



CHARACTERISTICS OF  
**COLLEGE  
STUDENTS  
TODAY**

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EACH college generation has been characterized or tagged with labels such as The Lost Generation or The Isolationists. The influence of a strong, vocal minority leads to the characterizing of an entire generation; their attitudes are not shared by all students—but they are pronounced sufficiently to affect the other students, the faculty, and higher education as a whole. The attitudes of today's college students are interesting because for once our perennial revolutionaries are not espousing causes and revolutions. Today's college student is called The Conformist, and his only revolution, apparently, is against what college students have been noted for in the past.

Perhaps I should draw a word picture of the present day university prior to discussing the college student. There is a new urgency among young people to avail themselves of educational opportunities and they are demanding that the scope for training be expanded to include a wider range of possibilities. In 1886 only one out of 740 young people attended college. By 1953 this number had increased to one out of 74. In 1957 the number attending college exceeded 3,000,000 and it is anticipated that this number will double by 1970. The college population is predominantly male.

Only one-third are women students. Public supported and controlled institutions are drawing sixty percent of the students. This is a change from the 1800's when church operated colleges predominated. The junior colleges have grown in numbers and popularity, and indications are that they will continue to do so.

The level of ability for college entrance is rising. State operated colleges as well as the long established private universities are raising their entrance requirements. It is becoming common procedure to give more attention to the orienting of freshmen so that their likelihood of success will be greater. A cosmopolitan atmosphere exists on today's campuses. Young people of all nationalities, creeds, and races come in great numbers seeking to avail themselves of the opportunities of higher education.

In thinking of the college population, we ordinarily assume that the great majority are of "college age" meaning from eighteen to twenty-one years. However, this age group makes up only fifty-five percent of those in college.

The forty-five percent who are twenty-two or older tend to make the college a more conservative—a more conforming institution than it was a couple of decades ago. An interesting development is that the number of women in the age group from twenty-four to thirty enrolled in colleges has increased one hundred and twen-

ty-seven percent in the last decade as compared to a twenty-four percent increase of men in this age group.

Those of us who counted our pennies in college during the depression never cease to be amazed at the economic status of the current college student. Students seem to have plenty of money to spend and many of them own cars. More than seventy percent of them earn part or all of their own way.

Much of their economic fluency is due to the many and varied opportunities for summer employment. It is not uncommon for those working during the summer to save from five to six hundred dollars toward winter enrollment.

As long as economic conditions permit, the married student will probably continue to be a large minority group on campus. Twenty-two percent of all college students are married.

There are those who say that married students are numerous only on the large mid-western university campuses providing housing for them! They should take particular note of the fact that there are three times as many married men as women on campus, which means that the girls are putting hubby through. In fact, many departments have special programs and present the wives a PHT diploma.

Much discussion is taking place by educators concerning the married student. Carleton College has taken a step: beginning this fall no married student, man or woman, will be permitted to enroll.

I personally feel that married freshmen coming to the campus find it very difficult to manage an education for both husband and wife, but that in the case of married upperclassmen both tend to complete work on their degrees.

The chief question among college students today is "Who Am I?" Students are involved in a continuing effort to find themselves and their place in the world. Students' success standards are material, but they are not "gadget happy." They want jobs which will provide today's notion of The Good Life. They do not want to become the head of a big company or prominent in a professional field. The job is a means to an end. The end being that Good Life which includes an early marriage, three or four children, leisure for social activities and hobbies and a modest amount of activity in community and public affairs. They are family and community oriented. Their desire to contribute to society through their chosen work and local civic activity after graduation is frequently expressed as a wish to use their talents "in the most constructive way possible."

The immediate goal of the collegian is a job. He is willing to work hard to make high grades which will give him priority consideration with employers, or for a fellowship to finance his graduate work.

The recent emphasis on science and engineering would lead us to think that perhaps these fields are rapidly increasing at the expense of other professions. However, there is a clear trend toward business administration and the social sciences as fields of study. Another trend is that many freshmen students arrive at the university with intentions of continuing into graduate school immediately on completion of the first degree.

The vocationally oriented student, according to the faculty, misses the real significance of the learning experience because his emphasis is on grades. He is prepared to cheat, if necessary, to make these grades. To many students the examination presents a challenge to cleverness. It is evident that cheating grows out of the competitive system under which college credits are awarded.

Campus activities have shown a change with the student's concern for self-improvement. His search for security is often sought in a highly personal and individual way. He no longer burns to change the world, because he no longer is so sure either of what the world is or what it should become. The crusader has largely disappeared and the groups he fostered to explore social and political questions have dwindled. His intensity for self-knowledge and understanding has created interest in a different type of activity. Reading and listening rooms, record libraries, visiting lecturers, campus orchestras and choruses, and toastmaster's clubs are frequented more and more.

**M**OBILE students make it difficult to weld the campus population into a body with a high esprit de corps. Pep clubs have to beg for members to promote organized rah-rah. The mobility of students extends beyond the campus. There is much transferring from college to college. Some of this is due to the increased popularity of junior colleges, but even among senior colleges much transferring occurs.

Students have a new eagerness to meet and know their teachers outside the classroom; not as people but as teachers and experts in their fields. They want an opportunity to explore ideas expressed in class or "to pick the professor's brains."

A gradual change is occurring in fraternities as a result of this new student. Improved scholarship and greater acceptance by Panhellenics and IFC's of the responsi-

bility for self government are but two of the results.

The increased expansion programs of fraternities is an indication to the college administrations of a growing sense of their possibilities. The fraternity system is so close to what the college so often seeks in a dormitory system; that is, relatively small in size, closely knit, and a unit of total education with special responsibility for campus leadership. They offer the opportunity for an unusual maturing process with group idealism balanced by individually held values.

I would not want to create the impression in this article that all students are alike, especially that freshmen and seniors have the same attitudes, or that men and women respond to college the same way. Freshmen have been described as an enthusiastic and happy group, but research data reveals that the freshman year is an unsatisfactory year for many. Time does not permit us to explore the causes of freshman dissatisfaction other than to say that educators are giving serious consideration to this problem. It is important to note, however, that half of the drop-outs occur after the freshman year.

Among the men students who have not already chosen their major fields of study upon entrance to college, the crisis about identity most often occurs in the sophomore year in connection with the choice of a vocation. After the choice is made there seems to be increasing stability through the junior and senior years.

According to a study made at Vassar College, senior women are well ahead of the freshmen in capacity to suspend judgment, flexibility of thinking, criticalness, and realism. There is more awareness and appreciation of the diversity of points of view and standards adopted by others. Senior women are less conventional and conforming; they are more assertive, rebellious and adventurous. The unrest is particularly noticeable among those not planning to marry upon graduation. The unrest is due in part to society's interpretation of the role of women and the senior's inability to establish her identity.

Other labels attached to this college generation are Mature or Conservative. They are more accurate, I think, than Conformist. According to one educator, many of today's college students may be described as rather cautious seekers after inner security in an outwardly secure world. They are aware that this search may be fruitless, but they engage in it with persistence, nonetheless, concerning themselves more with day-to-day living, self-knowledge, and personal life plans than with the problems of the larger world.