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NEWS AND COMMENT

City College of New York: Bearing The Brunt of Open Admissions

At the Hanukkah Festival sponsored by City College's Hillel Foundation last week, Dr. Robert E. Marshak, the president, beat 30 professors in the faculty dreidel-spinning contest. The dreidel is a small multisided spinner which has come to be associated with the Hanukkah observance. This was the second year the world-famous physicist won the campus championship. Afterwards he showed the faculty and students how he had prepared for the contest by working out in advance the physical properties of the dreidel.

He used a complicated series of mathematical formulas.—Item from Leonard Lyons' syndicated column, 23 December 1971.

This curious little story contains a number of ironies, most of them stemming from open admissions at the City University of New York (CUNY) and its effects on City College (CCNY), the oldest and best known of the nine senior colleges in the CUNY system. Perhaps the college's public relations office promoted the item in the hope of preserving something of a Jewish image for CCNY—a task that would hardly have seemed necessary a few years ago, when the college was graduating, as it had since the turn of the century, classes with a Jewish population exceeding 80 percent. The ethnic innuendo, however, implies many things besides current population levels. As the children of Eastern European immigrants flooded CCNY throughout the first part of this century, they brought with them a tradition of learning that, either because of or, as many believe, in spite of the institution itself, transformed CCNY into a highly respected educational facility.

A recent survey indicated CCNY to be second only to the University of California at Berkeley in the number of undergraduates who went on to earn doctorates. And to a nervous mother in Brooklyn or the Bronx, tales of dreidel spinning might indicate that her child could still go on to graduate study from CCNY, in spite of stories she's heard of drugs and crime at the campus on St. Nicholas Heights at the edge of Harlem, of a lowering of academic standards, and of the myriad problems that have confronted CCNY since the beginning of CUNY's open admissions policy.

Since September 1970, when the New York Board of Higher Education opened the doors of CUNY's senior colleges to everyone graduating from a New York City high school in the top half of his class or with an average of 80 or above, much has been written and spoken about open admissions. Most observers see the policy as beset with problems, but nonetheless a tentative success. However, CCNY has experienced some unique difficulties since open admissions began—most of them stemming from the decline in the number of high-achieving high school graduates who select City as the college of their first choice. The decline has occurred for a complex series of reasons —primarily the college's location and its changing reputation—but it has left CCNY this year with the highest percentage (55 percent in this year's freshman class) of students admitted with below 80 averages of any of the CUNY senior colleges. This change in the past 2 years has generated a number of problems for CCNY, not least of which is that the faculty of a distinguished college, accustomed to teaching the cream of high school graduates, suddenly finds itself confronted with students who, as the product of ghetto schools, often read or write at the eighth-grade level and who, in some cases, cannot conceptualize how a seesaw works.

These difficulties are compounded by a severe financial squeeze that has left all of CUNY with much less money for open admissions than had originally been promised. Because of the shortage of money, the Board of Higher Education recently decreed a "10 percent increase in productivity" for all faculty members—an order that CUNY faculty members find particularly irk-

some because their teaching loads already far exceed those required in most state and private universities. (Required teaching loads are now 12 hours of undergraduate teaching, 9 hours for graduate courses.)

In the midst of all this, Marshak, the hero of Leonard Lyons' story, could hardly be spending most of his time spinning dreidels, in spite of his being the first Jewish president in CCNY's 135-year history. Since his arrival at City College at the start of open admissions, Marshak has undertaken an enthusiastic program to strengthen CCNY academically, in order to compensate for the transformation of the student body. Several departments, particularly in the sciences, have been strengthened, schools of architecture and nursing have opened, and plans have been laid for several centers of academic excellence: the performing and creative arts, humanistic and ethnic studies, urban and environmental problems, and medical and health sciences.

"We can fight pretty hard to get additional funds," said Marshak, "but there's not much chance." He has therefore actively sought a variety of forms of outside support, coming up with, for starters, a $2.5 million private grant for the Center for the Performing and Creative Arts.

When Marshak arrived at City College, the faculty was bitterly divided, many feeling that open admissions had been thrust on them against their will. Thus, despite Marshak's energy and his elaborate planning for the future, much of the tension within the faculty remains, particularly since the crunch of open admissions at CCNY has been far more severe than anyone predicted. These difficulties are evident in the following excerpts from interviews conducted during the past month with members of the CCNY faculty.

