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Quiet Revolution: Curricular Reform and the Student Power Movement at Harvard University and the University of Massachusetts, 1968-1971

Abstract

Siobhan C. Atkins, College '09, History

The American Student Power Movement of the 1960s

The “student power” movement of the 1960s in America was characterized by a push for curricular reform, academic freedom, and a greater student and faculty role in decision making at universities across the nation. Not only was the movement widespread—virtually no university remained untouched—but it also resulted in tangible reforms, many of which remain to this day. What hopes and concerns did America’s youth have towards their society at the dawn of the postindustrial era? How did school administrators, parents, and intellectuals react? And what do these findings reveal about the generational conflicts at the heart of student dissent of the 1960s?

Comments

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**Quiet Revolution:
Curricular Reform and the Student Power Movement at
Harvard University and the University of Massachusetts, 1968-1971**

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Senior Honors Thesis*
and
2008–2009 Penn Humanities Forum
Undergraduate Mellon Research Fellowship

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Introduction

As the fall of 1969 approached, the University of Massachusetts, like scores of colleges and universities across the United States, prepared itself for the dawn of another school year. The sleepy Western Massachusetts town of Amherst, nestled in the Connecticut River Valley and also home to the private Amherst College and Hampshire College, began to awake from the summer stupor characteristic of university towns. By mid-August, Amherst was buzzing with landscaping, dorm-cleaning, and all the signs that another typical academic year was set to begin.

For the University of Massachusetts, however, this would be far from a “typical” school year. In only a few short weeks, the otherwise-pristine campus green would be overrun with construction -- the finished product, however, was not a new campus gym or laboratory but, rather, a series of white domes built by students in protest of university overcrowding and what they perceived as an overemphasis on competition and career preparation. In the following weeks after their construction, many students would forego regular classes, choosing instead to attend classes in the domes taught by willing (often younger) professors with titles such as “Seminar for the Conscientiously Dissatisfied.” By May, after the publication of a scathing report on the status of undergraduate academics by the school’s Student Government Association, a series of meetings between school administrators, faculty, and students, and an unprecedented university-wide referendum on

the school's grading system and curriculum, UMass had changed many of its graduation requirements and had introduced the pass-fail grading system as an option to undergraduate students. While the white domes dubbed "Tent City" did not outlast the brisk New England fall, the academic environment of the school would forever be changed.

Only a little more than a hundred miles to the east, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, another very different university was undergoing some similar strains. Harvard University, the nation's oldest and most prestigious college and the home of some of the country's best and brightest young bourgeoisie and Brahmins, had the previous spring seen its century-and-a-half-old administrative building University Hall overtaken by student protestors, with one dean even carried outside by members of the school's chapter of Students for a Democratic Society. The cause of this particular outburst was very different from that behind "Tent City" at UMass: the demands prompting the sit-in at Harvard largely centered on the campus branch of ROTC, a tangible target for students' anti-Vietnam War sentiments. However, while the Vietnam War may have been the primary catalyst for the protest, the debates among faculty and students that followed exposed deeper qualms with the university – ones that strikingly mirrored those at UMass. One student editorial in the *Harvard Crimson* proposed a student boycott on spring exams – not to protest the university's continuing refusal to ban ROTC activities on campus or even to show the power of student mass action, but, instead, to show that "the academic system here does not serve our interests as students and as people, but is in fact opposed to these interests." The editorial goes on to decry the competition and memorization of rote facts rather than critical thinking encouraged by the modern university – and, perhaps more importantly, connects the exam system to problems many '60s-era students found with the modern bureaucratic society. The student wrote,

“Exactly as in an office or a factory, the school encourages students not to think about the intrinsic pleasure or displeasure of the work they are required to do, but to respond solely to the easily controllable incentive system provided by the authorities.” The system of grades and exams students at Harvard – and students to the west at UMass – rallied against, thus represented much more than academic competition to its detractors: it instead mirrored the overly technocratic and meaningless working world many ‘60s-era students were reluctant to join. As the same *Crimson* editorial was quick to point out, “educational ‘reforms’ such as the abolition of exams and grades cannot be considered separately from the organization of society as a whole.”¹

More than just attack Harvard’s system of grades, a group of students that spring went farther: like the students at UMass a semester later, they began organizing their own classes. Dubbing their experiment “Harvard New College”, students – with the help of willing graduate teaching fellows and some professors – held seminars out of dorm rooms and common spaces, on subjects ranging from experimental dance to the science behind hallucinogenic drugs.

As one can see, two schools only a short drive apart, but light years away in history and reputation – one the oldest and most prestigious university in the country, the other a state-run former agricultural college -- experienced shockingly similar attacks on their academic systems, all within a year of each other in the late ‘60s. The question thus must be asked: what caused this sudden rebellion against grades and curricular requirements students at both schools had tolerated for decades? And why, given the seeming differences in the very academic policies students rallied against – not to mention the student bodies at each campus -- did both schools experience such similar movements?

¹ David I. Bruck, “A Proposal Concerning Exams,” [The Harvard Crimson](#), 28 April 1969.

Studying the evolution of academic-related protests at both Harvard and UMass will give me an opportunity to explore changes that were sweeping schools across the nation, whether public or private. Despite their differences in their respective relationships to the state, both Harvard and UMass ceded to increasing federal influence in the '60s – a fact students at both schools protested, particularly in light of the increasing specialization and neglect of the undergraduate liberal arts that often accompanied federal dollars. Both schools also embraced subtle changes in institutional focus over the course of the '60s, responding to a national exhortation for more scientists, researchers, and prepared white-collar workers at the dawn of a postindustrial era – an approach that left students seeking the traditional “Renaissance Man” education feeling slighted. And then, of course, both schools found themselves increasingly pressed for resources at a time when the demand for higher education in the United States was skyrocketing. The number of students at UMass in Amherst grew by a staggering 10,000 over the course of the '60s – a change that brought about overcrowded dorms, hastily-built high-rises, and overflowing lecture halls, conditions all ripe for rebellion.² And while Harvard's growth in the same era was much more modest, it still faced staffing problems, particularly in the liberal arts – a condition which contributed to students' sense of being “cut off” from their learning experience.

Other than growing and changing their academic focus, both Harvard and UMass changed in other ways, too. Over the course of the '60s, the student bodies at each school changed along with the schools themselves – and in ways that were surprisingly similar. Like students on campuses across the nation, students at each school were, overall, significantly more politically active than their '50s counterparts – a fact that is especially relevant, given that academic-based complaints at both schools first found their expression in

² Richard Freeland, Academia's Golden Age (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 315.

movements that initially focused on the war in Vietnam. The overall academic caliber of the student body at each school – particularly at UMass, but to a smaller degree at Harvard -- also increased over the course of the '60s, largely thanks to the dramatic increase in applications. Many students at each school thus not only had the inclination to lend a critical eye to their surroundings, but also possessed the intellectual capacity to do so.

Finally, in a way that is less quantifiable but no less significant, the student bodies at each school also seemed to possess dramatically different views regarding their own educations – and how such educations related to society at large – than their '50s-era equivalents. Rather than view their college educations from a purely practical viewpoint, with their degrees as the golden tickets to a lucrative career, students in the '60s increasingly began to question how their educations contributed to their overall personal growth – and to challenge the rigid, competitive evaluation methods of evaluation put upon them by the university. To many students, such systems reflected the overall competitive nature of life at large in a postindustrial society – a life that they hoped, in some small part, to change.

By changing the grades-bound system at their own universities and reforming staid curriculums to incorporate issues more relevant to students' identities, students at these two dramatically different Massachusetts universities thus hoped to accomplish much more than making their undergraduate careers less stressful: they hoped, in some small way, to make American society more cooperative and less cutthroat, more focused on quality of life rather than quality of station. And they certainly were not alone: students across the country were similarly engaged in questions of university curricular reform, forcing university officials and American intellectuals along the way to consider the merits of their complaints and the role of students in university reform at large. Like the far-reaching ultimate goals of curricular

rebellion, the reasons behind such unprecedented – and widespread – student dissatisfaction with undergraduate life are multifold, and have their roots in greater changes to American university structure and societal interests in the postwar era. An exploration of curricular reforms in the late '60s, thus, does not just expose student discontent with American society: it also reveals the radical transformations in the university's purpose and relationship with government and society as America moved into the postindustrial era.

Chapter One: “The Knowledge Factory”

To see where American higher education – and the average American university’s student body – found itself in the late ‘60s, it is of course necessary to first examine where it was coming from. America’s entry into the arena of higher education first came when Harvard was founded in 1639, a full century and a half before the colonies gained their independence from Great Britain. In the centuries that followed, the United States would quickly surpass its mother country (and many countries in Europe) with the sheer ubiquity of colleges available: by the mid-1800s, the United States had over two hundred higher education institutes, compared to Britain’s four.³ Still, however, before World War Two, higher education remained a distinctly elite – and white male – privilege. In the 1890s, only approximately 3% of the college-age population in the United States was enrolled in four-year college programs.⁴ With the exception of a few elite women’s colleges such as Radcliffe and Bryn Mawr, entry into colleges was largely limited to males, and steep tuition fees – not to mention unofficial and occasionally official quota policies for Jews and Catholics – meant that most university students remained upper-class Protestants.

American universities in the prewar era didn’t just take the high road when it came to the men they educated; they also tended to define their very educational missions as somehow “above” the base needs of society and industry. Rather than provide practical

³ Freeland, 21.

⁴ Christopher J. Lucas, *American Higher Education: A History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 213.

training to prepare their students for the workforce, schools saw it as their duty to instead cultivate well-rounded “Renaissance Men” with the character – rather than just the technical skills – to succeed in society. Much of this had to do with the economic climate schools found themselves in during the prewar era. Universities, while dedicated to cultivating well-rounded and intelligent men to stock America’s chief political posts and most profitable businesses, were largely seen as irrelevant to the ultimate health of the country. In an industrial society in which factories, not white-collar industries, provided the driving force behind the economy, the training provided by universities did not receive much interest or investment from corporations or the government – nor did universities seek to provide such training. Indeed, many American universities embraced British philosopher John Stuart Mill’s theory of university education, articulated as such:

“There is a tolerably general agreement about what a University is not. It is not a place of professional education. Universities are not intended to teach the knowledge required to fit men for some special mode of gaining their livelihood...Men are men before they are lawyers, or physicians, or merchants, or manufacturers; and if you will make them capable and sensible men, they will make themselves capable and sensible lawyers or physicians.”⁵

Some universities, however, began to feel the pressure to “modernize” and offer higher levels of specialization and innovation than that dictated by Mill’s philosophy. In the 1870s and thereafter, some higher education institutes in the United States began to model themselves on the Germanic ideal of higher education – one which, in lieu of emphasizing undergraduate general education in a wide array of subjects, placed value upon graduate programs, specialized subjects, and -- perhaps most importantly -- research rather than

⁵ John Stuart Mill, quoted in Richard Lichtman, “The University: Mask for Privilege?”, in Immanuel Wallerstein and Paul Starr, ed., The University Crisis Reader, Volume One: The Liberal University Under Attack (New York: Random House, 1971), 101.

teaching. Along with this newfound focus on advanced learning, many universities began to recognize – and tout – their greater purpose in illuminating and correcting the ills of society. As the founder and president of Johns Hopkins University, Daniel Gilman, saw it, a focus on research would allow “for less misery among the poor, less ignorance in schools, less bigotry in the temple, less suffering in the hospital, less fraud in business, less folly in politics.”⁶ Still, however, despite increasing interest in graduate programs and research, many liberal-arts colleges were slow to adapt. Furthermore, whether or not universities saw themselves as crucial to the promotion of American order, they still maintained their political autonomy – and often, irrelevancy. As Rebecca Lowen wrote in her study *Creating the Cold War University: the Transformation of Stanford*, universities pre-World War Two were “peripheral to the nation’s political economy”. Even as universities increasingly devoted themselves to higher-level scholarship and research, such research was typically framed as “pure” and devoted to finding universal “truths” – a mission that kept autonomy from government and business as one of its key prerequisites.⁷

The 1870s and 1880s also saw the beginnings of undergraduate curricular reform – a process that proved to be immensely controversial in colleges and universities across the country. In his inaugural address in 1869, Charles Eliot, the new president of Harvard, challenged the fixed, uniform undergraduate curriculum long seen as crucial to the development of serious scholars. As he stated, “The individual traits of different minds [in education] have not been attended to... The young man of nineteen or twenty ought to know what he likes best and is most fit for... When the revelation of his own peculiar taste and capacity comes to a young man, let him reverently give it welcome, thank God, and take

⁶ Lucas, 179.

⁷ Rebecca Lowen, *Creating the Cold War University: the Transformation of Stanford* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 2.

courage.” This bold statement – and Eliot’s consequent introduction of an unprecedented electives system – incited a firestorm of controversy from Eliot’s peers at other universities. As Noah Porter, then-president of Yale, insisted, “[Students’] tastes are either unformed or capricious and prejudiced; if they are decided and strong, they often require correction. The study which is the farthest removed from that which strikes his fancy may be the study which is most needed for the student.”⁸ Indeed, the sentiment behind most opposition to electives was a paternalistic one: students were seen as simply incapable of deciding what education was best for them. Nonetheless, Eliot’s vision of an elective-based education soon spread to universities across the country – even the president of the University of Tennessee soon admitted, “The harmonious and equitable evolution of man does not mean that every man must be educated like his fellow....That community is most highly educated in which each individual has attained the maximum of his possibilities in the direction of his peculiar talents and opportunities.”⁹

With the advent of World War Two, the mission of universities – and the student bodies they admitted – changed dramatically. During the war, the federal government – and organizations such as the National Defense Research Council (NDRC), later to become the Office of Science Research and Development (OSRD) -- turned to the nation’s universities and science professors to develop wartime technology, subcontracting important (and often highly classified) research projects out to colleges all over the nation. The prestige – not to mention cash flow – garnered by such projects gave university presidents hope that the government would continue to acknowledge universities’ relevance and importance long after the war ended. As President Carmichael of Tufts University declared in a speech on

⁸ Lucas, 171-172.

⁹ Ibid., 175.

university research programs, “The patterns of connection between the government and the colleges now evolving as war expedients will allow the endowed educational institution of the country to serve the nation’s welfare in peacetime as well.”¹⁰ During a largely popular war, such university complicity in governmental-military objectives attracted little controversy; it did, however, set a precedent for university-military symbiosis that would have devastating consequences during the Vietnam War.

