

Penn State

As a Community of Learning:

A Survey Report with Supplemental Readings

FERN K. WILLITS, JEANETTE O. JANOTA, BETTY L. MOORE, AND DIANE M. ENERSON



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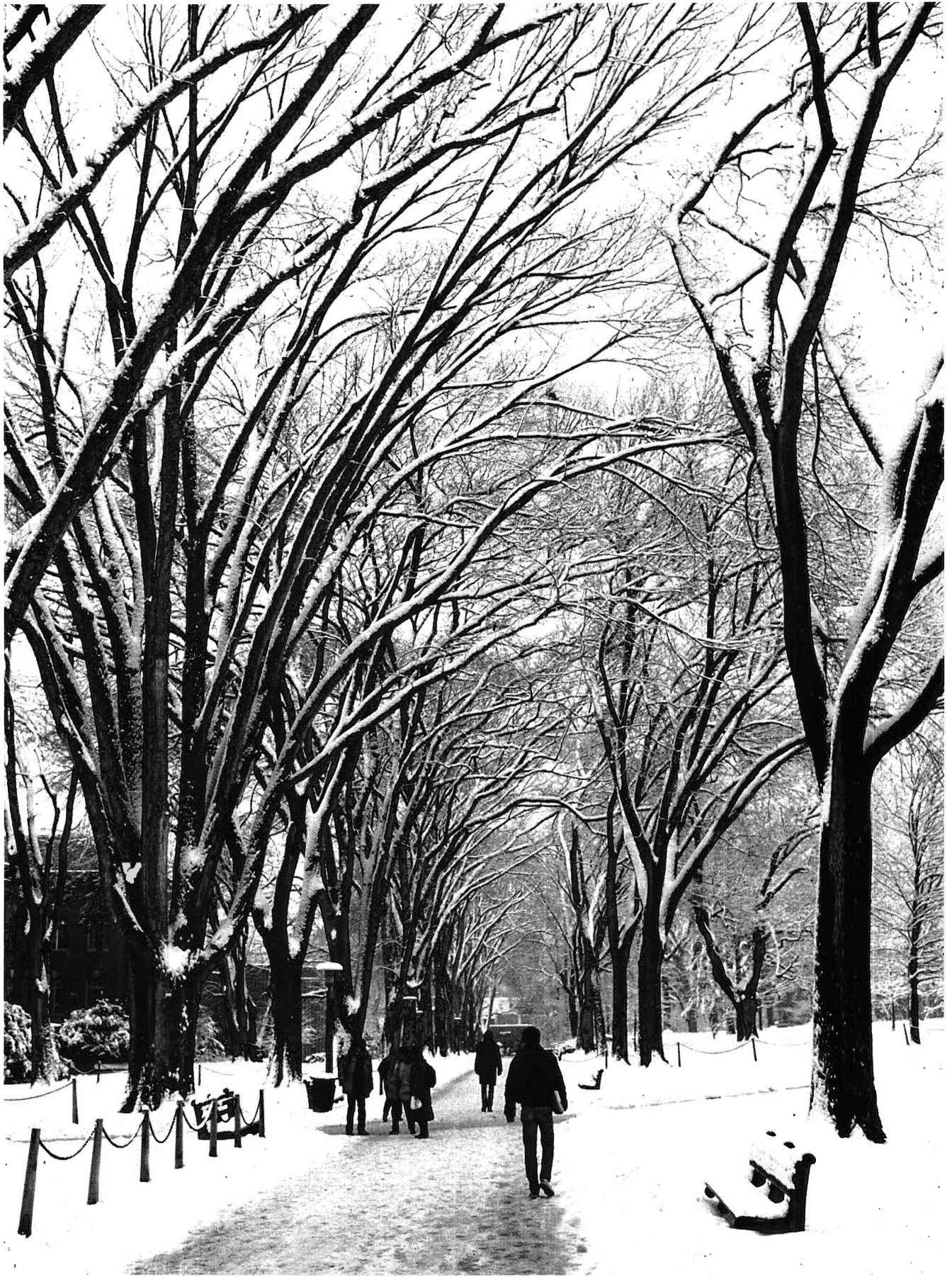
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Preface

In recent years colleges and universities have come under both internal and external criticism concerning the extent to which they exemplify a healthy and productive environment conducive to intellectual development, scholarly achievement, and personal growth. Administrators, teachers, and the general public have raised questions about what are the most important elements that are needed for educational institutions to fulfill their scholarly, educational, and developmental missions. In the early 1990s, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, under the leadership of Ernest L. Boyer, then President of the Foundation, sought to address this question by developing a set of principles or preconditions for what was termed a civil community of learning. Since then, many people at Penn State and elsewhere have explored the meaning of these principles and discussed methods for achieving them. Such discussions are likely to continue.

How well does Penn State currently embody the positive attributes believed to contribute to building a community of learning? To obtain information on the views of PSU faculty and students in regard to this issue, random samples of undergraduates and teaching faculty at University Park were asked their general perceptions of the campus community. This report summarizes the findings of those surveys. In addition, two supplementary documents are included to provide background for the survey materials: 1) a synopsis of the attributes of a community of learning as described by Ernest Boyer, and 2) a summary of a series of structured discussions, (prepared by Diane Enerson, IDP Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching) in which these ideas were discussed during the 1995-96 academic year.

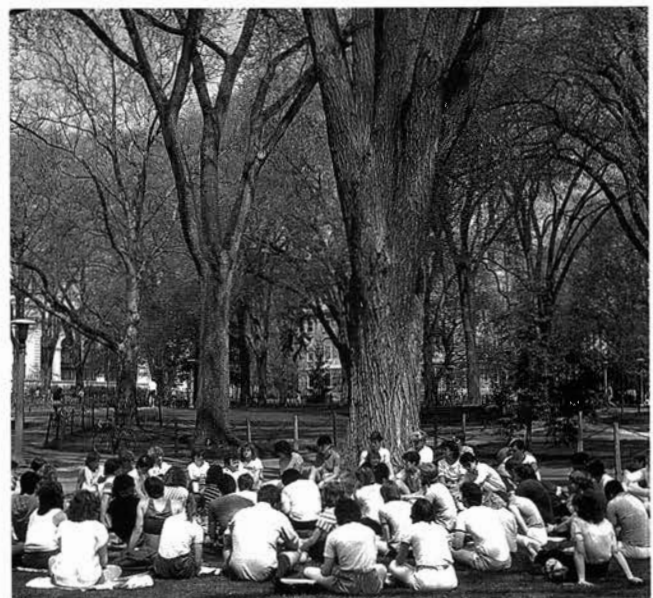
Taken together, these materials will hopefully provide information that can help to define some of those areas most in need of improvement and provide a benchmark against which future changes

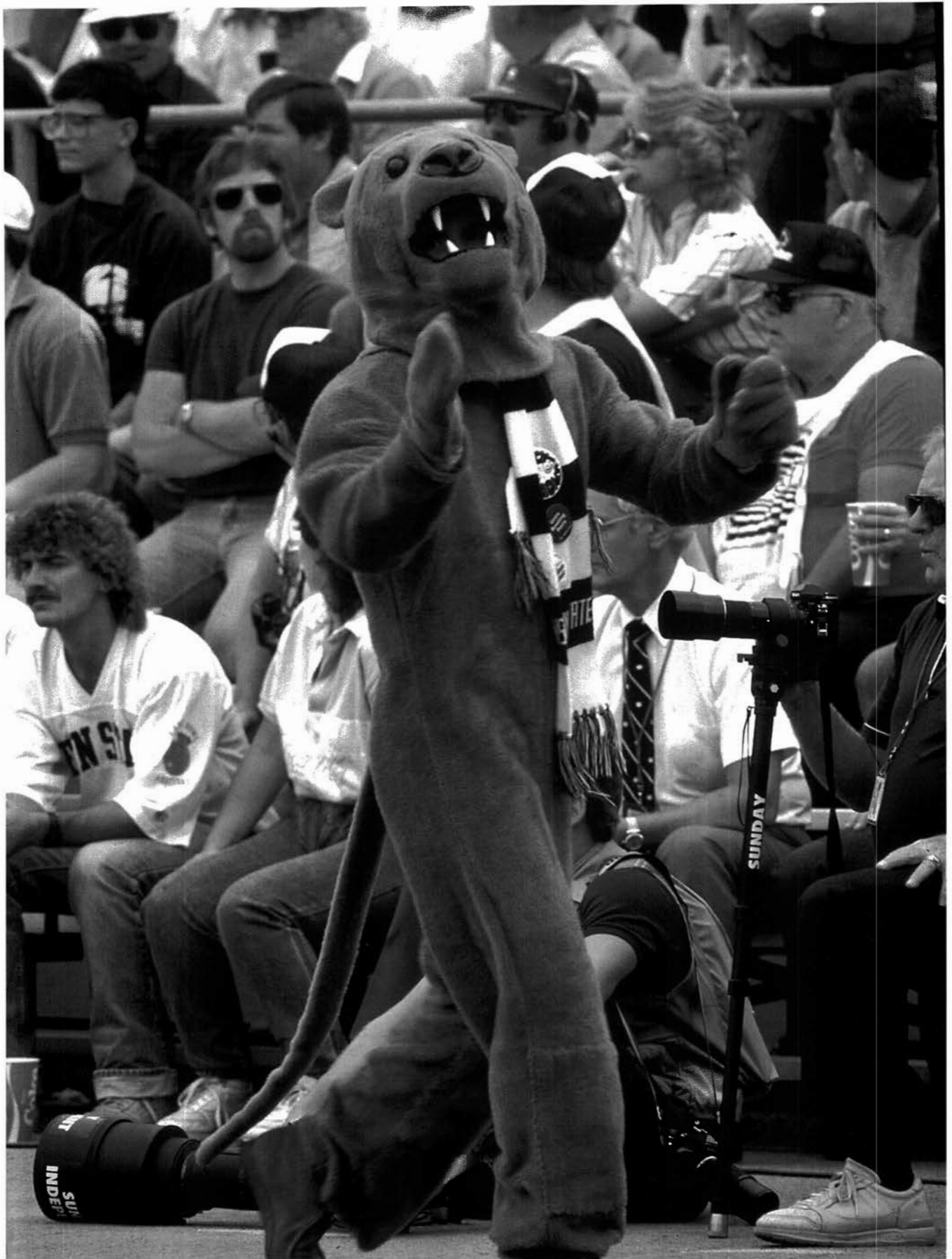
can be assessed. Equally important, it is hoped that this information will provide an impetus for further discussion by faculty, students, administrators, and staff members that may ultimately lead to implementation of a variety of procedures to enhance the quality of the Penn State community as a place to live, learn, study, and work.

