

ACE Study on Campus Unrest: Questions for Behavioral Scientists

A study of campus unrest conducted by the research office of the American Council on Education (ACE), with major financing by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), has run into sharp opposition from the university Left.

Critics complain that data gained in the study might be used by authorities for punitive action against individuals, and also that results of the research might contribute to a general strategy to control protests.

While a relatively small percentage of college and university students have been involved in protests the militants have considerable leverage on the study, since the cooperation of activists is obviously necessary if research on campus disturbances is to be carried out effectively.

The sharpest attacks on the study have come from the radical Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), but the relatively moderate National Student Association has expressed concern about civil liberties aspects of the study and has misgivings about other implications (see story, page 160).

Apprehensiveness about a potential misuse of information among members of a committee of university behavioral scientists formed to advise on the study led to an agreement on guidelines designed to insure the confidentiality of study data. Because the guidelines express in some detail the concerns of many social and behavioral scientists about large-scale studies such as the ACE study, the guidelines are being published in full this week in the News section.

The main target of student criticism has been the effort to gather detailed case studies, based on "in-depth" interviews, of serious protests on more than a score of college and university campuses, but the objections also extend to a broader study of student attitudes undertaken 4 years ago under ACE auspices.

Since ACE, largest of the national higher education associations, set up

its research office in 1965, it has been headed by psychologist Alexander W. Astin. A former director of research for the National Scholarship Corporation, Astin had interests and experience which led directly to the design of a pilot study for ACE of the effects on students' attitudes and behavior of their college experience. A pilot study involving about 60 institutions and 42,000 students was expanded in 1966 to a full-scale Cooperative Institutional Research Program involving 300 institutions.

This is a "longitudinal study"—which means that it is necessary to gather data when the subjects enter college, during their college careers, and when they leave. Follow-ups require that those conducting the research have identifying data so that they can follow individuals.

The study is computerized, and the basic instrument is a questionnaire with some 150 questions designed to yield standard biographical and demographical data and also information on educational and vocational plans, talents and achievements, aspirations, and political attitudes.

The aim of the study, says Astin, was to learn what it is about the college environment that is conducive or inimical to learning—the point being that, if it were possible to learn how students are affected by their colleges, "we could confront administrators with facts on how their practices affect students."

The other intensive study of student unrest landed at ACE in part by coincidence. Astin last year was one of the visiting fellows at the Center for the Advanced Study of Behavioral Sciences at Stanford. At the time the phenomenon of student protest was a subject of special interest there, and the fellows produced a statement (*Science*, 5 July 1968) in which they declared, "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."

That the call for such a study was heeded is perhaps largely accounted for by the fact that Eli Rubenstein, deputy director of the National Institute of Mental Health, was also spending a year as a fellow at the Stanford center.

Rubenstein emphasizes that the support of such a study was appropriate for NIMH because NIMH is not just a narrowly focused mental health agency but is designated as the official agent in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare for social science research.

The search for a chief investigator led to ACE's doorstep because of Astin's experience with research on students in a college environment and because the ACE project had already accumulated a valuable store of longitudinal data.

Rubenstein says that NIMH picked Astin and ACE because Rubenstein and his colleagues were satisfied that ACE has given its research office operating freedom and the study would not be controlled by ACE officials or members. Rubenstein, doubtless aware of the potential radical student backlash, insisted on the formation of a special advisory committee of well-known university behavioral scientists, including some "aggressively liberal people," presumably as a lightning rod against controversy.

ACE's research office had no staff to do the sort of survey work contemplated for the study, and, as contractor for the work, the Bureau of Social Science Research (BSSR), a nonprofit research organization in Washington, was chosen. In charge for BSSR is psychologist Helen Astin, a BSSR associate, who is also Mrs. Alexander Astin. This assurance of close coordination was convenient, since the study had to be designed and put into operation on a crash basis in March and April, after a trial run at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

The case histories on campus unrest are built on sets of 35 intensive personal interviews with students, faculty, and administrators at each of more than a score of colleges.

In addition, a careful collection is made of documents germane to the local protest at each institution, and the person responsible for the study writes a chronology of events (he is directed to eschew editorializing).

As student unrest increased, the questionnaires used in the ACE's big "freshman study" have been weighted more heavily toward questions bearing on protest behavior, and the intention is that the existing computerized data bank containing the information gained in the longitudinal study will also be fed data from the campus unrest study. The aim is to create a data bank

which will serve a wide range of research concerns.