Upon the end of World War Two – and, more importantly, the beginning of the Cold War – university presidents began to reevaluate not only their connection to the government and public policy objectives, but also their approach to educating undergraduates. The first and most noted shift again came at Harvard, with the 1945 publication of a faculty committee report entitled *General Education in a Free Society*. Dubbed “the Redbook” because of its glossy maroon cover, the report emphasized the newfound role that universities would have in more than just cultivating well-rounded men. Its authors saw the university’s primary responsibility as imparting good citizenship and American values along with scholarship to its students – and, more importantly, saw a shared “general education” curriculum as the best way to promote shared values and knowledge in an era of increasing specialization. While continuing to acknowledge divergent personal interests and talents, the report asserted, the university also needed to prepare students “so far as it can for those common spheres which, as citizens and heirs of a joint culture, they will share with others.”¹¹ The end result of the Redbook was the creation of three required courses in different disciplines, along with several electives for upperclassmen that focused on knowledge integration rather than specialization. Harvard president James Bryant Conant praised the new approach to

¹⁰ Freeland, 71-72

¹¹ Lucas, 270.

undergraduate education, declaring that it introduced an opportunity for universities to “both shape the future and secure the foundations of our free society.” This new effort to integrate higher education, thus, reveals a profound reconsideration of university’s roles at a time American values were seen as at risk. University presidents such as Conant saw their newfound educational mission as not just the cultivation of scholarship, but the active promotion of shared national values.

This approach was one, quite interestingly, now shared by the federal government. After World War Two, President Truman appointed two presidential commissions on the nation’s involvement and stake in higher education. One of the commissions, led by Dr. George Zook, former president of the University of Akron and then-director of the American Council on Education, concluded that “the failure to provide any core of unity in...higher education is a cause for grave concern.” Rather than specialization, the report argued, universities should “provide a unified general education”, resulting in a “common cultural heritage towards a common citizenship.”¹²

* * *

As the nation moved into the early ‘60s and children of the Baby Boom began to reach their late teens, universities strained to accommodate a newfound demand for higher education. Construction on many campuses became a year-round phenomenon, and many students found themselves denied on-campus housing or their first choices for courses because of over-enrollment. Universities during this period continued to forge connections with the federal government and to consider their greater role in promoting the national welfare. The approach many of them began to take, however, was dramatically different from that promoted by general education advocates in the late ‘40s. Rather than an

¹² Freeland, 78.

undergraduate-centric view of the university, one that saw higher education's chief goal as providing a coherent and cohesive curriculum meant to promote good citizenship and shared values, university presidents envisioned an education dominated by specialization and decentralization. Furthermore, unlike university leaders of previous eras, who saw autonomy from government and corporations as crucial to their legitimacy, these new leaders saw active cooperation with outside groups as the key to their continuing relevancy in a changing era. Perhaps the greatest articulation of this new vision came from Clark Kerr, the president of University of California appointed in 1958. In his landmark 1963 book *The Uses of the University*, Kerr, quoting turn-of-the-century academic pioneer Abraham Flexner, wrote,

“A University...is not outside, but inside the general social fabric of a given era...It is not something apart, something historic, something that yields as little as possible to forces and influences that are more or less new. It is on the contrary...an expression of the age, as well as an influence operating upon both present and future.”¹³

To that end, Kerr envisioned what he termed a “multiversity”, one where “science and nationalism” would reign – and become integrated. Federal grants to universities since World War Two had skyrocketed: by 1960, universities were receiving approximately \$1.5 billion in federal assistance – one hundred times what they had been receiving only twenty years earlier – with a full two-thirds of that amount going to university research centers and research projects.¹⁴ In the wake of the Cold War, Kerr argued, it was impossible to remain significant as a university without collaborating with government and industry. As he saw it, “In addition to the industrial revolution there was now the scientific revolution to be served. In addition to the stimulus of Germany, there was Russia – for Russian scientific achievements both before and after Sputnik were an immense spur to the new departure.”

¹³ Clark Kerr, *Uses of the University* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

Kerr occasionally commented on the paradox of so-called “private” institutions lending themselves so readily to nationalistic and scientific needs; in *Uses of the University*, he mused,

“It is interesting that American universities, which pride themselves on their autonomy, should have taken their special character as much or more from the pressures of their environment as from their own inner desires; that institutions which identify themselves either as ‘private’ or as ‘state’ should have found their greatest stimulus in federal initiative; that universities which are part of a highly decentralized and varied system of higher education should, nevertheless, have responded with such fidelity and alacrity to national needs; that institutions which had their historical origins in the training of ‘gentlemen’ should have committed themselves so fully to the service of brute technology.”¹⁵

Still, to Kerr, the newfound role of universities in turning the gears of the national political and postindustrial economy seemed somewhat unavoidable. He wrote, “The production, distribution and consumption of ‘knowledge’ in all its forms is said to account for 29 percent of gross national product...and knowledge production is growing at about twice the rate of the rest of the economy. Knowledge has certainly never in history been so central to the conduct of an entire society. What the railroads did for the second half of the last century and the automobile for the first half of this century may be done for the second half of this century by the knowledge industry: that is, to serve as the focal point for national growth. And the university is at the center of the knowledge process.”¹⁶

To that end, universities not only needed to be at the vanguard of governmental and corporate research – they also needed to train their students to become productive members of the new knowledge-based economy. His unyielding focus on the marketable skills rather than overall intellectual or moral capacities of the modern university student emerges in a

¹⁵ Kerr, 49.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

good deal of his writing. In his discussion of federal aid to universities, he identified two groups of students the university should be most assisted in training: the lowest performers and the highest performers. He stated, “At the bottom is the problem of... ‘drop outs’ of the unskilled from the employed labor force. Through occupational training and retraining, through counseling, guidance and relocation, these ‘drop-outs’ should be assisted to acquire skills valuable in a dynamic economy...At the top, the nation needs more research activity in a number of fields and more personnel of high skills – particularly engineers, scientists, mathematicians, teachers, and medical doctors.”¹⁷ Gone was the educational philosophy of yore, where universities charged themselves with developing well-rounded citizens for entry into society. Universities now found themselves in the task of grooming the next generation of workers – for better or for worse.

Another result of this newfound educational philosophy – combined with the skyrocketing enrollments at many universities -- was that opportunities for research and independent inquiry often supplanted colleges’ former sense of unity. In a modern society, Kerr argued, where students not only had divergent tastes but also were required by the economy to be highly trained in wildly different subjects, universities could no longer provide the same sense of shared experience that they previously had. Instead, universities would be better served providing the maximum number of opportunities for specialization possible, with the only true “shared” element being the administrative regulations holding the university together. As Kerr wrote, “Flexner thought of a university as an ‘organism’. In an organism, the parts and the whole are inextricably bound together. Not so the multiversity – many parts can be added and subtracted with little effect on the whole or even little notice

¹⁷ Kerr, 76.

taken or any blood spilled. It is more a mechanism – a series of processes producing a series of results – a mechanism held together by administrative rules and powered by money.”¹⁸

Clearly, Kerr saw the maintenance of a clear administrative power structure as essential to the functioning of the modern university. Yet when it came to matters of curriculum, Kerr -- interestingly enough -- eschewed the paternalism common in university administrators of yore, who saw a core curriculum as essential in not only instilling a shared base of knowledge but also guiding otherwise-hapless teenagers. Rather, Kerr did recognize the inherent power of students to guide their own academic careers and to influence the course of university life. The terms in which he saw student involvement, however, were not based upon a premise of students as members of the academic community, with distinct concerns to be heard and evaluated. Rather, Kerr approached their role in the way one would approach consumers in a free-market economy. Students would not influence the university through an active role in administrative or academic decision-making; they would guide it invisibly, through their decisions in what classes to take and what professors to patronize. Wrote Kerr, “Student do have considerable strictly academic influence...quite beyond that with which they are usually credited. The system of electives gives them a chance to help determine in which areas and disciplines a university will grow. Their choices, as consumers, guide university expansion and contraction...Also students, by their patronage, designate the university teachers.”¹⁹

As is evident from Kerr’s philosophy, he – along with many of his peers at other universities – viewed the university as a corporation in two senses: in the internal structure and power dynamics they maintained, and in the marketplace demands they sought to satisfy

¹⁸ Ibid., 21.

¹⁹ Kerr, 22.

with research and career preparation. This was a radical departure from educational philosophies of the past, and one that certainly did not go unnoticed by university students.

Kerr's approach to higher learning would soon serve as one of the focal rallying points in one of the nation's first – and most visible – student protests, one that would serve as a harbinger of things to come at universities across the country. On October 1st, 1964, the campus of the University of California at Berkeley erupted in chaos, culminating in a 32-hour sit-in at the school's Sproul Hall, over the school's decision to ban political organizing on campus. In the student speeches at the protests that followed, however, it soon became clear that undergraduate students' discontent with the school extended far beyond its draconian policies on political activities. Mario Savio, a charismatic junior from Queens, New York who would emerge as the de-facto student leader of the protest, delivered a speech to the rousing crowd assembled outside the hall in which he articulated students' sense of alienation with the perceived factory-like nature of their education. Along with declaring President Kerr and the Board of Regents to be “a bunch of bastards”, he insisted, “The University is well structured, well tooled, to turn out people with all the sharp edges worn off.”²⁰ Clearly, Savio and other students recognized that providing moral and intellectual development to its students was no longer high on the list of priorities of modern universities such as Berkeley.

G. Louis Heath, a graduate student at Berkeley at the time who would come to sympathize with the student protestors, wrote of their discontent in his book *The Hot Campus*. Like many other universities, Heath argued, Berkeley had become “devoid of the balance among disciplines” in its fanatical search for prestige through scientific and governmental research. Furthermore, in their newfound quest to partner with corporations in

²⁰ W.J. Rorabaugh, *Berkeley at War: The 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 22.

the conduct of such research, Heath believed that Berkeley had strayed too far from the 19th-century ideal of autonomous universities. He wrote, “A good number of multiversities have prostituted traditional university ideals in the service of wealthy special interests.” The undergraduate discontent with their educational experience, however, ran much deeper than just anger at questionable connections to corporations. Rather, students felt that their desires for their own education were being ignored – and what they wanted in their education, Heath argued, was not technical training or career preparation but *meaning*. Berkeley and schools like it, he argued, were becoming “myopically focused on matters of technique rather than value.”²¹

Furthermore, while multiversity proponents might have argued that concern for relevance was at the heart of their focus on research and career preparation, undergraduates were little interested in being molded for the workforce. Instead, they wanted courses that would explore the pressing political and racial issues of the day -- students even recruited famed Black Power radical Eldridge Cleaver to teach a class before the Board of Regents declared that students in the class could not receive credit – or, even better, give them a chance to get out of the classroom and into the community. This was truly a new class of students, one that rejected the newfound impulse towards careerism common in academia but eschewed the Great Books approach as well, instead seeking classes that would foster personal growth through engagement with current issues. As Heath wrote, “[Students at Berkeley] are obsessed with the idea of studying ‘relevant’ issues. Their rejection of the

²¹ G. Louis Heath, *The Hot Campus: The Politics that Impede Change in the Technoversity* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1973), 1.

Great Books, classical approach to liberal education, in favor of education-as-action, is an intense form of commitment to relevance.”²²

Students also rejected the intense competition put upon them by the multiversity, finding alienation rather than satisfaction in the pressure to succeed. The grading system, furthermore, was seen as yet another way for the university – and society at large – to ‘control’ its students. As one college woman wrote in an unpublished letter to the New York Times, quoted in a SDS pamphlet,

“I came to this school not thinking I could even keep up with the work...In the beginning, the first few weeks or so, I’m fine. Then I begin to wonder just what this is all about: am I educating myself? I have that one answered: I’m educating myself the way *they* want...So maybe I get an A...but when I get it back I find that A means nothing. It’s a letter *you* use to keep me going.”²³

What becomes clear from a study of the discontent at Berkeley – a malaise that in the mid-to-late ‘60s would spread to universities across the country – is that it wasn’t just the approach to undergraduate education that was changing; rather, the student body of colleges was changing as well. The biggest change, of course, was the sheer size of the undergraduate population. Such a drastic increase certainly made conditions ripe for the type of qualms students were having with their education, as it created not just logistical problems – overcrowding in dorms, increasingly large classes -- but also fomented an increasingly alienating learning and living experience for students. As Bryan Wilson explained in his study of youth dissent entitled *The Youth Culture and the Universities*, “The advocates of large universities tend to see the problems associated with them in administrative terms...The problems they acknowledge are those of congestion, overcrowding, rebuilding and parking

²² Heath, 23.

²³ SDS Pamphlet by Carl Davidson, in Wallerstein and Starr, ed., 88-89.

space. Unfortunately they tend also to assume that once they have solved these problems they have solved all problems”, when in reality, he argued, the very quality of learning relationships changed with university growth. “Slowly we move to a position in which routinized, impersonal exposure, without human contact, will provide students with the knowledge of which they should be in temporary possession in order to pass examinations. It has nothing to do with the tenor of their lives, it is unassociated with the spirit of inquiry, critical discrimination, [and] broad cultural perspectives.”²⁴ And indeed, discontent with large and impersonal lecture classes emerges as one of the primary complaints many students had with their university educations. Many longed for more intimate classes that, beyond fostering stronger connections with their professors, would allow them to develop stronger critical thinking skills than those required by “routinized”, exam-based lectures.

But, more than that, it appears that this specific group of students was rejecting the impetus to use their undergraduate education in the way previous students had – to merely get good grades and use their education to land a good job and a family – at a time that this impulse was being imposed on them by the university more than ever. Indeed, as is clear from the history of federal involvement in higher education, government and corporate investment in universities had begun two decades before students first revolted at Berkeley in 1964. What was different in the ‘50s, however – something that certainly precluded discontent – was the collective mindset of the student bodies at schools in previous decades. In his study of university protest in the ‘60s, Donald Phillips noted that students in the ‘50s were characterized by four main characteristics: “an absorbing self-interestedness”, “group dependence”, “social and political indifference”, and “an instrumental approach to reason

²⁴ Bryan Wilson, The Youth Culture and the Universities (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), 136-139.

and morality.”²⁵ Given these characteristics, it is no surprise that campuses during the ‘50s remained unscathed by questions of educational legitimacy or student role in academic decision-making. Students in this era viewed their educational experience from a purely utilitarian perspective, seeing it as a mere phase of life in which to build social connections and a strong GPA valuable for later life success.

As many academics studying ‘60s-era student dissent in other areas – the civil rights and Black Power movements, for example, or anti-Vietnam War protest – have observed, students enrolling in universities in the ‘60s were considerably different, eschewing the competitive, utilitarian aspects of universities in favor of collaboration and introspection. As evidence of the mindset of this new generation, one only need turn to the Port Huron Statement, a landmark document issued by Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1962. Rejecting the complacency and careerism of their parents’ generation, the statement presented a radical vision for a transformed American society, based not on external rewards such as money or fame but on *internal* desires – for love, collaboration, and work for its intrinsic pleasures. The Statement insisted, among other things, that “work should involve incentives worthier than money or survival”.²⁶

Perhaps most interesting about the new generation of students, however, was the extent to which the university itself became a target of opposition and reform. Indeed, Karl Mannheim, one of the preeminent sociologists of the 20th century, posited that youth rebellion occurs when the younger generation’s social position is profoundly changed – something that he asserts occurred between World War One and World War Two,

²⁵ Donald Philips, Student Protest, 1960-1969: An Analysis of the Issues and Speeches (Washington: University Press of America, 1980), 22.