* * * *

[Abraham Mazur, chairman of the chemistry department, has been a member of the CCNY faculty for 40 years and before that was a student at CCNY. Before the beginning of the open admissions program, Mazur had been the spokesman for a group of faculty members who favored open admissions, but who pleaded for more time to prepare for the program.]

Mazur. The important thing is that open admissions is here now and we have to make it work. The changes imposed on the university result from changes in the society as a whole. We see students coming in here from the New York City schools with unbelievably poor backgrounds, and you can spend a lot of time arguing whether a university should be making up for society's mistakes, but it's far too late for that. There's no sense worrying about whose fault it is.

I remember when the waves of immigrants were pouring into City, how the Princeton- and Harvard-oriented faculty resented them. In many ways the changes occurring today are parallel to the changes then—for example, the students coming here now are searching for dignity in their work—but, of course, in many ways they are also different.

Alumni always ask if the academic standards will go down, and I reply that the standards are based on what the staff does, not on the student body. So then they reply, 'You mean you're going to flunk everybody out?' And that's the hard question, but the last thing we want is a cheapened degree.

If we ever lost the Ph.D. program in this department, we'd be dead. The underqualified students and the Ph.D. students are the best mix in the world. When some of the ghetto kids came here they didn't even know what a Ph.D. was, and the graduate students have been a great help in teaching and as a source of information. When we get some of the ghetto kids into the Ph.D. programs, we will have made a giant step.

In a businessman's terms, is the result worth the investment? In my opinion, if we had a 5 percent success rate that would be fantastic, but others have different standards. There are some students who came here last year with totally deficient backgrounds, who have gone through our remedial chemistry course and will take the regular organic chemistry course next term, and I know that they will do well.

We took people who were used to teaching the upper crust and assumed that they could teach remedial students as well as anyone else. There are those who say this will undercut academic standards, but, at this point, I say "maybe."

A Burden on English and Math

Although the 75 (out of a normal freshman chemistry class of 1000) students with poor backgrounds who chose to take remedial chemistry exceeded the estimates of Mazur and his colleagues, the heaviest burden of remedial education has fallen on the English and mathematics departments.

Theodore Gross (chairman of the English department). Open admissions has been fairly successful, but we're simply overburdened. We have too many students in a class, and we feel we've been asked to do the work of open admissions for the other colleges of the City University. We have been trying to give the students extraordinary attention; we had 18 students in each remedial class at one time, but because of the increased productivity mandate it was increased to 23—and that is simply too many students for a remedial class.

Q. What can you do now?

Gross. We'll do nothing. We just won't do a good job. It would be an act of academic hypocrisy on the part of the City University to let things continue as they are. What's happening here is the same as what's happening to New York City at large. You can charge 35 cents for a subway token—40 cents—50 cents—and things decline and deteriorate. Life goes on, but the quality of life is diminished. People will leave the city; people won't work here. We believe in open admissions; we want to do a good job, but if the city won't fund it, the quality of education will simply deteriorate.

Q. Are any of the English department faculty contemplating resigning?

Gross. No one is going to resign, because it's a tight academic marketplace. If there were a place to go, we'd have resignations, but there's no place to go. We're compelled to stay here, but we're not compelled to enjoy it.

Fritz Steinhart (chairman of the mathematics department). Our remedial loads have shot up quite rapidly in the last year and a half. In the year before open admissions, we had 15 remedial sections with 15 students in each. This term, there are 91 with 20 students in each and great pressure to increase the class size. This amounts to 40 percent of our course load—50 percent in terms of teaching hours. We still have the same bread and butter courses, but if the remedial load keeps shooting up at even close to the present rate, it will soon consume nearly our entire program.

In spite of the difficulties, there is still time for research, and those who want to be productive can be productive. We have had an easy time getting new people, and our faculty is better than ever, due to the desperate situation in the job market.

There are hardly any faculty members whose hearts are not into making

open admissions succeed. But only a few are extremely enthusiastic.

Q. Have many of the students with academic deficiencies suceeded well in math courses?

Steinhart. Some. If you aren't going to be certain that saving a relatively few souls is worthwhile, then you had better make up your mind that it is going to be a flop.

[More than anyone else, **Howard Addelson**, a professor of medieval history, has become identified as an opponent of open admissions at CCNY. According to Addelson, a large percentage of the faculty share his views, but they are afraid to speak out because, "for political reasons it is not a practical position to take." Addelson spends four of his five working days at CUNY's graduate center on 42nd Street.]

