



—Jim Aronson

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

THE CLIMATE OF LEARNING

By PETER SCHRAG

BACK in 1925, the heyday of the hip flask and the Varsity Drag, a Florida land developer named George Merrick set aside a 260-acre tract of Coral Gables, which he happened to own, for what was to be one of the crown jewels of the Miami sun boom—a Real University. Two years later the real estate market collapsed; the great dream began to languish under swampy land options, uncollectable pledges, and academic ooze; and the institution chartered as the University of Miami became known as Sun Tan U. What the University lacked in academic distinction—which was a great deal—it made up in climate, attracting hordes of hedonists who came to "catch rays" on their way to the most hilarious bachelor's degree in the history of higher education. Their cash kept Old Sun Tan half alive until some real *chutzpah*, federal funds, and a new crowd of true believers came to the rescue. Now, like a lot of other Florida fairy tales, this one threatens to come true: The University of Miami is becoming respectable.

No one at Miami is yet prepared to acclaim it a great university: The telescopes of local ambition are trained on Duke, Emory, and Tulane, not Harvard,

Berkeley, or Oxford; yet Miami's boosters now regard marine science, medicine, and international studies with more reverence than scuba diving, surfing, and sunshine. With 15,000 students (one-third of them women), Miami has become an academic and geographical opportunist, using its unique location to scholarly advantage, investing heavily in the sciences, and betting that the prestige of special institutes, programs, and departments will ultimately purge it of its historic image. Miami is an institution on the make.

And, like all institutions on the make, Miami is plagued with ambiguities, problems, and inconsistencies. Because its chief sources of support are tuition and federal grants for research (some \$22,000,000 this year), it tends to be relatively strong at the top and weak at the bottom, heavy in the sciences and certain fields of research (marine biology, biochemistry, meteorology, medicine), light in the social sciences and humanities. It has been doing a monumental job in training and retraining thousands of Cuban refugees—among them hundreds of doctors and lawyers—but is thus far failing to ignite much social concern among its undergraduates. Its physics department has funds for forty full-tuition scholarships (and football

has 125), but the honors program has none; among its junior faculty are men who earn more than certain senior professors, and deserve it; and the same students who speak proudly about Miami's academic reputation can't tell from their own experience in what it might lie or whence it stems. As far as most of them are concerned, what's wrong with a little sunshine while "you're getting your education"? What is?

The University is divided into conventional academic departments—into schools of arts and sciences, engineering, law, business, nursing, medicine, and education, plus a growing number of special institutes for urban affairs, international studies, theoretical physics, and marine science. But the more important division is between the old Miami and the new, between a young faculty recruited for its academic and scholarly potential and an older staff that appears—in many instances, though not all—to be more interested in the golf course than the laboratory; and between a majority of affluent undergraduates who jam the parking lots with their Camaros and Corvettes, and a minority of academically talented and creative students who came without particular regard for the entertainment at Miami Beach. It is noteworthy that while the



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Ted Hendricks, Miami's All-American—"Where the university once regarded its advantages in terms of sunshine . . ."

big campus issues at Miami are parking, "security" (theft in the dormitories), and curfews, the University has a fledgling, unrecognized chapter of SDS and enough Negroes to constitute an active United Black Students organization, active enough to help stimulate courses in African studies and black history. Neither group has any numerical significance; the important fact is that they are there at all.

IF there is a geopolitics of academic development, Miami is a prime example. The University has always traded on its location, but where it once regarded its advantages chiefly in terms of sunshine, the new Miami sees them in terms of its proximity to the Caribbean, to Latin America, to an ocean that is hospitable twelve months of the year, and to the retired wealth—"the silent wealth"—that Florida attracts in increasing amounts. The task is to convert the old image—not to discard it, but to change it into an asset. Thus the oceanographers and marine biologists, thus the emphasis on medicine and medical research (especially tropical diseases), thus marine archaeology, thus the interest in Latin American studies, and thus a Center for Theoretical Studies where the glow of visiting Nobel Laureates can shine on Miami, and where the virtues of the institution, climatic and academic, real and projected, can be displayed to the visitors. "It's pretty easy to get people down here in the middle of the winter," someone said. "If we want a visiting lecturer in January or February, we can usually get him—at a reasonable fee."

The acknowledged catalyst of the new Miami is Henry King Stanford, an indefatigable enthusiast who has been the University's president since 1962. "A

university in a good climate," he said, "does not have to be undistinguished"—a declaration that, in the context of Stanford's ambitions, is rather an understatement. Stanford has raided not only the troubled state university system and other Southern universities, he is now beginning to bring in faculty and administrators from Princeton, Berkeley, Wisconsin, Hopkins, Chicago, and Columbia. He persuaded Foy Kohler, former United States Ambassador to the Soviet Union, to join the Center for Advanced International Studies; brought the conductor Frederick Fennell to the School of Music; appointed Harvey Blank, a distinguished dermatologist, and William J. Whelan and Sidney Fox, internationally known biochemists, to the School of Medicine. (Fox, who directs the University's Institute of Molecular Evolution, has made major contributions in the synthesizing of artificial protein cells from amino acids.)

