

E. T. Pascarella and P. T. Terenzini.

How College Affects Students: Findings and Insights from Twenty Years of Research.

San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991, xxiii + 894 pp.

As the foreword by Kenneth Feldman makes clear, this volume is the anointed successor of Feldman's and Theodore Newcomb's (1969) *The Impact of College on Students*. As such, it is sure to find a secure niche in education reference libraries, on the shelves of college administrators, and, to an extent limited by its price as a textbook, in higher education courses.

The book is ambitious in coverage, careful, and, as these things go, readable. It organizes and summarizes well over 2,500 published research studies in categories that include the intellectual, attitudinal, moral, occupational, and economic effects of college education. It presents these summaries in the form of reasonably detailed analyses as well as in more compressed overviews, in an effort to engage readers with various needs. And, despite their almost exclusive focus upon traditional quantitative research, the authors are careful not to understate the methodological problems that such research faces or to overstate the certainty of their conclusions. More than its predecessor, and in line with the more recent research on which it focuses, this volume conscientiously includes studies on particular populations of interest—minorities, women, community college students, nonresidential students. Within the bounds of what they count as legitimate research, the authors have made a deliberate effort to be eclectic in their focus and measured in their assessments.

Despite this effort, this book is likely to strike many readers, perhaps especially those concerned about the increasingly broad social role that universities are

expected to play in urban environments, as disappointingly narrow and old-fashioned. By and large, college education is understood here as what happens to those between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two who enroll in a traditional two- or four-year academic program. This definition is partly a result of the authors' own perceptions, their methodological preferences (older, diverse, and fragmented populations are hard to study reliably using methods designed for large and stable groups), and the available research. Of course, this population is still the primary audience for postsecondary education. Yet, as beliefs continue to evolve about who should be in college, what social and economic responsibilities universities have, and when in life learning should take place, this type of research is going to seem less and less relevant. Indeed, some of the findings, especially about the developmental and economic effects of college, make little sense for the wider and older population that predominates in at least some urban colleges today. For example, do the patterns of moral development found in the college education of young, unmarried, and childless adults still apply to those who have already passed through late adolescence as full-time workers and parents of young children? How should one measure the economic costs of a college education for the working single parent who completes a degree by studying part time over a ten-year period? Although this volume does compare the effects of full-time and part-time enrollment and although the authors point out the problem that maturation poses for longitudinal, quantitative studies, there is little if any attention paid to the age or the family status of students. The authors do note in passing this limitation of the research they survey and, therefore, of their own conclusions (p. 632); but this brief acknowledgement is overwhelmed by the hundreds of pages of analysis they devote to the traditional college student.

This specific omission points toward a larger difficulty in the authors' approach

and the research tradition upon which they draw, a difficulty that not only reveals the incompleteness of their project but that may also call into question their conclusions about what they take to be the central parts of their mission. Recently, Alasdair MacIntyre (1990) reminded us of an intellectual and moral tradition that has an important if often unrecognized influence on contemporary thinking and research, particularly in the social sciences. MacIntyre traces what he calls the encyclopaedic perspective, from the work of Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond D'Alembert in eighteenth-century France to the Scottish and British editors of *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Today, encyclopaedias tend to be regarded as mere catalogs of largely unrelated information. But that is not how their founders saw their mission. For them, the purpose of accumulating such information was to permit a single, comprehensive, and general understanding of the natural and human world to emerge, an understanding that in the long run any rational person must accept. The aspirations of Pascarella and Terenzini in this volume can, I believe, be understood in precisely these terms. They quite clearly wish to amass a large body of information about college education, but at the same time they believe that this information will cohere into a single, comprehensive story about how that education influences the lives of those who undergo it.

This encyclopaedic perspective has two primary consequences for their project. The belief that there is *one* best story to tell about college education permits them to ignore the older populations that we have already noted. For, at most, the story of college education for those populations *must* be a variation on the common themes that emerge from the facts about other, larger groups. This belief also affects the stories that Pascarella and Terenzini allow themselves to tell about the education of the groups to which they do pay explicit attention. Overwhelmingly, their concern over the education of women and blacks, for example, is whether the members of those groups receive the same benefits from

college education as men and whites do. This is a morally and socially important concern, but it is not the only concern that one might have.

Pascarella and Terenzini are not particularly interested in whether some people aspire to and achieve different outcomes from their college experience than do others—about, in other words, whether there is more than one important story to tell about college education in the United States. For instance, although they note in an early chapter that generally whether men and women develop in the same way is “disputed ground” (p. 47) and that specifically Carol Gilligan has proposed that young women’s moral development is best understood as the evolution of an ethic of caring, the authors’ chapter on moral development focuses exclusively on the moral reasoning implicit in Lawrence Kohlberg’s ethic of justice. Similarly, the finding that commuter schools produce less significant effects on their students’ attitudinal and psychosocial development than residential colleges does lead the authors to question the relative value of such institutions and to recommend changes in policy that would enable them to mimic the processes and effects of residential colleges. (pp. 639–640) This conclusion does not consider whether these students’ continuing involvement in their homes and communities produces other results (including educational results) that may be particularly important to the students themselves or for the society as a whole.

