions also is frequently rationalized on educational grounds: The brightest students need to be around other bright students in order to realize their maximum potential. This is in effect, the “center of excellence” argument, where the best students and the best faculty and the greatest resources are concentrated in one place.

This concept poses serious problems when it is viewed from a systems perspective: What civic interest is served by concentrating the least well-prepared students and the least resources in a separate set of institutions? How can such an arrangement be rationalized in terms of the larger interest of the community and the society?

Creating a real higher education community

While American colleges and universities can be justifiedly proud of their diversity and autonomy, a collection of 3,400 institutions simply “doing their individual things” does not make for a coherent or effective system. The problem is not that we are all so wonderfully individual and diverse, but rather that the sum total of our individual uncoordinated efforts doesn’t always add up to a meaningful whole.

Nowhere is the tension between individual and community needs better illustrated than in the case of the lower-performing or remedial student. Among institutions that have more applicants than available places—and this includes most of the baccalaureate-granting colleges—nobody really wants these students.

Such a policy might make sense from the myopic perspective of an individual institution that is striving for “excellence” in conventional terms, but it makes no sense from the perspective of an educational system that is trying to educate the entire citizenry. If our public colleges are to be regarded as merely places were students are trained by most institutions are educated, they threaten their sense of academic excellence, how can we ever hope to give any real priority to educating them?

Rather than seeing the underprepared student as a burden or as a threat to our excellence, we need to understand that we and the society and our democracy have an enormous stake in what happens to these students.

The systems approach

As long as institutions continue to operate independently and to persist in their traditional beliefs about excellence, any institution automatically puts its “excellence” at risk if it unilaterally chooses either to admit substantially greater numbers of underprepared students or to invest substantially more resources in educating such students.

One possible consequence of such a change in policy would be that the institution’s main constituencies—its alumni, donors and prospective students, together with their parents, teachers and counselors—will begin to believe that the institution is “slipping” or “in decline” because it is “lowering its standards.” This is a real concern that underscores the need for institutions to address the underpreparation problem collaboratively.

If we see fit to initiate a “systems level” discussion of underpreparation, it will soon become obvious that all types of institutions must share some of the responsibility for meeting this challenge, much like the agreement that insurance companies in most states have reached to share part of the responsibility for insuring “high risk” drivers.

It also will become obvious that the secondary school people should be invited to join in the conversation, and that we higher education folk must eventually form much closer partnerships with the lower schools in the interests of enhancing the quality of pre-collegiate education.

Other benefits of collaboration

The interinstitutional “systems” conversations being advocated here could help to dispel some of the myths about underpreparation: for example, that such students are simply incapable of learning, or that this problem is an issue only for certain types of institutions (a high percentage of freshman at the University of California, for example, are required to take remedial English).

It also would address some of the core issues that individual institutions will not, or simply cannot, address on their own. How are different types of institutions going to divide up the responsibility for teaching underprepared students? Is it educationally sound simply to track most of them into community colleges, which have the most limited educational resources? Are there structural changes—such as making each community college a part of a university—that would help to bring more educational resources to bear on this problem? Can some of the university’s educational and social science research capacity be focused more directly on assessing the impact of various approaches to remediation?

Research on programs for underprepared students and preparation of faculty to teach such students should be a collaborative effort carried out at the systems level. In this way, the different approaches taken in different institutions can be viewed as a grand “natural experiment,” where evaluators in the various institutional settings work together to identify the most effective educational strategies for the system.

Possibilities for action

The real question, I suppose, is how to change from an individualistic to a community mentality. I sometimes have fantasies that, some day soon, Harvard will call together all of the postsecondary institutions in the Boston area and just say, “Let’s do it.” The fantasy continues: UC Berkeley, not to be outdone, calls Stanford and all the other Bay Area campuses together and says, “Let’s do it.” And the other prestigious flagship universities—Michigan, UCLA, Wisconsin, Texas, Washington, and the rest—follow suit.

Fantasy or not, one thing seems certain: if institutions at the top of the pecking order, such as Harvard and Berkeley, see fit to deviate from the sacred cow of selectivity, this in effect “gives permission” to the rest of us to do it.