At the same time, Stanford has raised average faculty compensation from "C" to "B" in the ratings of the American Association of University Professors ("We used to pay in sunshine," someone said), has helped establish a federation of Caribbean area universities, and has fostered a vast expansion of the University's research. (It is now one of the thirty leading American beneficiaries of federal research funds.) The University has nearly \$700,000 in grants from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA); \$2,500,000 from the National Science Foundation; \$8,000,000 from the National Institutes of Health; and \$500,000 from the Department of Interior. The Medical School is a leader in studies of certain tropical diseases: Under a \$600,000 grant from the Army, it has done pioneer work on fungus and bacterial infections. Other Miami scientists are studying everything from hurricanes to shrimp, from cancer to birth defects. There are projects in radar meteorology, underwater sound waves, artificial kidneys, the political influence of the military in Latin America, space law, and the government of Cuba.

IN addition to the hard research, Miami can boast a recognized music faculty, among them Fennell and the pianist Ivan Davis; an intelligently designed and tasteful art gallery; an active program in theater; and a university press that has moved from the ranks of academic vanity publishers issuing marginal monographs that find no other outlets, to serious studies in oceanography, Latin American affairs, and literature. "In the past, climate compensated for academic weakness," said Armin H. Gropp, Miami's vice president for academic affairs, in discussing the University's appeal. "The flow of faculty talent used to be out of the South. I think we're reversing it."

But if Miami's research and some of its graduate programs have matured, if Miami can begin to pay in cash and academic company, its undergraduate offerings are just coming out of the ice—pardon, sunshine—age. "We're operating by a sort of trickle-down philosophy," Stanford said, but the trickles remain relatively sparse. As at many large universities, the faculty tends to be relatively small for the student body (about 1 to 18) and the classes large, a fact which led Miami to try a major, but ultimately disastrous, experiment with televised lectures for freshmen and sophomores, an experiment which has now been abandoned. Much of the fare, nonetheless, is standard, frequently uninspired, and sometimes inane. Most students, especially in the first two years, are subject to big lecture sections and graduate student instructors, to processes of routine note-taking, and to final exam regurgitation. (In an education course final: True or false: "The main purpose of an education is to store up factual knowledge for future use" and "Creativity is the process of bringing something new into birth.") The big sellers at the book store are course outlines and review books, and there is a lively trade in lecture notes. During final examination week the students are reading underlined textbooks, not paperbacks; are reviewing outlines and lists, not discussing problems or questions. "These kids," said a member of the faculty, "want to be spoon-fed. We had better students at [the state university] where I came from."

Nonetheless, in recent years the University has begun to attract a core of competent and sometimes outstanding undergraduate teachers in the humanities and social sciences, among them



—E. Fisher (Institute of Marine Sciences, U. of Miami).

" . . . the new Miami sees them in terms of its proximity to the Caribbean and to Latin America."

John H. Knoblock in history and philosophy (East Asia), Robert Hively and Robert Hosmon in English, and John Hall in archaeology. (Hall is a diver, searching for Greek artifacts in the Mediterranean, not a digger.) Most of them are more interested in methodology than in surveys or in "appreciation-type courses"; they feel little or no administrative interference (except on budgets); and they tend to be self-consciously young, new, and intellectual—many of them have little to do with the senior men. A few feel that Miami is doomed to remain a second-rate university, pointing out that to date Miami's best students, graduate or undergraduate, are there by accident—for reasons of health or marriage—not by free choice, and some confess that they themselves wouldn't be there if the climate was poor.

THE elite of Miami's undergraduates—some 400 to 500 students—are enrolled in an honors program that functions primarily for the purpose of matching academic talent with good teachers. The offerings in the program break away from the surveys, from the formal lectures and texts, and rely heavily on seminars, open-ended questions, and interdisciplinary topics. Some of them combine music and literature, history and philosophy, art and archaeology; their reading lists tend to be eclectic—from *The Victorian Frame of Mind* to *Lolita* in one course, from *The Iliad* to *Catch 22* in another—and their students to be competent and occasionally brilliant. "Our 'A' students," said Hively, who directs the honors program, "would be 'A' students anywhere." Hively, who would like to develop the program into a full-scale honors college—a college within the college—feels that there is a genuine intellectual subculture at Miami, people who "are not part of the XKE crowd, who listen to Mozart (there's a recital here almost every night, but few people know about it), and who will eventually go to the better graduate schools."

