

San Francisco

part II

The experiment

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SAN FRANCISCO—The city's State College is unusual—it has always encouraged innovation and flexibility.

It is also the most distinguished college in the states.

Students are older than in most colleges—the average age is 25. There has always been a great deal of freedom for faculty to experiment with new courses and new ways of teaching.

San Francisco State annually suspends classes for two days while three or four hundred faculty members meet on the beach at Monterey to talk about their school.

The real impact of the Experimental College lies in the "contextual changes" it has provoked, Axen says.

"The Free Speech Movement at Berkeley and now the Experimental College are setting a new context, allowing latent forces which have been there all along to have influence," says the professor of higher education. "The students have activated a guilt that faculty members have felt for a long time, for their authoritarianism, and for having mistreated the students for so long."

Axen was chairman of the Academic Senate last year, when Jim Nixon, one of the founders of the Experimental College, was elected as the Senate's first student representative.

STRONG RESISTANCE

If publicly the faculty feels compelled to support student initiative in academic reform, privately there is strong resistance. According to Axen, much of the faculty support is only lip-service.

"The Academic Senate voted almost unanimously to allow students a vote on all its major committees. If that ballot had been a secret one, the motion would have been defeated," Axen said.

"Any professor who does teach in the Experimental College loses respectability within his department," he said. "Even here, teachers are more strongly committed to their discipline than to teaching."

The Experimental College's impact has also extended beyond State.

Incipient student reform movements at several other campuses have taken their lead from the Experimental College. One eastern university student spent a week this semester learning the ropes of in-

background

This is the second, and final, installment on experimental colleges. The project at San Francisco State College makes an important point about the role of students in the academic community. They can do something, and they can do something significant. The experimental college at San Francisco is moving back the dark cloud of neglect which has hung over educational research at the university level. The experimental college is a student-financed, student-directed project. The new knowledge about university learning which has sprung from the college has been implemented in the administration campus. Why isn't something like this on the books here? We have a new students' union building which would house such a project admirably. Why?—it's a good question, and you'll have to see the students' union bureaucrats for an answer.

dependent education at State and is now leading a comparable project back home.

Leaders are even considering running a summer-long education program to train students from all over the country.

The Experimental College is not without its critics at San Francisco State, including some scornful commentators on the campus's student paper.

Phil Garlington, city editor of The Daily

Gater, once wrote in his column: "As the appointed members of the AS (Associated Students) Club sit in their committees scowling over their nickel-dime problems of State, they enjoy reminding one another of the big myth."

"The myth, which is actually credited by the AS coterie, is that they are radicals, and that what they are doing in student government, particularly in the Other College, is some kind of radical departure."

The paper's editors see themselves as spokesmen for radical thinking on campus. They feel themselves well within the tradition of the watchdog student press, belittling a sandbox student government.

In this case the tables have been turned, and the student government has become a much more sophisticated critic of the educational system than the newspaper.

It has taken over not only the leadership in radical criticism, but also in effective action.

Another kind of criticism, more in the way of self-scrutiny, comes from within the Experimental College and from its supporters on the faculty. Professor Axen points out two problems the Experimental College faces.

QUESTION OF CONTINUITY

"First there's the whole question of continuity," he said. "Nixon and his crew should be out recruiting in the high schools, so that by the time freshmen arrive here, they will be already familiar with the Experimental College and can be valuable to it for a full four years."

"And then there's pluralism, or lack of it. There's no doubt the Experimental College is appealing to a certain type of student, and it's in danger of becoming a circle of true believers."

The Experimental College leaders are probably their own harshest critics.

"Right now we're in a mess, compared to what we should be," was one girl's comment.

Amidst an almost universal recognition of the State campus and growing national acclaim from education organizations, the students are engaged in almost painful

introspection and attempts to define the future direction of the experiment.

TIES CREATED

One thing seems clear about the future of the Experimental College—it's going to create even closer ties with the official college, rather than move into an autonomous position.

One student predicted a partial merger with the administration within the next year.

Cynthia Nixon, one of the College's founders, is urging the incorporation of the less radical aspects of the experiment into the regular curriculum.

"For one thing, that would make room within the Experimental College for new radical programs, and take some of the financial burden off us. Closer interaction with the faculty would also force us to do higher quality work," she said.

This is a far cry from most radical students' tendency to see any co-operation with existing institutions as either selling-out or being co-opted.

LEADERS NOT UNAWARE

Experimental College leaders are not unaware of that possibility, but they appear confident of their capacity to maintain their own integrity while working within the traditional system.

The Experimental College seems to be changing the expectations that people have of each other in the academic community—students expect to be represented in policy-making bodies, and so when the faculty have to vote publicly on the question, they do give student representation.