Current political trends, however, seem to be headed in the opposite direction: Major public college systems such as the City University of New York and the California State University are talking about “phasing out” remedial education. If the more elite public and private institutions continue to stand passively on the sidelines, these wrongheaded, antidemocratic and self-destructive efforts to dump the underprepared student from public college system may well succeed.

Another possible scenario would involve an initiative from state government. What if the legislature of a large state like New York, California or Texas were to establish an incentive funding program which would, in effect, put a bounty on each underprepared student who successfully completes a postsecondary education program? Such an initiative would almost certainly change the institutional perception of the underprepared student from a “liability” to an “asset.”

Still another possibility would be grass-roots efforts, possibly encouraged or sponsored by regional consortia or by national associations like the American Council on Education, where groups of similar institutions would jointly agree to substantially expand and upgrade their programs for underprepared students.

Some concluding thoughts

The problem that plagues our contemporary democracy is in many respects the same problem that de Toqueville identified more than 150 years ago: the tension between individualism and community. Even our most recent research on students highlights the importance of community: the single most important source of influence on the individual student turns out to be the peer group.

We associate freedom with individualism, and democracy with community, but the two are really inseparable: We create our own democracy and our government through our individual beliefs and actions, while at the same time the condition and quality of our community and democracy defines what kind of individual freedoms and what kind of life we enjoy. The real question is what kind of community and democracy we want to have.

An open inquiry into our most deeply felt beliefs will show that our preoccupation with acquiring resources, enhancing our institutional reputations, and being smart and being seen by others as smart has affected practically everything we do, and that many of these effects are contrary not only to our own best interests as academics, but also to the educational mission of our institutions.

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A Vision for the 21st Century

Higher education must adapt to the Information Age

By Gary Locke

You need to learn it. At that time, Microsoft stock had just gone on sale to the public for the first time.

There is a lot of very complex, sophisticated economic theory about the difference between the Industrial Age and the Information Age. But I recently heard a little story that explains it in terms everyone can understand.

It seems that a few years ago, Dutch Hayner—who, as some of the legislators here know as the husband of a former Senate majority leader—ran into a close friend of Bill Gates. At that time, Microsoft stock had just gone on sale to the public for the first time. So Dutch asked his friend if she thought he ought to buy some Microsoft stock. And she said, “Oh no, I don’t think so. They really don’t have any assets to speak of. All they have is what’s in their brains.”

That was spectacularly bad advice. And it was bad advice because it was investment advice for the Industrial Age, not the Information Age. It was advice from the era when wealth came from land, from natural resources like timber or fish or oil, from factories or from having a large pot of money to invest in those resources.

In the Information Age, the primary resources that will drive our economy will be knowledge, creativity and imagination. That is very good news for young people like you.

But all the college professors and administrators you’ll encounter in the next few years may not understand this historic change. And those who do understand it may not recognize how dramatically a knowledge-based economy will affect what you need to learn, and when you need to learn it.

The traditional pattern of education is that you graduate from high school, then you graduate from college, and then your education is complete. But your education will never be complete.

That doesn’t mean you will have to sit in a classroom until your hair turns gray. In fact, people may actually spend less time in classrooms, because learning will be available in many other formats. You might take a course that’s available on a CD-ROM, or sign up for on-line tutoring from a teacher or a professional who lives and works in another state or another country.

You might participate in seminars at your workplace, or at a community center. Or you might learn by rotating assignments from one department of a company to another. Where you live—even if you live in Forks or Zillah—won’t be a barrier to learning, because technology will make both teachers and knowledge available worldwide. So you might take a course from a university in Japan or China or Belgium.

How and where you learn will matter far less than what you learn.

In our K–12 system, we’re just now beginning to hold both students and schools accountable for meeting tough new academic standards. This means that your little brothers and sisters won’t be able to get high school diplomas just for sitting through 12 years of class. They will have to prove that they have met specific academic standards for math, science, communication, and other subjects.

That is called “competency-based education.” It means we judge the quality of an educational experience by what skills and knowledge students really learn—not by how long they spent in class, or by the prestige or reputation of the school or the teacher.

The idea of judging the quality of education by what students actually learn is coming soon to a college near you. And it will dramatically change the way we think about higher education.

When the focus of education is learning—not prestige or academic pedigree—the way we think about the cost of education also will change.

For most people, college is paid for by a combination of tuition dollars and taxpayer dollars. Those two sources of funding represent the balance between each student’s personal responsibility for his own education, and the public’s interest in having well-educated citizens and workers. Both of those sources of funding are very limited.