This publication represents the collaborative efforts of Fern K. (Bunny) Willits (1995-96 Alumni Teaching Fellow), Betty L. Moore and Jeanette O. Janota (Office of Student Affairs/Penn State Pulse), and Diane M. Enerson (IDP Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching.)

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Student and Faculty Views of Penn State As a Community of Learning

FERN K. WILLITS, JEANETTE O. JANOTA, AND BETTY L. MOORE

The popular chant — WE ARE . . . PENN STATE! — conveys the participants' feelings that they are part of a larger University community which shares, at least in some measure, common goals, experiences, and values. To what extent does such a community exist? How, if at all, does it contribute to the educational experiences which are central to the mission of the institution? How can such a community be made to function more effectively? These are issues with which educators at Penn State and throughout the country are currently wrestling as they seek to enhance the quality of higher education at their institutions.

The Past as Prologue

When colleges and universities today are compared with their counterparts of 100 or even 50 years ago, striking differences are found:

- ◆ Students today are less likely than their predecessors to be willing to follow rigid rules and regulations regarding their personal behavior. This is true both because undergraduates are generally more mature, more sophisticated, and more independent than the teenagers who enrolled half a century ago and because the number of returning adult learners has increased dramatically.
- ◆ Universities and colleges no longer seek to take on the role of *in loco parentis* by enforcing rules of morality and social responsibility. Student revolts in the 1960s led to the abolishment of old restrictive rules of behavior, often more out of compromise than conviction.
- ◆ The composition of the student body has changed from a homogenous group of advantaged males to a diverse population of men and women from all ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. While universities celebrate the pluralism, it often brings with it new tensions and problems.

- ◆ The increasing size of universities has led to the evolution of complex administrative organizations in which academic and nonacademic functions are carried out by separate units. Many new services have arisen, but too often they are fragmented, highly specialized, and isolated.
- ◆ Scholarly productivity is increasingly measured by research and publication as universities seek assurance that their faculties are certifiably competent in their areas of expertise. Faculty loyalties have become divided between the needs of the local campus and the needs of their science or guild. Tensions between the demands of research and teaching reflect this division.

Along with these changes, undercurrents of hostility, tension, and frustration have come to characterize campus life — interfering with the mission of higher education and threatening to erode the vitality of the university.

The Search for Community

In response to growing concern in these areas, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in cooperation with the American Council on Education initiated a year long investigation of campus life in the U.S. Their findings, published in 1990, underscored the remarkable successes of American higher education and recognized that colleges and universities have responded to the new realities of campus life. However, they also expressed the need to clarify not only academic but civic and social norms and to define the enduring values and principles that should characterize a civil community of learning — the kind of community every college and university should strive to be. They suggested the following:

- ◆ First, a college or university is an educationally purposeful community, a place where

faculty and students share academic goals and work together to strengthen teaching and learning on the campus.

- ◆ Second, a college or university is an open community, a place where freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected and where civility is powerfully affirmed.
- ◆ Third, a college or university is a just community, a place where the sacredness of the person is honored and where diversity is aggressively pursued.
- ◆ Fourth, a college or university is a disciplined community, a place where individuals accept their obligations to the group and where well-defined governance procedures guide behavior for the common good.
- ◆ Fifth, a college or university is a caring community, a place where the well-being of each member is sensitively supported and where service to others is encouraged.
- ◆ Sixth, a college or university is a celebrative community, one in which the heritage of the institution is remembered and where rituals affirming both tradition and change are widely shared.¹



¹ The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. *Campus Life: In Search of Community*. Princeton, NJ. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990: 7-8.

The Penn State Response

Penn State has initiated a number of activities aimed at focusing attention on the need to foster an *educationally purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative* community as a means of enhancing the learning environment of the University. One of the most dramatic of these was at the 1995 Student Encampment when Dr. Ernest Boyer, President of The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, described the work of the Foundation and the need for building civil communities at institutions of higher education. The assembled students, faculty members, and administrators concentrated much of their discussion on the importance and means of building such a community at Penn State.

During fall semester, 1995 and spring semester, 1996, a series of Conversations on Teaching and Learning was sponsored by the USG Senate/Academic Assembly and the IDP Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching. Members of the Penn State community were invited to participate in four structured discussions exploring the six principles suggested as defining an effective university community and to discuss means for helping Penn State become such a community.

University commitment to these principles was also formally enunciated by William W. Asbury, Vice President for Student Affairs and published in the local newspaper² and the Penn State student newspaper.³

Our intent at this university is to build a greater sense of community. The key to a healthy community is for individuals to discuss their differences, argue points, and then move forward, past the confrontation stage. There is always common ground, but we all have to take the first step to find it. . . . Our efforts must be guided by certain assumptions and shared goals. We must believe in the uniqueness of each individual. We must believe each person has dignity and value.

More recently, elements of these principles have been included in the University's statement of mission, values, vision, and goals in the faculty/staff newspaper:⁴

² *The Centre Daily Times*, November 7, 1995.

³ *The Daily Collegian*, November 6, 1995.

⁴ *Intercom*, April 18, 1996.

We believe that education is the foundation of an enlightened and prosperous society. We seek a learning community in which:

The intellectual life is central and faculty, staff and students work together to achieve excellence in teaching, learning and the advancement of knowledge.

The dignity of all individuals is affirmed and equality of opportunity is pursued. Freedom of expression is protected and civility is affirmed. Individuals accept their obligations to the group and shared governance guides behavior for the common good. The well-being of each member is supported and service to others is encouraged. Our heritage is celebrated and change is embraced.

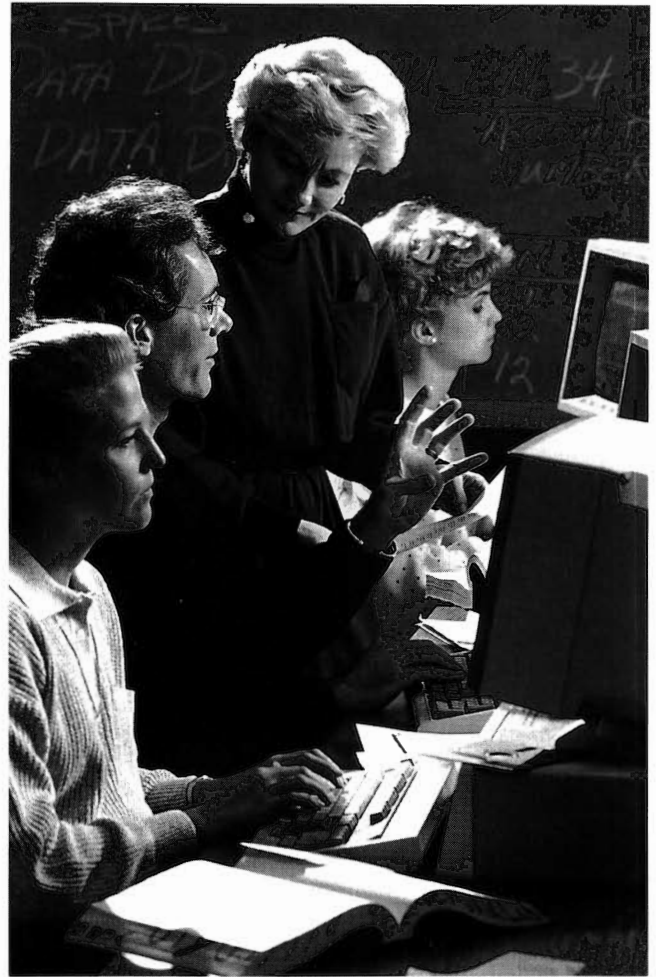
Surveys of Students and Faculty

How do current students and faculty at Penn State view the University in terms of the six principles delineated above? To what extent do they believe that the University community is educationally purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative?

Two separate surveys conducted during fall and spring semesters, 1995-96 asked for student and faculty perceptions of the University as a civil community of learning. The first of these was a telephone survey of undergraduate students at the University Park campus of PSU carried out in November 1995. The survey was conducted as part of Penn State Pulse, a project the Office of Student Affairs initiated to gather student feedback on various issues and on the use of University resources. A random sample of 492 undergraduate students was contacted, of whom 362 agreed to participate in the survey (a 74% response rate).

Students were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 how well each of six statements drawn from Boyer's descriptions of a community of learning characterized the Penn State campus. A score of 1 meant that the description did not fit at all; a score of 5 indicated that it was a perfect fit. The specific items were as follows:

- 1) Penn State is an educationally purposeful community where faculty and students work together and share academic goals.
- 2) Penn State is an open community where freedom of expression is protected and civility is embraced.



- 3) Penn State is a just community where each person is honored and diversity is pursued.
- 4) Penn State is a disciplined community where obligations and behaviors are regulated for the good of the group.
- 5) Penn State is a caring community where service to others is encouraged and the well-being of each individual is important.
- 6) Penn State is a [celebrative] community whose history is remembered and whose traditions and rituals are celebrated.

In addition, for each of these six questions, students were asked to indicate, on the same scale of 1 to 5, whether descriptions of specific actions or feelings described their personal experiences or behaviors at Penn State.

Several months later, (during March/April, 1996) a mail survey of faculty members was carried out. Questionnaires were sent via campus mail to a random sample of 1,072 tenured and tenure track

faculty members who had taught during fall semester, 1995. Of these, 589 returned completed survey forms (a 55% response rate). Although the faculty survey dealt largely with the quality of instruction at Penn State, it also included the six general questions that had been asked on the student survey regarding how well descriptions of the civil community of learning fit the Penn State situation.

This report summarizes the findings from the relevant items in both the student and faculty surveys.

Penn State as Community

Overall, many students indicated that the six descriptions of a community of learning either fit Penn State perfectly (5 on the scale) or nearly perfectly fit (4 on the scale).

