



REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

*Renewing the Educational Compact
Between Institutions and Students*

by

George Kuh
James Lyons

Thomas Miller
Jo Anne Trow

About the Reasonable Expectations Project

The Reasonable Expectations Project evolved from discussions in the Policy Advisory Task Force of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA). These discussions were in response to the 1993 revision of the *Joint Statement of Student Rights and Responsibilities* which was produced by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP).

NASPA, along with several other higher education organizations, contributed to the revision of the joint statement in the early 1990s. It became evident during this process that the nature of institution-student relations had changed markedly over the past 25 years in ways that could not be accommodated by the AAUP statement. After a March 1993 discussion at the NASPA annual meeting in Cincinnati, a small group was charged with developing an approach that would encourage discussion and debate at the institution level about what colleges and universities could do to clarify the nature of the relationship between institutions and students to enhance student and institutional productivity.

The group, chaired by Thomas Miller of Canisius College, met several times during a two-year period. In the fall of 1993, a draft of "Reasonable Expectations" was sent to several institutions, inviting them to use the document in any way that would be productive in their context. For example, some institutions convened small groups of faculty, students, and administrators to examine the extent to which their institutions clarified mutual expectations; others used the document to structure faculty and staff development activities.

At an open forum at the March 1994 NASPA annual meeting in Dallas, NASPA members commented on the document and shared their experiences using the report to stimulate discussion at their institutions. Subsequently, the document was sent to presidents and student life officers at additional institutions and to executives of a variety of higher education organizations inviting their comments. Many of their suggestions have been incorporated in this version. Any shortcomings are the responsibility of the authors.

We encourage institutions to use the document in any way they deem appropriate to clarify mutual expectations and to promote student learning. So that we can be of help to other institutions in pursuit of these goals, we invite your comments about how, and with what results, your institution has used the report. Please send all inquiries, comments, and suggestions to Thomas Miller, Vice President, Canisius College, 2001 Main Street, Buffalo, New York 14208; e-mail: miller@canisius.bitnet. Other members of the writing team include George Kuh, professor of higher education at Indiana University; James Lyons, dean emeritus and senior scholar at the Institute for Higher Education, Stanford University; and Jo Anne Trow, vice president at Oregon State University.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education in the United States has entered a new era. Virtually every qualified student has access to postsecondary education.

At all but a small number of selective residential institutions, the characteristics of students are very different from their counterparts of two and three decades ago. Proportionately fewer are 18 to 23 years old and have traditional academic preparations, more attend college part time, many are continuing interrupted educations. Whatever the reasons students in the past had for going to college, today the vast majority seek a credential that qualifies them for a good job in the global economic marketplace.

Along with changes in students, institutions now are more vulnerable to external influences. Uncontrollable economic forces, escalating costs, and shifting sources and availability of resources have forced institutions to be more efficient and to reexam-

ine what they do. Government agencies, professional societies, and licensing boards are demanding greater accountability. At the same time, the knowledge explosion has redefined faculty productivity and led to more specialized fields of study, occasionally fragmenting traditional academic units. Taken together, increased demand for participation, changing student characteristics and aspirations, and external forces are straining institutional budgets and promise to transform American higher education, a phenomenon that the Pew Higher Education Roundtable calls “massification.”

Accompanying this transformation is a significant shift in the nature of relations between students and institutions. Prior to the 1960s *in loco parentis* was the guiding doctrine. Since then, successful legal challenges defining students as adults stripped the parental role from colleges and universities. Most institutions, however, have not developed a coherent philosophy to replace *in loco parentis*, relying instead on civil law to define the institution-student relationship.

The Problem

In this context, it is not surprising that faculty and administrators focus on the exigencies of the moment. Too often, though, this means the quality of undergraduate education is overlooked. The passage of time exacerbates such oversights.

The central question is what form of educational compact between institutions and their students is most likely to promote the highest levels of student learning? Research on this topic points to two unequivocal conclusions:

- the more time and energy students invest in educationally purposeful activities, the more they gain
- the nature and quality of student, faculty, and staff relations are more important to student learning and personal development than such institutional characteristics as expenditures per student or percentage of faculty with doctoral degrees.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to stimulate discussion about what institutions and students can reasonably expect from one another to enhance learning productivity. Expectations can be divided into five areas:

- teaching and learning
- the curriculum
- institutional integrity
- the quality of institutional life
- educational services.

For each of these areas, a pair of complementary propositions is presented expressing the reciprocal expectations of institutions and students followed by questions to help determine whether these expectations are being met. The term *institution* refers to the organization as well as all those who play an educational role (faculty, administrators, support staff and others).