During the next few years, the portion of the fund that is provided by the taxpayer is going to be stretched beyond the breaking point, for three reasons: First, we’ll have larger and larger classes of graduating high school seniors during the next few years—the famous baby boom echo; second, a growing number of older adults also will be taking college classes to learn new skills, change careers or just for personal enjoyment; and third, all of us will need more knowledge, and therefore greater access to learning.

Greater demand for learning will mean fewer tax dollars per student. And that, in turn, will mean either that students pay more, that we shut more people out of the system, or that we find ways to make learning less expensive.

Some enterprises are already finding ways to lower the cost of learning. They’re offering college classes on the Internet, and starting private, no-frills courses tailored to the needs of niche markets, such as mid-career professionals who want MBAs. They’re offering learning in affordable, bite-size pieces, when and where people need it.

In the next few years, the marketplace for adult education will offer an ever-wider array of choices like these, and the long-standing monopoly of today’s colleges will be shattered.

In addition, a society that values competence, rather than educational brand names, also will value what people learn on their own. If you can show a prospective employer that you can produce sophisticated computer graphics, it won’t matter whether you learned it at a prestigious art school or on a computer in your garage. What will matter is that you can demonstrate your competence. And what will matter even more is that you can demonstrate your capacity to build on what you know—to create products out of the raw material of knowledge, and to create new knowledge.

This explosion of new ways of learning is just now beginning. So you enter the world of adult education at a very difficult moment. What you need and what your higher education system provides may not always match. For instance, most higher education is structured on the premise that you will choose one major because you will have one career. But you’re likely to have multiple careers—in fact, a lot of us are already leading multiple-career lives. And you can take you to all sorts of unexpected places in the 21st century, so you need a basic education—an operating system, to put it in computer terms, that serves as a platform for all sorts of new software.

To help you get what you need, I want to offer just three basic suggestions for being successful learners in the 21st century: First, be an informed, careful consumer of education. Shop for quality—for real learning—not designer labels; second, think long-term. Think of yourself as a perpetual learner, and plan to buy the education you need, when you need it, for your whole life; and third, push the higher education establishment to meet your needs. As students, you can do this from the inside. Your fresh young minds are free from the deep ruts of entrenched habit that sometimes prevent people from recognizing opportunities for change and improvement.

In many ways, you can see the 21st century more clearly than your elders can, because more of it belongs to you. And you can help us see what our higher education system needs to do in order to transform itself into a high-tech, learner-centered system of perpetual learning for every adult.

We also need your insights on what it will mean to be an educated person in the Information Age. We want new technologies to help us build a more compassionate, more democratic society—a society where families are strong, where communities are vibrant, and where the economy and the natural environment are healthy.

We have to educate ourselves in ways that will make that happen, and your generation must help to blaze that trail for those who will follow you.

And while you push for transformation from the inside of our colleges and universities, I will push from the outside. I’ve asked a group of this state’s smartest people to envision what our postsecondary education system ought to look like in the year 2020, and they will unveil their ideas this fall.

Those ideas will be the basis for my agenda for change in higher education. And they will undoubtedly be the basis for a major public conversation about learning for life in the 21st century. I hope that all of you—and your parents, teachers and principals—will help lead that conversation.

Gary Locke is governor of Washington. This article was adapted from his speech to The Washington Scholars, a group of the state’s highest-ranking high school graduates on April 27, 1998.
Remedial continued from page 10

States, 70 percent are racial minorities, 42 percent have annual household incomes of less than $20,000. 30 percent are non-English speaking children and 60 percent work either full-time or part-time.

Some speculated that Giuliani’s attack on remedial education was intended to curry favor with conservatives, should he decide to seek a Senate seat from New York State or run for national office.

Since then, student protestors have marched in front of CUNY headquarters on Manhattan’s East 90th Street, each time the Board of Trustees has met, demanding that open admissions and remedial instruction be retained. At the May 26 meeting, when the trustees voted to phase out remedial classes in the senior colleges, 14 protestors were arrested.

One of them was Edward C. Sullivan, the 65-year-old Democratic chairman of the State Assembly’s higher education committee, who refused to leave the board room after Paolucci evicted everyone except reporters. Sullivan was hauled off to the Protestors' House in handcuffs and was not released until the next afternoon.