The belief that there is one *best* story about college education also leads the authors to ignore the possibility that there are other plausible, comprehensive interpretations of the effects of college on students than that which they find implicit in the accumulated facts. For the encyclopaedists, the problem with past inquiry was that each investigator began with a prior commitment about the results of that inquiry and, therefore, tended to find what he or she had expected all along. The way out of this dilemma, they supposed, was to catalog the most elemental facts about people and their world. As this catalog becomes more and more complete, the fundamental nature and operation of the

world would become gradually more obvious to any rational person. God would be found in the details. This strategy would, for once and all time, put an end to the seemingly interminable disputation about fundamentals to which prior religious and metaphysical commitments led. And, most important, this strategy would enable one to know the truth without having to engage in or even be conscious of the high-level, abstract, and philosophical debates that had characterized inquiry in the past.

When Pascarella and Terenzini synthesize their findings, they seem to assume that there is a natural way of weaving the threads of evidence together. They conclude from their review of the literature that college education involves an integrated broadening and enhancement of individual lives. (pp. 557–565) For them, the findings that college increases intellectual flexibility, appreciation of aesthetics and culture, commitment to liberal political values, appreciation of the intrinsic value of study and work, ego strength and self-esteem, and economic advantage and that it decreases religiosity, authoritarianism, and ethnocentricity fit neatly and intuitively with that conclusion. This is roughly the hoped-for conclusion of the higher education establishment.

For Pascarella and Terenzini, the only major alternative to this conclusion seems to be the null hypothesis that college education has no detectable effects on students. Once the null hypothesis is defeated, then, the field is left to the traditional establishment account. But there are other, dramatically different, and far less optimistic ways of interpreting these specific findings. Let us consider just one of the alternatives that Pascarella and Terenzini ignore: These specific effects might be seen as intensifying students' and their society's selfishness, anomie, and disengagement from human communities. For example, the increase in the intrinsic value that students assign to learning and employment is often thought to represent a reduction in their crassness and greed. But it might be argued, on the one hand, that the seeking of intrinsic rewards is the ultimate selfishness since those kinds of rewards accrue only to the individual him- or herself.

With extrinsic rewards, one at least has the opportunity to share or give away the fruits of one's efforts. On the other hand, by coming to intrinsically value one's own activities, a student displaces other values with which he or she may have come to college, the values of service to others and attachment to one's family and community. While it is possible to celebrate this result as the loss of ethnocentricity and the gain of impartiality in judgment, one may also find here a regrettable shift of social values from human affiliation to individual fulfillment.

The point of mentioning this alternative interpretation of the effects of college on students is not necessarily to argue that Pascarella and Terenzini are wrong in their interpretation. Rather it is to point out two additional consequences of the encyclopaedic perspective. First, and most obvious, the authors, because of their orientation to that tradition, do not take it to be their task to argue explicitly about the correctness of interpretations, for the right interpretation is to emanate spontaneously from the facts themselves. This is not to say that the authors do not consider a number of controversies that arise within the research literature, but these controversies are almost always treated as debates between the establishment view of higher education and the null hypothesis, not as alternative interpretations of the general purposes or mechanisms of college education. For instance, Pascarella and Terenzini note the argument over whether the income effects of college graduation are due to an increase in individual productivity or to an artificial credentialism largely unrelated to the skills and knowledge of college graduates. (pp. 504–506) The authors see the latter as a challenge to the idea that college is actually responsible for causing those income effects. But one can see this debate in another perspective, a perspective that suggests that to a great extent the actual and intentional effects of college are achieved through enhancement not of individual productivity but of ascribed status. From this alternative viewpoint, college is responsible for income effects but the mechanisms are different and more problematic than those asserted by the higher education establishment.

Second, the encyclopaedic perspective leads the authors to neglect the ethical issues about college that lie, for many readers at least, just beneath the surface of the research they report. One can see the interpretation of the research findings suggested above (and many other possibilities not mentioned, as well) as not only an alternative empirical theory but also as a challenge to the establishment view of what the goal of higher education should be. For implicit in that interpretation is a commitment to a society that is more interconnected and community focused than that which Pascarella and Terenzini seem to value and that a dramatically reconstructed type of college education might help to achieve. To the extent that the authors evince an awareness of the ethical dimension of higher education policy, they are concerned with whether the effects they find can be achieved more efficiently and whether those effects can be distributed more equally (pp. 637–647) but not with defending the ultimate value of those effects against other possibilities. As MacIntyre (1990) reminds us, this resistance to ethical argument is also a hallmark of the encyclopaedic perspective. For the best ethical understanding is also thought to emerge from an understanding of the details; it does not require explicit argument.

In addition to the reasonable advice that Pascarella and Terenzini give to future scholars of higher education, I would urge researchers to consider two tasks that the encyclopaedic perspective teaches us are unnecessary—the engagement with alternative comprehensive interpretations of the higher education enterprise and a willingness to enter explicitly into the debate about the moral purposes of that enterprise.

Suggested Readings

- Feldman, K., and T. Newcomb. *The Impact of College on Students*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969.
- MacIntyre, A. *Three Versions of Moral Enquiry: Encyclopaedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990

Barry L. Bull
 Indiana University
 School of Education
 Bloomington, IN 47405