Making the Multiuniversity More Multiethnic

Rapid growth in Hispanic population in California increases pressure on university to come to terms with change in ethnic mix in 1980's

By 1990, more than half the college-age population in California is expected to be made up of minorities—mainly Asian, Black, and Hispanic. This shift in the ethnic mix figures strongly in a set of demographic and financial trends which will put heavy stress on the state's higher education system, particularly on the nine-campus University of California (UC).

Higher education is already facing financial hard times. A budgetary bloodletting was averted by the defeat in the June primary of Proposition 9, which would have slashed state income tax revenues, but chronic fiscal anemia is seen as extending into the indefinite future for higher education.

Demographics and social realities will combine to put special pressure on the selective UC. A decline of 15 percent is forecast in the state's overall college-age population between now and the early 1990's. Because state funding is tied to enrollment, the decline will have a sharp impact on higher education budgets. And if present patterns hold, UC will be hit harder than community colleges and public 4-year institutions because low proportions of Blacks and Chicanos qualify for admission to UC campuses.

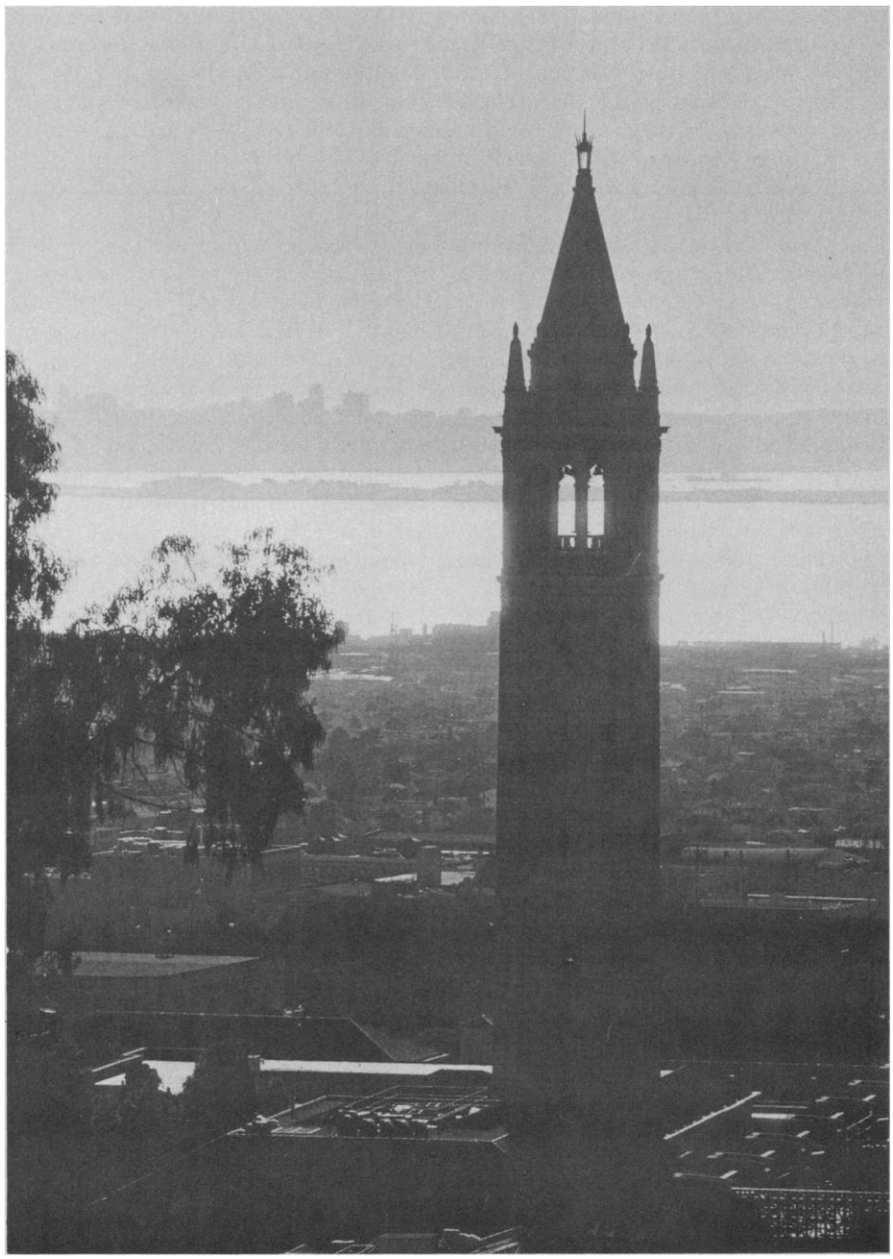
Only the top 12½ percent of high-school graduates are eligible to attend UC. The percentages of each group who qualify are Hispanics, 4.7 percent; Blacks, 5 percent; Anglos, 16.5 percent, and Asians, 39 percent.

Hispanics form the biggest and fastest growing minority in the state and are the most underrepresented major ethnic group in the university. A UC planning document produced as part of an effort to prepare the university to meet the trying times of the 1980's faced up to the implications of the shift with the comment, "We must attract a larger proportion of minority students into the University or the State's educational and societal needs will not be fully met, and our enrollments will certainly suffer."