- ◆ A majority gave either 4 or 5 ratings to Penn State as educationally purposeful (57%), open (53%), caring (54%), and celebrative (70%). Nearly half gave 4 or 5 ratings to the University as a just community (49%) and as a disciplined community (46%).
- ◆ The modal response for five of the six characteristics was 4 (a nearly perfect fit); the modal answer was 3 for a disciplined community.
- ◆ Fewer than 1 in 6 indicated that any of the descriptions did not fit at all or that they were a poor fit (1 and 2 on the scale). The descriptions of Penn State as a disciplined and just community were the most likely to receive this negative evaluation (15%). The lowest proportion of 1 and 2 ratings were as a celebrative community (8%) and as an educationally purposeful community (11%).
- ◆ Women students were more likely than were men to rate the University highly (ratings of 4 or 5) as an educationally purposeful community (63% vs 50%), as a disciplined community (53% vs 39%), and as a caring community (62% vs 46%).
- ◆ Overall, the higher their semester standing, the less likely students were to rate Penn State as educationally purposeful, open, and just. Semester standing was not related to responses about the University as a disciplined, caring or celebrative community.

- ◆ Nonwhite students were more likely than white students to indicate that the University was a disciplined community (61% vs 45%).
- ◆ Students who lived on campus were more likely than those who lived off campus to indicate that the description of an educationally purposeful and open community fit Penn State perfectly or nearly perfectly (4 and 5 on the rating scale) (62% vs 50%, and 61% vs 44%, respectively).

Faculty members were significantly less likely than students to indicate that the six characteristics of a civil community of learning perfectly or nearly perfectly described Penn State.

- ◆ Only a minority of the faculty gave 4 or 5 ratings to the University as an educationally purposeful (25%), open (40%), just (29%), disciplined (29%), caring (23%), and celebrative (47%) community.

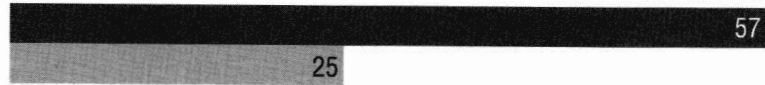
DIFFERENCES IN THE PERCENTAGES OF STUDENTS INDICATING THAT THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING "FIT" PENN STATE BY GENDER, CLASS STANDING, RACE, AND RESIDENCE ^a.

Community characteristics	Respondent attribute	
	Male	Female
	%	
Educationally purposeful	50	63
Disciplined	39	53
Caring	46	62
	<i>Freshman/sophomore</i>	
	%	
Educationally purposeful	69	48
Open	61	48
Just	57	44
	<i>White</i>	
	%	
Disciplined	45	61
	<i>On-campus</i>	
	%	
Educationally purposeful	62	50
Open	61	44

^a Only statistically significant (.05) differences are shown

PERCENTAGES OF STUDENTS AND FACULTY WHO FELT THAT THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A COMMUNITY OF LEARNING "FIT" PENN STATE.

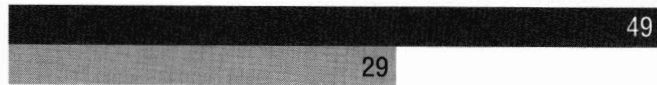
Purposeful



Open



Just



STUDENTS

FACULTY

Disciplined



Caring



Celebrative



- ◆ The modal response of the faculty for five of the six characteristics (educationally purposeful, open, just, disciplined, and caring) was a 3, indicating that they saw only a moderate fit between the description of a civil community of learning and PSU. The University as a celebrative community received a rating of 4 as the modal response.
- ◆ Faculty were just about as likely to indicate that the descriptions did not fit at all or were a poor fit (1 or 2 ratings) as to say that the fit was nearly perfect or perfect (4 and 5 ratings) in regard to the University as an educationally purposeful, just, or disciplined community.
- ◆ Academic rank was related to faculty perceptions of Penn State relative to four of the six characteristics. Associate Professors were the least likely to rate the University highly in regard to being educationally purposeful and open. As academic rank increased, the percentage of faculty who indicated that the descriptions were a perfect or nearly perfect fit (4 or 5 ratings) increased in regard to Penn State being a celebrative and just community, and decreased in regard to their ratings of PSU as a disciplined community. Fewer than 1 in 4 faculty members, regardless of their academic rank, saw the University as a caring community.

◆ Female faculty members were significantly less likely than male faculty to give Penn State a 4 or 5 rating as a just community (21% vs 32%); females were more likely than males to indicate it was a perfect or nearly perfect fit to a celebrative community (58% vs 45%).

The differences between the responses of students and faculty were noteworthy. Faculty members were much less likely than students to report that each of the descriptions of a civil community of learning “fit” the Penn State situation. Students were twice as likely as faculty to characterize Penn State as educationally purposeful or caring; they were more than one-and-a-half-times as likely as faculty to see it as just or disciplined.

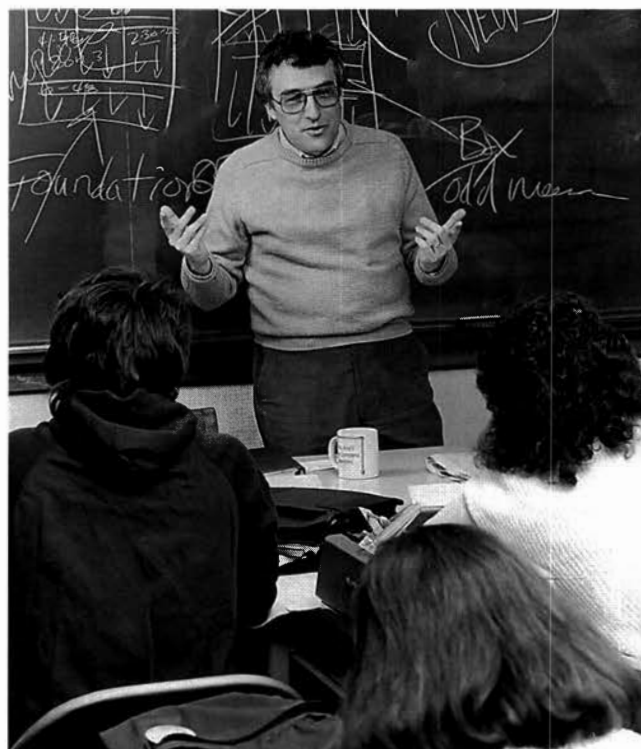
Just why these discrepancies between student and faculty responses occurred cannot be determined from the present data. It could be that differences in how the data were collected contributed to the observed differences since students were surveyed via a telephone interview while faculty responded to a mailed questionnaire. Previous research has sometimes documented slightly different answer patterns from telephone and mail surveys. However, the discrepancies between the student and faculty responses found here seem too great to be attributed simply to the differences in mode of data collection. Rather, it seems likely that the two groups view the University from very different perspectives and focus on different experiences and events in making their judgments. Thus, educationally purposeful to the student may mean class attendance, attention to course responsibilities, and a focus on grades/evaluations; faculty members may view educationally purposeful in terms of perceived student commitment to learning or the extent to which they see the University as rewarding teaching excellence. Students may see the University as caring because of counseling, guidance, medical and student assistance services available; the faculty may focus their evaluation on the level of support they receive or the extent to which they are rewarded for their efforts. Just may mean something quite different to the student seeking a high GPA and opportunities for participation than to a faculty member struggling to get tenure or recognition. Clearly, additional information is needed to clarify what students and faculty consider to be the important elements of each of the six dimensions of a civil community of learning.

Personal Experiences of Students

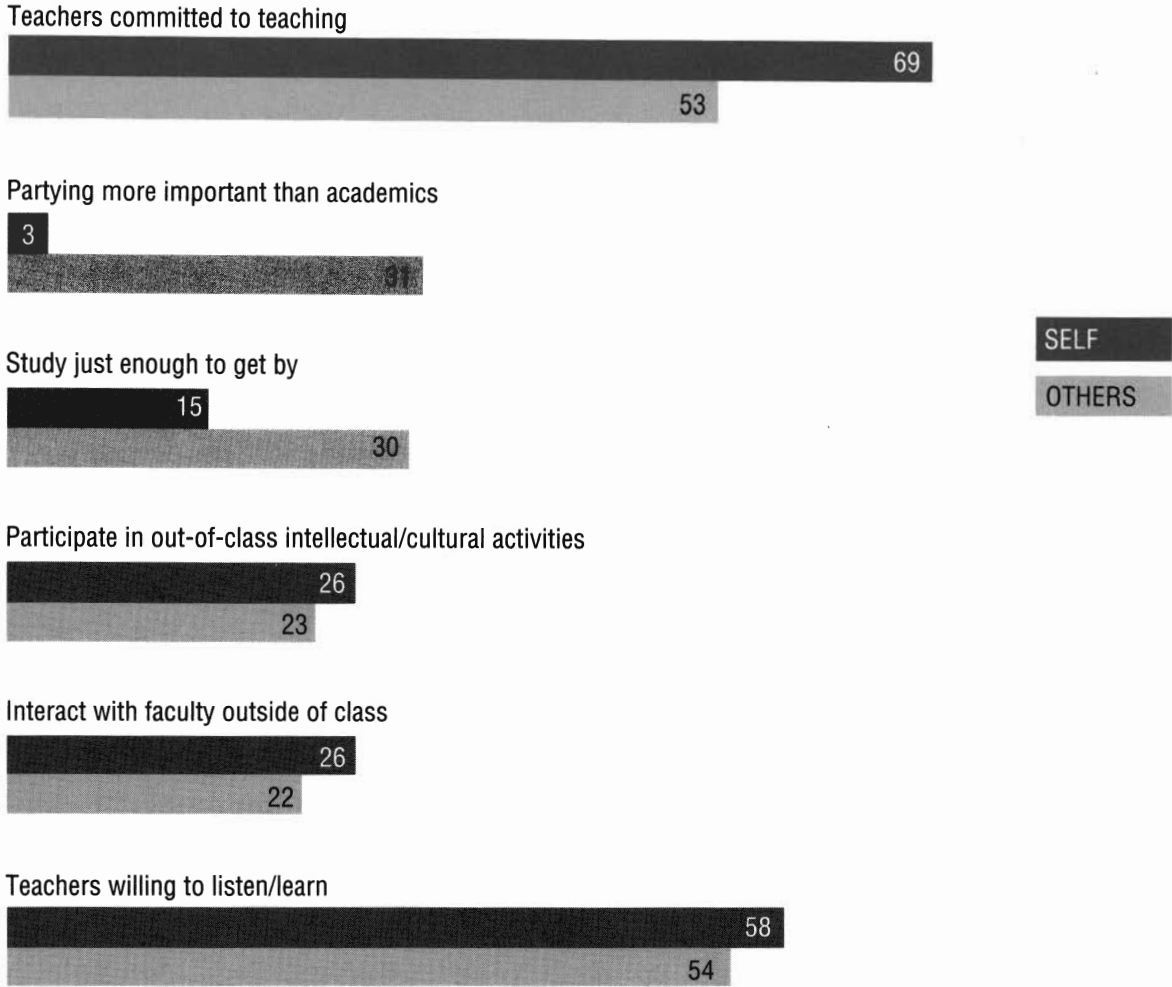
The undergraduate students were also asked about their personal experiences in regard to specific aspects of each of the six characteristics of a civil community of learning. Respondents indicated their answers on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 meant that the description did not fit at all and 5 meant that it was a perfect fit. Ratings of 4 or 5 were taken to mean that they agreed that the description fit their PSU experiences; ratings of 1 or 2 were assumed to mean that the student disagreed that the description fit their experiences. The faculty sample members were not asked to respond to these items.

