

# EDUCATION IN AMERICA

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## *Does the Small Private College Have a Future?*

TO MANY older Americans the word "college" calls up visions of an elm-shaded campus in a rural environment, a faculty devoted to the liberal arts, and a student body so small that each student knows all his classmates. Throughout the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, such colleges—usually private or church-related—dominated the American scene. Today, however, they are giving way to institutions that deviate greatly from the tradition.

Of the 4,800,000 students now enrolled in college, about 65 per cent attend rapidly growing state or municipal institutions. Of the remaining 35 per cent, about 40 per cent are enrolled in large private universities, most of which have an urban setting. While total college enrollments continue to rise rapidly, the percentage of students enrolled in small, private, liberal-arts colleges continues to decline.

The trend has been obscured by the vast amount of publicity given to a few small colleges of superior reputation. The names of Swarthmore, Carleton, Reed, Antioch, Haverford, Bennington, and the Claremont group have been nationally known for many years. More recently other colleges that have long had good regional reputations—Kalamazoo, Lawrence, Wooster, Grinnell, and Ripon are examples—have come to national attention. These are colleges that have chosen to remain small and have resisted the demands for undergraduate vocational courses and graduate professional programs. They have assured themselves of talented graduates by admitting only talented freshmen. Their rising prestige has enabled them to raise tuition fees and to attract funds from foundations and private donors. This, in turn, has enabled them to attract superior faculties.

Though the future of such colleges is secure, it would be difficult to name another hundred of comparable quality. But more than 600 small private colleges dot the nation's landscape. What of the others—the colleges whose names never appear on anyone's list of "prestige colleges"?

While some belong in the "obscure-but-good" category, and others are adequate though undistinguished, the sad fact is that many others are less than adequate by today's standards. Some are struggling to stay alive and for perhaps 200 of them the prospects for survival as effective institutions of higher learning are not at all bright.

Much of the trouble is financial. The sources of income and endowment on which their stronger and more prestigious rivals depend are not available to these weaker institutions. Foundation money most often goes to colleges that already have strong faculties and highly selected student bodies. Colleges that have made their contribution by educating ministers, teachers, and housewives have few rich alumni.

A large part of the federal money for higher education goes for research and consequently is not readily available to small undergraduate colleges. Campaigns urging everyone to "Give to the college of your choice" do not produce much revenue for obscure colleges that few have chosen. The total effect of the combined efforts of foundations, government, industry, and

fund drives is to make rich colleges richer while the poor ones remain poor. And the poverty of many private colleges—at least 200 to 300—is appalling.

The tragic state of their finances is revealed in faculty salaries. Last year the median salary paid to faculty members of all ranks in private colleges with enrollments under 500 was only \$6,264 and in those with enrollments of 500 to 1,000 the median was only \$6,808. Some of these in the lowest quartile paid salaries in the \$3,000 to \$5,000 range. Yet most of these are “fully accredited” colleges that grant liberal arts degrees. Some of them bear famous names and some have a long history.

Such colleges are losing their better professors to industry, and to more fortunate colleges, both public and private. A few of the older, dedicated professors will stay on regardless of salary but younger faculty members are discovering that it is just as easy to become dedicated to a professorship that pays \$12,000 or \$18,000 as to one that pays \$5,000. They are moving on.

The deterioration of the faculty is not the only problem faced by a poorly financed college. Prospective students who visit the campus find the decaying plant, the library, and the laboratories inferior to those of the high schools they have attended. As a result the weakest of the nation's private colleges find it difficult to attract students even in this period of bulging enrollments elsewhere.

In their efforts to survive, the weaker colleges have made questionable claims and have resorted to futile tactics. Some have insisted that educational quality is unrelated to faculty salaries. Many have claimed too much for the hallowed tradition, the intimate environment, and the low student-teacher ratio. Some, while boasting of their freedom from political control, have abjectly accepted the equally stultifying controls of provincialism and parochialism—while condemning state colleges as “Godless”, they have themselves substituted piety for learning. Some, while retaining the name of liberal arts colleges, have transformed themselves into low-grade vocational schools. In an effort to attract students, some have expanded their lists of course offerings without expanding their faculties or facilities.