Addelson. I was never opposed to open admissions per se—only this particular plan of open admissions. You cannot take people who are unprepared —people who cannot adequately speak and write—expect them to compete with academically well-prepared students, and not expect the level of work in the class to decline. The only alternative is to flunk out large numbers of students, which would be disastrous to their psyches.

[Addelson said he had advocated a plan of open admissions whereby underqualified students would be admitted to a special preparatory program and only allowed into the regular university classes after they had proven themselves capable of college-level work.]

Addelson. City College has been most deeply affected by open admissions, and since the new president took office the decay has been accelerated. I'm not sure that it can be stopped at this point.

A year ago there was a requirement for competence in mathematics (and it was minimal) for entering students. Recently, the faculty debated whether the same level should be a requirement for *graduation*. And finally they voted for no requirement at all. In most fields graded prerequisites are gone, so when you begin to teach a course you have to assume that everyone in the class knows absolutely nothing.

In some of the remedial courses they are granting credit for noncollege work, and this is depriving the student of the education which he is due. I'm not sure that I could any longer recommend to a bright high school student that he come here.

Ethics: Biomedical Advances Confront Pub

Early last month the Senate passed a resolution calling for the establishment of a National Advisory Commission on Health Science and Society. The vote, assuming it is reaffirmed in the House, culminates a quiet battle that Senator Walter Mondale (D–Minn.) has waged for several years for a federal-level body to center the nation's attention on ethical and policy questions raised by new advances in biomedical technology.

The new body would have a 2-year existence, with a budget not exceeding $1 million a year. The commission, directed by a board of 15 professionals from the fields of law, theology, medicine, government, and the humanities, would have as its mandate the study and evaluation of the ethical, social, and legal implications of advances in biomedical research and technology. In addition to holding hearings and seminars, the commission would contract for studies to be conducted by various universities and research centers.

The resolution was unanimously approved by the Senate, despite mild Administration opposition voiced in testimony by Merlin K. DuVal, undersecretary of Health, Education, and Welfare for health and scientific affairs, who said public and private groups already have things under control.

Mondale tried to get the Senate to act on his commission idea in both 1967 and 1968, when heart transplants were the center of medical controversy. But the proposal met strong resistance from members of the biomedical community and got bogged down in committee. During hearings in 1968, for example, Nobel laureate geneticist Arthur Kornberg testified he saw no new ethical or moral problems arising from advances in his field. The only use he could see for such a commission, he said, would be in educating the public on the need for more research money for scientists. Heart transplanter Christiaan Barnard took a similar tack. His remarks betrayed the assumption that attempts by any nonmedical body to influence medical or scientific policies would automatically be repressive.

Times have changed. Heart transplant decisions are child's play compared to the questions raised by advances in other fields, notably genetics, which have transformed yesterday's science fiction into today's foreseeable reality. Amniocentesis has made it possible to detect certain genetic disorders, such as mongolism and Tay-Sachs disease, in utero. In vitro fertilization of human ova has been achieved, and scientists are working on reimplantation of an egg in the womb. The ability to choose the sex of a baby is pending. And cloning—that is, producing an individual genetically identical to the original individual—may be technically possible in the next 50 years (some scientists say in the next decade).

Behavior modification is another field of equally rapid advances and stupendous implications. Both through chemistry and through electrical manipulation of the brain, scientists have found ways to stimulate or control emotion—developments that have the press speculating about "thought control" and the imminence of *1984*.

Technology that indefinitely prolongs the life of the dying has raised questions as to the "right to die" and when to "pull the plug." Linked with this is confusion over the allocation of scarce and expensive resources such as kidney dialysis machines.

The increased sensitivity to individual rights manifested over the past decade has caused a number of old practices to be reevaluated. Sterilization of the hopelessly retarded has become taboo. Methods of obtaining "informed consent" for human experiments are being questioned. And the denial of a life-saving operation to a newborn Mongoloid, a practice taken for granted at many hospitals for years, was the subject of passionate denunciation at a recent symposium on ethics.

Marshak sees the university as an instrument of social engineering, while I believe its main function should be the dispersal of knowledge. The way it is now, open admissions isn't helping anyone—it's programed for failure. Deculturalization is not the same as acculturalization.

[**Oscar Chavarria-Aguilar**, professor of linguistics and dean of the college of arts and sciences, came with Marshak to City College from the University of Rochester.]