Congruent with the characterization of Penn State as an educationally purposeful community, students felt that they themselves and their own teachers were committed to teaching and learning; they were less certain that Penn State students and teachers in general were so committed:

- ◆ 69% indicated that their teachers were committed to teaching; but only 53% believed that most faculty were committed to teaching.
- ◆ Only 3% of the students reported that partying was more important to them than academics; 31% believed that for most students, partying was more important than academics.



PERCENTAGES OF STUDENTS WHO INDICATED THAT DESCRIPTIONS RELATED TO AN EDUCATIONALLY PURPOSEFUL COMMUNITY CHARACTERIZE THEIR OWN AND OTHER STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES



- ◆ 15% answered that they studied just enough to get by; 30% reported that most students studied only enough to get by.
- ◆ 26% participated in out-of-class intellectual or cultural activities, while 23% believed that most students did so.
- ◆ 26% said that they frequently interacted with faculty outside of class, and 22% thought that most students did so.
- ◆ 58% of the students felt that their teachers were willing to listen to and learn from students; 54% thought faculty members in general were willing to do so.

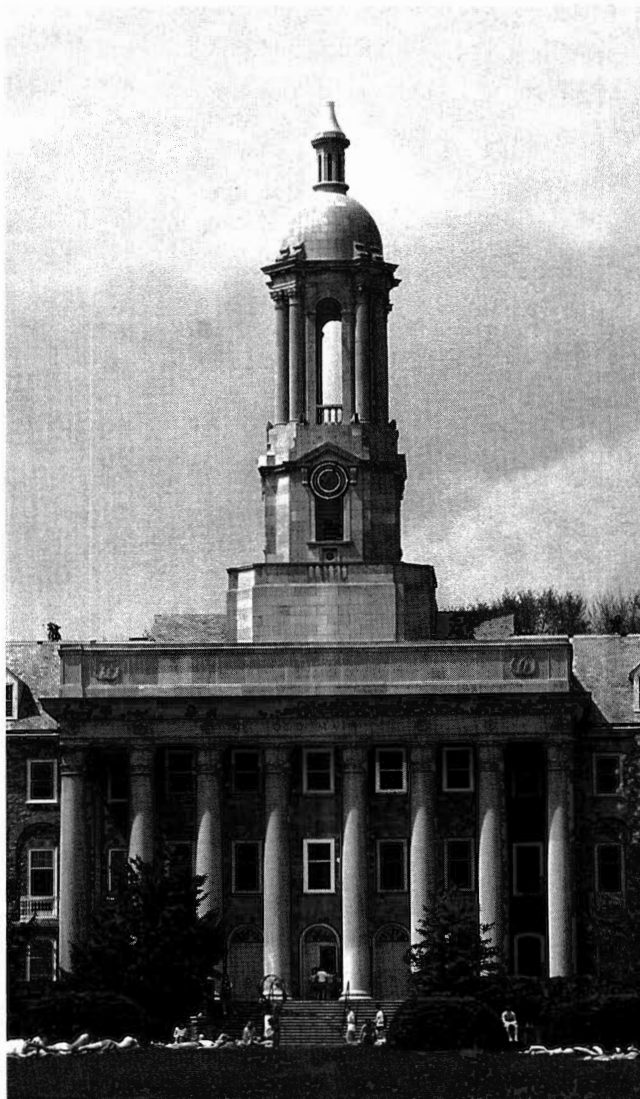
While the last three differences were not statistically significant, taken together the discrepancies between students' descriptions of their own

experiences and behaviors and what they perceive to be the experiences and behaviors of others raises questions about the accuracy with which people view the broader context of which they are a part. This tendency of people to differentiate themselves from the larger whole and to characterize their own behavior in relatively positive terms while perceiving the behavior of others in negative terms can have obvious detrimental effects in building community unity. It can also result in people believing that the community is less desirable than a summary of their personal experiences would show.

When students reported on their own experiences, most saw themselves as acting in ways that endorse an open community and indicated that they feel they are treated with respect and permitted to express their ideas:

- ◆ 90% believed their own actions respect the rights and dignity of others.
- ◆ 73% said they try to understand differing points of view.
- ◆ However, only 44% said that they had protested hurtful language by others.
- ◆ 72% denied that they have been treated with a lack of respect or courtesy.
- ◆ 61% disagreed that they have been prevented from expressing controversial points of view because of fear of reprisals.

The vast majority of students indicated that they support a just community, work to protect the rights of others, and have not been unjustly excluded at Penn State:



- ◆ 83% did not feel that they have been unjustly excluded from campus opportunities.
- ◆ 80% reported that they protect the rights and opportunities of others.
- ◆ 65% have developed a close relationship with someone from a background different from their own.

Most students indicated that they accept University and social standards of behavior; they support and have experienced a disciplined community at Penn State:

- ◆ 90% said that they feel obliged to treat others courteously.
- ◆ 70% indicated that they abide by University policies defining acceptable behavior.
- ◆ Only 50% reported that they speak out to oppose actions that are mean-spirited or rude.
- ◆ 70% denied violating a community legal or social standard.

Although 50% shared a sense of belonging to the Penn State community, smaller proportions of the students surveyed reported that their experiences showed that Penn State is a caring community:

- ◆ Only 17% felt that their needs are taken into account when decisions are made at the University.
- ◆ 33% indicated that they are "just a number" at Penn State; 31% denied that they felt this way.
- ◆ 26% reported that they did volunteer service here.

While students overwhelmingly felt that Penn State is a celebrative community when asked in general terms, only a minority reported actual participation in celebrations or expressed an interest in knowing more about the University's history and traditions:

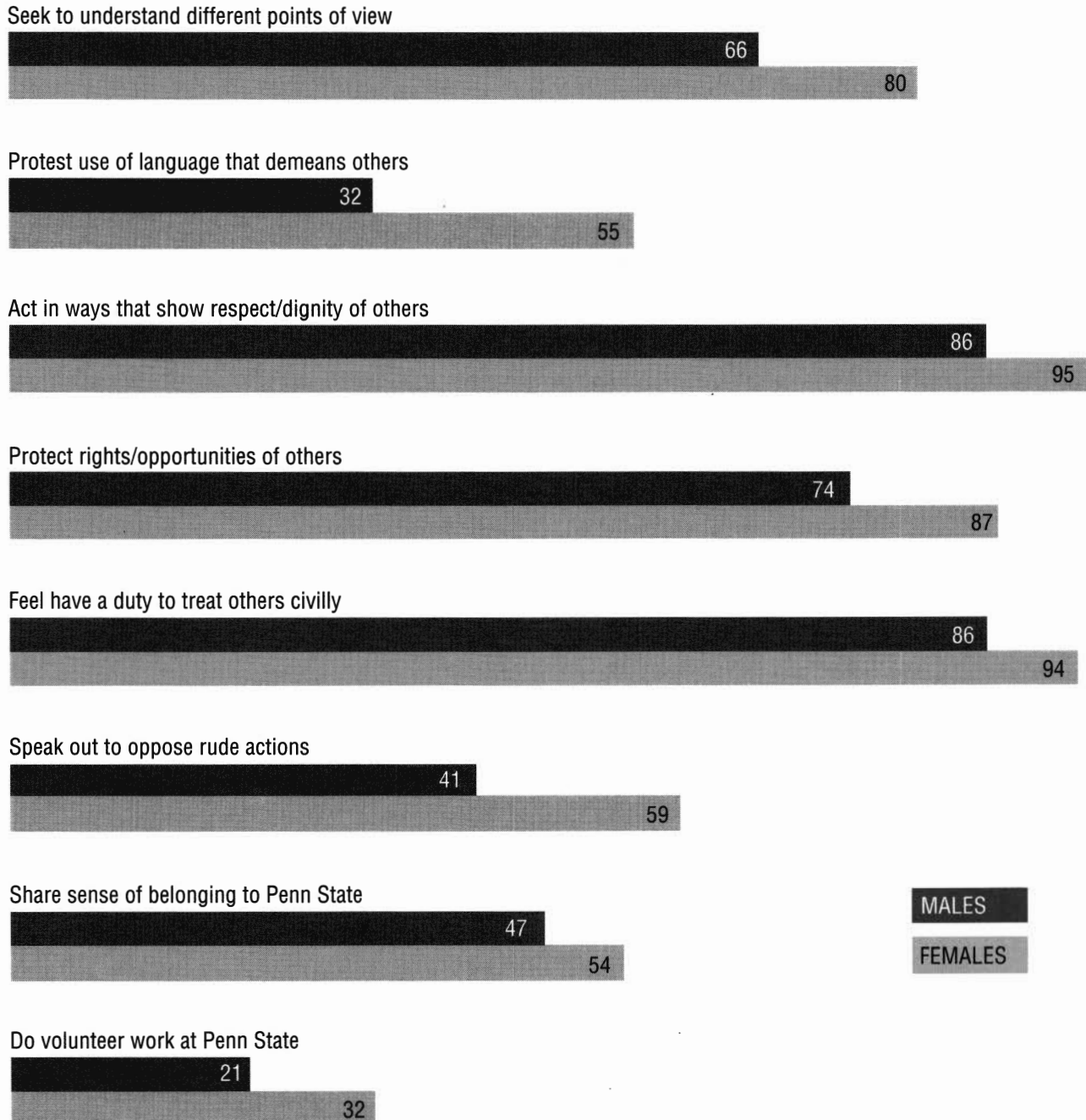
- ◆ 31% have attended celebrations honoring Penn Staters.
- ◆ 36% would like to know more about Penn State history and traditions.
- ◆ 46% believed that participating in celebrations helps them feel part of Penn State.
- ◆ 42% agreed that academic and athletic successes are celebrated in proper balance.