Such tactics are futile. The best chance for the survival of the small private college lies in doing what it can do best—offering a first-rate undergraduate education of a truly liberal but not highly specialized nature. A college with little endowment and no outside support cannot hope to provide first-rate professional training of any kind. Without expensive laboratories and shops it cannot train technicians and specialized scientists. But it can teach well the

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## Letters to the Editor

### Status Seeking

JUST A BRIEF WORD to thank you for David Boroff's article “Status Seeking in Academe” [SR, Dec. 19]. Although in doubt as to the value of my opinions, I do feel justified in saying that Mr. Boroff's views were, as a welcome departure from the stilted reams of literature so far published, most meaningful and well stated. A little tongue-in-cheek, perhaps, but, as an undergraduate at a small college, I can see the meaningfulness of many of his observations.

DAVID E. HANAWALT.

Medford, Ore.

KUDOS to David Boroff and his fine article, “Status Seeking in Academe” [SR, Dec. 19]. He knows his onions. As proof of the pudding, a friend of mine who teaches at a small, lower-middle-class state teachers' college in Pennsylvania revealed to me recently some of the criteria that institution uses to determine the worth of students seeking entrance to their hallowed halls.

Among the many items of concern were, of all things, overweight and “a look of femininity in male applicants.” I suppose with the horde of students trying to get into colleges these days the admissions people have to use *some* criteria to weed out the misfits! Yet this particular school prides itself in having the best facility for the training of artists in the state.

CHARLES P. SILOS.

Jackson, Mich.

### Loyalty Oath—Amended

TOM KASER's article “The Loyalty Oath: 1964-65” [SR, Nov. 21], for all its valuable information, was quite incomplete and misleading on two important matters.

Kaser failed to point out that the original NDEA disclaimer oath which “Senator John F. Kennedy fruitlessly tried to abolish” in 1959 was abolished in October 1962 under the NDEA as amended. However, the affirmative oath of allegiance was retained in the amended act. (By quoting both oaths from the original act, in the box accompanying Kaser's article, SR reinforced Kaser's misleading omissions.) Nevertheless, the criminal penalties of the original act were retained. The result is that today, if a student is a knowing member of a “Communist organization,” and has been notified that the organization has been given a “final order” to register under the Subversive Activities Control Act, he is liable to a \$10,000 fine or five years, imprisonment, or both, if he even *applies* for NDEA funds.

Having omitted all this, it is understandable that Kaser did not go on to mention that most of the “thirty-two U.S. colleges and universities” which did not participate under NDEA as originally enacted did so with alacrity once the disclaimer oath was dropped in 1962. The only exceptions are

some half-dozen colleges (including Bennington, Haverford, and Reed) which, though eligible, have not applied for NDEA monies through the Student Loan Fund provisions of the act.

The objection to NDEA as amended is that despite repeal of the obnoxious disclaimer oath a) the act still violates the academic freedom of students by imposing penalties for political nonconformity, and b) the student's own college is directly implicated in this because it both administers the student's application for NDEA funds and (in the case of the Loan Fund) contributes some of its own monies to these funds, thereby placing them beyond the reach of otherwise qualified students.

Surely these developments are as significant as any of those noted by Mr. Kaser during the past two years, and they warrant more notice and discussion than they have so far received. For they indicate both the persistence and toleration of loyalty oaths in our institutions of higher learning.

HUGO ADAM BEDAU,  
Associate Professor,  
and Chairman,  
Educational Policies Committee,  
Reed College.

Portland, Ore.

### Sir Eric: Too English?

SIR ERIC ASHBY's views on the university presidency [SR, Nov. 21] are engaging and engagingly put, partly because he is an extraordinary man and partly because he is in an extraordinary situation. For these very reasons he does those interested in higher education in America a disservice because, in effect, he deflects attention from all the issues that are cogent here.

The questions that do matter here are—some of them: What, if anything legitimizes—not legalizes—a university president's power? To whom is he actually responsible? Responsive? How? To whom ought he to be? How is a university to be governed in order and freedom—in that spirit that infuses the Constitution and that is America's breath, being, and gift to the world? Why are election and a four-year term and a limit on succession good enough for the government of this great nation, and not good enough for the universities that are to nourish and nurture that prickly independence that is this nation's treasure? How is constitutional amendment within a university to be pursued? How are scholars—junior and senior—“professors,” and “students” to be given those guarantees and immunities within the university that, outside the university, distinguish the free world from the slave states? How is it that almost nowhere is any university president fighting in alliance with his students and faculty for these things?

The last person who cared enough about  
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