Chavarria. One of our biggest problems has been a fairly conservative faculty who are often resistant to change. Some faculty members are hung up on the magical figure of an 80 score in high school, yet at the same time they complain that the high schools aren't doing good jobs. We don't know what the measure of a quality student is. People talk in terms of the quality of the education a student received before he got here—not his potentials as a student.

Of course this place is grubby and we're terribly overextended. The number of students choosing City as their first choice has declined sharply in the past few years, but not all of that is due to open admissions. Some of it is an irrational fear of Harlem and a take-over of the college by Blacks. But the evidence points in the opposite direction; more white kids have benefited from open admissions, even at this campus, than all the minorities put together.

One of our biggest problems has been that remediation in math and English is not, by itself, enough. Some of these kids are unable to even conceptualize a topic in order to write a composition. So we're trying to develop courses to teach the basic skills necessary to undertake a college education.

Q. Why not a short period in which the student is enrolled in nothing but remedial courses?

Chavarria. You'd just be prolonging high school, and that would be psychologically difficult for the student. Anyway, sometime you've got to assess whether or not he can do college-level work. But one of the biggest problems has been where to put the open admissions students. You can't just say to a department chairman, 'Your courses are easy, subcollege-level work.'

Q. What about credit in remedial courses?

Chavarria. This has been a real knockdown, drag-out battle. We finally

'olitícians, as well as Professionals with New Issues

A central issue in recent ethical debates has been abortion. Genetic advances and the rolling back of legal and religious prohibitions has turned the question of abortion into a forum for new attempts to define "life," "the right to life," the conflicting rights of interested parties (in this case, mother and fetus), and even (in the case of a grossly defective fetus), the right to be aborted.

A number of organizations that have recently come into existence are attempting to lay the groundwork, through symposia and interdisciplinary studies, for principles covering these matters.

One is the 2-year-old Committee on the Life Sciences and Social Policy of the National Academy of Sciences, directed by biochemist Leon Kass, which has been conducting studies in four areas: choosing the sex of the unborn, in vitro fertilization, behavior modification, and aging. Another is the Institute of Society, Ethics, and the Life Sciences of Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y., which was set up in 1969 by Daniel Callahan, a writer and theologian. The Hastings institute has set up interdisciplinary task forces to conduct long-term studies on a similar range of subjects, including population and the teaching of medical ethics.

The Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., Foundation, hitherto primarily devoted to the study of mental retardation, recently gave Georgetown University $1.3 million for the establishment of the Joseph and Rose Kennedy Institute of Bioethics, which will provide "on the job" training for graduate students in ethics.

The Kennedy institute, according to director Andre Hellegers, will be an unusual experiment in reuniting long-fragmented disciplines. Under one roof will be all the clinical, scientific, psychological, and sociological aspects of reproduction, genetics, and obstetrics.

Many people think that the reunification of long-estranged disciplines will be the only way to ensure a built-in sensitivity on the part of medical practioners and researchers to the implications of their work. Says Hellegers: "Ethics as a cogent force fell apart when it became divorced from other faculties." By the same token, intradisciplinary barriers have allowed the legal profession to come up with laws that are theoretically sound but medically senseless, and have left most members of the clergy ill-equipped to offer advice on anything but religion.

There are still only a handful of universities across the country that offer courses with an interdisciplinary approach to ethics. The only full-fledged program is a 4-year course offered at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons. But ethics seminars, where available, are increasingly popular with medical students.

It has been more through the activities and symposia sponsored by such interdisciplinary groups as the Hastings institute than through the efforts of organized medicine that public attention has been focused on questions raised by new biomedical technology. These groups see a federal-level commission as a desirable supplement to their endeavors and a way to educate scientists as well as laymen on the need for public discussion.

The American Medical Association, by contrast, has indicated to Mondale's committee that the private sector is giving adequate attention to these matters through such forums as the biennial AMA congresses on ethical issues in medicine, which began in 1966. Nonetheless, the AMA Judicial Council moved in November to arrange for a series of articles on euthanasia, genetic engineering, and so forth to be written for the AMA journal—a possible sign that deep-rooted complacency in some areas is being rapidly replaced by concern over unanticipated and possibly irreversible developments the future may have in store.—CONSTANCE HOLDEN

decided that some courses have some 'college-level' substance, and for those we would allow partial credit.