²⁶ The Port Huron Statement, in Tom Hayden’s The Port Huron Statement: The Visionary Call of the 1960’s Revolution (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2005), 54

culminating in the “Lost Generation” and youth association with radical politics and Communism.²⁷ One could use the same explanation for ’60s-era youth: rather than becoming mere “creators and promoters of bourgeois political theory and philosophy”²⁸, middle-class students were now expected to turn the gears of the new knowledge-based economy. All the political action and/or rebellion of students in the ‘30s, however, remained focused *outside* the university, directed at the prevailing mainstream political structures rather than at universities themselves.

In dramatic contrast to their ‘30s counterparts, this new generation of students increasingly directed their reformist energies towards the social structure closest to them: that of the universities they attended. As Mark Rudd, president of the Columbia branch of SDS and a visible member of late-‘60s protests, put it, “We see the university as a factory whose goal is to produce: 1) trained personnel for corporations, government, and more universities, and 2) knowledge of the uses of business and government to perpetuate the present system.” Students were becoming far more conscious of the political and economic ends served by their own schools – a relationship between university and economy that, as I argued earlier, had developed only within the previous twenty years. Whether or not students decried the governmental or corporate influence upon their school like the more radical members of SDS chapters, though, many did consider the merits of their undergraduate education and exhorted the administration to listen to their demands.

Why such a profound change in students’ relationship with their own schools? Why did it, not just the outside society, gain saliency as a target of rebellion and reform? Part of

²⁷ Karl Mannheim, “The Sociological Problems of Generations,” in Paul Kecskemeti, ed., Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1952), 286-320.

²⁸ Bettina Apthekar, The University as an Instrument of Social Control (Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1972), 29.

the equation, as one can deduce from Clark Kerr's philosophy and statistics on universities as they moved into the '60s, lies in the changing nature of universities themselves. Indeed, as author Philips argued, the Berkeley protest greatly influenced the national discourse on higher education, highlighting many of the problems with modern universities such as their size and "the problems of undergraduate teaching, including relevancy of the curriculum."²⁹ Of even greater significance in students' complaints, too, was how their education related to the greater society they were primed to enter – and, indeed, often rejected. While some academics dismissed students' qualms with universities as a war "against a sham enemy"³⁰, many intellectuals and university administrators took their complaints very seriously. Mervin Freedman, then-assistant dean of undergraduate education at Stanford, recognized that, by being groomed to enter the modern competitive economy without a thought to their moral or spiritual development, "students are being educated to fit into a society they reject, at least in considerable part."³¹

Many academics studying student rebellion attributed deeper causes to the newfound dissatisfaction with universities, one rooted in the very personality of the new student generation. They asserted that the prosperity of the postwar boom had ushered in a new style of parenting, one that embraced children's individuality and indulged their whims rather than preparing them for the life of work ahead. Once students reached college, however, they found the style embraced by their parents during their childhood to be severely at odds with the new expectations placed upon them. As Heath wrote of the students at Berkeley, "The hippies resent their parents (Dr. Spock's *Baby and Child Care* in hand) who lavished ultra-

²⁹ Philips, 45.

³⁰ Fred Hechinger, "Reforming College Education: Student Targets: Professors Next," Current 107 (May 1969): 34.

³¹ Mervin Freedman, "Roots of Student Discontent," Nation 200 (14 June 1965): 639.

permissiveness on them during childhood and adolescence. Mom and Dad suddenly demanded a complete transformation of lifestyle – from the paradise of acting out one’s own impulses to the self-discipline of meeting stiff college competition.”³²

Perhaps because of this increased permissiveness afforded them by their middle-class parents, students began to conceive of their university experiences in radically different terms. In the new affluence of the postindustrial economy, where students simultaneously required more advanced training to enter the workforce and had the luxury of attending school for longer, the number of students planning on attending graduate school skyrocketed. Many youth also stayed in school to avoid the Vietnam War draft, creating what author Horowitz termed the “permanent student” phenomenon. Perhaps because of this prolongation of academic life for many American youth, students no longer viewed their four years at college as “a tunnel in time” or a means to an end, as their ‘50s-era peers had.³³ Students now saw the schools at which they attended as a place to not only live in but to *change*.

The idea of power to change – and the simultaneous anger students felt towards university structures and the prevailing hope for reform – gets at the heart of the ’60-era student psyche and the mindset behind academic-based protests. Perhaps one of the greatest legacies of the ‘60s was the unprecedented exposure of American flaws to its own citizens, and student anger towards the university was often due, in no small part, to university complicity with American structures and status quos students found detestable: racial oppression, military hegemony, and so on. Quite often, the university and its curriculum remained the most salient and easily affected institutions for students frustrated about other

³² Heath, 309.

³³ Irving Louis Horowitz & William H. Friedland, The Knowledge Factory, Student Power, and Academic Politics in America (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1970), 22.

facets of society they *couldn't* change. Still, what truly seemed to set this group of students apart was not just their rage at America, but their optimism in their own power to make a difference. Indeed, as Heath found in a survey of those involved in protests at Berkeley, protestors were not only more interested in politics than nonprotestors, but were also – perhaps most tellingly – more likely to believe in democracy.³⁴

* * *

The protests at Berkeley ultimately had great consequences, both at the school itself and in surrounding universities. At Berkeley, the protests of the fall of '64 – and the Free Speech Movement that developed as a result – culminated in the creation of the Center for Participant Education (CPE), which encouraged students to design their own education and offered alternative courses focusing on issues perceived as relevant to students. The Center, however, met the limits of bureaucratic leniency when the Board of Regents, incensed over a course taught by Black Power radical and ex-con Eldridge Cleaver, denied students credit for courses taught by people without an instructional title. Perhaps the greatest legacy of the Berkeley protests, however, was the discussion it stimulated -- not just among intellectuals but also among students at other universities across the country. Over 3,000 miles away, in Amherst, MA and Cambridge, MA, two other colleges would soon confront the same type of academic-based student protest. Those schools, like Berkeley, would in turn be forced to ponder: were students merely customers, like Kerr insisted? Or were they members of a community – with the power and influence that such a role entailed?

³⁴ Heath, 26-27.

Chapter Two: “Agitation in Amherst” Curricular Reform at the University of Massachusetts

Unlike its more storied counterpart in Cambridge, the University of Massachusetts was a relatively new institution as it approached the 1969-1970 school year. Founded in 1863 as part of the national land-grant movement, UMass was originally developed as Massachusetts Agricultural College, an institution devoted almost exclusively to agricultural education and science, and was incredibly slow to expand – at the end of the 19th century, the school’s enrollment still hovered below one hundred, and its curriculum still remained committed to agricultural pursuits.³⁵ In fact, the school had only begun to offer liberal arts classes in 1931, and did not become a full university until 1947.

Not only was the school new, but it was also – like many other schools of its era – relatively new to student protest. Throughout its short history, there had only been a few occasions of unrest among students, and many centered on the frivolous rather than the serious: the Class of 1881 held a student strike to protest the arrest of several students who had stolen the College cannon, and the class of 1878 struck to express disapproval over the disciplinary techniques employed by one Professor Cressy in the school of Veterinary Science, which consisted of “throwing horse bones at woolgathering students”.³⁶ Before the 1960s, the only serious protest aimed at changing the structure of the school was staged by the class of 1871: their focus was the system of mandatory farm labor, originally designed to promote “learning the operations of the farm and garden.” Students argued that the

³⁵ Freeland, 28.

³⁶ List of Student Strikes. Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA.

requirements interfered with other scholastic and extracurricular commitments, and issued a resolution to President Clark arguing that “the educational department of this institution should stand paramount to all others; and that no student should be allowed to perform optional or compulsory labor upon the farm to the detriment of his standing in college...The compulsory labor system, to ensure satisfaction and good feeling to all concerned, should be immediately abolished.”³⁷

Despite the lack of protest and disruption in previous years, it was clear at the dawn of the '69-'70 school year that times – and the University itself -- were changing. The most dramatic change, of course, came in the school's size. From 1958 to 1968, the school's enrollment quadrupled, and in the first seven years of the '60s, enrollment grew at a brisk pace of 1,500 students per year. Beyond putting a strain on the university's physical and educational resources, the growing size of the university also brought about its share of social problems. In December of 1966, UMass saw a spate of violent and disruptive incidents on campus, including the shooting of a female student by her ex-lover and several suicides. When questioned about the recent incidents, Dean of Students William Field attributed the violence to “the times...and the wider community ‘unease’ ” but also the tensions created by a large and crowded campus, stating that “these represent the continuing problems of any large school.”³⁸

The school also quickly began to feel the effects of the chaotic political environment of the late '60s. Even bucolic Amherst could not remain sheltered from the political upheaval affecting college campuses across the nation, and in February of 1969, members of

³⁷ Resolution issued to President Clark by the class of 1871, Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst MA.

³⁸ David Nyhan, “UMass Dean Calls Student Unrest Reflection of Broader Social Ills,” Daily Hampshire Gazette, 23 December 1966.

the campus' wing of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) conducted a take-over of the Whitmore Administrative Building, site of then-President John Lederle's office, to protest the on-campus recruiting of Dow Chemical, a company that in its contract work with the Department of Defense seemed to represent all the follies and evils of the Vietnam War. To end the standoff, President Lederle called in the Massachusetts State Police to remove students from the building, a decision that was met with outrage by many students. Asked later by a local newspaper to reflect on the situation, on the same day students at Harvard succeeded in their takeover of University Hall, President Lederle insisted, "This group presented an impossible demand that military and job recruiters be barred from campus. I had no room to move. The police were the only answer." Still, he acknowledged, "[Current students] are trying to solve real issues that are very important. In the old days, the issues were panty raids, and student drinking. Today we are confronted with treatment of the Negro and the Vietnam War – issues that were swept under the rug in the past."³⁹

Certainly, UMass was not the only campus in the country – or even the state – to find itself confronted with student rage over the Vietnam War and other political issues. Perhaps most interesting about the February 1969 protest and similar events at UMass, however, was that student qualms with the University *itself* – and, in particular, its curriculum and the lack of student involvement in changing it and other campus policies -- quickly took center stage, garnering more student interest than the anti-Vietnam elements of the demonstration. In a smaller demonstration the previous year, also to protest Dow Chemical's on-campus recruitment, the student newspaper *Daily Collegian* reported that "the tenor of the crowd...changed. The concern of the speakers shifted to a protest of University policies and the war became a secondary issue. Bart Kaplan, graduate student at UM and editor of the

³⁹ Neil Giroux, "Lederle Admits Student Takeover Successful," [Daily Hampshire Gazette](#), 17 April 1969.

Mother of Voices, began speaking against University policies, specifically criticizing the lack of dialogue between the administration and the students.” The *Mother of Voices*, the alternative publication mentioned in the *Daily Collegian* article, reported a similar change (albeit in more effusive language). They wrote, “In a spark of mystical truth...the REVOLUTION began. From Dow and recruitment it spread to student rights, open housing, curriculum revision, and student power.”⁴⁰

Ultimately, the Dow protest in February of '68 failed to garner considerable student attention or participation – precisely because, as some students contended, the protest refocused on Vietnam-related issues and moved away from problems seen as more relevant to students: namely, control over the curriculum and other elements of student life. One student commented, “The issues were supposed to be concentrated on core curriculum and open houses. But they (the radicals) threw in all sorts of things.” Another student, James Collins, agreed, saying, “What happened later...was that the leadership switched from the things the kids were upset about to other issues and everyone lost interest.”⁴¹

Students quoted in the *Daily Collegian* and *The Mother of Voices* were not the only sources to recognize the other issues at work in the wake of the Dow protest. In the spring of 1968, two authors, commissioned by the Massachusetts wing of the Bureau of Government Research, published a study assessing student views on their own education. The results showed a considerable amount of dissatisfaction with the quality of education students were receiving at UMass: 68% reported that poor teaching had been a “very important” or “important” problem faced by them over the course of their undergraduate career, and the

⁴⁰ University of Massachusetts Daily Collegian and The Mother of Voices, quoted in John Fenton and Gail Gleason, ed., Student Power at the University of Massachusetts: A Case Study (Amherst, MA: Bureau of Government Research, 1969), 10.

⁴¹ Fenton and Gleason, 14-18.

same percentage reported problems with the strictness of course requirements. Most importantly, these concerns translated to a strong desire for students to play a part in academic decision-making. While only 17 percent of those polled felt that students should be allowed an active role in business decisions of the University, a whopping 64% thought that student opinion should play an equal or better part in determining the school's course offerings.⁴² As of the spring of 1969, these academic problems had yet to create serious protest. All would change, however, when students arrived for the start of classes the following fall.