Differences in Student Experiences

The overall responses reported above tell only part of the story concerning the civility of student experiences at Penn State. To more fully understand the situation, it is also important to consider the variation in the experiences reported by different segments of the University Park undergraduate community. Differences in the responses of students

depending upon their gender, class standing, race, and on-or-off campus residence were explored. Of the 26 items dealing with the students' own experiences, responses to 8 showed significant (.05 level) male-female differences in response patterns, 5 were significantly affected by class standing, 5 showed significant differences by racial category, and 5 reflected significant differences between on-campus and off-campus residence.

PERCENTAGES OF MALES AND FEMALES INDICATING THAT VARIOUS DESCRIPTIONS "FIT" THEIR EXPERIENCES AT PENN STATE

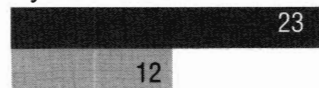


PERCENTAGES OF UNDERCLASS STUDENTS (FRESHMEN AND SOPHOMORES) AND UPPERCLASS STUDENTS (JUNIORS AND SENIORS) INDICATING THAT VARIOUS DESCRIPTIONS "FIT" THEIR EXPERIENCES AT PENN STATE

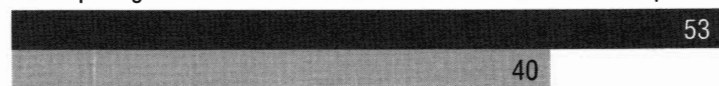
My teachers are strongly committed to teaching



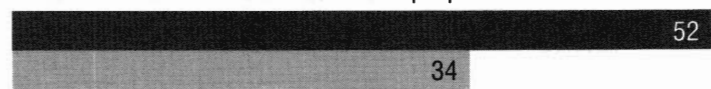
My needs are taken into account when decisions are made at Penn state



Participating in ceremonies and celebrations make me feel a part of Penn State

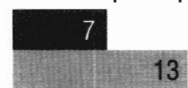


Academic and other successes are in proper balance



UNDERCLASS
UPPERCLASS

Fear of reprisal prevents me from expressing my view



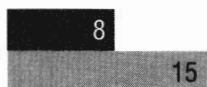
Female students were significantly more likely than males to:

- ◆ Agree that they seek to understand points of view that differ from their own (80% vs 66%).
- ◆ State that they had protested use of language that demeans or hurts others (55% vs 32%).
- ◆ Act in ways that show they respect the rights and dignity of others within the Penn State community (95% vs 86%).
- ◆ Protect the rights and opportunities of others within the community, even those who were different from themselves (87% vs 74%).
- ◆ Indicate that they had a duty to treat others in a civil fashion (94% vs 86%).
- ◆ Speak out to oppose actions that are mean-spirited or rude (59% vs 41%).

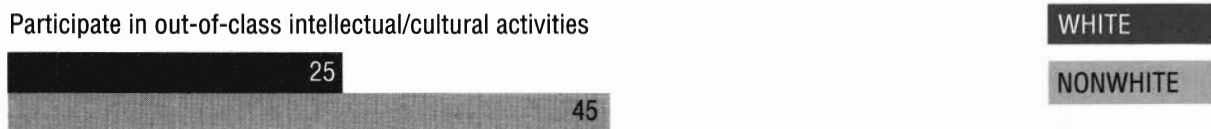
- ◆ Share a sense of belonging to the Penn State community (54% vs 47%).
- ◆ Do volunteer service at Penn State (32% vs 21%).
Underclass students (freshmen and sophomores) were more likely than upperclass students (juniors and seniors) to:
- ◆ Agree that most of the faculty members from whom they have taken classes were strongly committed to teaching (72% vs 65%).
- ◆ Feel that their needs are taken into account when decisions are made at Penn State (23% vs 12%).
- ◆ Agree that participating in Penn State celebrations makes them feel a part of the community (53% vs 40%).

PERCENTAGES OF WHITE AND NONWHITE STUDENTS INDICATING THAT VARIOUS DESCRIPTIONS "FIT" THEIR EXPERIENCES AT PENN STATE

Have been unjustly excluded from Penn State opportunities



Participate in out-of-class intellectual/cultural activities



Have close relationships with others from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds



Feel they are just a number at Penn State



Protest use of language that demeans others



- ◆ Agree that academic and athletic successes are celebrated in proper balance (52% vs 34%).
- ◆ Disagree that fear of reprisal prevents them from expressing their views (69% vs 54%).

Overall non-whites were more likely than whites to:

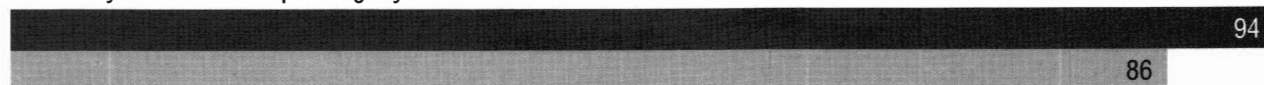
- ◆ Feel that they have been unjustly excluded from opportunities at PSU (15% vs 8%).
- ◆ State that they participate in out-of-class intellectual or cultural activities (45% vs 25%).
- ◆ Indicate that they have close relationships with someone from a different ethnic or cultural group (91% vs 63%)
- ◆ Feel that they were "just a number" at Penn State (42% vs 32%).
- ◆ However, more white students than non-whites indicated that they had protested the use of

demeaning language by others (44% vs 39%).
When students were grouped into on-campus and off-campus residence categories, on-campus students were more likely to:

- ◆ Indicate that they act in ways that show they respect the rights and dignity of others within the Penn State community (94% vs 86%).
- ◆ Agree that they have an obligation to treat others with civility (93% vs 86%).
- ◆ Report that they have spoken out to oppose rude actions of others (53% vs 47%).
- ◆ State that they share a sense of belonging to the Penn State community (56% vs 43%).
- ◆ Report that participation in ceremonies and celebrations makes them feel part of Penn State (50% vs 40%).

PERCENTAGES OF ON-CAMPUS AND OFF-CAMPUS STUDENTS INDICATING THAT VARIOUS DESCRIPTIONS "FIT" THEIR EXPERIENCES AT PENN STATE

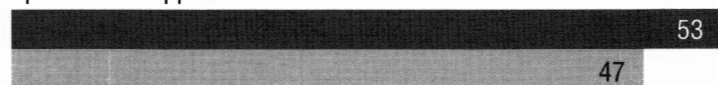
Act in ways that show respect/dignity of others



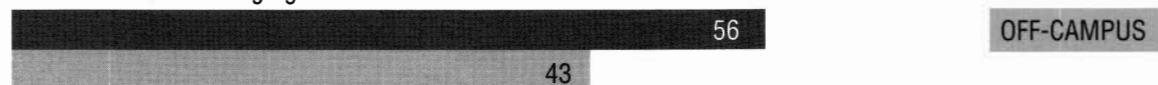
Feel have a duty to treat others civilly



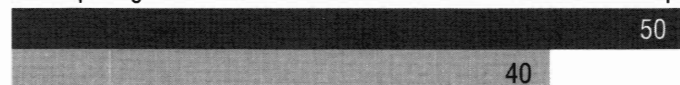
Speak out to oppose rude actions



Share a sense of belonging to Penn State



Participating in ceremonies and celebrations makes me feel a part of Penn State.



Conclusion

If the conception of the University as a civil community of learning—a community which is to be educationally purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative—is to be realized, it is important to understand what is meant by these terms and the extent to which Penn State exemplifies such a community as viewed through the eyes of its members. Such perceptions may vary, depending upon the individual's placement in the larger system. Thus, students were much more likely than faculty to view the University as purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative. Further research is needed to understand why there were so many discrepancies between the perceptions of these two groups and what are the critical aspects which lead to teachers' and students' evaluations.

This study also suggests that asking individuals to describe the University community as a whole may be misleading. When students were asked about their own experiences and behaviors and also

about "students in general" or "most faculty members" they tended to see these others in more negative terms than they viewed themselves and their experiences. As a result, summarizing the views of the group members about "others" may lead to a more negative picture of the whole than would be the case if the personal experiences of the individual group members were amalgamated. The resulting misperception, sometimes termed "pluralistic ignorance," has been documented by other researchers in similar situations.⁵ This tendency of people to invoke negative stereotypes of the whole can inhibit their identification with the larger group and interfere with the development of a sense of community among group members. Knowledge of the overall nature of personal reports of the actual experiences of individuals can provide some antidote to the

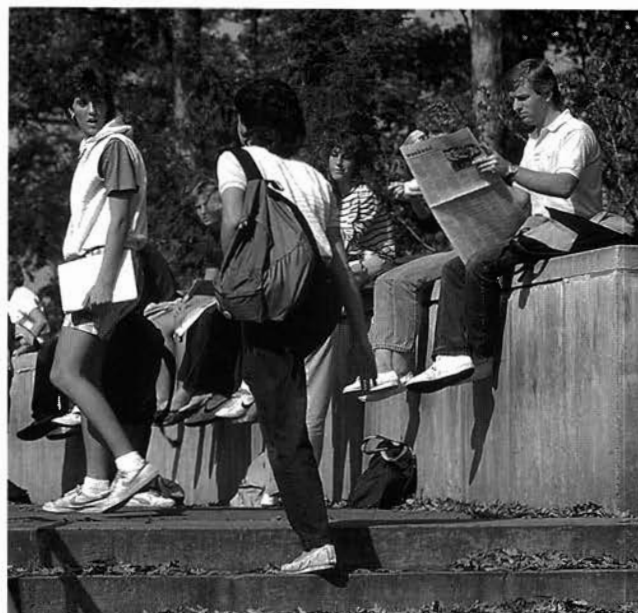
⁵ Merton, Robert K. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. New York: Free Press, 1968:

negative images resulting from such stereotyping. Consequently, an understanding of the extent to which the University represents a civil community can likely be more accurately assessed by asking individuals about their own experiences and actions than by the phrasing of general questions about the whole or others. It was the case that when students reported their own experiences, most indicated behaviors and experiences congruent with the characteristics of a civil community of learning. This was especially true in regard to the University as an open, just, and disciplined community, although several of the behaviors dealing with educational purposefulness and caring were reported by only a minority of the students surveyed.

