The double life of the college campus

Striking a balance between reality and expectations

by William C. Welburn

A handful of American places enjoy powerful double lives, one daily and real, another conducted largely in the national imagination. Manhattan, like California, is such a place; so are Alaska and the Mississippi Delta, the frontier West, and the inner city. Oldest and strongest of these common dreamscapes is the campus."[1]

So begins the writer Anne Matthews in *Bright College Years,* her journey through college life across the United States. Nowhere is the double life of the American college campus more evident than in the experiences of students—undergraduate and graduate, liberal arts and professional, part-time and full-time, U.S. citizen and foreign born. And when thinking about new realities, new relationships for college and university libraries, nowhere is the double life of the college more evident than in students' involvement in learning.

Learning, educational researchers have found, does not stop at the classroom door. Out-of-class experiences—whether involvement in fraternities and sororities or other student organizations, athletics, employment, extracurricular activities, or doing research with faculty—are found to have profound effects on student learning and cognitive development.[2]

"In most cases," Vincent Tinto writes, "academic integration seems to be the more important form of involvement" over social integration in getting students to persist through gradu-ation.[3] The challenge to academic libraries is to constantly revisit the question of our relevance to students in an era when students are deeply affected by obstacles on and off campus that often defy their imagined collegiate experience.

Different characteristics, environments, and cultures of higher education, not only in the United States but also in other parts of the world, provide the first level for diversity in higher education. Yet the locus of diversity is most often considered within the campus. The globalization of the student population and questions over access to higher education for students from low- and moderate-income families, have emerged as two of the most pressing issues affecting the very character of the college campus, and both are essential to our discussions about how academic libraries are likely to affect college students.

Students crossing borders

Learning, like knowledge, knows no geographic boundaries. According to the Institute of International Education (IIE), enrollment by U.S. students in study abroad has more than doubled over the past decade and a half. Although Europe continues to be the "destination of choice" for U.S. students, the IIE reports that "the most noteworthy change since 1985/86 is that the share of Americans studying in Europe has fallen by 18% while the proportion going to Latin America has more than doubled, from

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7% to 15%."[4] Likewise, the number of international students on American campuses has grown from 34,000 in 1954 to more than 514,000 in 2000. International students now compose 3.8 percent of students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities and are 12 percent of the students enrolled in graduate schools.[5]

Some disciplines are heavily subscribed by students from other countries. For instance, the "Survey of Earned Doctorates" reported that while 70 percent of all doctorates awarded in the United States in 1999 were awarded to U.S. citizens, some fields such as engineering and physics awarded substantial numbers of doctorates to students from abroad.[6]

Yet as we entered the 2002–03 academic year, concerns surfaced over the potential effects of September 11 on students crossing borders. Early reports tell us that students have continued with their plans to study away from their home countries. U.S. students are going abroad, although the number of American students selecting the Middle East as their destination continues to decline. Foreign students have continued to apply for admission to American universities, especially to prestigious graduate programs.

Colleges and universities are already experiencing the much anticipated effects of more intensified scrutiny of foreign students, including more student visa denials (particularly in science and mathematics disciplines) and in the reporting requirements of the new zero tolerance policies of the Immigration and Naturalization Service and their implementation of a new tracking system known as the Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS).

While the short-term effects of federal policies on the international exchange of students are uncertain, it is likely that in the long run the composition of our student populations and the demands that they make on our services will be forever changed. This change is brought about by students' rich cultural experiences and the flow of knowledge and learning across borders.

Consequences of socioeconomic conditions

The idea of the campus as a microcosm for globalization in the national consciousness is not the only image confronted by the realities of the broader society in the early years of the

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21st century. Higher educators are also deeply worried that the gains made by low- to moderate-income, first-generation college students will be lost by rapid tuition increases, losses in state support, and an inability of the federal financial aid system to keep pace with the cost of educating students who lack the resources to attend college.

According to one recent study of student financial aid, "This year, 406,000 college-qualified high school graduates from low- and moderate-income families will be prevented from enrolling in a four-year college, and 168,000 of them will be unable to enroll in any college at all,"[7] due to the high financial barriers of attending college.

