Student Protests: A Phenomenon for Behavioral Sciences Research

Statement of a group of Fellows at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, Stanford, California

Despite the recent flood of commentary in both scientific and popular publications about student revolt on the college campus, there has been relatively little objective examination on a national level of this "crisis in education."

The substantive issues raised in each instance, ranging from student participation in university governance to the role of the university in solving major social problems, are important and worthy of careful consideration. Individual institutions involved in these protests are now addressing the underlying questions, and some answers are being found. In many instances, however, the reaction to the manner of presenting the issues overshadows the response to their substance. Much of the energy and attention has been directed at the process of confrontation, often making *this* the issue.

Because this process of confrontation and its consequences have been of major importance in these student protests and because they are not well understood, we believe that a national study, supported by some appropriate federal agency or private foundation, should be undertaken to examine the individual and group patterns of response to these protests by students, faculty, and administration. A distinguished panel of behavioral scientists and educators should be appointed to serve as an advisory body. The scope and methods of the study should be developed by this advisory body, and should be designed to provide a national perspective on this phenomenon.

Some background to this recommendation, and the reasons for making it, are in order.

Background to the Proposal

Last October, at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, the group of 50 Fellows invited to the Center for the academic year initiated various informal seminars. One seminar was on "The College Environment as a Place To Learn."

The nucleus group of approximately 12 participants represented an unusual diversity of scholarly competence. These Fellows, almost all of whom are senior professors at their respective universities, included psychiatrists who have been working in the area of adolescent behavior, psychologists concerned with student behavior and the taxonomy of educational environments, a professor of the philosophy of education, a professor of history interested in the history of higher education, and colleagues from England and other countries of Europe who have been working in the general area of the sociology of education.

The seminar began last fall in a rather leisurely fashion with an examination of the manner in which colleges today provide an environment suitable for education. Various issues were discussed; for example: In what way is the interaction between the student and the school supportive of the learning process and in what way is it inhibitory? Do schools and students have distinguishable characteristics recognition of which could lead to a better fit between categories of students and categories of schools? What are some of the critical incidents in the initial and subsequent interactions between the student and his college environment which are significantly positive or negative in influence? What kind of research should be developed for looking at the student, the school, and the interaction so as to increase the effectiveness of the college as a place to learn?

As the seminar continued into the late fall we became increasingly aware of the impact of student unrest on the college campus as demonstrations occurred on the campuses of the participants in our seminar. The issue came closest to immediate concern when the laboratory of one of the participants—Antioch's Behavior Research Laboratory (BRL)—was picketed and forcibly closed for a few hours by a group of students because of its research contracts with the Department of Defense. Harry Jerison, the participant in question, wrote a statement presenting his position on this entire matter. His statement gives a personal point of view on academic freedom and other issues that have been receiving attention and expression in the past year. His concluding paragraphs were a direct response to the student activists who had organized an *ad hoc* Committee Against Defense Research (CADRE). They are worth repeating.

It may come as a surprise to CADRE, but it is a fact that the Defense Department has always supported many activities of questionable benefit to the military establishment but of great benefit to the country and the world. Beginning with the manning and organization of the Lewis and Clark expeditions, continuing through the great geological, paleontological surveys of the 19th century, and into our own time with the support of contracts like the one permitting BRL to exist, the Defense Department and its forbears have been favored instruments for making national commitments to scientific activities. For myself I would prefer a more honest system. It might make better sense to limit the Defense Department to soldiering, and to develop other approaches to the nonmilitary jobs. However, since the support of unclassified research that I would find acceptable for Antioch is completely aboveboard, with the expenditure and work open for all to inspect, I hesitate to quibble about the words one uses to describe the source of money. It comes out of our tax dollar, and I sometimes think that those who feel guilty about the fraction of their dollar going into military expenditures could be solaced to some extent to learn that the "military" expenditure goes into many nonmilitary activities. The expenditure of taxes that paid for the Naval Academy operations in the 1870's educated Midshipman Michelson. It paid his salary after graduation while he taught at Annapolis and did his first experiments on the speed of light. The Navy Department in this way supported work important