The data are available to anyone willing to pay a nominal user's fee. Since the flak on confidentiality began to fly, the data-accessing system has been extensively modified to keep identification data physically separate from research data. The identification file on tape is sequestered in a way

that Astin won't discuss in detail, and he says that there is a "fail-safe" security system in which the staff has considerable faith.

If any government agency subpoenaed data, the ACE research office would be truly in the middle and would face a test of a reported assurance to critics by ACE staff that they are "prepared to go to jail if neces-

Statement on Confidentiality, Use of Results, and Independence

Background

Several questions have been raised concerning the study of campus unrest conducted by the research staff of the American Council of Education and supported by a research grant from the National Institute of Mental Health. These questions derive from concerns that complete confidentiality will not or cannot be maintained in this study, that the results of the study will be misused, or that pressures from the sponsoring or funding agency will compromise the objectivity of the research. A statement about these concerns seems called for, both because the study raises questions with large numbers of students and faculty on many American campuses, and because of the ethical and political implications of the questions raised and the solutions proposed.

We strongly support the legitimacy of and need for scientific studies of controversial topics, when conducted with due regard for confidentiality, the ethical use of findings, and the objectivity of the research staff. The study of campus unrest is an effort to gather solid information that will contribute to understanding an important social fact. It is an attempt neither to repress nor to legitimize protest.

The study of campus unrest consists of two parts. The first part involves using the longitudinal A.C.E. research data on students in a representative national sample of more than 300 colleges. These existing data, along with new data still to be gathered, will be analyzed to study the characteristics of students and of institutions that are related to various types of campus unrest, and to determine how students and colleges are affected by unrest when it occurs. The research also involves intensive case studies of a number of specific protests that have recently taken place. These case studies will be used to study the process, development and outcome of campus unrest. This part of the study is being conducted under sub-contract by the Bureau of Social Science Research.

Special problems arise in conducting research of this kind into a controversial social phenomenon. These problems are aggravated because campus unrest is simultaneously being investigated by legislative groups, police agencies and courts, and because proven involvement in certain student protests might constitute the basis for court action and/or the withdrawal of federal scholarship funds. Because of these problems, we believe it important to spell out the guidelines of this study.

Confidentiality

1. The complete confidentiality of all data gathered in this study will be maintained, including the confidentiality of the names of all specific respondents, of all persons named by specific respondents, and of all institutions and groups involved or named in the study.

2. Confidential scientific data does not currently have the generally accepted legal status of privileged information, as do many patient-doctor, client-attorney, and penitent-priest communications. Partly as a result, special precautions have been taken to assure the confidentiality of all data gathered in this research. Because the problems of protecting confidentiality differ in longitudinal surveys and in case studies of specific protests, these two parts of the study have required different kinds of precautions.

3. *A.C.E. longitudinal data.* Any longitudinal study must keep records of respondents who are to be re-contacted at a later date. Extraordinary precautions have been taken for some years by the A.C.E. and B.S.S.R. research staffs to protect the confidentiality of their records and to insure the anonymity of individual respondents or individual institutions. In the A.C.E. research program, these precautions include data files without identifying information which are used for research purposes, and physically separate files containing identifying information. The latter files are kept in vaults and unlocked temporarily for purposes of mailing follow-up questionnaires. A controlled data access system now in operation makes it impossible for users of the longitudinal data, including all members of the A.C.E. staff except the Director, to obtain any information concerning the identity of individuals, but permits any person to use these data for research purposes.

4. *Case studies of specific protests.* Case studies of specific campus protests require a different set of precautions. Because campus unrest is a sensitive and controversial phenomenon, the following safeguards have been taken:

a. All recorded information that might permit the direct or indirect identification of respondents or individuals and groups named by them has been destroyed.

b. In all future case studies, each respondent will be specifically informed of the voluntary nature of participation, of the safeguards taken to guarantee confidentiality, and of the manner in which the data are to be treated. No data

sary" in order to keep data confidential.

Those carrying out the ACE study count on the good faith of university administrators in respecting the stated purposes of the study. Radical students, on the other hand, are unwilling these days to give the "establishment" the benefit of any doubts.