* * *

Student disruptions were only one of a host of problems facing John Lederle as he approached the twilight of his tenure as UMass president. Lederle, a lawyer and professor from Michigan who was rarely photographed without his horn-rimmed glasses, had been appointed to his position in 1960 to engineer what some termed UMass' "multiversity phase": to expand UMass' physical plant, enrollment, and budget to the levels already seen in public universities in California and Michigan. Part of the rationale behind the expansion, as was this case at many universities, was to meet the increased demand for higher education for middle-class students brought about by the Baby Boom. Lederle frequently used populism and state pride to garner approval for his expansion plans, and rallied against the perceived elitism displayed by other Massachusetts universities such as Harvard: as he insisted, "young people were coming along with no place to get an education" due to the fact that "private institutions in the Commonwealth were becoming national and elitist. There was this great

⁴² Fenton and Gleason, 17.

demand. I felt that the University of Massachusetts, being in the lead position, ought to meet that demand.”⁴³

And meet demand it did. When Lederle took the helm in 1962, one of every 150 Massachusetts young adults was attending UMass; by 1972, one of every 45 was, largely thanks to the newly-minted campus of UMass-Boston. Lederle also greatly expanded the school’s budget and physical size – during the same period, the number of buildings at the UMass campus at Amherst rose to 300, an increase of over 70%, and the budget increased to over \$100 million. Lederle acknowledged the strain such rapid changes placed on the campus, but seemed to relish the challenge: he declared UMass’ role to be “a great and continuing laboratory for testing the limits of accommodation between the demands of quantity and the need for quality.”⁴⁴ Lederle’s focus on size – and desire to model UMass after the greatness of Berkeley and Ann Arbor – was accompanied by a subtle shift in educational priorities, as he repeatedly stressed the importance of research and graduate studies in achieving his vision of the perfect university. This shifting focus, as expected, was met with considerable resistance from not only students but also the holders of the purse strings: the state legislature, who saw undergraduate teaching as of the utmost priority. As Lederle stated, “Legislators tend to think in terms of undergraduate teaching and teaching as primary, and it’s with great difficulty that you get them to appropriate directly for research... You have to squeeze and cut and work in various ways to get the state-funded support for research by squeezing it out of other things. This means fewer undergraduate

⁴³ Ronald Story, Five Colleges, Five Histories (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 63.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

teachers, teaching large classes, in order to take care of graduate students and research, and this leads you to the horn of the dilemma.”⁴⁵

Student disillusionment with the rapidly changing campus can be detected in many campus publications from the 1968-1969 school year. The 1969 “Index”, the yearbook for the graduating class, is replete with pictures of bulldozers and cranes preparing the campus for the latest campus high-rise, their blunt concrete skeletons serving as a stark contrast to the otherwise-pastoral Western Massachusetts landscape. One page in the yearbook provides a picture of a window in the traditional brick Quadrangle; below it lies the caption, “The Quad: Just as the Old Chapel standing amid the polished walls of the new buildings served as a symbol of what the campus once was, so the Quad, with its isolated ring of houses remained as a reminder of a time when the college was small, and buildings were separated by areas of grass instead of concrete...It retained a tradition of dorm spirit and unity, which, in a period of expansion and disruption, was becoming ever more difficult to find.”⁴⁶

Alternative publications from the '68-'69 school year also reflect an increasing dissatisfaction with the system of grading on campus, a system that was rapidly becoming ever more mechanized as the University expanded. Graduate student and teaching assistant Stanley Finehirsh wrote a letter to his Math 111 students following the Fall 1968 semester, one that was published in the alternative publication *Carbunkle Review* under the title “Degrading Education”. In it, he sympathized with his students’ objections with the grading system on campus, stating, “What are grades? Grades are an imposition on, and a distortion and manipulation of, the educational system. They are an imposition because they contribute nothing to an education. They are a distortion because they turn education from a

⁴⁵ Story, 70.

⁴⁶ University of Massachusetts 1969 Index, Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst MA, 71.

cooperative venture in knowledge to a competitive contest for expertise in getting high grades. They are a manipulation because they force us to do what we have no desire or need to do.” At the end of the letter, he announces his intention to give everyone an “A”, stating, “The true worth [of your participation in this class] was not in being patted on the head by teacher. The true worth was not in your competitive standing on a bell-shaped curve... Your achievement is in terms of the things you learned, the obstacles you overcame, and the goals you reached.”⁴⁷ Finehirsh’s letter echoes the objections to grading systems voiced by students across the nation – as seen in the previous chapter, ‘60s-era students often rejected the competition and careerism extolled by their school’s grading systems. His letter also perhaps indicates that many UMass students, like their peers at Berkeley and other universities, increasingly sought intrinsic value in their studies rather than the external rewards promised by good grades.

The expanding priorities UMass students ascribed to their own education can also be seen in the Bureau of Government Research poll conducted in the spring of ’68. Along with assessing their views on University policies and the desired student role in changing them, the poll also asked students the simple question: Why did you attend college? Perhaps not surprisingly at a mainstream, largely middle-class institution, many still saw job preparation as one of the primary reasons for attending college, with 94% declaring it “very important” or “important”. What is most interesting about the poll, however, is that similar percentages assigned importance to loftier pursuits. 90% reported that “intellectual stimulation” was important in their college education, and 92% gave value to an even more intangible goal: acquiring “self-knowledge”.⁴⁸ Students at UMass, like students across the country, were

⁴⁷ Sidney Firekirsh, “Degradation of Education,” Carbunkle Review, 27 March-10 April 1969.

⁴⁸ Fenton and Gleason, 49.

beginning to demand a sense of meaning and identity from their college experience -- and such quests, even at a large former agricultural college like UMass, were rapidly gaining as much importance as more traditional aims such as career preparation.

This quest for a more fulfilling educational experience – and UMass’ failure, as it became larger and more research-oriented, to provide such an opportunity -- led to one of the most visible displays of student discontent UMass had ever seen. In September of 1969, a group of undergraduates, initially motivated by dissatisfaction about not receiving on-campus housing or the classes they had requested, constructed a series of plastic geodesic domes behind the Southwest Residential College, which they soon dubbed “Free University City”. The tent community, however, sought to do much more than provide temporary shelter to those shut out of on-campus housing – or to give unruly students a way to “stick it to the Man” by invading the school’s physical plant. Aimed at increasing the sense of community on campus along with promoting closer interaction between faculty and students in teaching alternative subjects, Free University City began to offer a series of seminars on subjects such as “The French Revolution of 1844: From Barricades to Ballot Box (led by Bob Weiner) and “Seminar for Conscientiously Dissatisfied People” (led by Mental Health Services), not to mention a three-day seminar/workshop on sexuality as the means to personal freedom. The project rapidly increased in size and scope: propelled by a \$2000 budget appropriation from the Student Senate and a \$250 gift from the Class of 1972, the group soon collaborated with a Texas-based architecture group to increase the physical size of the project, and several hundred students attended the official opening ceremony one week after the beginning of construction.

More than expanding the “city’s” physical size, students soon elaborated on – and expanded – the reasons for its construction. More than just an ad-hoc response to the logistical problems created by an expanding campus, its creators argued, “Free University City” was instead a reaction to much more pervasive problems of alienation and disconnect on UMass’ campus. To express their claims, the founders published a “Rationale on Free University” in the September 17th issue of the *Daily Collegian*, UMass’ daily student newspaper. They argued, “All these problems in housing space, course scheduling, and financial aid are very recent, and are largely a result of the insufficient funds. Aside from these immediate issues, however, there are several more longstanding problems. The university has a history of showing disregard for both the internal lives of individual students, and for the external conditions of the world that lies outside the University”, a disregard that manifests itself in “an antiquated course requirement system”, a grading rubric that “guarantee[d] competitiveness rather than cooperation”, and a “basic exclusion of students from policy making and decision making.” They concluded their statement by writing: “Students no longer believe that the University is capable of rising to meet these issues. Therefore they have joined together to create a model of what a University out to be. Students from all over campus have organized and begun construction of a Free University City. The most important aspect of Free University City is that it is a constructive action.”⁴⁹

For the first few weeks of school in September, “Free University City” appeared to be the center of campus activity. Beyond attending seminars in the tents, students also staged skits meant to express their opinion on campus affairs: a picture published in the *Daily Collegian* shows one student dressed up as a wind-up man, meant to represent, according to

⁴⁹ “Rationale on Free University,” University of Massachusetts Daily Collegian, 17 September 1969.

the paper, “the rigidity which the students...face in classrooms and with school policy according to their characterizations.”⁵⁰

The tent city also soon attracted widespread attention from locals and parents. The Springfield Union, one of Western Massachusetts’ largest newspapers, published an editorial on the subject: the title, “ ‘Freedom’ on Campus”, with ‘freedom’ in skeptical quotation marks, speaks to the decidedly cynical tone of the piece. The editorial board wrote, “The geodesic-dome community on the University of Massachusetts campus is not really the answer to the problems of its members.” They go on to argue, “There are activities and organizations, official and nonofficial, that can help fill the gap between the ‘freedom’ that many students seek and what they regard as a cold and rigid administration...Whatever role the students are to have in the shaping of university policy will be impaired, not helped, by splinter groups that overlook avenues already open to such participation”, such as student government. Not only should students be contented with established ways of having their voices heard on campus, the authors argued, but they should also be grateful for the education they are receiving in the first place. They concluded their piece by insisting, “The competition is sharper every year among young people for the chance to get a college education. Those fortunate enough to make the grade can help themselves best by putting the emphasis on learning – while working, if they wish, to eliminate the problems of university life in ways that are truly constructive.”⁵¹

The sentiments of the editorial board at the Springfield Union were echoed the previous day by the staff at the Northampton Gazette, another local newspaper. More than just wasting students’ own education, they also insisted that the form of protest, at a state

⁵⁰ Diana D’India, “Recorder Photos,” University of Massachusetts Daily Collegian, 17 September 1969.

⁵¹ “ ‘Freedom’ on Campus,” The Springfield Union, 24 September 1969.

university, was a drain on taxpayer money. They declared, “One good thing about a ‘free university’ is that it is free to everyone but the taxpayer... The university is free because the domes have been erected on land bought and paid for by the Commonwealth.” They conclude, somewhat flippantly, “ ‘Free’, what a wonderful word! We suppose it is still all right for us to be ‘free’ to be a little fed up with all this inanity and wonder why all these hard-working students wouldn’t just get down to the business of getting their education...?”⁵²

Free University also received its fair share of attention from UMass alumni. In a September letter to President Lederle, Nelson Hair (class of ’68) wrote, “Both my wife and I are concerned graduates of the University. Up until the beginning of this academic year we were proud graduates... Within the late few days I have become aware of some of [the students’] demands. There is one that really disturbs me. They wish the grading system be abolished [because] it ‘breeds competition.’ This sounds like a very communistic demand... it would breed mediocrity, punish the ambitious and destroy the ‘intangible’ that made this the greatest country in the world.” Mr. Hair concludes by insisting, “We feel that the one way to insure [*sic*] the continued freedom of this country is to insure [*sic*] competition for Communism, by definition, can not survive in a competitive society. I know that many of their demands will be met, but for the benefit of the overall society, do not meet this one demand.”⁵³ For alums such as Mr. Hair, it seems, the student protest did not just represent an assault upon a taxpayer-funded institution: their demands also represented a challenge to American values, a sentiment that expresses the increasing “value gap” between younger students and their older counterparts.

⁵² “It’s Great to be ‘Free,’” Northampton Gazette, 23 September 1969.

⁵³ Nelson Hair, Agawam, MA, to John Lederle, Amherst, MA, 24 September 1969, Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst MA.

Such a “value gap”, however, was not just limited to students and their older neighbors. In fact, a similar rift existed between the students who participated in or supported activities such as Free University and other students – albeit a minority – who did not. The Bureau of Government Research poll conducted in the aftermath of the Dow sit-in collected demographic data in addition to assessing student attitudes, and sought to establish correlations between how students felt about student protests and how they described themselves. Out of the 16% of the sample that was strongly anti-“student power”, which the authors define as an active student role in academic and administrative decision-making, most tended to fall into a few demographic groups: they generally lived at home, defined themselves as Republican, reported their father’s profession as “small business”, or were fourth-generation or more American.⁵⁴ As one can see, students more likely to embrace conservative, “traditional” values also tended to view students’ role within the University in more traditional terms. Rather than believe students should have an active role in changing course requirements or making faculty appointments, such students were more apt to leave such decision-making power in the hands of those who had traditionally wielded it: members of the administration.

For their part, the faculty and administration did little to halt the activities of Free University City’s founders. Most seemed to be relieved that the activities of Free University City did not take on the confrontational undertones of the previous year’s anti-Dow demonstration, and thus the administration did not attempt to disband the City: in a statement to the *Daily Collegian* on September 22nd, Assistant Dean of Students Gerald Scanlon stated, “Up to this point there is no reason why they shouldn’t be permitted to go ahead unless they interfere with the right of other students, or the operation of the University, or present a

⁵⁴ Fenton and Gleason, 21.

health or safety hazard.”⁵⁵ Pictures published in the *Daily Collegian* show Provost Oswald Tippo standing outside one of the tents with Paul Brubacker, assistant dean of students, and William Venman, associate dean of administration, arms folded in a “relaxed position” as Brubacker smoked a cigarette. The men, with their suit-and-tie attire and slicked-back hair, provide a somewhat amusing contrast to the hippie scene around them, but for their part seem moderately unconcerned with the students’ latest architecture project.⁵⁶

Many faculty members, furthermore, actively collaborated with the project by teaching seminars and workshops on the green; many others, while not participating actively, sympathized with the alienation felt by students and attempted to communicate their sentiments to the administration. In the last week of September, Professor Ellsworth Barnard wrote a lengthy memo to President Lederle expressing the attitudes towards UMass expressed by the students in his classes. He wrote, “Not many were actually involved in, or perhaps very fully informed about, the Free University, but almost all were in sympathy with any attempt to dramatize their grievances against the University.” He went on to delineate their specific complaints against the school; namely, problems with registering for classes, advising, and overcrowded classes and dorms. He asserted that the overall root of discontent ran much deeper, however, arguing, “Their general complaint – and it is no less strongly felt because it is so trite – is that nobody really cares about them, nobody treats them as individual human beings, nobody listens to their unique problems. They feel themselves

⁵⁵ Mark Silverman, “Free University Grows and Develops,” *University of Massachusetts Daily Collegian*, 22 September 1969.

⁵⁶ Diana D’India, “Recorder Photos,” *University of Massachusetts Daily Collegian*, 22 September 1969.

trapped by policies about which they have not been consulted or even informed, and which seem to them to have been adopted without regard to their needs or interests or feelings.”⁵⁷

As for President Lederle himself, his feelings on the students seemed mixed – perhaps as mixed as the divergent interests to which he, as president of a taxpayer-accountable university, was expected to pander. When it came to student confrontations in the past, Lederle was frequently criticized for being either too permissive or too harsh: while student leaders decried his decision to summon the State Police during the Dow confrontation, he also received a letter from Professor Richard Trueswell, head of the Industrial Engineering Department, insisting that the President take “a very strong hard line, (clearly defined) on your part whenever ever students violate the rights of others...I urge you and implore you to do something to correct the degrading image of the University that is currently being developed by a very small and active group on campus.”⁵⁸ To Professor Trueswell’s memo, Lederle replied, “There are many of us who would like to take a stronger and more direct stand, but there is plenty of evidence that there are large numbers of faculty and students who feel that in the case of the Dow sit-in we moved too rapidly...If I had a more vocal faculty and student support, I could follow a much harder line. I have said very frankly on many occasions that the kind of student disruptions occurring today violate academic freedom and invite outside interference. I have no sympathy for the juveniles who indulge in these in order to have their ‘thing’.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ellsworth Barnard, Amherst, MA to John Lederle, Amherst, MA, 28 September 1969, Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts, Amherst MA.

⁵⁸ Richard Trueswell, Amherst, MA, to John Lederle, Amherst, MA, 25 March 1969, Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst MA.

⁵⁹ John Lederle, Amherst, MA, to Richard Trueswell, Amherst, MA, 28 April 1969, Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst MA.