The personal experiences among students at University Park did differ somewhat depending upon their gender, semester standing, racial, category and whether they lived on-campus or off-campus. Of the twenty-six areas assessed, male-female differences were the most numerous. When significant gender differences were found, women students were more likely than men to indicate that their behavior and experiences were in accord with those that characterize a civil community of learning. However, fewer than a third of the behavior/experience items showed significant male-female differences, suggesting that there are also many similarities in the experiences of men and women in regard to community civility.

While only five of the twenty-six personal experience items had responses that differed by class standing, in every case, freshmen and sophomore students were more likely than their junior and senior counterparts to report that their experiences were congruent with those defined as characteristic of a civil community of learning.

Responses to only five items reflected significant differences in the experiences of whites and non-whites on campus. White students were more likely than non-white students to have protested the use of demeaning language by others. Non-white students were more likely to participate in out-of-class activities and (partly reflecting the relative minority of non-whites) more likely to indicate that they had close relationships with others outside their groups. They were also somewhat more likely than white students to feel that they were "just a number" at Penn State. While

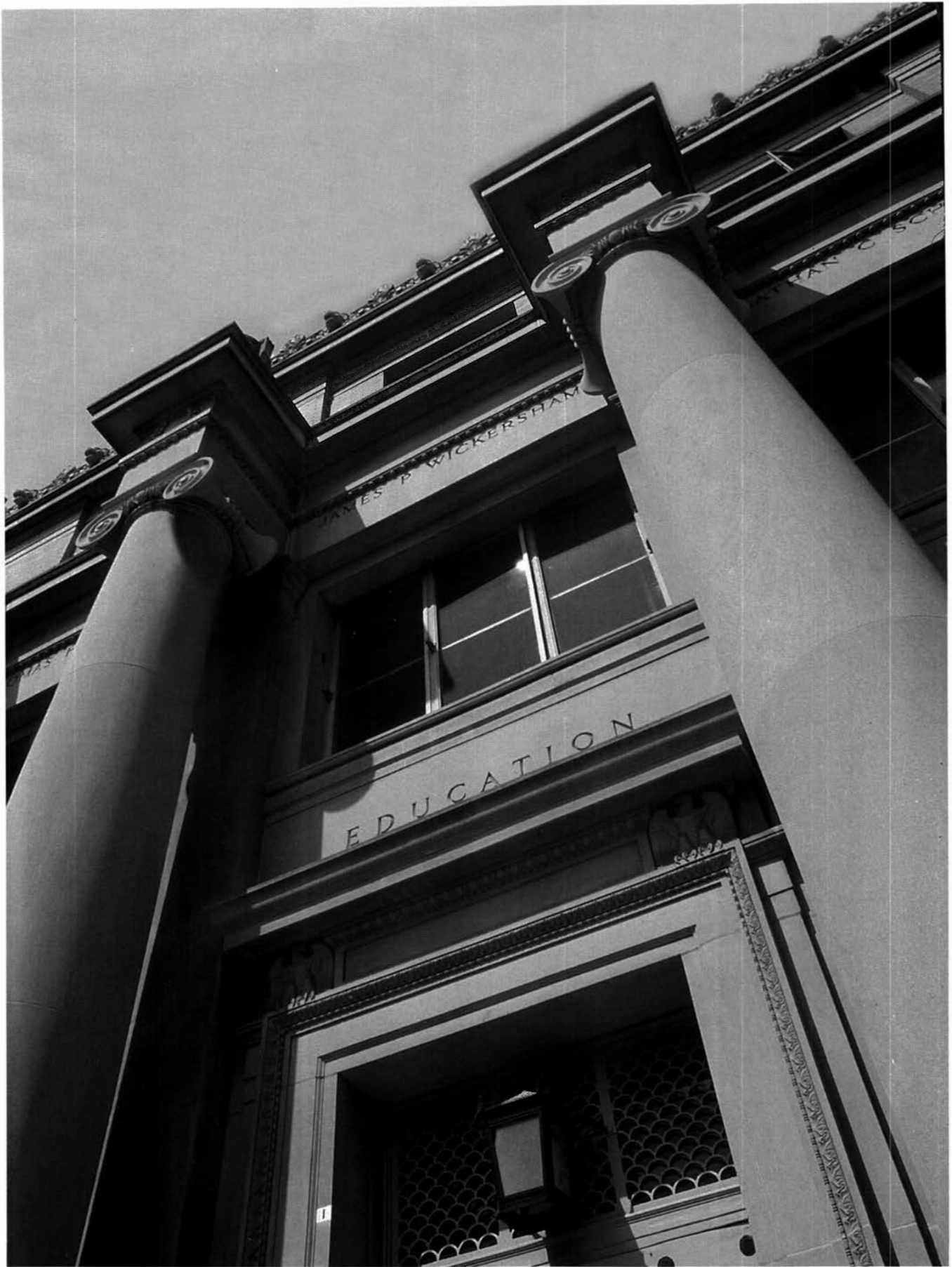


non-whites were more likely than white students to indicate that they felt they had been unjustly excluded from some opportunities, the proportions who actually reported this description as a nearly perfect or perfect fit to their experiences (4 and 5 ratings) was quite small for both whites and non-whites (8% and 15%, respectively).

Of the five items where there were on-campus versus off-campus residence differences in experiences and actions, students living on-campus were more likely than off-campus students to have a sense of belonging, to believe that participation in ceremonies and celebrations makes them feel a part of Penn State, to treat others with civility/respect, and to oppose the rude acts of others.

Building a true University community of learning is likely to be a gradual process that is nurtured by the interests and efforts of many people who come to share the vision. To be effective, the process needs to recognize and call into account the diversity of perspectives, needs, and individual goals of the University's constituent members. This report has focused on student and faculty views, but the perceptions of administrators and support staff as well as alumni and others are also relevant. Achieving the goal of making Penn State truly an educationally purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative community requires the concentrated effort of all of these stake holders.

WE ARE . . . ALL . . . PENN STATE!



Characteristics of a Community of Learning

ERNEST L. BOYER¹

Introduction

During the last fifty years American higher education has become, by most measures, a remarkable success. New campuses have been built, enrollments have exploded, and the nation's great research universities have become world class. Women, minorities, and older students have enrolled in larger numbers, making the nation's campuses intellectually richer, and culturally more diverse. However, strains and tensions associated with change have also become apparent in campus life. Recently a group of college presidents, described what they termed "the declining quality of life on campus" as follows: "We have growing racial tensions on the campus, and more crime. The spirit of community seems diminished and there is frustration about how the university should respond." The president of a large public university confessed: "I've been around a long time and frankly I'm more concerned today than in the sixties. Back then, you could meet with critics and confront problems head on. Today, there seems to be a lot of tension just below the surface that could explode anytime."

It was in this climate that The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, in cooperation with the American Council on Education, launched a study of campus life. Throughout their year-long investigation—one that included a literature review, campus visits, and a (1989) survey of 500 college and university presidents—it was clear that most colleges and universities in the nation were essentially in good health and well managed. But it also found that student apathy, alcohol abuse, racial and ethnic divisions, and acts of incivility weaken the integrity of many institutions and limit their ability to function as vital communities of learning. Administrators are understandably concerned about these problems, but they also are ambivalent about how to respond.

There was a time when college leaders felt responsible, not only for the nurturing of the students' intellectual life, but for the guardianship of their morality as well. This was done with rules, regulations, and restrictions. The problem today is that no theory of campus governance has replaced the rigid structure of the past. Few would argue for a return to those days when colleges arbitrarily imposed a list of "dos" and "don'ts" on students. But many are now asking:

- ◆ Where does the responsibility of the college begin and end?
- ◆ Where is the balance between students' rights and institutional concerns?
- ◆ How can the spirit of community in higher education be strengthened?

In response to these challenges, the Foundation organized its report around six essential principles or characteristics that capture the essence of both the social and academic dimensions of campus life and provide a framework within which a vital community of learning can be built.

A Purposeful Community

A college or university is, above all, a purposeful community, a place where the intellectual life is central and where faculty and students work together to strengthen teaching and learning.

An institution of higher education is, by definition, a place for learning. However this is often undermined in colleges and universities today. Students report that social life and jobs are higher priorities than academic pursuits. Getting credentialed is often more important than obtaining an

¹ Excerpted from Ernest L. Boyer, *In Search of Community*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Council on Education (Washington, DC, January 10, 1990) and The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *Campus Life: In Search of Community*. Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990.



education, and “getting by” is viewed as “good enough.” Rigorous preparation, scholarly excellence and serious commitment to the academic life may be characteristic of only a tiny fraction of students today.

The 1989 faculty survey revealed that two-thirds of today’s professors believe their students are not academically well-prepared; over 60 percent said they are teaching undergraduates what they should have learned in high school; 55 percent said undergraduates are “doing just enough to get by.”

On many campuses, quality teaching is less rewarded than publications, research, and the acquisition of grants and contracts. As a result, faculty members are discouraged from devoting time to classroom preparation and advising/mentoring undergraduate students. However, teachers are in the position to be the most effective leaders in creating a common ground of intellectual commitment and in encouraging active student participation. It is in the classroom where a learning

community begins, although it should also pervade all aspects of campus life—residence halls, departments, and student activities. A college is, above all, a purposeful community, a place where teaching and learning matter most. If academic concerns are not vitally sustained, if faculty and students do not join in a common intellectual quest, then all the talk about strengthening community in higher education is simply a diversion.

