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Bipolarity on the Campus

The great social revolution gripping this nation has uncovered for a wide public an important consideration that has been of deep concern to thoughtful educators for decades; traditional criteria (Scholastic Aptitude Tests and rank in class) fail to identify as promising college students many young people who are fully as capable of profiting from a college education as those who are usually accepted. Some of the young people excluded from our colleges had attended inadequate secondary schools and were ill prepared for the SAT's. For extraneous reasons, many of the youngsters from ghetto areas have not achieved a rank in their high school class commensurate with their potentialities.

As a partial and belated recognition of this complex and serious human and social problem, various kinds of special programs have been inaugurated in our colleges and universities. The admissions criteria for these special programs represent a break with tradition; they de-emphasize rank in class and SAT's and emphasize economic and educational disadvantages.

One of the potential conflicts created in highly selective colleges as a consequence of the development of such special programs is the almost inevitable polarization of the student body into two groups. The traditional group consists of a large number of students selected for their proven high academic ability, and the new group consists of a small number of students united through their entrapment by substandard academic preparation.

This explicit bipolarity, with its divergent, and almost antagonistic, life-styles with racial overtones, has in it the fuels for resentment, hostility, and suspicion, and they flare up, or smolder, in many diverse ways. The prevention of continuing disruption and unrest on the campuses with such strong bipolarity has required of students in both groups extreme forbearance. While we should be thankful for the restraint usually exhibited by our students as they live and study in explosively unstable communities, we should press a search for solutions to ameliorate this instability.

One possible and partial solution might be to modify the composition of the student body from one consisting of two divergent groups to one with a heterogeneous student body. The extremes would still be represented, but the existing bipolarity would be replaced with a continuum of student abilities and backgrounds. Such a modification of the student body, I think, might create a climate on the campus conducive to greater understanding, improved enrichment, and fuller education.

To the extent that this approach is desirable, a difficult problem is created for our faculties and admissions officers. How could a college with a respected academic reputation justify accepting a student of but modest demonstrated academic ability while denying admission to one of highly demonstrated academic ability? And if the college does not move in the direction of accepting the students who bridge the two extremes, how does it eliminate the destructive bipolarity while trying to accommodate representatives of the deserving elements of our society? I suggest that these are questions of the highest importance for the health of higher education in America, and they must first be faced by our more selective colleges and universities. For those institutions at the cutting edge of the changes affecting American society, of which bipolarity is but one example, the encompassing question is: How do we meld the best of the academic tradition with the requirements of the social revolution?—ARNOLD B. GROBMAN, *Office of the Dean, Rutgers College, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08903*