To be convincing in its claim that it is dedicated to both quality and equality in higher education, UC in the 1980's will have to make the multiuniversity more genuinely multiethnic. And, increasingly, this means dealing more successfully with the Hispanic minority.

California has had a large, indigenous Hispanic population. But large-scale immigration, legal and illegal, from Mexico and a higher birthrate than other population groups have brought a major increase in numbers, to between 16 and 20 percent of the state population of 20 million plus.

California's Chicanos are an urban population concentrated in the southern part of the state. In Los Angeles the Chicano presence is large and growing very rapidly. Although the Hispanic voting-



The view from Berkeley.

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A Major Minority

In California, as in other parts of the country, the Hispanic minority has rather recently become a force to be reckoned with. According to government estimates, in the last decade the Hispanic population grew some 25 percent to 12 million nationally. The growth rate for the general population was about 7 percent and for Blacks 12 percent. The figures on Hispanics do not include those in this country illegally, who are thought to number at least 7 million. Although the official count of the Census may not show it, the actual number of Hispanics is estimated to be high enough to pass Blacks as the nation's largest minority group.

Political engagement of Hispanic groups has, in general, lagged behind their growth in numbers. Hispanics, for example, were not widely involved in the intense civil rights and anti-Vietnam war movements into which political activism was channeled in the 1960's. The national organizations devoted to promoting the rights and interests of Hispanics, however, are increasingly active politically, and Mexican-Americans tend to dominate these organizations. In California in the 1970's, Chicanos scored notable successes in unionizing farm workers and in local community projects. For Hispanics, the question of illegal immigration, which is greatest from Mexico and the rest of Latin America, is a primary concern. Hispanics, generally, want authorities to recognize the de facto situation and improve the treatment of the illegal aliens. The question, a volatile one domestically and internationally, seems sure to be a major issue for the 1980's and will test the ability of Hispanics to influence public policy.—J.W.

age population there is 20 percent, the schools are 30 percent Hispanic and the percentage in kindergarten is 50 percent. Most Chicano and Black high school students in the state attend schools in which minorities make up more than 50 percent of enrollments and where dropout rates are high and the percentage of graduates going on to college is low. Of the Chicanos who do attend college, upward of 85 percent are enrolled in 2-year community colleges; their transfer rate to 4-year institutions is low.

Politically, California Chicanos have been underrepresented in elective office, the civil service, and the justice system. As voters they record low percentages in registering and turning out at the polls. In the economic power structure they make up a less than proportional number of professionals and corporate executives.

This lack of upward mobility is attributed by Chicano spokesmen to a history of discrimination and a conditioned Chicano suspicion of an Anglo-dominated society and economy. Socially and culturally, most Chicanos live in a world defined by family, barrio, and the Catholic Church. Statistically, a majority earn low incomes and hold dead-end jobs. Many Mexican-Americans expect to return to Mexico after making a financial stake and do not share the assumption of immigrant groups farther from home that their futures lie in the United States. The nearness of Mexico and the influence of the Chicano culture contribute to a strong ambivalence toward assimilation.

Winning increasing Hispanic access to higher education has not been a high priority for Hispanic activist groups. In education, the focus recently has been on bilingual education in the public schools, with the debate carried on in both the state legislature and at the community level. Bilingual education is an issue in which ambivalence about assimilation comes into play and on which the Hispanic community is divided.

Higher education, however, is getting more attention. The Bakke case, which propelled the question of preferential admissions programs into the Supreme Court, mobilized minority organizations on the issue and earned it a higher place on their agendas. The Mexican-American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), for example, has a foundation grant to monitor the effects of the Bakke decision and will obviously be alert to what it sees as adverse developments.

In California, MALDEF's legal counsel, Vilma Martinez, is a member of the UC Board of Regents and has been sharply critical of UC's efforts to recruit more minority students. For example, Martinez has been closely watching the effect of revised admissions requirements at UC which, it was thought, might adversely affect minority enrollment. Apparently this is not the case, but Martinez notes that minority enrollment was not, in fact, increasing at a time when the ethnic shift "should be showing up" in enrollment figures.

The regents look at reports of performance of UC students according to their old high schools and, says Martinez, "As you might expect, kids from poor schools don't do as well as those from Beverly Hills." She adds that "White poor children from rural areas do as poorly as Chicano and Black children." Martinez goes on to say, "I'm arguing that the real challenge is to make minority and poor children more UC eligible."

At the June regents' meeting she asked the State Superintendent of Instruction Wilson Riles for a report on what can be done. Says Martinez, "I'm asking when we're going to see the necessary commitment to improve the statistics." She says she's tired of hearing about plans for action and wants to know "What are the results?"

She says that the impression that minority organizations have not been focusing on higher education is misleading. It was necessary to start at elementary and secondary school level in the 1960's on problems of school access and desegregation. Next, high dropout rates in high school became a serious matter. Now Chicanos have started to get into colleges, but most are limited to study at 2-year community colleges. So the effort to open up education to Chicanos has had to progress from one level to the next.