An Open Community

A college or university, at its best, is an open, honest community, a place where freedom of expression is uncompromisingly protected and where civility is powerfully affirmed.

Colleges and universities confront two sometimes competing issues that are at the very center of collegiate life. On the one hand, they must maintain an absolute commitment to the free expression of ideas while also assuring that the use of language is

neither deceptive nor abusive. Maintaining the balance is not easy. One of the most troublesome findings of the 1989 survey was the growing inclination among some students to use words, not as the key to understanding, but as weapons of assault in the form of racial, ethnic, and sexual slurs.

The problem appears to be most difficult for larger institutions where more than 60 percent of the presidents identified "sexual harassment" and about half listed "racial harassment" as problems. Further, when presidents were asked what would improve campus life, 86 percent of those at large universities said "new and revised statements on civility and respect for others."

However there is another side. A college or university is, by definition, a place for the free expression of ideas, even when the opinions seem to be outrageous. Therefore, any effort to restrict speech by regulation, regardless of intent, is unacceptable. The University must not engage in censorship so as to make ideas safe for students; its role is to prepare students so that they are safe for ideas.

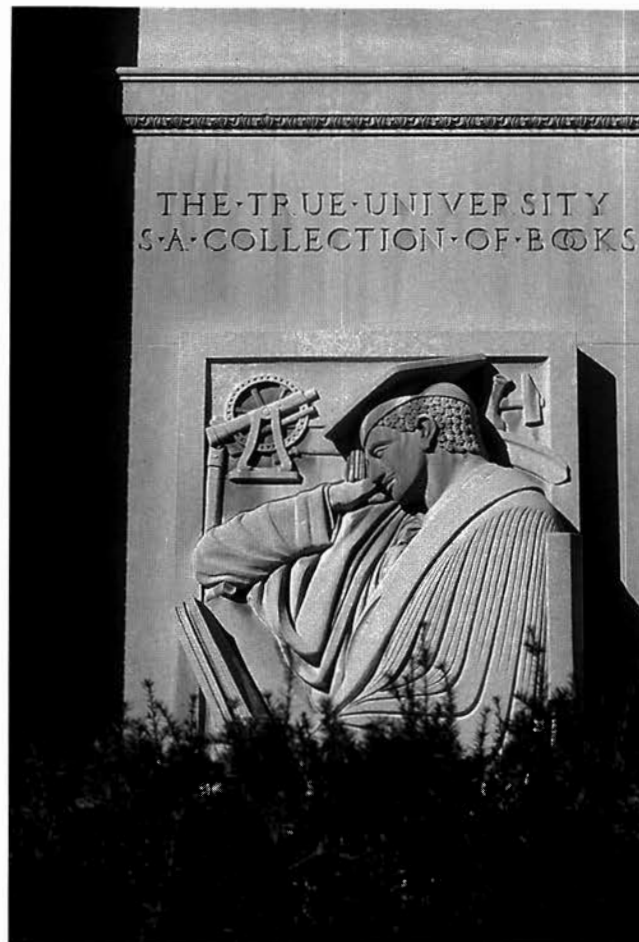
But protecting speech in all its forms does not mean remaining passive—especially when the boundaries of honesty and decency have been crossed. Rather, the university should define high standards for itself and denounce the violation of those standards in clear, unequivocal terms.

A Just Community

A college or university is a just community, a place where the dignity of all individuals is affirmed and where equality of opportunity is vigorously pursued.

Affirming justice is one of the most urgent obligations higher education—and the nation—now confront. Injustice takes many forms. Even though progress has been made, many groups still encounter prejudice on campus—ranging from tenure problems to harassment. At colleges, both large and small, there is evidence of demeaning attitudes toward women, blacks, Hispanics, Jews and other racial, religious and ethnic groups.

If the nation's colleges and universities are to be just communities, prejudice in all its forms must be challenged and every college should develop a comprehensive plan to strengthen pluralism, within a community of learning. Inequality may be rooted

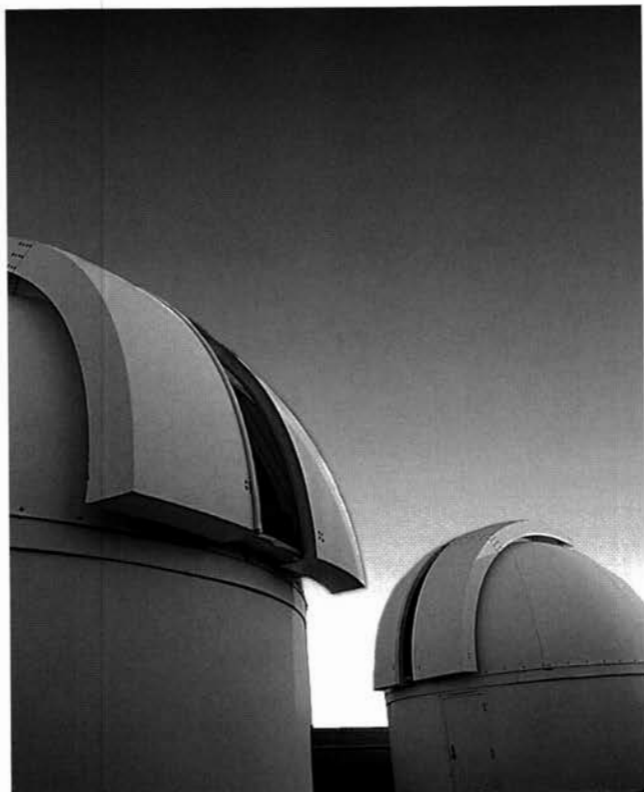


in society at large. But still it falls on higher education to have an unequivocal commitment to social justice. The goal must be equality for all.

A Disciplined Community

A college or university is a disciplined community, a place where individuals accept their obligations to the group and where well-defined governance procedures guide behavior for the common good.

There was a time when women's dorms were locked, there were rigid study hours, chapel attendance was mandatory, and the lights were out at eleven o'clock sharp on weekends. During the 1960s, college students across the nation revolted, ending the policy of *in loco parentis*. Administrators are no longer "parents," but many are now asking: What are the standards by which student conduct should be judged, especially if that behavior is personally and socially destructive? Asked to name their most serious concern, college presidents in the



1989 survey were most likely to name substance abuse, especially alcohol.

Alcohol has always been a part of campus life. Still, a disciplined community means caring for one's health, as well as obeying the laws of the land. If alcohol use is illegal for those under twenty-one, colleges should support the law rather than ignore it. Students need models of courage, not equivocation.

College and university presidents were also concerned about increased crime. Almost one-third of those at liberal arts colleges report "theft" a problem; at the larger institutions, two-thirds of the presidents consider it a problem.

A lack of discipline reflected in "excessive noise and disruptiveness in campus residences," was reported by 65 percent of the liberal arts college presidents as a problem. And concerns about the standards of fraternity life were especially acute. Fraternities and other student organizations can be constructive forces. But institutions of higher learning simply cannot tolerate prejudicial or disruptive conduct. Organizations that do not demonstrate a commitment to civility have no place in campus life.

Problems notwithstanding, it was impressive that almost all of the colleges and universities surveyed are trying to confront these issues; they deserve more credit than the headlines would suggest. Ninety percent of the nation's colleges and universities have alcohol education and prevention programs; more than 70 percent have special task forces on substance abuse, and almost everywhere there are seminars on crime prevention. Chaplains and campus religious centers provide support. Students are helping to shape new codes of conduct. No one wants to return to the days of rigid regulations. But institutions of higher learning need standards, not just in academic matters but in non-academic matters as well.

A Caring Community

A college or university is a caring community, a place where the well-being of each member is sensitively supported and where service to others is encouraged.

Caring is, in fact, the key to everything because while colleges should be purposeful, open, just, and disciplined—the unique characteristics that will make these objectives work, the glue that holds it all together, is the way the members of the community relate to one another.

Today's students cherish their independence. They are pleased that *in loco parentis* has been abolished, but they still need to feel that they belong. One student captured this ambivalence when she said, "We don't want the university to be involved in our lives, but we would like someone to be concerned occasionally about our lives."

Students form their own groups or communities to overcome the anonymity of the campus, just as they have always done. These communities-within-community are essential, but not sufficient. Now, more than ever, students must connect with the institution as a whole. The university must take the initiative for community building, without a return to the rigidities of regulation. Indeed, when presidents were asked what should be done to improve campus life, two-thirds said "more interaction between faculty and students"; well over 90 percent said that strengthening community was important at their institution.



A Celebrative Community

A college or university is a celebrative community, one in which the heritage of the institution is remembered and where rituals affirming both tradition and change are widely shared.

If community in higher education is important—and almost all campus leaders agree that it is—colleges should sustain a keen sense of their own heritage and traditions. Rites, ceremonies, and celebrations unite the campus and give students a sense of belonging to something worthwhile and enduring. Celebrations, if meaningfully designed, sustain the vitality of campuses. The challenge is to instill all rituals and ceremonies with real significance—and fun as well. Such activities keep memories alive and sustain a sense of community. Community must not only be created but continually recreated, since from a quarter to a half of the undergraduates are new each fall. Without traditions, rituals and celebrations, continuity could easily be lost.

Conclusion

These six principles/characteristics of a civil learning environment are all familiar. They can be found, to some degree, on almost every campus in the country. Taken together and continuously affirmed, they can provide a useful framework for the building of community in higher education.

Many of the issues faced by colleges and universities reach far beyond the campus. America seems to be increasingly divided, racial tensions seem to be increasing, the gap between rich and poor has widened, and self-indulgence is celebrated, while service is undervalued. However, when all is said and done people do need one another. No one can make it alone. If colleges and universities cannot find common goals, if higher education cannot overcome the intellectual and social separations that so diminish the quality of life on the campus, what can be expected from society at large? But, if purposefulness, openness, justice, discipline, caring and celebrativeness can become hallmarks of campus life, not only will the integrity of higher education be affirmed, but perhaps renewal to the nation can also be realized.



Four Conversations on Teaching and Learning: A Synopsis

DIANE M. ENERSON

Introduction

What constitutes Penn State undergraduate education? What does it mean to be a part of the Penn State community? How can the members of this community communicate effectively with one another? These questions and others were the focus of the 1995-96 Conversations on Teaching and Learning, a series of structured discussions cosponsored by the IDP Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching and USG Senate/Academic Assembly. The Conversations on Teaching and Learning are dedicated to discussion and the exchange of ideas among the diverse members of the Penn State community. It is a series that is designed to help break down the "us" and "them" barriers that can easily develop in large institutions.