When it came to the Free University debacle, President Lederle faced equally conflicting interests. On the one hand, he had the needs of the students to contend with – and those of their faculty sympathizers. In response to Ellsworth Barnard’s letter detailing student complaints, Lederle wrote, “Those of us in administration have no defensive reactions to these criticisms. While students repeat many clichés, the fact is that they do feel alienated and ignored and that there are a sufficient number of faculty and administrative personnel who corroborate the stereotype... We must all work continually to create ‘the humane university’.”⁶⁰ In response to the similarly timed letter from disgruntled graduate Nelson Hair, however, Lederle expressed a radically different attitude towards Free University City and the student qualms expressed through its construction. While he stressed, “The so-called ‘dome city’ activities are being carried on by a much more moderate group [than SDS, who led the Dow sit-in]”, he mused, “Certainly one of the less pleasant aspects of being a university president these days is the need for responding to often absurd demands by unhappy students.” Far from acknowledging the legitimacy of student qualms and the need to remedy them, Lederle then went on to assure Mr. Hair, “That we listen to complaints does not mean that improper demands will be complied with... I suppose the nature of a grading system will be debated ad infinitum by students and faculty in the future as in the past. I have serious doubts that any majority on this campus will move in the direction of eliminating competition completely. Individual differences exist and systems for making distinctions between individuals are bound to survive.”⁶¹

⁶⁰ John Lederle, Amherst, MA, to Ellsworth Barnard, Amherst, MA, 30 September 1969, Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst MA.

⁶¹ John Lederle, Amherst, MA, to Mr. and Mrs. Nelson E. Hair, Agawam, MA, 26 September 1969, Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst MA.

President Lederle's predictions about the attitudes of the student majority would soon be tested in a dramatic fashion. In April of '70, a few short months after the construction of Free University City, classes and daily life at the University came to a screeching halt for two days, as the a committee comprised of members of the student Senate, faculty, and staff members organized a school-wide referendum and several day-long discussion groups to address proposed changes to the school's grading system and to students' role in school decision-making. The faculty Senate and Chancellor Oswald Tippo both ceded to the group's – dubbed the April 10-11th Committee -- request that classes be cancelled from April 10th-April 11th so that students, faculty, and administrators could come together in discussion groups on topics ranging from the Board of Trustee's role in campus decision-making to potential changes to the layout of dormitories to create a more intimate sense of community on campus. Reports on the discussion groups issued by the *Daily Collegian* – and, indeed, the titles of the discussion groups themselves -- reflect the overwhelming sense of loss of community felt in the wake of the school's expansion and a sense of uncertainty about the school's educational direction. Among the different groups students had the option of attending during the 2-day teach-in were ones titled "Nobody Cares – Dignity for the Individual within the Institution", "Can Students and Faculty Ever Relate?" and "Do The Humanities Have Any Future at UMass?"⁶² One student, living in a recently-constructed high-rise building, said in a discussion group on dorm groupings, "I know most of [the students] in my corridor, but I don't know many more... everything is so impersonal when you don't know people."⁶³

⁶² "April 10-11 Committee Plans For Shut-Down of University," University of Massachusetts Daily Collegian, 31 March 1970.

⁶³ "Smaller Dorm Groupings Suggested," University of Massachusetts Daily Collegian, 11 April 1970.

In addition to feeling the effects of lost community, students participating in the discussion groups of April 10-11 also reported feeling increasingly disconnected from – and devalued by – professors and administrators. In class-related discussions, many students reported that it wasn't necessarily the size of increasingly large lecture classes that caused their discontent; it was, rather, the increasing reluctance of professors to give students the opportunity to participate in class or share ideas. Professors in the discussion groups, however, countered that students often did not take advantage of participation opportunities given to them. Reported one professor, "Students say they want smaller classes, more discussion between themselves and the faculty, but they don't say anything when I give them this opportunity. Is it because they don't expect to discuss anything?" Student dissatisfaction in the classroom thus appeared to be a vicious cycle: accustomed to the passive learning style promoted by many of their classes, some students weren't prepared to take advantage of the few chances for interaction given to them. A similar pattern of "learned helplessness" emerged in discussions of the student role in decision-making on campus. Students in the groups reported an overwhelming desire for an active role in everything ranging from dorm designing to faculty appointments – but acknowledged that the apathy of a vast majority of the student body often hindered such efforts. Students insisted, however, that much of the seemed disinterest was due to a "feeling of powerlessness in changing the university; a feeling of impotence." One student questioned, "How can we do anything when they only tell us about a problem when the decision is already made? How can we affect the final decision?"⁶⁴

The discussion groups of April 10-11, more than just giving students a space to air their grievances, resulted in tangible changes later in the semester. Proposals generated from

⁶⁴ "UMass Problems Distill to Interaction," The Massachusetts Gazette, 11 April 1970.

the different discussion groups made it onto a campus-wide referendum issued to students, faculty, and staff in early May, with questions on university complicity with the war, grades, reorganization of the academic calendar, and required courses. While nonbinding, the referendum was declared “a measure of sentiment on basic campus issues” and “[would] be used to guide and support campus change and reform.”⁶⁵ Many of the questions on the ballot concerned proposed changes to academic competition and course requirements: one asked for student and faculty sentiment on adding a “no record” option to the current ABCDF system (which would also eliminate the “f” designation), along with a Pass/No Record with Portfolio option, whereby students would be able to submit a series of teacher evaluations and papers in place of a letter grade to those requesting a transcript. Still others asked for opinions on the current core requirements for students. Still, the fashion in which opinions were collected perhaps reflected the increasing disconnect between student desire to be heard and seen “as individuals” and the bureaucratic needs of a large university: respondents were only allowed to record “yes” or “no” answers, and all responses were recorded on IBM cards – the same IBM cards substituted for students in a Berkeley cartoon meant to mock university depersonalization.

The results of the referendum were released in late May, just a few weeks before commencement. In total, only about a third of the approximate 20,000 undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, administration, and staff voted on the referendum; however, approximately 6,000 undergraduates voted, placing their rate of participation at slightly less than 50%. By an overwhelming margin, undergraduate students voted to drop the “F” designation from students’ records, replacing it with the designation “no record” – 3,527 supported the measure, compared with 1,929 opposed. Comparing the undergraduate

⁶⁵ “Referendum Plans Announced,” University of Massachusetts Daily Collegian, 21 April 1970.

opinion on that measure with that of other demographic groups illustrates the generational gap at work when it came to measures of performance: the other groups voted 810 to 375 against eliminating the “F” designation – faculty and administrators voted most vehemently against the proposal, by a margin of 262 to 80. However, even students did not support a radical overhaul of the traditional letter grading system: when asked if they favored a pass/no record with portfolio system for *all* classes, students voted no, by a 600-person margin. Students did, however, favor having the option of such a designation. Whether or not students were able to articulate what grading system they would prefer in its place, they overwhelmingly rejected the current ABCDF system, by a ratio of almost 2.5 to 1.

From the results of the referendum – as well as the student complaints that motivated the referendum in the first place – it becomes clear that many UMass students in 1969 took issue with the same grading rubric their predecessors had accepted for decades. This refusal was seemingly not because students simply couldn’t succeed under such a system: in fact, by all traditional quantitative measures of academic achievement, the entering freshman class of 1969 –as was the case for their upperclassmen peers – surpassed their earlier counterparts by leaps and bounds. The entering class of 1969 posted a median SAT score of 1160, and that of the freshman class a year earlier was not much lower, at 1140, whereas their peers in the entering class of 1963 reported median scores of over 100 points lower.⁶⁶ The entering classes of the late ‘60s also faced greater competition in receiving admission to the school in the first place. In 1959, the school accepted almost 60% of applicants; by 1967, that percentage had dwindled to 41%.⁶⁷ Even outsiders commented on the staggering shift in the academic talent of the student body as a result of the expansion: in the 1967 New England

⁶⁶ Alison Cox, “Factbook”, March 1977, Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst MA, 86.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 36.

Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools report on UMass, the evaluators wrote, “As a consequence of the rapid growth and change which characterize the University...the undergraduate students are a highly selected group. They are intelligent and well prepared for college work.”⁶⁸ So why, if the students of the late 1960s had proved themselves more capable of succeeding by traditional academic measures than their earlier peers, did they decry such systems as “rigid” and overly competitive?

Perhaps the increasing academic achievement of the late ‘60s students rendered them *more*, not less, likely to take issue with their own education. While academic achievement and intellectual curiosity don’t always go hand-in-hand, for the late ‘60s UMass generation they apparently did: as the school became more competitive and the students in turn became more qualified, many students also became more likely to take a critical approach to their own educations. Certainly, this wasn’t true for all students -- many still remained apathetic and disinterested in campus protest activities – but the nuanced claims voiced by those who *did* complain points to such a connection. Furthermore, judging by the increasing number of students seeking “intellectual stimulation” from their undergraduate years, students clearly expected more than grade-based validation from UMass: instead, they increasingly demanded the exercise of their own intelligence.

* * *

The dawn of the ’70-’71 school year, following the tents, protests, and referenda of the tumultuous previous year, brought many changes to UMass’ academic environment. In October of ’69, following the development of Free University City and its creators’ complaints of an “antiquated course requirement system”, then-Acting Dean of the College

⁶⁸ “Report to The New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools on the University of Massachusetts, 8 September 1967, Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst MA, 5.

of Arts and Sciences Seymour Shapiro initiated a review and revamping of the College curriculum required for graduation. The end result, approved by the majority of the faculty, created an option of “independent scholar” in place of declaring a major, replaced all specific courses required of all College graduates (such as English 125/126) with distribution requirements, and reduced many already-existing distribution requirements – instead of needing 18 Natural Science/Math credits, students now only needed 12.⁶⁹ Following the results of the campus-wide referendum, the administration also approved the introduction of a “pass-no record” option for undergraduates, a change that, while seemingly minor, appears to have had a lasting effect on the academic culture at the school. One page of the ’71 Index contains images of students in a ballet class, faces strained in concentration as they engage in *battements*. The pictures are accompanied by the caption, “Now, for many, scenes of lab sciences and physical education are obsolete – a nightmare of years past, countless eight-o’clocks spent kicking a soccer ball or watching planeria. But some, boldened by lesser requirements and pass-fail options, branched out and explored areas foreign to them. They learned, unpressured and interested, and became fuller individuals. By these curriculum reforms, another step was taken towards the true goal of the University.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Seymour Shapiro, Amherst, MA, to College of Arts and Sciences Faculty, Amherst, MA, 27 May 1969 – plan ratified in Seymour Shapiro, Amherst MA, to College of Arts and Sciences Students and Faculty, Amherst, MA, 24 November 1969, Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst MA.

⁷⁰ University of Massachusetts 1971 Index, Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst MA.

Chapter Three: “Harvard New College” Curricular Reform at Harvard University

Approximately 100 miles to the east of the elm-lined streets and stark concrete architecture of UMass-Amherst lies a school of a very different caliber, one whose ivy-covered dormitories and lofty lecture halls practically speak for themselves: Harvard University. Founded in 1636 by the Puritan settlers of Massachusetts Bay, the school, beyond holding the honor of being the United States’ oldest educational institution, also maintained its title of being its most esteemed, educating scores of Boston’s finest Brahmin sons and preparing them for entry into law, politics – and, perhaps most importantly, into civilized society. In short, the name Harvard, as the school approached the 1968-1969 school year more than three centuries later, remained synonymous in the public consciousness with elite propriety – quite the opposite of the disruptive disobedience taking hold at many other universities across the U.S. Even a September visit to campus from Marc Rudd, leader of the SDS branch at Columbia and one of the more revered symbols of the student power movement, failed to incite revolutionary fervor in Harvard students. As the *Crimson* wrote of Rudd’s visit, which included a video on the sit-in at Columbia and a speech by Deitrich Wessel, head of the German branch of SDS: “It soon became evident that half the crowd was more interested in watching a free movie than starting the Revolution. Knots of open-collared, sport-jacketed students sat yawning and chatting through Wessel’s hour and ten minute opening speech.”⁷¹

Even Harvard, however, would not remain untouched by campus disruption for long. On April 9th, 1969, students stormed and occupied one of Harvard’s oldest buildings and one

⁷¹ John G. Short, “Columbia Film, Rudd Get Mixed Reception,” *The Harvard Crimson*, 28 September 1968.

of the symbols of its prestige, University Hall, demanding that the school eliminate its R.O.T.C. program and allow student involvement in the selection of Afro-American Studies professors. President Pusey summoned the police the next morning to clear the building by force – yet his swift action, far from bringing an end to the controversy, fomented even more student discontent. Students, led by the school’s branch of the SDS, proceeded to undertake a two-week strike of University classes and activities, one that did not end until the faculty voted to accede to the R.O.T.C. and Afro-American Studies-related student demands. This level of disorder at America’s most hallowed – and, seemingly, tradition-bound – university attracted widespread national attention. Images of Harvard’s placid Quadrangle, filled with statues of Harvard’s illustrious founders and alumni, uprooted by scores of disorderly students seemed an apt parable for the dismantling of tradition – and authority – at universities across the country. If Harvard couldn’t quell student discontent, what school could?

Beyond the more attention-grabbing political uprisings on Harvard’s campus, the school was meanwhile facing a quieter threat, this one aimed at the very essence of Harvard’s identity: its undergraduate curriculum. On April 15th, while many students boycotted traditional classes, a small group of students and teaching fellows began offering alternative courses, in the form of “Harvard New College”. The College, an educational experiment run out of student dorm rooms rather than classrooms, offered seventeen courses in subjects such as “Radicalism in America: Past and Present” and “Social Relevance of Science.” Much like UMass’ Free University City, Harvard New College did not last long. Yet its very existence, however brief, represented the larger discontent many students felt not just with America’s involvement in Vietnam or their school’s complicity with the war effort, but also with their

very own education. Projects such as Harvard New College, along with greater student pressures, soon led College of Arts and Sciences Dean Ernest May to initiate the first review of the College's curriculum in nearly twenty-five years, and led to greater reflection among students, faculty, and the administration about the purposes of undergraduate education in the U.S.' rapidly shifting economic and social circumstances.

Student dissatisfaction with their own curricula, as was the case at UMass, reflected many things: discontent with courses and classroom styles that left students feeling alienated and disconnected from the academic process *and* students' need to be considered as individuals rather than mere cogs in the wheels of the U.S. economy. Their anger can thus be seen as an indication of university policies that had simultaneously changed to focus on preparing students for industry, yet had also failed to adapt to the new reflective individualism of '60s-era young adults. What the movement thus reveals is that Harvard, as an institution, was changing dramatically over the course of the '50s and '60s to accommodate the needs of the new economy – and that its student body was changing dramatically as well. Unlike at UMass, however, where the largest change occurring in student demographics was increased academic talent, the shift at Harvard seemed to be, overwhelmingly, one of values.