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Colleges and universities have one thing in common: they exist to promote teaching and learning. A variety of people teach — faculty members, professional staff, and students to name a few.

Learning is not confined to the classroom, laboratory, and library: it occurs in many contexts — studios, theaters, residence halls, student organizations, sports. Learning is primarily, but not exclusively, a student activity.

Faculty scholarship, institutional improvement efforts, and staff development activities are manifestations of other forms of learning that occur in collegiate settings. The richest learning environments include a clear, coherent set of educational purposes and outcomes and complementary policies and practices that consider the background and aspirations of the learners.

Proposition: Students expect their teachers to:

be knowledgeable about the subject under study

use effective teaching approaches such as holding students to high standards of performance, explaining desired outcomes, and applying fairly and clearly articulated evaluation practices

be available for consultation.

To what extent does the institution:

indicate how much time and effort students should spend on assignments in various classes?

acknowledge human differences in preferred approaches to learning?

assure that teachers are available to consult with their students?

ask students to apply what they are learning in class to their out-of-class lives?

use multiple approaches to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning?

make adequate learning resources (e.g., libraries, computing equipment, learning skills centers) accessible to all those who can benefit from them?

Proposition: Institutions expect their students to:

prepare for, and attend, classes and structured learning activities

participate fully in classroom activities

invest the time and effort demanded by course requirements

complete assignments in a timely fashion

behave in a civil, supportive manner toward peers and teachers

strive to apply what they learn in class to their lives outside the classroom.

To what extent do students:

devote the time and energy necessary to prepare adequately for class?

exhibit the academic skills required to succeed academically?

treat all peers and instructors with respect?

use examples from out-of-class experiences in class assignments?

help their peers to obtain resources (e.g., library materials) and acquire skills needed to succeed academically?

reflect on what they are learning and how their classroom experiences relate to their lives outside the classroom?

THE CURRICULUM

The number of different courses has increased during the past few decades, in large part a function of the knowledge explosion and resulting specializations within disciplines. For various reasons, many institutions have reduced course offerings in recent years, resulting in larger classes, elimination of some courses, and irregular scheduling of certain courses.

The expansion and contraction of the curriculum — largely unplanned — has produced an incoherent array of course offerings, eroding the quality of the undergraduate experience and making it difficult for many students to complete degree requirements within a reasonable period.

Proposition: Students expect their institution to:

- offer a curriculum that provides a coherent intellectual experience and prepares them to live productive lives after college

- specify major field, distribution, and other academic requirements in accessible institutional documents

- offer all general education and major field courses at a rate that permits students to complete their educational objectives in a specified period of time

- make advisors available with the knowledge to help students identify appropriate courses and vocational options.

To what extent does the institution

- clearly delineate and explain requirements for various degrees?

- periodically review the curriculum to ensure coherent sequencing of courses that respond to student demand and job market realities?

- develop a multiple-year schedule of course offerings that reflects the nature of the student body and balances student demand and faculty expertise and interests?

identify in advance the status of instructors teaching the respective courses (e.g., tenure track faculty, graduate student teaching assistant, part-time faculty member)?

plan a program of study in consultation with an advisor?

monitor their progress toward degree completion and seek assistance from faculty or staff when needed?

use electives to expand their intellectual and social experiences?

Proposition: Institutions expect their students to:

learn the requirements for their program or degree

seek advice from faculty and staff who are knowledgeable about graduation requirements

plan their program of study so they can enroll in the necessary courses over a period of time commensurate with their enrollment status

take as many classes per term as is reasonable, given their other roles and responsibilities.

To what extent do students:

know the requirements for graduation and their major (or where they are published)?

*I*NSTITUTIONAL INTEGRITY

Higher education was once considered a citadel of ethical behavior and moral courage. Because of increased competition, many colleges and universities have become more aggressive in their efforts to acquire resources, students, and status.

These efforts occasionally stretch credulity when students matriculate and discover that what appears in admissions materials to be new facilities are in disrepair, or courses needed for graduation are not available, or certain programs and services are not included in tuition and fees.

Competition sometimes affects faculty and students in unseemly ways (e.g., researchers publish papers with fraudulent data, academic misconduct by students seems to be at an all-time high). Faculty and staff members must affirm the centrality of academic integrity to teaching and learning and explain to students the importance of integrity in academic work.

Proposition: Students expect their institution to:

- model ethical and moral behavior in all transactions
- communicate clearly and apply fairly rules, policies, and practices
- provide programs, services, and facilities as described in institutional publications
- establish accurate fee structures and financial aid practices that allow students access to services and required courses.