The statement, here slightly condensed, was signed by the following Fellows: M. H. Abrams, Cornell University; Alexander W. Astin, American Council on Education; Richard A. Brody, Stanford University; Harry S. Broudy, University of Illinois; Frederick G. Brown, Iowa State University; Beatrix Hamburg, Stanford University; David A. Hamburg, Stanford University; Harry J. Jerison, Antioch College; Sanford H. Kadish, University of California, Berkeley; Robert J. Levy, University of Minnesota; Donald G. MacRae, London School of Economics; Maurice Mandelbaum, Johns Hopkins University; Clarence Morris, University of Pennsylvania; Eli A. Rubinstein, National Institute of Mental Health; Melvin Sabshin, University of Illinois; David L. Sills, Columbia University; Gregory Vlastos, Princeton University; William Vickrey, Columbia University; Merlin C. Wittrock, University of California, Los Angeles.

enough to merit the first Nobel Prize in Science awarded to an American.

I consider the danger of external control through contracts to be great enough to support regular reviews of contractual commitments. On the whole I have faith that most of the faculty and many of the students have sturdy enough characters to resist selling out. The CADRE group, were it in control, would be much more dangerous. It would first police our morals by making sure that it is impossible for us to sell out to the Defense Department. Next year it could decide that doing research on nucleic acids is irrelevant and therefore immoral, and prohibit that. The scientifically trained members of the community could then be mobilized to work on high priority problems identified by the New Antioch. According to CADRE, Antioch might start by marching its scientists out in a phalanx for action-research on the problems of middle-class ennui in a decadent America. It is an interesting prospect.

This strong statement reflected a point of view and feelings that were generally shared by Fellows who had become involved in student unrest on their own campuses. At the same time there was a genuine desire to understand the sources of unrest and the influence of this manner of behavior on the efforts to resolve the issues raised by the demonstrations themselves.

Because of this incident and others which touched upon the academic lives of the seminar participants, we decided to look more intensively at this entire phenomenon of student unrest. We invited a number of college presidents to meet individually with us in the seminar. We were especially interested in discussing with them their views on student unrest and the role it is playing on the college campus. How do they view its importance? How do they view the students so involved? What, if anything, does the college administration need to do about it? What implications does it have for the way our colleges should function? What kinds of research would help us to understand better, and to respond more appropriately to, student dissent?

The plans for this phase of the seminar were initiated in December 1967. By that time, demonstrations had already occurred, between September and December, on at least 62 different campuses of 4-year schools, and approximately 15,000 students had been active participants. But all of these were prior to the major student revolt at Columbia. Our discussions with the college presidents who came to the seminar between February and April of 1968 were conducted against a background of Berkeley, almost 4 years in the past, with Columbia yet to come. Thus, while neither the seriousness nor the significance of student unrest was underestimated, violence sufficient to close the campus of a major university for an extended period was not a part of immediate past history.

The various presidents (Robert D. Clark, San Jose State College; John Summerskill, San Francisco State College; Roger W. Heyns, University of California, Berkeley; Dean E. McHenry, University of California, Santa Cruz; and Louis Benezet, Claremont University Center) independently agreed that there was a need to improve and increase student participation in university functioning. They also agreed that the university could not tolerate disruption through acts of violence or coercion. With these two positions as anchoring points, the discussions ranged over a wide area of concerns as to the meaning and importance of student unrest (*1*).

A Need To Look at the Process

It is clear from the increasing number and intensity of demonstrations on campuses in the United States and abroad that we do not understand how best to deal with these crises when they occur and certainly do not have the knowledge to prevent them from occurring in the first place. The present series of student protests might be compared to a succession of earthquakes, some minor and some major. They have come unexpectedly and with an impact which has produced visible tremors in the structure of higher education and confusion and concern in the academic community. What is not known is how severely the foundations of the academic institutions have been damaged or where the fault really lies.

It is important to point out that, in using words like *deal with* and *prevent* in discussing these protests, there is the implicit assumption that violent or destructive behavior, of itself, is undesirable and self-defeating. We believe this to be true.

It is an ironic coincidence that last year a majority of the Fellows at this Center, in an open letter to the President of the United States deploring the military escalation in Vietnam and urging a cessation of the bombing of North Vietnam, included the following paragraph:

> As students of human society and behavior, we cannot but be painfully aware of what a great German scholar called "the diabolic forces lurking in all violence." Despite the best intentions of good men, violence feeds upon itself and all too easily overwhelms and corrupts the purposes to which it is put. We fear that this is now happening in Vietnam.