Faculty members expect thoughtful criticism from students on educational issues, and so they are willing to communicate their work and their concerns and work together.

"Students got what they wanted here," says Nixon.

"After we got the freedom, we had the choice whether to use it or not. At least we've used it to prove one thing—nothing is impossible—once students have the information they need."

"Nothing is impossible."

Peace Corps — a 'university in dispersion'

Well how about that? The Peace Corps doesn't like university education programs either. It just isn't good enough for what they want, so they designed their own and now one of their number has become president of a new college in State University of New York system. The article says "he has been give full freedom to review all the conventional ingredients—admissions policies, grades, course systems, and academic divisions." His college is scheduled to open in 1970 but he is trying out his ideas now. Will we have a new university in the '70s? Not unless the University of Alberta starts taking educational experiment seriously.

WASHINGTON (CPS)—There's a phrase gaining currency within the Peace Corps—"university in dispersion."

Staff members and volunteers use it to define the highly successful organization, and with that in mind they are creating training programs that may be radical models of educational reform for this country.

Since its inception six years ago, the Peace Corps has relied largely on universities and academic faculties to conduct three-month training programs. These usually consists of intensive academic, and sometimes physical,

exercises.

"What has been wrong with Peace Corps training are the same things that are wrong with higher education in general," according to Associate Director Harris Wofford.

Wofford was appointed head of an Education Task Force in August 1965, charged with developing plans to "move training from a three-month operation to a two-year or three-year process of Volunteer education."

One year ago the task force produced a draft report indicating the weaknesses of Peace Corps training and recommending reforms. A final report is expected this month which will evaluate the new programs run during the past year.

UNIVERSITIES DAMNED

The Task Force draft report damned traditional training methods and, by implication, the universities which had developed them. Among other recommendations, the report urged that:

- Training concentrate on starting processes of learning, rather than on cramming as much information as possible into the volunteers' heads.

- Programs included community action in unfamiliar environments, either in slums, rural areas, Job Corps camps, or in the host country itself.

- Staff members should not use standard lecture methods of teaching. There must be a co-

hesive faculty to plan the program, work together throughout it, and participate along with the volunteers.

- Volunteers should be trained in small groups of no more than 100, in which individual needs and interests are respected and the trainees participate in some of the decision-making and evaluation.

- Instead of treating training institutions as service stations, to which the Peace Corps comes, fills up, and drives off, the training program must be only the beginning of the university's role. The faculty must be invited in various ways to participate in the continuing education of the volunteers overseas, and the volunteers encouraged to develop continuing relationships with particular faculty members or colleges.

In effect, the Peace Corps is attempting to become a university, but one unlike any other in the world.

ACTION PROGRAMS

One recent training program, whose members just left for Nigeria, was set up in Roxbury, a Negro ghetto of Boston. The 60 trainees were scattered in private homes in the area, and allowed to develop their own community action projects.

The trainees came together in groups of 15 for seminars and language instruction. Each seminar group had a \$1,300 allowance to furnish an empty

apartment as a library and seminar meeting place. The trainees provided the substance of the seminars, developing their own curriculum. Only two books were assigned at the start: "The Autobiography of Malcolm X" and Graham Green's "The Quiet American."

Although a few new volunteers left the first day of the project, most of the trainees seemed to find the setting a challenge.

The project was highly unstructured, and seminars became non-directive sessions during which the trainees examined their relationships and activities in Roxbury. Staff members were almost as uncertain as the trainees about the goals of the project, and decision-making was decentralized and free-wheeling.

WEAKNESSES

"The great raging controversy" of the three months, according to Roger Landrum, the project's director, was over whether trainees had real decision-making power.

The Roxbury project was not without weaknesses. Several trainees expressed a desire for more intellectual substance—"I didn't learn anything about teaching law in Nigeria" was a Berkeley law school graduate's comment.

The project also seemed to turn in upon itself, rather than out toward the community. A few trainees set up a school and involved students and parents in

a new educational experience.

But the great majority of the volunteers did not take the initiative and were content to attend the sessions provided for them by the program.

The effect of projects like the one in Roxbury is difficult to measure. On the one hand, its goal is to create a capacity for living in and learning from another culture.

CONCEPTS CHALLENGED

On the other hand, its goal is to challenge existing concepts of education in American universities. Several institutions already give credit for community action or volunteer work as part of a regular academic program.

The most potentially powerful influence, however, are the people now involved in one way or another with educational experiences they are finding much more stimulating than anything they did in college.

Harris Wofford left the Peace Corps on January 20 to become president of a new college in the State University of New York system.

He has been given freedom to review all the conventional ingredients—admissions policies, grades, course systems, and academic divisions.

The new college is scheduled to open in 1970, but Wofford is already taking about beginning before the time with students and no central campus—"a university in dispersion," he called it.