* * *

While Dean May's examination of the curriculum was the first of its kind in twenty-five years, the early part of the century – the era immediately following the end of World War Two – served as a time of immense educational innovation at many universities across

the country. Harvard, in fact, served as one of the pioneers of this educational innovation, with its publication of the *Redbook* in 1945. Imbued with the nationalistic spirit sweeping the nation upon the end of the war, the *Redbook* stressed the importance of cultivating a shared body of knowledge among its students – and, in doing so, creating not only good scholars but “good citizens”.⁷² To that end, Harvard instituted requirements in three divisional departments: by the end of their four years at Harvard, all undergraduates were required to have taken at least one course in each of the three areas. While the ideals of general education in practice amounted to little more than distributional requirements seen in many universities today, we will see later that the “Gen Ed” premise proved to be onerous to many later students, as the requirements often could only be filled with large – and often-alienating -- lecture classes.

As Harvard moved into the ‘50s and into the Cold War era, a different – one might say competing – ideal of higher education developed, one that emphasized not a shared base of humanistic knowledge but, instead, increasing specialization and technical aptitude. One early proponent of this approach was Harvard President James Conant, who took the helm of the university in 1933 and remained president until 1953. While Conant had supported the work of the Redbook committee and the ultimate institution of general education requirements, he also believed the future of higher education – and the key to Harvard’s continuing dominance as the nation’s premier university – lay in research and graduate education, and during his tenure worked to improve the caliber of Harvard’s advanced studies departments. Conant himself served on the National Research Defense Council from 1941-1946, and thus no doubt understood the important role universities could hold in both sponsoring research directly and in cultivating future scientists and researchers – but his

⁷² *Report of the Harvard Committee on General Education in a Free Society*, quoted in Freeland, 79.

leanings as a fiscal conservative seems to have precluded any substantial research institutions from being constructed during his reign.⁷³

Despite Conant's stated belief in the importance of research, Harvard didn't reach its fullest manifestation of the "multiversity" model until the reign of President Nathan Pusey. Writing in the 1958-1959 Annual Report of the President, Pusey commented, "The requirements now placed on universities by a complex culture are more numerous, more various, and more exacting than an earlier age could imagine. They call for an ever more discerning and deeper scholarship, and for an increasing number of mature scholars.." He concluded his report by quoting an 1823 report by Harvard's Board of Overseers, which found itself at the precipice of the Industrial Revolution just as Harvard, in Pusey's time, confronted the needs of a technology-based, Cold War society. The report insisted that "in a society like ours, which is continually expanding and embracing more elevated objects of research, the nature and extent of University education, and the methods of instruction, must be, in some degree, liable to change, so as to be adapted to the spirit of the age." Pusey concluded, "This was then a wise view of a university's practice: it is no less apposite today."⁷⁴

Pusey's take on the need for adaptation in universities – adaptation that, most importantly, would conform to the changing needs of society – would prove prophetic for the decade to come. Unlike Conant, whose fiscal restraint prevented Harvard from undertaking many large research projects, Pusey was an ardent supporter of advanced-level collaborative research centers, many of the caliber and focus one might see at large, decentralized institutions such as Berkeley. In his 1958 annual report, written in *Sputnik's* aftermath,

⁷³ Freeland, 81.

⁷⁴ Nathan Pusey, Report of the President of Harvard College and Reports of Departments (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Printing Office, 1960), 23.

Pusey wrote enthusiastically of Harvard's new Center for International Affairs, writing, "In the light of recent events perhaps there is a hopeful juxtaposition here between the study of the power within the atom and problems of relationships between nations." He went on to report that the Center would provide a particularly "important supplement" to three other geographically-based research centers at Harvard: those studying the Soviet Union, the Middle East, and East Asia. Perhaps most tellingly, the director of the new Center, Robert Bowie – himself the former Assistant Secretary of State for Policy Planning – was to receive assistance from Henry Kissinger.⁷⁵

Changes to the undergraduate curriculum in Pusey's years also speak to the increasing focus on research and specialization. A 1963 faculty report commissioned by the Dean of Arts and Sciences and led by faculty member Paul Doty proposed "the introduction of new subjects, advanced work and course sequences that would permit students to develop a particular interest in greater depth." Furthermore, they proposed allowing "specialized departmental courses" to fulfill General Education requirements – recommendations that were all passed, to little controversy, in a faculty meeting.⁷⁶ The idea of the well-rounded Renaissance Man seems to have been supplanted, at least in part, by a new ideal: that of the research expert, one who would be well-prepared to enter the new economy and lead the nation in solving many of the "pressing problems" Harvard's new research institutes themselves sought to address.

Overall, Conant's and the beginning of Pusey's reign saw, as Richard Freeland argued, the rise of a "homogenized research culture", one that not only promoted specialization but also defined achievement by increasingly objective – and therefore

⁷⁵ Nathan Pusey, Report of the President of Harvard College and Reports of Departments (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Printing Office, 1958), 7.

⁷⁶ Freeland, p. 156.

measurable – standards. Still, relics of Harvard’s not-so-distant past, which saw collective knowledge and the cultivation of the “good citizen” as the preeminent aim of undergraduate education, still remained. “Gen Ed” requirements, while loosened to allow for more flexibility in course planning, endured as a central part of each undergraduate’s educational experience. Harvard undergraduates, thus, found themselves at the center of somewhat contradictory aims. Encountering an institutional exhortation for increased expertise and focus, the students were still weighed down by shared course requirements. The annoyances of “Gen Ed” is palpable in many ‘60s and ‘70s-era editions of student-written *The Confidential Guide to Harvard*, or the “Conf Guide” for short. Intended as a guide to Harvard classes and professors for hapless freshmen as they struggled with course planning, the guides also serve as a window into upperclassmen frustrations. As one guide stated bluntly, about Gen Ed, “Courses in the Gen Ed program can be superficial, unrewarding, boring.”⁷⁷

Students also began to detect another shift in Harvard’s focus, one that was part and parcel of Pusey’s plan to adapt the school to meet the “pressing needs” of the 20th century: increased emphasis on the sciences – often at the cost of the humanities. In the winter of 1966, the *Crimson* reported on a \$35 million fundraising drive for undergraduate and graduate science programs proposed by Pusey, along with another for the International Studies center, and observed, “The Arts and Sciences fund drive is not as far advanced as any of these.”⁷⁸ A faculty committee commissioned in 1969 came to a similar conclusion: in

⁷⁷ The Confidential Guide to Harvard, 1972 edition, ed. Harry Hurt, 5. HUK 305.14, Box 1, Harvard University Archives.

⁷⁸ “Pusey’s Annual Report Heralds \$35 Million Drive for Science,” The Harvard Crimson, 21 January 1966.

assessing the collective funds available to all the disciplines, it found that the sciences had the most at their disposal – and the humanities had the least.⁷⁹

All of these trends – more focus on sciences, increased funding for research rather than instruction -- seemed to go hand-in-hand with another development, one that quickly emerged as a major point of contention in the protests of '69: increased reliance on federal funds to support such research. For his part, Pusey – at least in the early days of his tenure -- seemed determined to keep some modicum of independence at Harvard. Even in annual reports, he often lamented the “trumpeting outside” that made independent learning seemingly impossible.⁸⁰ Still, he acknowledged that complete independence from government and other social institutions was, in an era dependent on university-supplied knowledge and university-produced workers, virtually impossible. As he wrote in a Harvard report on federal funding in 1961, “The university no longer expects to avoid involvement in public affairs, for it is by now all too clear that free universities and free political institutions are interdependent and their futures intertwined.”⁸¹ Harvard’s budget changed accordingly: in 1967, over 40% of its money for research and teaching within departments came from the government.⁸²

Students, however, quickly used the influx of federal funds as evidence of governmental cooptation of their education. In May of 1969, in the aftermath of the University Hall sit-in and resulting strike, the *Crimson* issued a feature article on the changing relationship between Harvard and other universities and the government. Noting the increased levels of federal funding to schools and to individual professors, the article

⁷⁹ Freeland, 147.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁸¹ Pusey, quoted in James Glassman, “A Report on the Future of the University,” *The Harvard Crimson*, 7 May 1969.

⁸² Freeland, 146.

concludes that, while Harvard remained perhaps the most independent university, “Harvard has become deeply dependent on federal funds for its survival...[and] that dependence causes university administrators to act often with the interests of the federal government, not the university, in their minds.” The author goes on to insist that Pusey’s unwillingness to eliminate Harvard’s ROTC program was a reflection of this dependence; doing so would “clearly harm Harvard’s relationship with the federal government.” Beyond the implications of federal involvement in the ROTC debacle, however, students also clearly recognized the enormous connotations such an association had for their education as a whole. The author pointed out that much of federal aid to universities, rather than support institutional activities in general, went directly to scientific research, a “product” which the government was in the market to purchase.

What could this mean for regular undergraduates? The *Crimson* author responded with a quote from a report by the Association of American Universities, one that echoes many of the most urgent fears about higher education in an era of shifting national priorities. It reads, “Perhaps higher education has responded too much to trends in American society...Although America’s new position in the world calls for the highest level of social, philosophical, and political leadership, the universities build larger laboratories [and] federal programs encouraged universities to do these things. Thus have federal programs encouraged higher education to turn away from its first function of criticizing, prodding, and even leading out national thinking.” Beyond failing in their task of providing an unbiased view of society, Harvard and other universities – also due to increased federal funding, and the shift in priorities such a step displayed – also seemed to be neglecting their most important duty: instilling a humanities-centered base of knowledge in their undergraduates.

The author of the *Crimson* article condemned the lack of balance between the sciences and humanities at Harvard, noting that because Social Science and Humanities departments did not receive the same level of funding as their science counterparts, students “have become cut off from their professors and from much of the learning experience because there are not enough professors to go around.”⁸³

Students also spoke out on the arbitrary and alienating processes of grades and exams, oftentimes seeing grades as analogous to the oppressive, competitive bureaucracy of the society they were set to enter upon graduation. In the spring of 1969, one student published a piece in *The Crimson* proposing that all students boycott their spring examinations. The author’s rationale behind the proposed boycott provides a great deal of insight into students’ qualms with their own education at Harvard – and how they tied such complaints to greater issues they and other members of their generation had with society at large. As the author insisted, “The academic system here does not serve our interests as students and as people, but is in fact opposed to those interests.” Arguing that modern universities such as Harvard had become production centers for modern bureaucrats rather than true hubs of intellectual and personal development, he elaborated, “If schools are primarily designed as teaching models of modern economic enterprises, then grades become the hard coin of the scholastic marketplace. Students learn to sell their labor for money by selling their labor for grades. Exactly as in an office or factory, the school encourages students not to think about the intrinsic pleasure or displeasure of the work they are required to do, but to respond solely to the easily controllable incentive system provided by the authorities.”⁸⁴

⁸³ James Glassman, “A Report on the Future of the University,” *The Harvard Crimson*, 7 May 1969.

⁸⁴ David I. Bruck, “A Proposal Concerning Exams,” *The Harvard Crimson*, 28 April 1969.

As becomes clear from petitions like this, Harvard students' anger towards the overly competitive nature of their undergraduate education was part and parcel of problems they identified within modern society at large. Just as students turned a critical eye towards American society – and searched for ways to live personally fulfilling ways within that society, as shown in SDS' *The Port Huron Statement* a few years earlier – they also began to evaluate their own Harvard educations, and often found their coursework devoid of all meaning or personal value. Even more moderate students, while certainly not proposing exam boycotts, seemed to share Bruck's sense of despair. In the 1969-1970 *Confidential Guide*, the authors, in providing advice to freshmen on how to write papers, stated somewhat fatalistically, "The success or failure of a paper, as meat for the grade-grinding factory, will depend on how closely it conforms to some mythical prototype. Accordingly, you do yourself an injustice by not trying to find out, in advance and in detail, exactly the sort of paper that is desired."⁸⁵

As was the case at UMass, the increased cynicism among Harvard students about the nature of their education came at a time when the student body was more intellectually talented than ever before. Applications had risen dramatically over the course of the '50s and '60s, from 3,100 in 1952 to 5,200 in 1960 and, finally, to 7,200 in 1967. Given that the number of accepted students over this same time period had increased only slightly, especially in comparison with other schools, the end result was a student body of "unprecedented ability and preparation." Then-Dean of Admissions Wilbur Bender pronounced in 1960 that dropping admissions rates, combined with a new "needs-blind" admissions policy, had produced a student body more academically-prepared than ever, one

⁸⁵ The Confidential Guide to Harvard, 1969-1970 edition, ed. James Lardner, 5. HUK 305.14, Box 1, Harvard University Archives.

whose acceptance depended solely on academic brilliance rather than wealth or social connections. He insisted that the new policies had fostered “the greatest change in the Harvard student body in a short time – two college generations – in our recorded history.”⁸⁶ While the academic talent of Harvard’s student body had certainly risen, however, it remains unclear whether the new admissions policies had truly changed Harvard’s academic caliber as much as Bender envisioned – and it undoubtedly hadn’t changed as much as it had at UMass. As Nicholas Lemann argued in *The Big Test*, his study of admissions policies at American universities in the 20th century, Harvard was simply too dependent on alumni donations to become a true meritocracy. Referencing Bender’s “needs-blind” policy, he argued, “The connection between family money and higher education was never truly severed. The level of government support for private universities never rose high enough to allow them to stop needing alumni contributions...If [a meritocracy] were adopted wholesale, there would be no way to pay the bills.”⁸⁷ Because of its needs as a private university, Harvard continued to accept students of subpar academic merit, on the basis of family or financial connections.

As student complaints make clear, the largest change occurring within the student body at Harvard was one not of talent but of values. A March 1969 Alumni Bulletin reported that the average Harvard senior was “unhappy with the formal education of Harvard College...totally uninterested in business, less concerned about a career than about a life, wanting to create and wondering whether I’m capable, wanting to help and wondering how I can.” This overall attitude shift manifested itself in more quantitative ways as well. 250 seniors in 1970 reported themselves in “vocational limbo” – almost three times the number in

⁸⁶ Freeland, 154.

⁸⁷ Nicholas Lemann, *The Big Test* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1999), 140.

1967.⁸⁸ James Ackerman, a professor of Fine Arts and the Radcliffe Class of '69 Commencement speaker, aptly summed up the change in student values that he saw as at the heart of all Harvard student protests, including the ROTC strike in the spring. In his own college generation, he argued, students generally agreed upon – and accepted – the traditional trappings of ‘the good life’: a good job, financial success, et cetera. Harvard students of '69, however, had begun to realize that “our image of success has had little in it that bears of the quality of life. Our goal has been to make the grade...Rarely does a person who has arrived socially and financially stop scrambling in order to enjoy life.”⁸⁹

Ackerman’s comments capture a sea change occurring within the tradition-steeped walls of Harvard. Even students at the college, who for centuries had unabashedly cashed in upon the degree and social capital acquired in their undergraduate years with successful careers in business or politics, had begun to question the true merit of the lives awaiting them upon graduation. More importantly, many students began to challenge Harvard’s ability to provide them with the education they saw as necessary not for a successful career, but for a fulfilling life.