Despite its less extreme nature, violence on our college campuses can produce the same corrupting effect. This is said in recognition of the fact that crises of confrontation, such as these student demonstrations, often are indicative of serious social problems, both on and off the campus. As characterized by the more extreme student activists, these social problems are inherent in our entire present social structure, and a purpose of confrontation is a direct attack on the structure. Whether or not one accepts this characterization, it is apparent that the recent student revolts have precipitated a crisis in education.

Difficult as it may seem at present,

these social problems can be separated from the behavior of the students who bring the problems to the attention of their community. But both the problems and the behavior affect the modes of governance and of education on the campus; they demand the attention of all members of the academic community and of all who are concerned with education. The substantive social issues are now being addressed with great intensity by the many special groups and commissions within the colleges and universities where demonstrations have occurred. Changes are being made and will continue to be made as a result of these efforts.

At the same time, the behavior of the students who have so forcibly brought these issues to everyone's attention should be of special concern to the behavioral scientists. It is pertinent to point out that generations of college students have served as subjects in countless psychological and sociological experiments on campus. Much of the new knowledge in the behavioral sciences has come from these experiments. The present crisis offers an opportunity to make use of some of that knowledge in an effort to understand and interpret the behavior of the students and everyone else immediately affected by these demonstrations. A major effort at research on a national level needs to be initiated to examine the behavior of participants in these student protests, as well as the response of students, faculty, and administration.

In recommending such a line of inquiry it is recognized that those individuals who are deeply committed to the course of action represented by student protests may criticize such inquiry as a form of inaction indicative of today's "outmoded thinking." The behavioral scientists must grasp this nettle firmly. Such an attitude itself is an aspect that should be examined and, hopefully, understood. In fact, a study of the behavior of protest is itself a warranted partial response to one of the common criticisms made in the protest movement—that the subject matter of college courses and academic research is irrelevant to problems in the real world.

We also wish to make it clear that a national study should be undertaken in addition to, and not in place of, individual studies now under way or being planned. In the past few years there have been a number of careful examinations of student activism, and undoubtedly many more are now being initiated. These can all add to our understanding of the phenomenon. Our recommendation is based on the belief that more needs to be done, on a national level, because of the widespread occurrence of these protests.

The history of student demonstrations shows that communication by crisis represents a crisis in communication. The so-called generation gap is nowhere more clearly demonstrated than in the heat of the campus demonstration. Professors and administrators who have long viewed themselves as vanguard liberals suddenly find their positions far to the right of those of the student activists and the faculty members who participate in the protests. Discussion takes on a "we" and "they" aspect, and reason gives way to rhetoric. Attitudes become polarized, and principles, which should motivate both action and reaction, are lost in the tactical maneuvers by administrators trying to contain the situation and by demonstrators forcing confrontation or change. In many cases the original issues are lost in this process and new issues about the appropriate roles of parties to the confrontation become central.

Little Is Known

Although the characteristics of student activism have been examined by behavioral scientists and others since the events at Berkeley in 1964, recent instances of student protest raise new questions about the dimensions and nature of this phenomenon.

For example, the following assertions, representative of statements being made in publications about activism, are based on relatively little comprehensive, nationwide data, or on none at all.

1) Less than 10 percent of the student body is actively involved in initiating activist demonstrations on campus.

2) While the immediate stimulus for student demonstrations may be a local incident, the more pervasive roots are embedded in the discontinuity between what students perceive today's college education to be and what they want it to be in relationship to society at large.

3) Demonstrations on campus occur more frequently in those institutions that have the most student freedom and the most permissive administrations.

4) While the leaders of student movements are usually bright and articulate, the general population of student activists is not significantly different, intellectually, from the rest of the student population on the campus in question.

5) There is a subgroup of student activists, most recently exemplified by certain members of the new left and by some black student leaders, with whom a fruitful dialogue no longer seems possible.

6) The succession of ideologies in the past 3 years and the variety of activist groups emphasize the complexity and multiplicity of the causes of student unrest.

7) Of all the external causes of student protest, the Vietnam war has probably been the most powerful.

8) While student unrest, as such, is not a new phenomenon, there is now a basic questioning of the legitimacy of adult authority.

9) Drugs and "the pill" have created problems on campus but are not importantly related to student unrest.

10) If it remains within tolerable boundaries, student unrest can be a constructive effort at adaptation to a future social era.

11) Minority but active faculty support is an important adjunct in student unrest.

