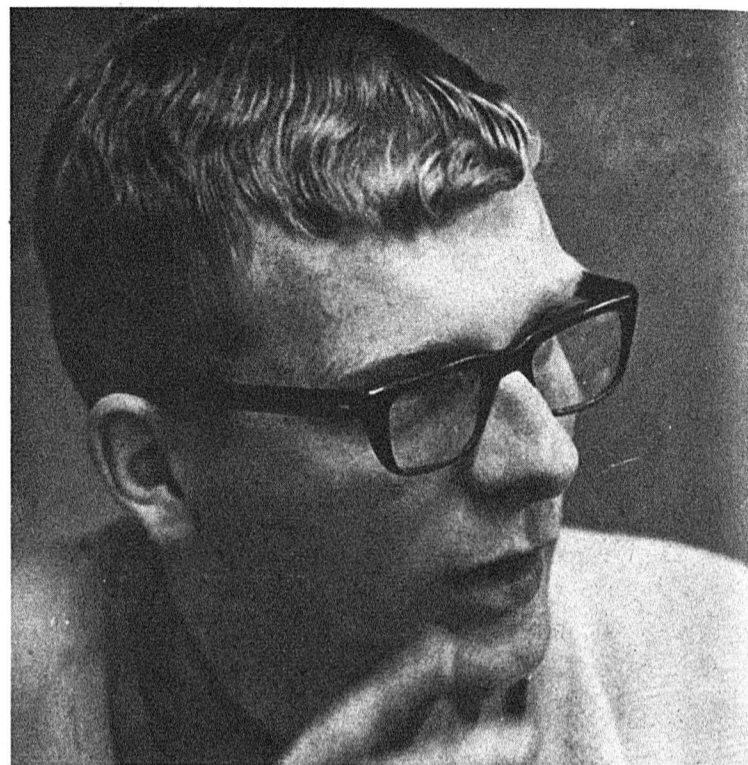


Change and



At San Francisco's

Experimental College

A coffee-house class -- for credit

BY RITA DERSHOWITZ
The Collegiate Press Service

SAN FRANCISCO—Ten students cluster around a seminar table in a classroom. One man among them must be the professor, but only because he is about 20 years older than anyone else in the room.

He does nothing to direct the discussion.

At this third meeting of the class, officially titled Seminar in Higher Education, the members are still

background

When you want an explosion just drop a little educational change. The effect is catastrophic—to your marks, if you're in the wrong faculty or class. This story is about a change which at least got a chance. The article on San Francisco State College's experimental project came to us courtesy of Bob Gross of the United States Student Press Association. The photos are by Jack Segal.

arguing with each other over what they should be doing.

They finally decide that a classroom and class meeting times are artificial ways of learning anyway—they will work with each other independently and come together when they have something to tell the others.

JUST REGULAR

A Free University course somewhere? Not exactly.

It's a regular course offering of the education department at San Francisco State College, but it was organized because of the Experi-

mental College, a student-initiated educational reform movement at State.

Members of the seminar are all leaders in the Experimental College, receiving credit for the course from the education department.

"I find it surprising," said Professor Richard Axen, the seminar's teacher, "that people who are committed to a theory of non-authoritarian learning, and who have had experience with that method, still cannot take the freedom of this course and use it to do what they want."

A PARADOX

Professor Axen's seminar points up a paradox of the Experimental College, which operates on the assumption of student responsibility for education.

At the same time, however, the very existence of such a seminar in a college department, indicates the extent to which students have raised important questions about the quality of learning and teaching to an entire campus.

Initiated three semesters ago by the Associated Students, the Experimental College currently enrolls over 1,000 students out of 18,360 at State, all of them commuters.

It offers about 70 courses, taught by students, faculty members, and outside specialists. Credit is available in some courses for those who wish it, through procedures in the regular College that allow faculty members to grant credit for independent study.

WEIRD COURSES

Courses this semester include a seminar in mass-communication, organized by the staff of a local non-commercial radio station; classes non-objective literature; the college and war; meta-hamlet; the historical development and social significance of black power; propaganda; brainwashing and the



"I THINK YOU'RE WRONG, AND PASS THE SUGAR"
... is this the only place thinking is done?

—Jack Segal photo

political metaphor; gestalt theory; the Kennedy assassination, led by one of the growing band of sleuths investigating the assassination on their own; and conscientious objector counselling.

In the campus bookstore, a special section for Experimental College courses offers Bob Dylan's latest recording; poetry by John Lennon, and a 1966 Popular Photography Annual.

"The Experimental College is not a protest movement," said Michael Vozick, a scientist-turned-humanist who was attracted to San Francisco State by the Experimental College and is now a graduate student there.

"We are intimately engaged in challenging the College, and in creating a situation in which students have the responsibility. The result is that courses we develop here, and prove can work, are being incorporated into the regular curriculum."

NON-PROTEST KEY

A non-protest stance is probably the key to the Experimental College's distinction from other "free university" movements.

Although many of its organizers

have been involved in civil rights or radical political activities, they have not created a new sounding-board for the Left. Nor do they define themselves as opposition to an enemy institution.

"We're trying to work in a real situation," Vozick explained. "You have to define politics by what you want to build, not just what you oppose. The game is not between the bad guys and the good guys, but it involves a bad structure in which everyone, faculty as well as students, are bound in."

For the past three years, student government at State has been in the hands of highly articulate students whose goal was to gain a greater part for students in academic decision-making. Last year, for the first time, students had voting representation on the College's Academic Senate and on most of its major committees.

THE PROGRAMS

The Associated Students has established three highly successful educational programs—a tutorial, a community involvement project and, most recently, the Experimental College.

Last semester it hired Paul Goodman to lead a ten-week seminar for \$7,000.

Jim Nixon, one of the founders of the Experimental College and

currently president of the Associated Students, sees the Experimental College as a political base for changing the official college.

"The Experimental College is a way of building an example of what we want, and then using that example to test our thinking about education and also to influence the regular college," Nixon said.

"We need allies wherever they may come from; we can cooperate with any elements of the institution that help us and fight any parts that don't."

QUALITY FIRST

The double role of the Experimental College—as a testing ground for educational innovation and a political lever—has provoked a debate among Experimental College leaders.

Cynthia Nixon, whose involvement as a founder of the Experimental College stems from her psychology of learning and teaching, is battling to make educational quality the first priority for the College.

"We have no political power unless we do something good educationally," she said.

"What we've done is create an atmosphere in which people can

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