This confluence of factors – Harvard’s gradual underfunding of the undergraduate humanities, combined with Harvard students’ increasing awareness of the sterility of their own educations – soon manifested itself in student protests and activities. For many students, Harvard itself – as the institution in which they lived their everyday lives – served as an outlet for reforming issues they saw not just within their educations, but also in their lives at large. In March of 1969, a group of eight undergraduates banded together to form a “Conspiracy Against Harvard Education” protest group. While the group itself was small, it

⁸⁸ Morton and Phyllis Keller, Making Harvard Modern (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 324.

⁸⁹ “Ackerman Says Protest is Sign of Deeper Split,” The Harvard Crimson, 11 June 1969.

took issue not with just a specific aspect of Harvard governance, but with the education it provided to undergraduates as a whole. As one mission statement insisted, undergraduates “are serving the University’s needs, without the University responding to serve theirs.” Conditions such as large lecture classes, in which students learned passively and developed few connections with their professors or fellow students, created a sense of “discontent, alienation, and unfulfillment [sic]” within the students. The group’s ultimate aim, argued cofounder Timothy Gargin, was to “create an environment in which people can meet and talk to each other. Sure, professors have office hours – but that’s a very marginal commitment to students. It’s hard for them to communicate with us as equals.”⁹⁰ It soon became clear that their concerns resounded with a large part of the student body. The following week, the group’s open meeting attracted a whopping 250 undergraduates and faculty members.⁹¹

As one can see, Harvard’s undergraduate body, once thought resistant to the seas of social upheaval sweeping other schools, was rapidly becoming disillusioned – and not just with the governance of its schools’ Afro-American studies department or its handling of the ROTC, but with the very nature of the education their school offered. It was in this context that Harvard New College developed.

Unlike its counterpart the following fall at University of Massachusetts, Free University City, Harvard New College had no elaborate structures, no physical plant to announce its presence to the school and to the rest of the world. The project was initially met with little fanfare – only a 6-sentence news article in the *Crimson* announcing its beginning. Yet its ideas soon began to attract attention. Many students began to recognize that the conditions creating dissatisfaction with the bureaucratic sterility of a Harvard education had

⁹⁰ “Harvard Conspiracy Seeks New Education,” The Harvard Crimson, 20 March 1969.

⁹¹ “Conspiracy Tells Students to Find Joy of Learning.” The Harvard Crimson, 25 March 1969.

been building for several years: as a *Crimson* article published a few days after Harvard New College's opening stated, "An awareness has been smoldering for several years: that there is something very wrong with the teaching process at Harvard and, particularly, that a process that should be ecstatic has been rendered sterile."

So what was it that caused this project to develop and flourish at this time, if its concerns were anything but new? Perhaps it was its association with the far larger event occurring on Harvard's campus: the ROTC strikes. As the *Crimson* article points out, "The Strikes gave these explorations [of alternate forms of learning] a powerful added impetus." Indeed, the project itself developed out of discussions between strikers on April 11th, and its creation at an event in which over 300 students were already participating expanded its leadership, with over 40 students taking part in its initial planning. More importantly, as suggested by the project founders, the Strike itself may have changed student consciousness, leading many otherwise-apatetic students to consider larger issues of their University education they may not otherwise have confronted – points out the *Crimson* article, "There was a strong feeling that something very desirable was happening to peoples' consciousness as a result of the Strike."⁹²

So, most importantly, what *were* the ideas being promoted by the Harvard New College, with which many Harvard students were now even more apt to align themselves? Much of its philosophy can be divined from its course catalog published on the first anniversary of its inception, in the spring of 1970. According to their pamphlet, the organization was established with three major goals: "one, to offer a counter-curriculum to anyone in the Boston-Cambridge area who felt stifled by the atomistic, competitive, and overly technical nature of university education, as well as by the irrelevance and

⁹² "Harvard New College: The Pursuit of Ecstasy," [The Harvard Crimson](#), 17 April 1969.

ineffectualness of most college curricula; two, to act as a medium for exploring innovative methods of teaching and learning, with education viewed as a creative group process in which all participants are both teachers and learners and in which group leaders are resource persons rather than instructors; and three, to act as a political force for curriculum reform within the established universities, especially Harvard.”

As for how the New College sought to bring about such changes, much can be gleaned from the courses themselves. All courses listed in the 1970 course catalog sought to facilitate philosophical or humanities-based inquiries rather than impart technical or scientific skill; several others also offered the opportunity for participants to expand themselves through music or poetry, such as a “Dance Free” course, described as a “communal dance experience”, and an “Introduction to Sitar” course. Many attempted to introduce issues of the ‘60s counterculture lifestyle into a course format: one, taught by a “consultant to Time Life on the subject of hallucinogenic drugs”, was titled “Drugs: What Do They Really Do?” Another spoke directly to students imbued with a resentment towards Harvard administrators: entitled “Forms, Nature, and Bases of Authority”, the description stated, “Various models concerning the scope and rationale of authority will be taken from philosophical and (perhaps) sociological literature as a basis for a critique of present-day examples of authority.” Perhaps the most common theme emerging in the course pamphlet, however – that is to say, the malady the College sought to address, whether through philosophy or other subjects – was the sense of alienation and impotence many students felt in their everyday academic experiences. One course, entitled “Dialectical Thinking”, described its subject as “a method of thought with the potential for overcoming intellectual and social fragmentation and alienation; a breaking of dichotomies leading to higher

syntheses.” An advertisement, on a page opposite a Moody Blues song quote – “Sometimes you can’t hide/Says you’re lonely/Hidden deep inside” – promoted a group called “HAPPY!”, or “Harvard Association to Provide Pleasure for You.” An outgrowth of a Harvard New College course offered the previous semester named “Within You Without You: On the Taboo Against Knowing Who You Really Are”, the organization was “an attempt to fight the loneliness, depression, and game-playing that pervades so much of this community.” The details on exactly how the organization sought to fight such malaise, of course, was unclear from the advertisement, but the sense of personal initiative and individual power intrinsic to the group emerges immediately from its description. It declares, “HAPPY! can be whatever its members make it. That is one of its beauties, one of its joys.”⁹³

Indeed, perhaps the most powerful way in which Harvard New College sought to change the Harvard experience -- beyond the philosophical and existential questions it allowed students to explore -- lay in the very personal initiative its classes provided to students. While Harvard New College benefitted from the assistance of willing faculty and teaching fellows, the majority of the courses were led by students themselves, on subjects they found personally compelling -- whether the subject was “The Aesthetics of Sailing” or “The Wonderful World of Walt Disney.” Even in courses led by faculty, students -- per the program’s very mission statement -- assumed a far greater participatory role ever allowed to them in large Gen Ed lectures. More than just a manifestation of their discontents with Harvard as an institution, thus, Harvard New College represented a desire -- and a chance -- for students to take charge of their own educations.

⁹³ New College Course Catalog, Spring 1970. HUK 601, Harvard University Archives.

Students involved in the New College movement did not stop at offering alternatives to large lecture classes: they eventually formulated a plan for reforming Harvard's entire curriculum. In Harvard's 1970 yearbook, New College member Richard Tilden issued a call for a "Humanistic Counter-Curriculum", one that would enable students to forego the traditional concentration system – one that he and many others saw as embodying a narrow, workplace-centered education method – in favor of a far broader education. As he wrote, "Academic specialization at the undergraduate level is, for some, a self-denying pursuit. For someone who considers his education a life-long pursuit of self-fulfillment rather than a short-term process of credential-getting through skill acquisition, concentrating in an academic discipline as an undergraduate may not be the best means of achieving his educational goals." Tilden also described the problems created by the concentration system paired with the core Gen Ed requirements still in place: he wrote, "President Lowell's conception of the ideal Harvard graduate, one who 'knows a little everything and something well', is no longer an adequate universal model...The failure stems from the subject-centeredness, the discipline-orientation of the present scheme." In place of the then-current model, he proposed a self-directed curriculum, one that would allow students to chart the course of their own education by designing their own General Studies program under a tutor's guidance. Students under this program would also be allowed to receive a Pass-Fail designation for all coursework rather than letter grades; rather than have a grade transcript as evidence of achievement at the end of their four years, students would instead have a portfolio – which would also include a self-evaluation. Such a program, Tilden argued, would have many practical merits: it would allow for flexibility in Harvard's curriculum and satisfy the needs of students demanding that Harvard develop new concentration options to

meet their individual needs. Most importantly, however, the program would “foster (not just allow for) the development of the entire personality” of each Harvard student. In doing so, Harvard itself would change: rather than “a scholarship factory”, Harvard would become a cooperative educational center, where students would be empowered to develop not just as students and future employees but, instead, as individuals.⁹⁴

* * *

All the clamor concerning Harvard’s curriculum – whether in the form of petitions to boycott examinations or full-fledged educational experiments such as Harvard New College – soon attracted the attention of Harvard’s administration. In November of 1969, while curricular experiments like the New College still persisted, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Ernest May, issued a memorandum announcing his plans to initiate a comprehensive, faculty-led review of Harvard’s undergraduate curriculum, the first of its kind in over 25 years. In his memorandum, May acknowledges many of the concerns voiced by Harvard students concerning their own educations. He begins by outlining the traditional components of a Harvard education – among them, General Education courses and courses related to a student’s concentration – and states, “Recently, many students, some faculty, and at least a few alumni have begun to say that the curriculum should contain, or at least give formal recognition to...additional components”, such as political activities or “action-oriented” programs. Acknowledging that “students are assumed to be at Harvard not just to acquire units of knowledge but also to mature and benefit intellectually, culturally, and socially from prolonged interaction with their peers and with other members of the

⁹⁴ Richard Tilden, “A Humanistic Counter-Curriculum,” Harvard University Yearbook, 1970 edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Yearbook Publications), 147-149.

University”, Dean May urged faculty members to consider what role the arts, political activity, and other self-enriching activities traditionally not thought to be part of the curriculum could play in Harvard students’ education. In response to student complaints about the arbitrary and oppressive nature of Harvard’s grading system, May also proposed that faculty members consider what alternate forms of evaluation professors could employ in their classrooms. In short, Dean May took a major step in acknowledging – and perhaps ultimately assuaging – student fears that their educations were overly sterile and competitive, promoting passive absorption rather than true personal development.⁹⁵

Dean May’s memorandum, in some ways, succeeded at bringing about change in Harvard’s tradition-bound curriculum. The following spring, the College faculty passed legislation enabling faculty members to issue “alternative” forms of evaluation – other than final exams, long the standby for all Harvard courses – to students upon the completion of their spring course work.⁹⁶ Pass-fail grading and independent concentration options soon also came to exist at Harvard, becoming part of the College’s curriculum in the fall of 1970.⁹⁷

Despite such changes, many students remained skeptical on the true causes and aims of Dean May’s interest in the curricular reform movement. Some saw the project as an attempt to divert attention from the virulent political issues still raging and Harvard -- and the larger themes at stake in the curricular reform debate. One student wrote into the *Crimson* in the spring of 1970, arguing, “If repression hasn’t stifled discontent, will caption do the job?”

⁹⁵ Record of the Deans of the College of Arts and Sciences, Memorandum from Dean of Harvard College Ernest May to Harvard and Radcliffe Masters, House Committee Chairmen, House Presidents, the Dean of Freshmen, and the President of the Freshman Council, subject: Reexamination of the Undergraduate Curriculum, 24 November 24 1969, HUC 8969.2, Box 875, Harvard University Archives.

⁹⁶ Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Notice Regarding Completion of Spring Term 1970 Course Work. Harvard University Archives, HUC 8969.100.

⁹⁷ Keller, 325.

Will the promise of a little more novelty and fun in the curriculum divert attention from substantive issues and suppress just demands for fundamental reform?”⁹⁸

Whether or not Dean May sought to distract students from heavier political issues, however, his calls for curricular reform still represent an administrative attempt to understand and address concerns students had about their own education. Perhaps most importantly, his calls represent an acknowledgement – in one of America’s most elite colleges, no less – that students’ college educations involved much more than exams taken during school or career paths followed afterwards. With the simple statement that “students [were] assumed to be at Harvard not just to acquire units of knowledge but also to mature and benefit intellectually, culturally, and socially,” May began a process of reorientation within colleges across the country, in which administrators increasingly focused on students’ personal as opposed to professional development. Certainly, the acknowledgement that students had lives outside their coursework was nothing new: glee clubs and spirit committees had flourished on college campuses for decades. What *was* radically different, however, were the methods by which administrators now sought to enable students to develop personally: through – at least partially – allowing students to take charge of their own educations.

Dean May’s efforts, however, may have been an incomplete answer to a more fundamental value shift within Harvard’s student population. Frank Eisenberg, a senior in the College, forecasted in Harvard’s 1970 yearbook that “‘curriculum reform’ as administered by Dean May – and by the President of the University – will cause more discontent than it answers.” The reason? He argued that his generation of students at Harvard differed fundamentally from previous students in “style of thought”. He then quoted Professor James Ackerman, who the previous summer wrote: “The intellectual achievement

⁹⁸ “Vapid Curricular Reform,” The Harvard Crimson, 23 March 1970.

and position of the first half of the 20th century [is] a period that has been called the Age of Analysis. The upstart is the Engaged Style, the method through which young people are searching for new sensations and experiences, expressing their mistrust of authority and bearing witness to strongly held convictions.”⁹⁹

Were the Harvard students of the ‘60s of a new, ‘Engaged Style’ of learning? Projects such as Harvard New College certainly point to such a change. Rather than tolerate large lecture classes and passive learning, seeing their education as merely a means to an end, many Harvard students of the ‘60s sought to inject – and further cultivate – their very senses of self in their classes. While pass-fail options certainly did much to loosen the academic rigidity of Harvard, perhaps nothing short of a full academic revolution would fully please this new generation of students.

⁹⁹ Frank Eisenberg, “Administering Reform.” Harvard University Yearbook, 1970 edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Yearbook Publications, 1970), 145.

Conclusion

Since the 1960s, the higher-education scene in Massachusetts has changed quite a bit, continuing the trend of growth and expansion that marked higher education across the country in the time of “Free University City” and “Harvard New College”. The number of colleges and universities within an hour’s drive of Boston has grown to 50, and Boston alone is now home to a whopping 100,000 students – making them one of the city’s largest demographic groups, at almost one of every five residents. This growth, part of which came from UMass, meant that the physical distance between Harvard and UMass has shrunk: under Lederle’s reign, the school opened a campus in Boston, right across the river from Harvard’s hallowed halls in Cambridge. But one thing has remained the same in Massachusetts higher education: UMass and Harvard are, to this day, dramatically different schools. While UMass-Amherst’s out-of-state population has grown in recent years, it still caters to a largely regional population, many of whom rely on the school’s heavily subsidized tuition. Harvard, on the other hand, now casts an even wider net, with its prestige attracting students from across the globe. UMass’ budget is constantly subject to cuts from Massachusetts’ cash-strapped legislature; Harvard, while certainly not immune to the recent national financial crisis, still retains the largest endowment of any private university in the world.