During 1995-96, the series was entitled *Building a Community of Learning* and took as its focus Ernest L. Boyer's six principles for building a healthy community of learning—purpose, openness, justice, discipline, caring, and celebration.

The series consisted of four Conversations with a total of roughly 40 different faculty, students, and administrators participating. On average 15-20 individuals were present for each Conversation. At each session, participants were provided with an abridged text describing one or two of the characteristics of a community of learning as delineated by Boyer as well as a set of questions to guide their reading and to structure the discussion. Because membership remained fluid throughout, each session began with a summary of the themes that had emerged from previous conversations. The hope was to provide a context for discussion and exploration of each of the six characteristics and their implications for building a community of learning at Penn State.

Building a Purposeful Community: What is a Penn State Undergraduate Education?

(OCTOBER 18, 1995)

In October, 1995, the series was opened by asking participants to reflect on the issue of purpose. Participants were invited to read Boyer's text and reflect on three questions: What is the idea of Penn State that you carry in your head? What intellectual quest are you on? What is the purpose of a Penn State education?

For those present, Penn State's land-grant mission acted as a powerful divining rod for defining the University's purpose. Not surprisingly, one of the first and most salient descriptors to emerge from this first discussion was the word "pragmatic." But many were quick to add that the University's purpose goes beyond the mastery of technical and immediately useful skills. There is also an obligation to provide more broadly for the students' futures—as learners and citizens. Ultimately and ideally, the purpose of a Penn State education is both to empower and to enlighten.

Although the group quickly reached consensus about these ideas, there was concern about how these goals could be implemented and whether they might be manifested differently in different contexts. If so, this could pose a problem in identifying a "common intellectual quest" that could be recognized by all the members of the Penn State Community.

Concern was also expressed about the extent to which undergraduates understood these abstract goals. Do students arrive at Penn State understanding that an undergraduate education can go beyond mere credentialing? Is it reasonable to expect them to know this when they arrive? Or is the campus community responsible for informing them as part of the educational process?



In this first Conversation it was clear that there was consensus at an abstract level about purpose. The details proved more problematic. Penn State's size and complexity and the multiplicity of agendas clearly complicate the process of coming together around a "common intellectual quest." What could be done to overcome these complexities? The session ended with a few answers but also with more refined questions. Two of the most persistent and engaging of these were: What is the purpose of face-to-face interactions in building community? Can you build community at a distance?

Building an Open Community: How Can We Communicate Better?

(NOVEMBER 15, 1995)

The second Conversation began with a summary of the first discussion, an excerpted text, and another set of questions: What is the present status of communication at Penn State? Do members speak

with care? Do they listen well? What are the most significant barriers to communication at Penn State?

This second discussion moved beyond describing Penn State as complex and vast to an observation that "the Penn State community consists of many small, homogenous, and often insulated groups." It was also felt that this insularity can be repressive and restricting. Is there something about Penn State and its complexity that stifles free exchange of ideas? What are the forces that prevent this exchange? What, is the impact of distance?

It was here that the image of communities within the community emerged. Many seemed to feel that although communication may proceed smoothly within the small homogenous groups, it becomes complicated and inefficient across group boundaries. When speaking across these boundaries, there is a tendency for each group to speak loudly and rarely really listen. What are the forces that would ease and increase communication? Although there are obvious problems that seem to stem from the existence of the many small homo-

genous groups, they also provide individuals with a sense of belonging and identity. Nevertheless, among the many obstacles to communication at Penn State—size, distance, disciplinary difference—the existence of these small sub-communities within the large community was seen as among the more important impediments.

But isn't the plus side of this complexity diversity? Are university members actually uncomfortable with diversity? Has the hands-off impetus of affirmative action and political correctness gone too far in steering people clear of sensitive issues? Has too great a price been paid for this avoidance? In the effort not to offend has some richness of our native diversity been lost?

The discussion shifted to a consideration of how to ameliorate the problem. Can a common intellectual quest, or cause, be found that would unite the many insular groups? Does communication begin with the assumption that others "should be the same as we are?" Is this a reasonable assumption to make given the complexity and vastness of Penn State? With groups defining themselves in narrowly homogenous ways, differences may be used to shut down communications since, "You are not one of us." What would be the effect if everyone began with the assumption that others will be different? What if difference were accepted as a given and interactions were begun as a search for sameness?

Building a Just and Disciplined Community

(MARCH 19, 1996)

Four months had passed since the last Conversation. That session had ended with observations and questions about whether there might be more effective ways to deal with differences. The focus of the text for the third Conversation was justice and discipline.

What is the present state of equality at Penn State? What are the current standards by which students' conduct is judged? One of the initial observations to be made about equality at Penn State was that the extent of equality, although not complete, has improved during the past decade. For example, traditionally unrepresented groups are



now present in significant numbers. There may now be more freedom to "be yourself" and still be an identifiable and valued part of Penn State.

But has this been a positive change for everyone? Is there evidence that the dignity of each individual is being affirmed in the face of this added complexity? How is an individual's dignity acknowledged? It was suggested that rank and titles garner too much privilege and are not always awarded justly. For example, it was noted that women may be less likely than men to be granted their appropriate title. If so, the result is a signal of inequality that is felt not just by those overhearing these conversations but by others as well. What are the appropriate corrective mechanisms?

Here again, the discussion returned to the theme that small groups, while creating protection of a sort, also create situations where diversity may not be aggressively pursued. Ultimately, the conversation turned to consideration of the obvious but difficult questions: How can intolerance for harmful activity be coupled with tolerance for differences? How can 40,000 people share a life? Can at least a vision be shared? The session ended with a discussion of the kinds of simple actions that might reshape Penn State to be a more just and disciplined community.



Building a Caring and Celebrative Community

(APRIL 2, 1996)

The fourth Conversation focused on caring and celebration. Again the discussion began with a set of questions: In what ways do Penn Staters show that they are concerned about the lives of others? How can the “little loyalties” that are already established be used to connect the individual with the institution as a whole? What are the important rituals and traditions of Penn State? How do they help sustain a sense of community from year to year? Can they be improved? Who are the heroes? How can this become a celebrative community that not only affirms tradition and builds loyalty but also celebrates change, innovation, and inclusiveness?

A discussion of celebration and heroes at Penn State could not begin without some acknowledgment of sport. Boyer observed that “no campus tradition is more celebrative than sport, and certainly there is much to be said for the role of athletics in higher education.” But there was also agreement that the rituals and ceremonies of sports need to be balanced by rituals and ceremonies that focus on the intellectual life and our commitment to social responsibility. What are these other ceremonies?

Do they have the unifying force that is needed to balance sport? Who are the non-athletic heroes? The group had difficulty agreeing on the answers to these questions for the University as a whole. Within the smaller communities the answers were easier. Here the theme of the smaller communities within the larger community re-emerged. And again it was positive. But is this enough? Is the recognition of a common intellectual quest enough to provide a unifying vision for the entire University?

In the end, the discussion resulted in asking many more questions than were answered. However, the process of framing these questions facilitated a sharing and joint learning partly because the conversations had crossed the normal boundaries that too often fragment Penn State. Boyer’s text had provided the context for reflecting on the process of community building. It seemed clear that these conversations were only a beginning, but that they represented a useful format for future dialogue. It also seemed clear that strengthening community at Penn State will be an evolutionary process, not something that occurs by fiat. For most of those present the next step would be to return to their own smaller communities to initiate similar conversations that had in common the themes of purpose, openness, justice, discipline, caring, and celebration.

Epilogue

When one examines the quantitative evidence from the survey of students and faculty, reviews the qualitative content of the Conversations on Teaching and Learning, and, perhaps, reflects upon personal experiences on campus, it seems clear that the “fit” between Boyer’s characteristics of a civil community of learning and the current Penn State situation is less than perfect. The extent to which the “ideal” and “real” are seen to differ varies somewhat among different segments of the population but in no case are they identical. It is noteworthy that often those persons with the most limited period of contact with Penn State tended to be more positive in their perceptions than those with somewhat longer University experiences. Thus, students were more positive than faculty. Among students, freshmen and sophomores expressed more positive views than did juniors and seniors; and the evaluations of assistant professors were more positive than were those of associate professors. However, when there were differences by academic rank, full professors were likely to be intermediate between assistant and associate professors. Thus, contact during the last decade or so with the University was associated with increased disillusionment among students and faculty, even though more long-term contact did not have such an effect. Such a finding is consistent with Boyer’s observations concerning the recent strains and tensions that have developed in academe and suggests that Penn State has not been immune to the effects of these forces.

Recent interest in developing an educationally purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring and celebrative community has been evidenced by the participation of various groups in discussing these issues, by public pronouncements of administrators, and by the inclusion of these ideas in the mission statement of the University. Such efforts need to be sustained and expanded. Boyer has suggested several specific ways in which the University can continue the process:

For example, the principles might be adopted by trustees, or discussed with students during orientation, or with new faculty, or used by presidents in deciding which student groups should be approved. Some colleges may wish to adopt formally the principles as a “Campus Compact,” . . . One or more of these principles, justice, for example, might become the topic of a year-long, campus-wide discussion, and provide, perhaps, the foundation for a new philosophy of campus life.¹

Administrative directives, student forums and protests, faculty deliberations, and staff initiatives can raise awareness of the issues, focus attention on specific problems and suggest means for implementing corrective actions; but, in themselves, these activities are unlikely to result in development of the desired community of learning.

Purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative are adjectives that capture the essence of an ideal community. These principles need to be personalized in time and space. To do so it is important that the individual members of the Penn State community come to understand and appreciate the needs and perceptions of others and personally seek to implement the ideals of a civil community in their day-to-day activities.

Those who are “successful” should be lauded by fellow community members; those who are not should be corrected. All stakeholders in the University—students, faculty, staff, administrators, trustees, parents, and the public—have a right to expect that the University will strive to be a civil community of learning; all have an obligation to make it happen.

¹ Ernest L. Boyer, *In Search of Community*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Council on Education (Washington, DC, January 10, 1990).

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