Asked if her fellow regents support her stand, Martinez said that some do because "it's the right thing to do. Others want a vital institution and realize that if you don't have students you won't have professors and a fancy University of California."

The UC record in attracting and retaining minority students appears to have been much like that of other public universities in states with large minority populations. UC for some years operated an equal opportunity program aimed at recruiting minority high school graduates. The success stories tended to be among the relatively small number of minority students with good academic

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preparation. In general, the attrition rate among Black and Chicano students in the program was high. Three years ago UC launched a new outreach program designed to start at the junior high school level and carry through high school. The idea was to motivate minority students to aim for a 4-year college education and acquire the academic skills necessary to succeed. The first students in the program pipeline are still 2 years from the college admissions stage so the evaluation cannot really begin until then. Expenditure on the program has reached $4 million a year, with the state taking over a major share of the funding, but the future is uncertain, the program being viewed as vulnerable because of uncertainties about state support.

For UC, the problem of deficits in academic skills is not limited to minorities. A report from a joint planning commission noted "there has been a marked and general decline in the basic skills and academic preparation of students graduating from high school." Not only is the decline indicated by the scores on standardized tests by entering students, but achievement by graduating students as measured by scores on the Graduate Record Examination also slumped.

Providing greater access to UC for minorities while at the same time preserving academic standards will not be easy, particularly in a period when resources are certain to be short. And the minorities issue, is, of course, not the only problem facing UC in the coming decade. A principal question is whether the state can afford to continue to finance a nine-campus system which is competitive in terms of faculty salaries and general resources with top private and public research universities. The case for paying salary differentials to faculty in high-demand fields such as computer science and some engineering specialties is one touchy matter now being explored. These and other potentially divisive issues are unlikely to go away. Nevertheless, dealing with the ethnic shift is an urgent matter for the university because of the potential political power of the Chicanos.

On these prospects Martinez is one of those who takes the pragmatic view that "numbers do not guarantee political power." For many years, she says, Chicanos were kept out of the voting booth. After such experience, she says, "it's not easy to educate people." The political learning process involves making mistakes. She says, for example, that Chicano's "have got to stop running 15 different people for an office." Another factor is that Chicano's are a young population with an average age 10 years below that of the general population, and young voters are hard to get to the polls. But, in time, growing numbers and increasing political sophistication are likely to convert ethnic pride to political power. So for UC, faced with the problems of the minorities in the altered financial and political environment of California in the 1980's, social responsibility and institutional self-interest will certainly coincide.—JOHN WALSH

NIH Shaken by Death of Research Volunteer

A lawsuit is threatened, but spokesmen say the NIH is not responsible for the death

At 5:15 in the morning of Saturday, 12 April, Bernadette Gillcrist died, presumably from a cardiac arrest. She was a volunteer participating in a sleep experiment at the National Institutes of Health (NIH)—an experiment considered so safe that no nurse or trained medical personnel were even on duty. A 23-year-old nursing student at nearby Catholic University, Gillcrist seemed healthy and her death was a shock to NIH and the medical research community. "It never would have occurred to me in my wildest dreams that a 23-year-old girl would die in that experiment," says Mortimer Lipsett, director of the NIH Clinical Center.

NIH administrators are worried about the legal and political ramifications of the death. "Everyone around here is getting a little paranoid," says one NIH official. Gordon Forester, an attorney retained by the Gillcrist family, says he will recommend that the family sue NIH for negligence and that it be a substantial suit, "in the millions." After seeing an NIH committee's report on the death, he concludes that the normal volunteer program "adds up to a pretty beastly operation."

These are strong words, and NIH officials feel they are unjust. The normal volunteer program, begun in 1954, has enrolled about 7000 subjects. Until Gillcrist's death, there were no serious incidents. And the Gillcrist case was exceptional. As the NIH committee found, she was by no means a "normal" volunteer. She lied about her medical history and, had that history been known, she would never have been admitted to the volunteer program. What especially bothers NIH officials is the likelihood that the entire volunteer program will be under attack as a result of the incident. "To act on this single event is to take one piece of evidence and blow it out of all proportion," says Griff Ross, deputy director of the NIH Clinical Center.

Still, a lot of little things went wrong in the experiment during which Gillcrist died. These are the events that Forester is referring to when he charges negligence. But none of these things, by themselves, could have caused her death. Ultimately, it appears that the person responsible for the death is Gillcrist herself.

The history Gillcrist concealed is that she suffered from anorexia nervosa and self-induced vomiting. On two previous occasions she had experienced cardiac arrest, and she was in a coma for 2 days on the first occasion. Her doctors believed that her cardiac arrests were a direct result of her vomiting, which causes loss of hydrochloric acid from the stomach and leads to a compensatory loss of intracellular potassium. This can result in a potassium imbalance, which can cause cardiac arrest. According to Ross, about 10 percent of anorexia nervosa victims die, and those who die are not necessarily the emaciated ones—they are the ones who vomit.

Gillcrist's history of vomiting was especially ominous because she was given lithium as part of the NIH experiment. Lithium further depletes cells of potassium, but not to an extent that is dangerous to normal people. But in Gillcrist's case, says D. Lynn Loriaux, act-

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