Given the schools’ continued contrasts, it may be surprising that they both experienced dramatically similar educational reform movements within a semester of each other in the ‘60s – similar, in fact, down to the very name each protest carried. With such seemingly divergent student bodies, not to mention school structure, what did these two

schools share in the '60s that rendered them susceptible to student anger over their own education?

In some ways, the answer can be boiled down to one word: change. Both schools – and the presidents at the helm of each one – faced ideological as well as pragmatic incentives for transforming their institutions' priorities, and such shifts often came at the expense of undergraduates. On the pragmatic side, both schools faced the coming-of-age of one of the largest demographic booms the nation had seen – a change that demanded university expansion. As the schools and their leaders strained to keep up with rising enrollments, entering undergraduates in Amherst and, to a lesser extent, Cambridge encountered overflowing lecture classes, crowded on-campus housing, and endless construction of austere concrete structures to accommodate them in the future. The sheer inadequacy of the physical and educational environments students encountered amidst these changes lay at the heart of many of even their most profound complaints. A particularly inflammatory cartoon, drawn in the late '60s and referenced by President Lederle in his oral history, shows Lederle cramming cap-and-gown-clad students into a sardine can.¹⁰⁰

Both Harvard and UMass, despite their radically different positions on the higher education spectrum, also faced similar internal, ideological pressures to change -- not just to expand, but also to transform their very educational priorities to meet the needs of a new society. President Lederle of UMass, for his part, foresaw an era in which UMass could compete with the nation's top public research universities: the Berkeleys and the Ann Arbors (where, not-so-coincidentally, he had held a number of administrative posts before coming to UMass as president in 1960). Naturally, this shift required the expansion of higher-level

¹⁰⁰ John Lederle, Interview by Robert McCartney, January/February 1975, University of Massachusetts Oral History Project, Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA, 90.

educational opportunities and research centers, particularly in the sciences: as scholar Freeland wrote, “Lederle knew what was required to raise his institution’s standing: a more cosmopolitan and academically well-prepared student body would need to be recruited and graduate programs expanded; faculty members with degrees from leading universities and highly scholarly potential would need to be hired; teaching loads would have to be reduced, and facilities for research enhanced.”¹⁰¹ This desire to change UMass didn’t just come out of a grandiose need for higher ranking; in fact, Lederle often claimed he was simply meeting the needs of the new marketplace and of the students within it. B.A.s in liberal arts were no longer sufficient to gain employment in the new postindustrial economy: students needed advanced degrees and scientific training, and he felt that UMass, as a publicly-funded institution, was obligated to meet that need. As Lederle argued, “It’s little wonder that people wonder about the portion of taxes being paid to higher education, when we’ve got so many people with Bachelor’s degrees who can’t get jobs... The fellow coming off the line with a recent Ph.D. has an advantage.”¹⁰²

While Harvard was free of many of the obligations attached to public universities, it, too, felt the need to shift its educational focus at the dawn of the postindustrial era. While the school didn’t have a history as a subpar regional agricultural college from which to break free, as was the case with UMass, it *did* have a reputation among some as a staid, tradition-bound school, resistant to innovation or modernization. And while the “Ivory Tower” standard for universities – as institutions imparting time-old knowledge and good citizenship, free of the influence of government or corporations -- may have once been the ideal, it no longer was. As Pusey wrote in his 1960-1961 Annual Report of the President, in discussing

¹⁰¹ Freeland, 322.

¹⁰² McCartney, 152.

new institutions and research programs dedicated to Eastern politics, “Surely both our country as well as other countries are well-served by the fact that American universities – and not least this University – in response to altered circumstances are now developing a conception of their task commensurate with national responsibilities which are now world-wide.”¹⁰³ Furthermore, Harvard, in the eyes of President Pusey, not only could no longer remain free of the influence of society and its needs: it risked becoming irrelevant as an institution if it tried – particularly because of the increasing importance of federal funds to its operating budget. In 1960, as President Pusey reported, Harvard received more money from the government than from its own endowment. This fact not only risked undermining Harvard’s institutional independence, but also threatened to undercut undergraduate humanities programs, as most federal funding went to graduate science programs instead. President Pusey certainly recognized this danger, writing in the 1960 annual report: “Under present circumstances it promises to become increasingly difficult to find adequate private funds to maintain a rate of growth for the social sciences and the humanities comparable with that in prospect for the natural sciences. There is also anxiety lest these funds draw attention of the faculty away from teaching to research; and from undergraduate students, who perhaps most need their help, to graduate students and post-doctoral research fellows.” Nonetheless, he concluded, “The relationship between Federal Government and the universities is here to stay.”¹⁰⁴

Harvard and UMass, by virtue of their vast differences in prestige and institutional strength, conceptualized their institutions’ modernization over the course of the ‘60s in very different terms. UMass sought to finally enter the vanguard of public research universities

¹⁰³ Nathan Pusey, Report of the President of Harvard College and Reports of Departments (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Printing Office, 1961), 12.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

by, in some ways, conforming to the “multiversity” ideal promoted by Clark Kerr: namely, by increasing research opportunities and improving graduate programs. Harvard’s academic eminence, on the other hand, remained unquestioned – yet its faculty and administration felt immense financial pressure to descend from their “Ivory Tower” and embrace scientific and governmental resources opportunities. Thus, while the pressures to “get with the times” came from drastically different sources – and histories – the end result was, in many ways, the same: undergraduates, particularly those in the liberal arts, received less attention, less funding, less resources.

While many of these policies served to catalyze student discontent with their own schools, shifts in institutional focus weren’t the only changes afoot. In fact, what becomes clear at Harvard and UMass is that, over the course of the ‘60s, the students *themselves* were changing. By the end of the decade, UMass possessed a student body that was not only larger but also significantly higher achieving than in the early ‘60s. Perhaps at least partially as a product of their higher intellect, UMass students of the late ‘60s were also far more primed to analyze and criticize the nature of their own education – and, in turn, the institution responsible for it. Changes to university structure and priorities in and of themselves would not have been sufficient to cause protest at schools such as UMass: some students, too, had to be engaged enough to make themselves and others aware of such shifts.

One can see just how engaged many of the new generation of UMass students were in reading a document produced by the Academic Affairs Committee, a branch of UMass’ Student Government Association, in 1969. The proposal, entitled “Education for Living: A Program for the ‘70s” and written entirely by the student representatives on the SGA’s Academic Affairs, contains a number of substantive suggestions for reforming the College of

Arts and Sciences curriculum and grading requirements – proposals that reflect their and other’s students views of their own educations as restrictive and overly competitive. Perhaps equally as significant as the proposals themselves, however, is the incisive way the document’s authors criticized the modern university and its perceived prostitution to government and corporate interests. Starting in the document’s preface, the Academic Affairs Committee chairman Richard Story eloquently yet devastatingly documents the ills committed by modern universities in general and UMass in particular. He declares, “The contemporary university – or at least those that are viewed as having ‘made it’ – now seems to be everyone’s servant and nobody’s master – master least of all of its own house. Kerr’s notion of isolated units tied together only by common plumbing was getting at something of this sort, it seems. By making itself – its faculty and facilities – available to nearly every bidder, public or private...the university has put itself into the glorified service station trade.”

Far from turning the document into a tirade against University administrators and other representatives of ‘the Man’, however, Story goes on to parlay his knowledge of the complexities inherent in the modern university to propose a mutually-beneficial program of change. Acknowledging that “the subservience to the external...is, by and large, what has made the modern university what it is today. These factors would not be well-served by a major turn-about in institutional philosophy”, Story and his colleagues instead suggest curricular and institutional reforms that would ultimately grant more freedom to *both* the student interested in the most unstructured liberal arts education and that interested in using his/her education purely to further a career path. As Story writes, “To grant the freedom to one student to construct and pursue the most free-ranging interdisciplinary education imaginable requires granting the freedom to another student to construct a narrowly

vocational and specialized education... Thus the provisions in these suggested revisions which would, if exercised, develop more parochial departmental programs than at present. It is our firm conviction, however, that the bracing effects of the tonic we here propose will be strong enough as to color every academic endeavor with a new regard for the personality and sovereignty of the individual student.”¹⁰⁵

The academic achievement of Harvard’s student body certainly didn’t rise as much as UMass’ over the course of the ‘50s and ‘60s – perhaps because, as a private institution, Harvard was still beholden to alumni and parent donations. What clearly did change dramatically during the era, however, were student values. Many students during the era, rather than merely accept the eventual social and financial advantages that a Harvard degree would bestow upon them, sought to engage with their educations on a level that far surpassed the rote memorization required of large lecture classes. Indeed, the ‘60s saw the rise of a new breed of students, one who increasingly rejected the “means-to-an-end” view of undergraduate education – even at the most prestigious university in the United States, where the “end” offered all the trappings of traditional success.

Certainly, there were some striking differences between the push for curricular reform at UMass and its counterpart at Harvard. Perhaps one of the greatest differences, furthermore, can be found not in those who led or supported the movements at each school but who didn’t. Those participating in the Free University City movement at UMass faced an obstacle that those at Harvard didn’t appear to: considerable backlash from alumni and local residents, an ire that manifested itself in bitter editorials in local newspapers and angry letters to President Lederle. The nature of their complaints exposes one of the primary differences –

¹⁰⁵ Academic Affairs Committee, Student Government Association, “Education for Living: A Program for the ‘70s”, Special Collections and University Archives, W.E.B. DuBois Library, University of Massachusetts Amherst, Amherst, MA, 1-6.

and hindrances to change – at state institutions: operations were bankrolled not just by alumni donors or even governmental grants but also by every taxpayer in the state. Local newspapers rallied against the so-called “free” nature of Free University City, a complaint that underscored their belief that student protesters at UMass were frittering away a valuable state-subsidized education in organizing their own classes.

Still, the student-led pushes for curricular reform at UMass and Harvard, movements that manifested itself at other colleges across the nation, forever changed the academic climate at many American universities. As a direct result of “Free University City” and the student-initiated academic referendum, UMass instituted a “pass-fail” option for students – a change that, as the UMass *Index* pointed out, encouraged many students to take classes in subjects such as dance and art without fear of academic retribution. In a similar fashion, “Harvard New College” forced Dean May to acknowledge that students at Harvard deserved more than just “acquir[ing] units of knowledge” from their four undergraduate years, and prompted him to seek ways to incorporate nontraditional classes into the graduation requirement rubric. Today, students at Harvard can fulfill their General Education requirements, long seen to be the bastion of large lecture classes and passive memorization, with courses such as “Self, Freedom, and Existence” and “Soundscapes: Exploring Music in a Changing World.”

The curricular reform movements of the late ‘60s marked the first time students at American universities reconsidered, on a large scale and in a highly visible fashion, the nature of their own higher education. Many American students in the modern era now take it for granted that they will acquire something deeper and more intangible from their college education than marketable skills or a job upon graduation, but students of the late ‘60s were

the first who truly began to pursue classes and courses of study that, while not preparing them for the workforce, encouraged critical thinking and self-knowledge that would greater prepare them for citizenship and life. Equally as important, students at Harvard and UMass in the late '60s forever changed the role of students in academic decision-making. By demanding a say in changing grade requirements, curricular structures, and available classes, students ushered in a new era in academic administration, in which students at many universities play an active role not just in extracurricular organization but also in determining the very future of curricula. As evidence, one only needs to look at the most visible legacy of Penn's own curricular reform movement of the '60s: the Student Committee on Undergraduate Education, or SCUE for short. SCUE has, over the course of its 30-year history, established student reviews for all Penn classes, initiated a Freshman Seminar program, and installed a Pass-Fail option for all classes – and has represented student interests on a countless number of academic steering committees. SCUE has forever changed Penn's academic landscape – both in the representation it gives students in academic decision-making, and in the more engaged forms of learning it has promoted. For many students, it is difficult to imagine a Penn education without the landmark changes the organization has instituted.

* * *

At the heart of the alternative visions of academia presented by “Free University City” and “Harvard New College”, of course, lies one fundamental question: what is the purpose of an undergraduate education? Is it to provide students with technological

knowledge and marketable skills to ease their entry into the workforce? Or is to imbue students with deeper -- but perhaps no less important -- qualities: critical thinking skills, self-knowledge, and the ability to work cooperatively as well as independently? This question is no less important today -- and has gained particular attention and consideration in the wake of the recent economic crisis. In the last few months, the “perfect storm” of plummeting university endowments, evaporating family savings, and bleaker-than-ever job prospects for college seniors upon graduation has created a demand for a new type of university education -- one in which there is no place for seminars such as “The Art of the Self”. The number of students pursuing bachelor’s degrees in the humanities is now less than half the number who received them during the late ‘60s, and this figure -- along with many institutions’ dedication to liberal arts programs -- appears to be waning even further. From December 2008 to February 2009, the *New York Times* reported, at least 36 colleges had postponed or cancelled hiring campaigns for faculty in their religion and philosophy departments. In an unfriendly economic climate, it seems, many students and universities find it difficult to justify the luxury of classes with no clear marketplace benefit. As Andrew Delbanco, the director of American Studies at Columbia, maintained, “Although people in humanities have always lamented the state of the field, they have never felt quite as much of a panic that their field is becoming irrelevant.”¹⁰⁶

Despite the unfriendly climate, many academics and university administrators -- not to mention students -- remain staunch advocates of the liberal arts. The *Times* article soon prompted a flurry of letters from current and former professors in liberal-arts departments, who insisted *more* -- not less -- teaching in the humanities was essential in an increasingly

¹⁰⁶ Patricia Cohen, “In Tough Times, The Humanities Must Justify Their Worth,” *The New York Times*, 24 February 2009.

complex world. As John Worsham, a retired psychology professor at Trinity, wrote, “It is shockingly inappropriate to reduce support for the humanities when most of the problems we are faced with in the nation and the world are the result of deficiencies in integrity and ethics, not deficiencies in vocational skill sets. The subtleties of civilized living require an understanding of human functioning through centuries of ethical dilemmas, missteps and their consequences...A significant number of excellent humanities courses should be required of all college graduates, no matter what their course of study happens to be.”¹⁰⁷

The debate over the best kind of undergraduate education is, clearly, one that rages on to this day. Particularly in changing economic times – as was the case in the ‘50s and ‘60s, with America’s entry into the postindustrial world – administrators, students, and citizens are apt to reconsider what skills and services universities should provide to its members and to society at large. Such reassessments, furthermore, expose much more than the changing economy or politics of our world. They reveal our changing notions of what it means to be a good worker, intellectual, or citizen in increasingly complex times.

¹⁰⁷ John W. Worsham, “Letters: Humanities and the Examined Life,” [The New York Times](#), 1 March 2009.

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