To what extent does the institution:

- publish accurate information (e.g., admissions viewbooks, catalogs, grant applications) that reflects current circumstances?
- maintain the same standards of integrity for all academic and extracurricular programs (e.g., athletics, student newspapers, fraternities), and administrative functions (e.g., admissions, financial aids)?
- encourage academic integrity through explaining what constitutes academic dishonesty and inappropriate use of academic resources?

Proposition: Institutions expect their students to:

- distinguish between actions that are consistent with and violate the principles of academic integrity
- behave in a manner consistent with the principles of academic integrity and ethical imperatives.

To what extent do students:

- understand what constitutes academic integrity and ethical behavior?
- abide by honor codes and other covenants as reflected by the number of incidents of academic fraud and dishonesty?
- challenge acts of academic fraud and other unethical or immoral behavior by their peers and institutional agents?

QUALITY OF INSTITUTIONAL LIFE

Learning is as much a social activity as a solitary endeavor. It best occurs in settings where learners are known by name and respected as individuals, feel comfortable, interact with people from backgrounds different than their own, feel free to take intellectual risks, assume responsibility for their learning and social welfare, and have opportunities

to participate in community governance.

Both residential and commuter institutions foster student learning when faculty members, administrators, and students demonstrate mutual respect and have high expectations for student performance, both in and outside the classroom.

Proposition: Students expect their institution to:

- offer opportunities to be involved in all aspects of institutional life
- have and support diversity within the student body, faculty, and staff consistent with the institution's context and educational purposes
- teach students how to engage in civil relationships with others
- guarantee and model free expression through reasoned discourse

provide safe learning and living environments free from harassment.

To what extent does the institution:

expect and encourage students to participate in institutional governance?

hold students accountable for establishing and enforcing policies and practices that govern their behavior, both in and outside the classroom?

value diversity and celebrate human differences?

provide opportunities for students to engage in activities and programs that promote the common good?

support initiatives that link students, the institutions, and the local community in common cause?

Proposition: Institutions expect their students to:

treat each other and institutional agents with civility, respect, and compassion

exercise guaranteed freedoms in a responsible manner consistent with the aims and traditions of the academy

acknowledge the interdependence of the institution and the surrounding community

take responsibility for their learning and collective welfare

contribute to the quality of life at the institution and the surrounding community.

To what extent do students:

participate in institutional governance?

interact with each other in civil, ethical, and productive ways?

use facilities at the institution and in the surrounding community with respect and urge others to do so?

participate in community events in ways that demon-

strate they are responsible citizens and community members?

EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Most colleges and universities provide services to assist students in attaining their educational goals. Such services may include advising, counseling, housing, financial assistance, health and medical assistance, child care, career placement, employment, legal aid, social and cultural events, and recreation and sports activities.

The nature and scope of these services vary depending on the location, mission, and size of the institution. As resources become less plentiful, institutions will be able to provide fewer services; services once provided at no cost may require user fees. Those that remain will be scrutinized frequently to determine if they are being used by students in ways that complement the institution's academic mission and students' aspirations.

Proposition: Students expect their institution to:

provide services consistent with the institution's mission, educational purposes and location, and students' characteristics

accurately describe the available services and the rationale for user fees

make services available by competent personnel at convenient times and locations in a cost-effective, efficient manner.

To what extent does the institution:

publicize the availability of services?

systematically assess student needs and use of services?

make services available at hours and in places that meet users' needs?

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- provide staff development activities to assure competent personnel?

Proposition: Institutions expect their students to:

- use services responsibly
- provide information required to offer needed services
- participate in evaluating the quality of services.

To what extent do students:

- use services to promote independent, self-directed behavior rather than dependence?
- report when services are not meeting their expectations and needs?
- recognize the difference between essential and nonessential services?

CONCLUSION

At every level of education, high expectations clearly articulated are essential for fostering learning. Although high expectations cannot assure student success, low expectations are almost always deleterious. Changing expectations — those that students have for themselves and institutions have for their students — is a significant challenge.

The nature and details of the institution-student compact necessarily will vary according to the institution's mission and student characteristics. Consensus will not emerge immediately about what constitutes reasonable expectations.

Moreover, simply asserting new expectations will not change performance. Faculty, administrators, and others must assiduously cultivate institutional norms that compel them and their students to expect more of each other and to put forth the effort needed to meet these expectations. Anything less will fall short of what the public expects from its colleges and universities.

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**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
STUDENT PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATORS**

1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 418

Washington, DC 20009-5728

202.265.7500, phone

202.797.1157, fax

office@naspa.org, e-mail address