

# Letters

## More Views on College Admissions

The following verse was stimulated by the criticism of Astin by Gray, and Astin's rebuttal (Letters, 20 Feb.).

All God's children should go to school,  
From wisest one to the biggest fool.  
Choose them by lottery, in a  
democratic way,  
And to heck with the views of Non-  
educator Gray.  
Down with the professor to whom bright  
kids are fun,  
Give them lottery students and, oh yes,  
a gun.  
Goodbye to competition, the spice of our  
life,  
Welcome indifference and occasional  
strife.  
Hail "Scientist"? Astin, the man of the  
season,  
Farewell "tried and true," farewell to all  
reason.

Despite this attempt at humor, I am very much concerned by the possible deleterious effects that Astin's lottery proposal could have on our system of higher education. I am of the firm opinion that our future depends on a highly educated and emotionally stable citizenry. Our educational system must change with time, but hopefully it will change in an evolutionary manner.

LAWRENCE G. BURK  
*USDA Crops Research Division,  
Oxford Tobacco Research Station,  
Oxford, North Carolina 27565*

Astin bases his arguments for less selectivity in college admissions on the idea that "the principal function of the college is to educate." Colleges cannot educate, any more than teachers can teach; they can only provide an environment in which students can educate themselves. A very important part of that environment is the quality of the student body. I would suspect that a bright student learns most in the company of other bright students, faculty and facilities being held constant.

GENE LESTER  
*Department of Psychology,  
State University College at Buffalo,  
1300 Elmwood Avenue,  
Buffalo, New York 14222*

Gray's philosophy is correct when he suggests that "our goal must be to admit to our colleges and universities all those interested in, and capable of benefiting from, higher education." However, Astin raises the practical and eminently human questions of (i) who decides which students are qualified; (ii) what criteria should be used; (iii) what data fit the criteria; and (iv) who should decide the allocation of "equal opportunity"? The phrase is deceptive if students are not active participants in setting educational requirements. They should participate in setting admissions requirements, learning requirements, teaching requirements, and graduation requirements. Obviously, teaching tasks would become as important as research under such conditions. . . .

In the matter of grading, I conducted an experiment while teaching a small freshman class in engineering design. No grades or scores were given (except at midterm and end of term), although notes and corrections were made on all written work. At the final individual interview, each student was asked to submit his estimate of his course grade. I did the same. To my surprise, the greatest discrepancy between a student's estimate of his grade and mine was only three points, far closer than I expected. I make no claim to scientific evidence, but I suggest that grades might be more meaningful if both student and teacher had an agreed upon set of criteria to use in evaluating the efforts of both student and teacher in meeting objectives of the course. Would we dare take the students into confidence on setting those standards with which we make judgments on their future?

GEORGE A. CORSER  
*1159 North Chevrolet Avenue,  
Flint, Michigan 48504*

. . . Astin notes the inequalities in college grading systems. He is correct. The same courses are taught at different levels at different institutions although the grades which are given may

not reflect these differences. Last summer I attended the University of Alabama at Birmingham as a part-time student. Using calculus and physics as my reference, I found the courses given there were on a much easier level than they are at New College where I am a full-time undergraduate student. This difference must surely be related to admissions standards and the requirements for passing grades. I benefited little from my summer studies. One can maintain that if a student is really interested in a subject he will find ways to learn the material. Fine—if the resources are available—in both faculty and reading material. But this is why there is the argument in favor of selective admissions: so that less able students can make use of college resources (and teachers) which would not satisfy the best and most intelligent (I do not know why people are afraid to use the term) students. . . .

WILLIAM O. ROMINE, JR.  
*Box 1898, New College,  
Sarasota, Florida 33578*

Consistency demands that Astin carry his ideas further. Instead of grading pass-fail on the basis of objective tests and the teachers' subjective judgments let us use a lottery to select those who pass and those who fail, those who graduate and those who do not, those who are admitted to graduate school and those who are rejected. Then, instead of a bar examination, medical boards, and the like, let us use a lottery to select the new lawyers to be admitted to the bar, the doctors, the new dentists, the new architects and engineers to be admitted to professional practice. Let us not neglect barbers. Also let companies select their new hires by lottery.

Then to be perfectly fair, when Astin needs a lawyer or a doctor or a dentist or a barber, or when he wishes to hire a nursemaid, let him make the selection by lottery. We would extend the virtues of Astin's proposal to the examination of auto drivers, airplane pilots, ship captains. Welders could be qualified much easier; there would be no need for all the tedious and expensive test specimens. Just draw names in a lottery.

Let us talk sense: the purpose of selection practices in our universities is not to be socially just, not to adjust the distribution function of society, not to make the greatest improvement in the least promising individuals. The purpose of these selection practices is, or ought to be, to select the raw material

on which a limited resource is to be expended so that the greatest increase in value due to the process will be realized. (You can make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. It isn't worth doing. It is more economical to make a silk purse out of silk.)

Our present selection practices are not optimum. They need improving. But the purpose should not be lost. A random selection would give a zero correlation coefficient. Unless Astin can show that our present practices have a negative correlation coefficient we ought to stay with what we have until something better comes along.