The conflict over the study of campus unrest amounts to a confronta-

tion of radical students not only with university authorities but also with the social scientists over the rules of the game in research.

A flood of personal accounts and analyses of campus disturbances has flowed forth since the era opened at Berkeley, and much of it has been written by social scientists. The records, however, are mainly of two kinds.

First there are case histories focusing on a sequence of events at a particular institution, which usually include explanations of the outbreaks in terms of local situations, groups, and personalities.

Then there are the attempts to generalize about the campus upheavals and to apply an all-purpose psychological or sociological interpretation.

By the Advisory Committee A.C.E. Study of Campus Unrest

concerning specific protests will be maintained which permits direct or indirect identification of respondents or individuals and groups named by them.

5. Henceforth, all investigators, data collectors, field investigators and other researchers involved in this study (whether at A.C.E. or B.S.S.R.) will explicitly undertake to protect all confidential information, whether recorded or not, that is revealed to them. They will specifically agree to refuse to divulge confidential information to any person or group, including investigative agencies, committees, and courts of law, and even if they or their records should be subpoenaed.

6. Convinced that it is the ethical responsibility of the investigator and his advisors to protect the confidentiality of data gathered and the anonymity of all respondents, *we advise and counsel all researchers in this study to refuse to release or provide any confidential information, even if directed to do so by a subpoena or other court process from a legislative body or court of law.* We will support with all legal means any such refusal.

7. The members of this Advisory Board urged the prompt passage of carefully drafted legislation that will grant privilege status to communications between respondents and legitimate scientific investigators. We urge professional associations of social scientists to seek immediate legislative action on this matter.

8. Certain aspects of this study should obviously *not* be confidential. These include the over-all research design, all research instruments, and the general findings of the study. In addition, the opportunity to re-analyze or to perform new analyses of the data collected in this project, with the safeguards concerning confidentiality built into the A.C.E. data access system, should continue to be available.

b. The study is not intended as an evaluation of the merits of campus unrest. While this research may help clarify the consequences for students or institutions of protests, other considerations are obviously important in judging the merits of specific protests or of campus unrest as a social phenomenon.

2. This study is not intended as a means of gathering information in order to enable college authorities to screen out or admit "protest-prone" applicants to an institution, to dismiss or expell particular students, to solicit memberships in particular campus or political groups, or to select particular kinds of students for specific curricula, courses or programs. The Advisory Board believes that any such uses of the findings of this study would be unethical. For example, to employ predictive criteria for "protest-proneness" in college admission procedures would be to discriminate for or against students on the basis of predictions that they might engage in protests over institutional, social or political matters. It would thus deprive students of their right to obtain an education regardless of their convictions, and would trammel fundamental notions of liberty, equal protection of the law, fairness and due process.

Independence from Funding and Sponsoring Agencies

The controlled data access system provides equal access to the A.C.E. data bank to all qualified persons. No special access to data or findings is available to the members of the American Council of Education, the Bureau of Social Sciences Research, the National Institute of Mental Health, or this Advisory Board. All findings of this study will be made public.

Presentation and Use of Findings

1. The findings of this study will be presented by the study staff in the form customary for the reporting of this type of scientific research. This form is not always clear to the general public. For that reason, we spell out some of the considerations involved in the presentation of this study.

a. The study is not a comprehensive investigation of the causes of campus unrest, since it necessarily neglects the role of social, political, economic and historic factors.

* Chairman of the committee for Campus Unrest and Change is Wayne Holtzman, University of Texas; members are Christian Bay, University of Alberta; Allan M. Cartter, New York University; Amitai Etzioni, Columbia; The Rev. Andrew Greeley, National Opinion Research Center; Seymour Halleck, University of Wisconsin; Joseph Kauffman, Rhode Island College; Kenneth Keniston, Yale New Haven Medical Center; David Reisman, Harvard; Eli Rubenstein, National Institute of Mental Health; M. Brewster Smith, University of Chicago; Preston Valien, Office of Education. The guidelines were signed by all members except Amitai Etzioni, who felt that the guidelines should be limited to internal use and the two representatives from the federal government.

Lewis S. Feuer's *The Conflict of Generations* is one of the most extensive efforts to explain events on the campus and on the barricades in terms of what is coming to be called the "Oedipal revolution."

Largely missing so far have been serious attempts at empirical research on student unrest, and the ACE studies are designed in part to help fill the gap.

