

Students: Changing Roles, Changing Lives

By Harold Silver and Pamela Silver

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Reviewed by

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In many ways, going to college is not unlike a visit to a haunted house. Generally, a person would not go alone to either event. In most cases, some level of companionship is highly desirable. Some might go for the thrill of it while others might go because it is the popular event of the season. Anyone who is anyone goes to it. There is a certain amount of anxiety and preparation involved in the time heading up to the event. Special circumstances notwithstanding, there is a cost for attending although its impact can vary from person to person. While many may consider both a means to an end, the college experience can be as quick, frightening, and can have as much relative meaning as a trip through a haunted house. In Silver and Silver's *Students: Changing Roles, Changing Lives*, the authors delve into numerous areas of the student experience, ranging from the traditional roles of a student to the more contemporary view of a student as a consumer rather than a colleague-in-training. Ultimately, the authors offer the view that the college experience means different things to different people.

In the early chapters, Silver and Silver lay out the necessary foundation of the work. Historically, students showed a propensity toward learning for learning's sake. A student was seen as an apprentice, someone who had a fair amount of training but was still considered to be of the lower class within the social structure of academia. In this system, in order for a student to reach the peak of graduation, the intellectuals-in-training were required to steadily gain experience and knowledge that would move them up the mountain of learning in a gradual, methodical pattern. In the current day, education is being marketed toward people in all walks of life, the young and old, the advantaged the disadvantaged, the transportationally-challenged, and those already living in the town center. As a result, the lines between social class are becoming more difficult to decipher. With the increased number of opportunities, there are a corresponding number of logistical challenges as well.

In the same way that a chameleon has learned to adapt itself to changes in the physical environment, so too must students learn to "go with the flow" if they are to survive the often tumultuous nature of American society. As the social environment continues to undergo various transformations due to real-time mass media and the global economy, droves of people are willing to be placed under the microscope. The lure of instant fame and fortune, as evidenced most recently by the unprecedented popularity of

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the television reality/game/survival show, *Survivor*, often supercedes what society used to consider off-limits. The concept of the American Dream continues to evolve as the increase in reality-based television creates instant millionaires whom are often ill-equipped to effectively balance the new money status with tried and true methods of personal success. As the evolution of the student continues, it seems clear that those best suited to survive the rigors of higher education are not necessarily those with the money or those with no money at all. The more like a chameleon a student can be, in adaptability to different environments, the greater the chances to overcome the obstacles of higher learning and live out the American Dream. While many professional entertainers have begun to question the value of reality-based performers, education is now becoming a matter of what can education do for me versus what can I do for education.

Well-written and thorough in its treatment of both the British and American student, *Students: Changing Roles, Changing Lives* does conclude with a most intriguing concept: Is the student a contributor or a consumer? Traditionally, students have gone through a rite of societal passage whereby they tame the rigors of the intellect so that they might function effectively in a civilized society. In the 21st century, as America seems obsessed with “keeping up with the Jones,” it follows that most students view education as a means to an end, a free pass to the next level of affluence in the richest country in the world. Given the popularity of game shows that help perpetuate the overnight millionaire sensation, lotteries, and the instant success of Bill Gates, education will always retain a place in civilized society, but classroom instruction may no longer retain its position as the only viable method of “making it.”