Miami, like many institutions, is subsidizing its advanced programs with the tuition paid by undergraduates. But because its endowment is still relatively low (now some \$27,000,000—about 2 per cent of Harvard's), it needs that tuition more desperately than most. (Oddly, at \$1,650 a year, it is also lower than most.) The big lectures and the mass programs are helping to capitalize prestige. "Let those kids come in their Ferraris," said a member of the faculty. "We'll take their money and flunk 'em out." And flunk out they do. Three-fourths of Miami's entering freshmen don't survive through graduation; some transfer, some get married, some simply disappear. The competence of the average Miami student has been rising steadily—

the entering classes now average about 500 on their college board tests, placing them (in this respect at least) on approximately the same level as entering freshmen at Amherst or Harvard twenty years ago, but they are—with notable exceptions—neither intellectuals nor social reformers, and see no reason why they should be. Two-thirds of them come from out of state, most of them from the urban areas of the Northeast. More than a third are Jewish, and another third are Catholics (including some 2,000 resident Cubans) according to the University's records. For many of them, Miami is probably a second choice, and their insistence that they came, among other things, because of the climate, may be partly the defensiveness of people who weren't admitted to Penn, USC, or Colgate. If Miami's climate were dismal and its setting genuinely urban (rather than palm-fringed

When students talk about going to the beach, they are not referring to surf and sunshine, but to the commercial entertainers in the big hotels; the boys read *Playboy*, the girls *Bride's* or *Good Housekeeping*, not for entertainment, but for instruction in the modes of consumption—for proper living room arrangements, for the latest styles in furniture or dress, for the things one ought to buy. The richly stocked book shop on the second floor of the Student Union (the first floor of the shop is devoted to cosmetics, gifts, and greeting cards) is poorly patronized. Ask any student what books are exciting the undergraduates—books other than those assigned—and he's likely to treat you like some sort of nut. Ask him what he thinks of his teachers, his courses, his academic life, and he'll tell you he likes them fine. He's getting an education; as in everything else, he is a consumer of learning.



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"In addition to the hard research, Miami can boast a recognized music faculty, among them the conductor Frederick Fennell."

glass-and-concrete suburban), it would probably resemble Boston University or Syracuse.

What is striking about most of the undergraduates is not that they are playboys or hedonists, but that they are the ultimate consumers, conscious of dress, of money, of cars, of what it costs. They are utterly reasonable, politically conservative (a majority for Nixon in 1968), socially apathetic, and surprisingly humorless. About thirty Miami students spent last summer on the campus working with disadvantaged kids (with no remuneration), and a number were involved in the 1968 campaign, but they are almost invisible. The handful of undergraduates with long hair who hang out in the coffee shop of the Student Union are regarded with vague embarrassment by the majority, and the black students who dance to the hard rock on the juke box on the terrace just outside are like visitors from another planet.

The girls consume men. "This," said the resident director of a woman's residence, "is a good gene pool." This means that for a Jewish girl in Cincinnati or Waco or Atlanta, where the number of eligible males is low, Miami is a place to meet boys, to get pinned, to get engaged. For her and most of her classmates, going to college is an exercise in being reasonable: structure your time—study in the afternoon, go out at night. There is a time for homework, a time for setting your hair, a time for shopping. When you start a course with a tough reputation, you get a tutor—get him (or her) now; don't wait until you have trouble. In the midwinter, chances are good that the family will be in town for a few weeks. They are there because you are there (or vice versa); and you will spend much of your time with them and may use the occasion to have them meet your boy (or girl) friend, look the pos-

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UNTAUGHT TEACHERS AND IMPROBABLE POETS



—Drawings by Gaspar E. Filato.

By FLORENCE HOWE

When the post-war history of educational reform is written, an extensive footnote will have to be devoted to the many programs and projects in which non-professionals explored new styles and approaches to teaching and learning—often with notable success. The accompanying article, adapted from a report to the U.S. Office of Education, describes such a program in which a group of undergraduate women from Goucher College in Baltimore attempted to introduce vocational high school students to poetry. Much of the description is taken from daily journals kept by the undergraduates. The author, an assistant professor of English at Goucher, was the director of the project, and is co-author, with Paul Lauter, of "Education for Change" and "Rebellion and Service" to be published by Macmillan.

ON the first day of the program, one student said, "I guess they are trying to make gentlemen out of auto mechanics. Or maybe as we drop the oil pan on a car we're supposed to recite poetry." The Goucher undergraduates who were teaching sixty-three tenth-grade boys did not want to turn auto mechanics into poets. But their aims were no less modest for that. They wanted their students to learn to enjoy and read poetry because they thought it was valuable. The undergraduates hoped to learn something as well from an experience that removed them from their campus and placed them in an urban classroom with small groups of boys in circles of discussion.

Early in the spring of 1968, Goucher College and the Baltimore public schools agreed to cooperate in sponsoring a ten-week pilot project, using undergraduate English students to develop and teach a curriculum unit on contemporary poetry to high school students. The project depended in large measure on the talent and energy of

undergraduates, inexperienced as teachers but committed to literature and writing, and on the intelligence and good will of high school students who cooperated in the experiment. It depended also on a fledgling group known as Teachers and Writers Collaborative, funded by the Office of Education through Columbia University's Teachers College. The Collaborative, which financed our project, seeks to involve teachers, children, and professional writers in the creation of an English curriculum that is stimulating and relevant to the lives of children in school today.

School officials were responsible for the choice of a vocational-technical high school, of the tenth-grade boys, and of the participating teachers. I had asked that the teachers be willing to participate and that the students be relatively uninterested in reading and writing poetry. As it turned out, the students had had little or no instruction in poetry. Their teachers expressed ambivalent attitudes toward the project. They were interested in participating in an experiment. But their own training had