The newspapers took sides in the growing dispute—the tabloids pointed six of the 16 voting board members appointed by the presidents of most of the colleges and Patrick Diggins, a professor at the City University Graduate Center, urged the board to allow remedial instruction only in the two-year community colleges.

For months, the trustees wrestled with the issue. Even though Pataki has appointed six of the 16 voting board members (there is a 17th, a faculty representa- tive who does not vote), and Giuliani appointed five, it was difficult for them to gather the nine votes necessary to change the admissions policies. There was strong opposition from students, faculty members, the presidents of most of the colleges and from some trustees, notably two who were appointed by former Democratic Governor Mario Cuomo—Edith B. Everett, a professor at the City University Graduate Center, urged the board to allow remedial instruction only in the two-year community colleges.

Defenders of open admissions and remedial education said Mayor Giuliani was ignorant of the needs of City University students.

the four-year and two-year graduation rates are indisputably low—less than eight percent in the senior colleges, less than two percent in the community colleges.

But officials contend that short-term rates are not meaningful for a system like CUNY, where half of the first-time freshmen were born outside the United States. 42 percent come from households with incomes of less than $20,000 and almost 60 percent hold full-time or part-time jobs.

“This isn’t Amherst or Princeton or...continued next page

Low Graduation Rates?

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Students protesting the phasing out of remedial classes march in front of City University of New York headquarters in Manhattan.

Sample Test Questions

The CITY UNIVERSITY of New York tests all first-time freshmen in reading, writing and mathematics. In the past, those tests have been used to determine which students need remedial work. In the future, however, students who fail one or more of the tests will not be admitted to one of the 11 four-year colleges in the CUNY system, although they still can attend one of the system’s two-year community colleges.

The new policy will be phased in over a three-year period, beginning in fall 1999. These are sample questions from the tests:

Writing

You will have 50 minutes to plan and write the essay assigned below. You may wish to use your 50 minutes in the following way: ten minutes planning what you are going to write; 30 minutes writing; ten minutes rereading and correcting what you have written.

You should express your thoughts clearly and organize your ideas so they will make sense to a reader. Correct grammar and sentence structure are important.

A. It always strikes me as a terrible shame to see people young enough so much of their time staring at television. If we could unplug all the TV sets in Ameri- ca, our children would grow up to be healthier, better educated, and more in- dependent human beings. B. Older people bring to their work a lifetime of knowledge and experience. They should not be forced to retire, even if keeping them on the job cuts down on the opportunities for young people to find work.

Do you agree or disagree? Explain and illustrate your answer from your own experience, your observations of others, or your reading.

Mathematics

Simplify (3 – 2t) – 2t

(A) 3t – 4t (B) 2t (C) 2t (D) 2t (E) 2t

A room is 20 feet long, 12 feet wide, and 8 feet high. The area of the floor is:

(A) 240 square feet (B) 240 cubic feet (C) 1,920 square feet (D) 1,920 cubic feet (E) 1,920 square feet
even Berkeley,” a Lehman College dean said. “These people have very complicated lives and it takes them longer to finish, but they do get there.”

Long-term graduation rates appear to be comparable with those of other urban public institutions. Six years after entering CUNY in fall 1990, 32 percent of bachelor’s-degree candidates had graduated, while the average for 15 other urban universities—such places as the University of Alabama, Birmingham; the University of Illinois, Chicago; and the University of Louisville—was 33 percent, the CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Analysis has reported.

Supporters of remedial education argue that the City University, with large numbers of low-income, immigrant students, is bound to require more make-up classes.

A 1997 study by David Lavin, professor of sociology at the City University Graduate Center, and several colleagues, found that 30 percent of CUNY community college students had earned diplomas after eight years, and another ten percent had received bachelor’s degrees or diplomas from other institutions.

“Both at CUNY and nationally, extended college careers have become the rule rather than the exception, and transfer rates are high,” the report said. “For these reasons, graduation studies that use short time intervals and which fail to take account of transfers, seriously under-

CUNY Campuses

Graduate School and University Center
Senior Colleges
Bernard M. Baruch College
Brooklyn College
City College
Hunter College
Herbert H. Lehman College
Queens College
York College
Comprehensive Colleges (offering both two-year and four-year degrees)
John Jay College of Criminal Justice
Medgar Evers College
New York City Technical College
College of Staten Island
Community Colleges
Borough of Manhattan Community College
Bronx Community College
Eugenio Maria de Hostos Community College
Kingsborough Community College
LaGuardia Community College
Queensborough Community College

estimate the educational success of community college students.”