Almost nothing, of course, infuriates student revolutionaries more than an

analysis which shifts attention from the social or political conditions they are protesting to the behavior of the protestors. Any reporter who has covered campus protests is familiar with the radical's remonstrance, "For God's sake don't write another story about alienated youth."

The university Left was weaned on the social and behavioral sciences. They owe much to C. Wright Mills, Marcuse, Fanon, Lewis, and Debray

for their social perceptions and revolutionary theory.

Now, many American social and behavioral scientists are attracted to the study of the apostles of social change. But they find themselves consigned politically to the liberal middle and separated by an ideology gap from the student radicals who insist that the proper study of the behavioral sciences is American institutions, not them.

—JOHN WALSH

Confidentiality Is Not the Only Issue Causing Unrest among Student Critics of the Effort To Study Protests

A statement by the social scientists at the Center for the Advanced Study of the Behavioral Sciences calling for a study of student unrest (*Science*, 5 July 1968) concluded, "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 on campus unrest." If this was not an anticipation of trouble, it was at least prophetic. In the few short months during which the study has been under way, it has been the subject of controversy among its own staff members, its university advisers, and its government sponsors, as well as the focus of attack by the nation's two most influential student organizations, the National Student Association (NSA) and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Two colleges, Oberlin and Swarthmore, have refused to cooperate, and other schools have refused to let interviewers ask certain questions about race and religion. Most of the complaints are focused on the in-depth interviews of students which are a part of a study on campus unrest; this study is separate from the American Council on Education (ACE) freshman study. ACE research head Alexander Astin, who subcontracted the study to the Bureau of Social Science Research (BSSR), ruefully admits, "We had no idea what we were getting ourselves in for."

The questions, which have been raised both by social scientists connected with the study and by students and social scientists opposed to the study, fall into three general categories: the problem of confidentiality and violation of privacy, the question of what should be studied and how, the matter of the political uses of the data.

NSA first raised the question of confidentiality and privacy, to which the new guidelines are addressed, early in the fall of 1968. Concerned about the growing number of government investigations of student protests, drug use, and draft resistance and the more general climate of what NSA staff members call "anti-student" feeling in the country, NSA president Robert Powell became worried about certain aspects of the ACE freshman study. The fact that ACE was collecting Social Security numbers as well as names and addresses of the freshmen interviewed for follow-ups and was asking students a few questions about drug use and protest participation troubled NSA. Powell got the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to advise them. Robert Christen, chairman of the Academic Freedom Committee of ACLU, made three recommendations: that Social Security numbers be stricken from the forms; that ACE should develop a procedure to separate the names of participants from their answers to questionnaires; and that every questionnaire should be stamped with the notation that participation in the study is voluntary.

ACE agreed to the ACLU recommendations; however, this did not head off the more complicated and serious questions of confidentiality presented by the campus unrest study. Meetings of the advisory group for the study were fraught with conflict from the start. At the first meeting, in December, a number of the university social scientists advising ACE argued that the study should not focus primarily on student behavior (or disruptive actions) but should examine the precipitating social and political causes of protest as well. Some NIMH officials

still agree with this criticism. But this argument about research design was not the serious professional question for the advisory committee that the question of confidentiality was to become. The fact that the entire study was about disruption meant that much of the information collected might be incriminating either to student participants or to others whose activities a student might describe. The student questionnaire—30 pages long—included many open-ended questions about personal drug use and political views as well as requests to name groups and nonstudents involved in protest. BSSR was taking the names of the participants, although no follow-up interviews were planned, and recording the names on the face sheet of the questionnaire. The identifying sheet is now destroyed.

No less important a factor in underscoring these issues was the announcement by the McClellan special investigations committee this spring that it would begin subpoenaing data about students for its study of campus violence. Also alarming to advisory committee members was the increasingly "hard line" taken by the Justice Department about student protests, and the recommendation by another congressional committee that federal scholarships be cut off from students participating in demonstrations. To NSA staffers, members of SDS, and sociologists like Yale's Kenneth Keniston and Chicago's Richard Flacks, the BSSR data began to look more and more germane to these investigations of students.

This is, of course, not the first time the question of the responsibility of social scientists in protecting their subjects from invasion of privacy has come up. Although ethics of research in clinical psychology and medical science has been more highly developed, social scientists are beginning to