W. M. WOODS

114 Tabor Road,  
Oak Ridge, Tennessee 37830

### Opposition to TIAA-CREF Bill

In his editorial "Threatened faculty pensions" (6 Feb., p. 823), Wolfle states that "some insurance representatives oppose the bill" which would grant TIAA-CREF a federal charter. I believe that if Wolfle had been aware of the extent of the opposition to this bill he would not have made such a mild and misleading statement.

The TIAA-CREF bill is opposed by (i) the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC), a voluntary association of state officials, numbering among its members all of the principal insurance regulatory authorities of the 50 states; (ii) the National Association of Life Underwriters (NALU), an organization of over 100,000 life insurance agents, general agents, and managers residing in and doing business in all of the 50 states; and (iii) the American Life Convention and the Life Insurance Association of America, two life insurance company trade associations that have an aggregate membership of 355 United States and Canadian companies, accounting for about 92 percent of the total life insurance in force in the United States and Canada.

In brief, the reasons for this opposition are:

1) The proposed regulatory prohibition contained in the TIAA-CREF bill represents *questionable public policy*. The enactment of the TIAA-CREF bill would affirmatively establish that there is no state other than New York which is to have the power to oversee the insurance operations of TIAA-CREF. This would establish an unsound fed-

eral policy because the federal government would be denying to 49 states the right to regulate this one insurance operation.

2) The proposed legislation would create competitive inequality among competing insurers. The type of insurance sold by TIAA-CREF is not unique to them and neither is the nature of their customers. There are a great number of insurance companies that sell the same type of insurance and annuity products as TIAA-CREF, and the policyholders of these companies include teachers and other employees of educational and scientific organizations. The proposed TIAA-CREF bill would exempt TIAA-CREF from any existing or potential taxation by any state on policies written on persons residing outside of New York.

3) The TIAA-CREF bill would not provide relief for *all* teachers covered under insured retirement annuity programs, rather it would benefit *only* those teachers whose contracts are purchased from TIAA-CREF. In fact, for the TIAA-CREF bill to really be successful, it would result in TIAA-CREF obtaining a monopoly in the teacher market—a result which seems clearly repugnant to our free enterprise system.

I believe that these arguments support the position of the insurance business that the TIAA-CREF bill is an unsound proposal and should not be approved by the Congress.

WILLIAM B. HARMAN, JR.

*American Life Convention,*  
1701 K Street, NW,  
Washington, D.C. 20006

### Scientific Muckrakers' Role

Alvin Weinberg construes the objective of Daniel Greenberg and other "scientific muckrakers" as the exposure of "corruption" and the lament of delicate "sensibilities . . . hurt by the existence of a scientific politics" ("In defense of science," 9 Jan., p. 141). Surely, it is, rather, an attempt to understand and identify the scientific institutions and social interests that are served by present arrangements and to determine the extent to which they do and do not coincide with larger national interests—precisely the objective at which Weinberg has been a master. As when he stated that "even the professor of purest intent must be in some measure loyal to the Estate which he represents. . . . It would not be a great exaggeration to

describe the advisory apparatus of the scientific government as a lobby for the scientific university" (1).

Then, he recognized that the "purest intent" was no safeguard against self interest. Now he tells us that scientific politics have been "elevated . . . sanitized and legitimated"—by, of all things, philosophy! As if politics (good and bad) had not been wedded to philosophy (good and bad) since Plato's *Republic*; as if *Minerva* first brought philosophy either to Washington or to science; as if hell were not paved with philosophy.

No, scientific politics will not be cleansed by the best philosophy. What it needs are scientific politicians able to distinguish the interests of scientists from those of the public and, when these diverge, to serve the latter. Turgenev once implored Tolstoy to return from philosophy to literature. This muckraker (2) prays that our master will return from philosophy to scientific politics (3).

HAROLD ORLANS

*Brookings Institution,*  
1775 Massachusetts Avenue, NW,  
Washington, D.C. 20036

### References

1. A. Weinberg, *Yale Sci. Mag.* 37, 11 (1963).
2. O.M. (Order of Muckraker) conferred by Weinberg in *Minerva*, 7, 52 (1968-69).
3. O.M., not A.B.M., politics please! This letter is not supported by an NSF grant.

### DDT Observations

Concerning the moon issue: How remarkable is the moon! Not a trace of DDT to be found.

ALBEY M. REINER

*Department of Bacteriology and Immunology, University of California, Berkeley 94720*

Just browsing through some recent issues of *Science*, *Chemical and Engineering News*, and *Nature*, I came to the conclusion that there is at least one unequivocal effect of DDT. It causes T. H. Jukes to write an inordinately large number of letters defending it . . . (1, 2).

PAUL F. TORRENCE

2805 Jennings Road,  
Kensington, Maryland 20795

### References

1. T. H. Jukes, *Science* 166, 44 (1969); *ibid.* 167, 126 (1970); *ibid.*, p. 1199.
2. ———, *Nature* 225, 301 (1970); *Chem. Eng. News* (22 Dec. 1969), p. 4; *ibid.* (11 Aug. 1969), p. 7.