Lavin and others pointed out that many community college students enroll in a few courses to brush up their business or computer skills and have no intention of completing a full diploma program.

Too Much Remedial?

“If we are promising a college education, we should deliver one.” Mayor Giuliani said at a press conference last spring, repeating one of the major themes of his campaign to cut back on remedial instruction at CUNY.

The mayor and other critics charge that the City University spends too much time, money and energy teaching students things they should have learned in high school.

Supporters of remedial education have countered with the argument that the City University, with large numbers of low-income, immigrant students, is bound to require more make-up classes.

They also blame New York City high schools for graduating students with a frail grasp of fundamental skills like reading and writing.

“The New York City schools are terrible,” said Joe O’Sullivan, who runs the freshman writing “immersion” program at Bronx Community College. “If they were doing their job we wouldn’t be doing all this remedial work.”

CUNY officials applaud recent efforts by New York schools Chancellor Rudy Crew to prepare more students for college work, but they say it will take at least several years for these efforts to pay off.

University records indicate that remedial instruction has declined in the four-year colleges in recent years—from 55 percent of first-time freshmen in the fall of 1994 to 39 percent two years later. However, some of this improvement might have been achieved simply by changing the names of remedial classes or by “mainstreaming” students with remedial needs into regular freshman classes, as has been done at Lehman College.

While the need for remedial work might have been declining in the senior colleges, it has been increasing in the two-year community colleges—from 68 percent of first-time freshmen in 1964 to 75 percent in 1996.

CUNY records also show that remedial classes account for only five percent of total instruction in the senior colleges. In the community colleges, the figure is 20 percent.

As long as there is a City University of New York, there will be a need for some remedial instruction, said Louise Mirrer, CUNY vice chancellor for academic affairs. “We will always have some unprepared students,” she said in an interview. “So does every university in America.”

Private Remedial Education?

Initially, Mayor Giuliani insisted that all entering CUNY students in the community colleges as well as the four-year campuses, should be able to pass the basic reading, writing and math tests. He said this probably would eliminate three-quarters of the 65,000 students now in the two-year colleges.

The mayor said remedial work in the community colleges should be done by private companies like the Kaplan Educational Center or the Sylvan Learning Center.

However, as it became clear that getting rid of remediation in the senior colleges would be a major battle, the mayor dropped his community college proposal (though many expect him to revive it next year).

Vice Chancellor Mirrer said contracting out remedial work would cost two and one-half times more than CUNY now spends and that the instruction would not be as good.

CUNY’s remedial instruction is relatively inexpensive to provide because much of it is done by part-time faculty who earn only $3,000 to $4,000 per semester course and receive limited benefits.

For teaching two sections of freshman composition at Lehman College, “I take home exactly $572, after taxes, every other week,” said Mali Heded, the young instructor who was struggling to interest her class in the writings of Langston Hughes.

Many educators believe the rapid expansion of remedial education is a real problem, not only in New York City but in many other places around the country. However, they doubt that the problem can be solved in a superheated political atmosphere.

“There is a legitimate issue here but, unfortunately, now it’s all politics,” said Arthur Levine, president of Teachers College at Columbia University. “The legitimate issue is, at what point is enough, enough? The government’s got to ask, ‘How long do we do this? We do remedial education in elementary school, in high school and then again in college. What are we getting for all this expense?’

‘So this is a real issue,’ Levine continued, ‘but I’m sorry it has come up in this political context, where everybody is taking shots at remedial and nobody is giving careful thought to how it might be done more effectively.’

As a matter of fact, quite a lot of careful thought had been given to the subject at the City University of New York—by faculty members, campus presidents, system-wide administrators and the Board of Trustees—and last fall they seemed to be close to consensus.

‘Rational discussions about the missions of the different colleges were underway,’ Louise Mirrer, the academic vice chancellor, said, ‘We were also having a highly rational discussion about remediation and areas of agreement were emerging.’

Then Mayor Giuliani began his public blasts at the City University and the rational discussions ended.