In so many ways, though, the problem is a red herring. People keep screaming 'academic excellence' and 'college-level' as if those terms really meant something. In this business there are no absolutes.

Arthur Waldhorn (professor of English). We knew open admissions was coming. Many of us faced the decision years ago, and we had the chance to leave. When the crunch came, however, it was violent—more violent than we expected.

The problem is how to deal with the psychic needs of the students and maintain intellectual standards at the same time, and the answer is remediation. We've also got to struggle to continue attracting topflight students.

We have a 5-year crisis time in which to do battle with realities, and right now we're in a very depressing period, but I'm compelled to make myself take a long-range optimistic viewpoint. If you are old enough, you can look forward to retirement, but not everyone can do that, so it's a struggle.

I'm teaching a remedial course and it's tough. I don't feel I've had results that are commensurate with the effort I've put in. Each of us has had an experience with inverted racism, where we are accused of failing a student because of race, and that, too, is depressing.

Just because we've said yes, we'll do the job, doesn't mean we have to sing a hallelujah chorus. Even if a faculty member lacks a social worker's commitment to change society, he should have an intellectual commitment.

Of course, we'd rather be our intellectual selves—as hollow as that might be (I prefer Bach to Offenbach)—but we have a job to do. Open admissions has a chance to work, and we have no choice but to give it that chance. The only other alternative is socioeconomic genocide.

* * * *

The responses vary, but seldom do they lack emotion. As for the future, CCNY's financial picture is unlikely to improve under the same Republican state legislature and state governor who cut back funds last year—particularly in the midst of a much-publicized, severe financial crunch for both the state and the city. Nor is the distribution of students among the CUNY campuses likely to be altered soon by the Board of Higher Education, as many in the faculty and administration at CCNY wish. Seymour C. Hyman, deputy chancellor of CUNY, told *Science*, "If City College thinks they're overburdened, that's their perception." Hyman did indicate that the Board of Higher Education is "studying and restudying various allocation schemes." But most observers see little chance for substantive changes in the near future.

Yet even as things now stand, it is clear that at City College some students who would have had no opportunity 2 years ago are successfully obtaining a higher education, and that "quality education" is still available, as it always has been at City, for those who seek it. And despite all the attendant problems, it would seem that the future of American higher education is being hammered out less at some secluded, innovative, liberal arts college in the New England countryside than at old City College at 137th Street.—ROBERT J. BAZELL

Robert Bazell, a member of the news department who has been based in New York City, has left Science *to join the New York* Post.

AAAS Meeting: Pro Forma Protest and Constitutional Reform

Philadelphia is the home of constitutional change, and the AAAS at its meeting there last week took a major step toward democratizing its own rules of governance. The atmosphere of the City of Brotherly Love, however, seemed to have no particular effect on the tumult and shouting that have been a feature of AAAS meetings in recent years.

Press attention centered on two incidents created by activists, one involving Senator Hubert Humphrey and the other William P. Bundy, who was State Department assistant secretary in charge of East Asian affairs during the escalation of the Vietnam war. At a meeting on Monday, 27 December, Humphrey was splattered when a thrown tomato scored a near miss, and his address was accompanied by heckling and the sailing of paper airplanes. The second incident occurred at a Thursday morning panel session, "Conflict Situations: Vietnam-Knowledge Gaps," which Bundy joined as a late addition. A wrangle over the agenda of the meeting and accusatory questioning of Bundy finally led the chairman to cut the session short. Despite these well-publicized outbreaks, observers generally agreed that the level of intensity of the disruptions was lower than in recent years.

The Humphrey incident, however, moved former White House aide Daniel Patrick Moynihan to cancel a scheduled speech at the meeting and to issue a statement critical both of the activists and of AAAS policies that he said condoned the disruptions. Moynihan, a Labor Department official in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations and until recently a key White House adviser on social policy, has been a AAAS section vice president this year and was recently elected to the AAAS board of directors.

Moynihan's statement went as follows:

As vice president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, I would like officially and personally to offer my apologies to Senator Hubert H. Humphrey for the way he was treated at yesterday's meeting.

I have decided not to deliver my vice-presidential address scheduled for Wednesday. In circumstances where Hubert Humphrey is not allowed to speak, I chose not to speak.

Clearly the group involved in these now repeated demonstrations is a small minority of the Association membership. Their tactics are not for that reason any less a threat to free enquiry. I have re-