Closing the educational gap, another study concluded, would "clearly pay for itself not only through the resulting long-term savings in income transfer and public social programs, but also through the resulting increased tax revenues and increased disposable income for individuals involved."[8]

Given differences in costs for college in relation to the needs students have to fit higher education into their circumstances—be they the need to commute from home; to take care of parents, siblings, or children; or to have access to academic or social support services—our greatest challenge to the diversity we seek among our students is one of opportunity, to continue to close the education gap. Making college affordable for low- and moderate-income students may also be our greatest challenge in higher education in the United States in the present decade.

Institutional responses of academic libraries

Where does all of this leave libraries? We know that certain themes transcend colleges and universities, including the attention given to the

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lives of students outside of class and our understanding of the relationship between student persistence and academic and social integration. Yet we must understand that no single response by the library to work with students can fit all institutions of higher learning. Different strategies must correspond to the characteristics, environments, and cultures that distinguish colleges and universities from one another.

We have also learned over the past year how vulnerable our students are to the outside world. Anne Matthews noted that the college was invented "as a safe place to sleep."[9] Students are no longer cloistered from the issues and the ills of the outside world. Perhaps our strongest response is to promote *civility*. Civility enables us to think about a healthy marriage between intellectual freedom and cultural diversity, not only in how we work with one another but also how we work with our constituents.

Models of collaboration with faculty pursued by many librarians can serve to bring a rich dimension to classroom teaching and learning by opening new vistas for the independent pursuit of ideas. Learning to trust through cross-cultural communication between diverse student populations and a diverse library workforce—from student assistants to administrators—can also signal a library's commitment to the promotion of campus civility.

In her presentation at the ACRL 10th National Conference, Eileen de los Reyes remarked, "I name libraries as pockets of hope since I have learned in my years as a student, as a librarian and as a faculty member that those who were immensely powerful in my life did not have as much power in the university as I had imagined."[10] Libraries, in de los Reyes' view are places "where students can learn to live in their world and dream about a healthy and humane future." This vision for academic libraries in their role with today's college students brings the double lives of colleges and universities—one imagined and one real—together.
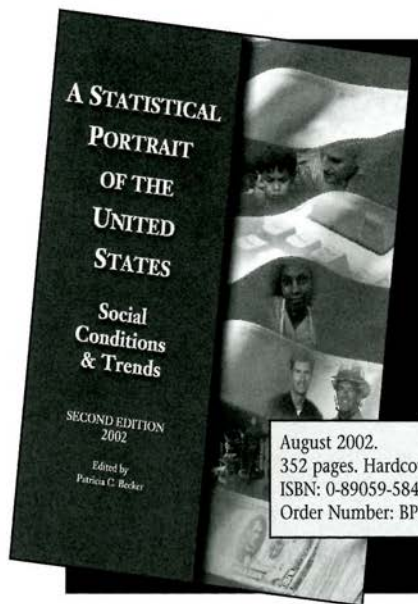
Notes

1. Anne Matthews, *Bright College Years: Inside the American Campus Today* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 17.

2. Patrick T. Terenzini, Ernest T. Pascarella, and Gregory S. Blimling, "Students' Out-of-Class Experiences and the Influence on Learning and Cognitive Development: A Literature Review," *Journal of College Student Development* 37 (March/April 1996): 149–62.

3. Vincent Tinto, "Colleges as Communities: Taking Research on Student Persistence Seriously." *Review of Higher Education* 21 (Winter 1998): 169

4. *Open Doors 2000* (New York: Institute of International Education, 2001): 17.

5. Ibid., 17.

6. In 1999, 51.2 percent of doctorates in engineering and 42 percent of doctorates in physics were awarded to international students. "Doctoral Recipients from United States Universities: Summary Report" (Chicago: National Opinion Research Center), 16.

7. *Empty Promises: the Myth of College Access in America* (Washington, DC: The Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, June 2002), 27.

8. George Vernez, Richard A. Krop, C. Peter Rydell, *Closing the Education Gap: Benefits and Costs* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1999), xiii.

9. Matthews, *Bright College Years,* 117.

10. Eileen de los Reyes, "Becoming Pockets of Hope: The Challenge to Academic Libraries in the 21st Century." *Proceedings of the ACRL 10th National Conference,* (Chicago: ACRL, March 2001), 26. ■

Correction

In the October 2002 "Fast Facts" column, it was stated that a survey by the Pew Internet Project found that "85% of American Internet users have *never* used an online search engine to find information on the Web . . ." The quote should have read, "85% of American Internet users have *ever* used an online search engine to find information on the Web" (emphasis added). The editors regret the error.