These assertions and many others that are now being made need to be examined in broad perspective and in the light of recent events. The dynamics of protest itself need to be examined and understood. How does a handful of students enlist an increasing number of students and faculty in the sequence of events that occur during a student protest? Who stays and who leaves during the sequence of events in a campus crisis? In what way does the response by faculty, by administrators, and by the rest of the student body influence the process?

The entire matter of communication is a key variable. What is the nature of communication during the protest and after? What roles do the communication media play in these demonstrations?

There are broad aspects of behavior and social process that need to be examined. If student unrest is a form of social movement, how are students recruited into it? What are some of the underlying value commitments? In what way does protest influence the future of those who participate?

The answers to these and many other questions related to student activism

are just not known at present. It is obvious that this phenomenon is importantly affecting university structure and function. It is also obvious that it is receiving a tremendous amount of attention and reaction. Because of this importance and visibility it deserves the kind of comprehensive examination that can provide insights into the behavioral aspects of the phenomenon.

A Caution and a Hope

We are aware that the pursuit of these questions may be viewed with alarm by some groups. Insidious motives may be ascribed to proponents of a national study to examine student unrest. We see no way to avoid such criticism. It is our belief, however, that such a study, dedicated to a better understanding of the dynamics of the process of student protest, can be useful in resolving the substantive issues which are being raised in these protests, and is important in its own right as an area for behavioral research.

Note

1. A separate report on these sessions with the college presidents is being prepared for publication.

Choosing a Scientific Computer for Service

Computers can be cheap and available or prohibitively expensive, depending on choice of size and type.

M. V. Mathews

Digital computers give promise of serving mankind as no other machine and no animal has ever done. They, and the other technology which our science can create, inspire realistic visions of an economic and intellectual plenty which was formerly unimaginable. Computers promise to control production machinery with unprecedented flexibility; to store, summarize, and quickly provide the business information needed to run complex industries; to marshall demographic and economic data; to predict complex phenomena such as weather; to compute dosages of, and administer, radiation in radiotherapy; to watch over the care and genetic development of the plants and animals that provide our food; to play instruments, to sing, and to draw pictures; perhaps even to play games for our amusement. They promise to replace both the unwilling slave as man's servant and the willing dog as man's best friend.

In order to realize these potentials, we and others are investing much effort —to develop computers, to train users of the computers, and (hopefully) to apply these machines in solving important problems. Unhappily, our progress is slowed by the very progress that is being made in computer development; we are impeded by subtle and unexpected difficulties which we do not completely understand. For example, introduction of the current generation of computers, which are clearly more complex and slightly faster than previous machines, has almost ended computer solutions of useful problems in many places. Because of their cheapness, the new machines were irresistible; because of their complexity it is taking years to write the system programs that will make them usable.

We find ourselves close to the position of needing every person who can program a computer to write the system programs, and to rewrite them as fast as the next generation of machines is constructed. Furthermore, this programming is intriguing; we can easily enjoy serving computers rather than making computers solve our problems. (Computer science is often a synonym for serving computers.)

Schools have rightfully assumed the tasks of training computer users and applying computers in solving worthwhile problems. In doing so, they face not only the difficulties I have mentioned but also unprecedented costs, and the problem of choosing from a large array of possible machines. These vary in cost, according to size, from $10,000 to $10 million; there are more than 30 domestic producers, some making over 20 different models. There are scientific computers, business computers, and remote-access computers, all different.

Computation is young, and computer experts are few. Often schools must choose a machine and develop a program for its use with very little technical help. It is to be hoped that computer manufacturers will soon provide technical guidance to assist in wise selection of computers, at least from their own line of machines. At present this seems not to be the case. In reply to a suggestion that a Columbia University seminar on the relations between research, education, and computers hold sessions dealing with the technological reasons for selecting a particular computer, the representative of a large computer manufacturer on the program committee replied, "As to the subject of choice of computer, the points you raise are mainly technological whereas a real computer is chosen on grounds other than the technology: available funds, whether for rent or for sale; space available; future expansion capabilities; the existence of a joint user's committee with pooling of funds—these are all factors which I call political rather than technological, and I suspect that these factors outweigh what might otherwise be a purely technical decision." The current weight of political factors may indeed be significant.

In the remainder of this article I point out some technical factors which I feel are vital considerations in choosing a computer. Choice of the proper

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