UNIVERSITY EXCELLENCE: STUDENTS' ACADEMIC REFORM BELIEFS

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In this study of 460 SIU-C students conducted in May 1973, five topics are explored. First, to what extent do these students view the academic community as taking the quest for academic excellence seriously? Second, how do these students rate various components of the university regarding academic excellence? Third, who do these students perceive as the source of leadership in the university concerning the achievement of excellence? Fourth, how long do these students feel it will take for excellence to be effected in the university, and how much change must result for excellence to occur? Last, for excellence to be achieved, what types of qualitative changes must occur, and how will the university differ qualitatively if excellence is effected? The results of this study are discussed within a political model of the academic system, treating the university as a political system and students as quasi-citizens who possess a rudimentary academic belief system.

Key words: academic reform; students' views

Academic excellence is a frequently discussed and cited concept which is infrequently analyzed or researched (Balderston, 1974; Sanford, 1967; Martin, 1969). This lack of attention is particularly marked with regard to unversity students' attitudes, impressions, and desires concerning academic excellence in the university. Indeed, when the subject of academic excellence is introduced, the role of students in the excellence achievement or maintenance process is rarely considered (Ladd, 1970; Ladd, 1972; Corwin, 1974; Mood, 1973).

As a means of exploring and elaborating this topic, this paper will focus on university students' perceptions and evaluations of academic excellence. Furthermore, as a means of providing a broader perspective, the relationship between students' excellence-related

attitudes and their basic attitudes regarding the university will be investigated. In this regard, students' feelings of attachment to the university environment—or its reverse, academic alienation—would seem especially salient.

In this context, five topics will be specifically examined. Perhaps one of the most fundamental questions to be explored is the degree to which university students feel that academic excellence is to be taken seriously or to be considered as a real goal to be achieved in the academic community. Another related topic concerns students' evaluations of various components or constituencies in the university (e.g., the administration, faculty, or student body) as to their respective levels of excellence. A third subject pertains to the source of leadership in the university in achieving excellence; in this instance, questions concerning relative responsibilities, capabilities, and motivations are the central issue. Related to these concerns, are students' attitudes about temporal constraints and necessary change: How long will it take to attain excellence, and how much change in the university is required for academic excellence to be achieved? Finally, the question of qualitative change must be addressed. At least two questions must be considered here: first, what types of change are necessary in order to effect excellence, and second, how will the university differ qualitatively once excellence is achieved?

ASSUMPTIONS

A number of assumptions are fundamental to this investigation, the first of which being that university students manifest the attributes of academic citizens. By this is meant that students are interested in, aware of, and involved in the university political system (Henderson, 1970; Gross and Grambsch, 1974; Foote, 1968; Powell, 1968; Long, 1976e; Long, 1976f). Furthermore, they are capable of monitoring university functioning and the academic environment, and they frequently evaluate this functioning and this environment which leads to desires on their part for general academic reform (Long, 1976a).

A second basic assumption guiding this research concerns the nature of students' desires for general academic reform. In this case, it is assumed that these desires for reform are not independent of other attitudes and beliefs relevant to the university (Axelrod, et al., 1969). In addition, it is assumed that while students' reform attitudes may exhibit multidimensionality, they, at the same time, are interrelated. Thus, it is suggested that these attitudes show constraint, that they constitute, either wholly or in part, an academic belief system (Long, 1976c).

Related to this notion of an existing academic belief system is a third assumption regarding the antecedents of this reform orientation on the part of students. Here, it is assumed that the primary determinant of student demands for academic reform is a feeling of academic alienation by students (Long, 1976g). In this context, the concept of academic alienation is considered to possess three interrelated components: (1) a feeling of inefficacy or powerlessness with regard to the university decision-making process, (2) a feeling of cynicism concerning both abstract academic goals and the means utilized to implement them, and (3) a feeling of estrangement and meaninglessness regarding the academic community in general (Long, 1976d). The best predictor of the student reform orientation, then, is feelings of student academic alienation, as defined above.

Another assumption inherent in this analysis relates to the sources of student academic alienation. In this instance, it is assumed that such feelings are a consequence of objective student appraisals of the university. Three aspects of the academic community would appear particularly salient to feelings of academic alienation. The initial component of this assessment model which leads to feelings of alienation from the university has to do with major discrepancies between students' expectations and actual perceptions of the university (Long, 1976b). At least two evaluative dimensions are relevant to this process, first, students' evaluative discrepancies between their conceptions of the ideal university as compared with the academic realities of their universities, and second, students' perceptions of discrepancies between their university goal preferences and the actual goal promulgation and performance at their universities. The second component of this assessment model relates more to the university classroom. This portion of the model is concerned with students' perceptions and evaluations of teaching and curricular quality, the extent to which an academic climate is maintained, and estimates of academic impact on students (Stern, 1962; Ellison and Simon, 1973). Finally, a third source of academic alienation regards students' perceptions of the characteristic governance style in the university; in this case, if it is paternalistic, authoritarian, and repressive, then it is assumed that feelings of student academic alienation will result. To repeat the fourth assumption, therefore, feelings of academic alienation by students are primarily a function of an objective appraisal of the academic community.

In terms of student sentiments for academic reform, what are the consequences of academic alienation? A number of consequences follow student feelings of academic alienation, according to assumption five. First, the more students feel academically alienated, the greater

importance they will ascribe to academic excellence as a goal to be
achieved. Second, academically alienated students will view the
academic change process as requiring a great deal of time for its
achievement. Furthermore, the more alienated students feel, the more
they will perceive major structural changes as being necessary to effect
excellence in the university. Fourth, alienated students will typically
view university administrators as incapable of effective meaningful
change in the university, as being ideologically opposed to such
change, and as serving as a major obstacle to such change (Lyons and
Lyons, 1973; Hefferlin, 1969; Wilson and Gaff, 1970). Thus, fifth,
alienated students will reject administrators as their preferred change
agents in the academic reform process, and the students will generally
view reforms in terms of demands for greater student power in
university decision-making, greater democratization in the process of
university governance, and, perhaps to a lesser degree, demands for
academically oriented reforms, e.g., concerning teaching and curricular
quality, course requirements, curricular relevance (Carnegie
Commission, 1973a; Jencks and Riesman, 1968; Meyerson, 1966).

METHODS AND MATERIALS
Sample

The data for this study were collected by means of a written
questionnaire which was administered to a random sample of 460
students enrolled at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale in May
1973. Trained interviewers were used to collect the pertinent data from
each of the respondents in the sample; anonymity and confidentiality
were guaranteed for all students sampled.

Of the students sampled 46% were male and 54% female. Ninety
percent were white and 10% were black or of other racial-ethnic origin.
In terms of class standing, 17% were freshmen, 16% were sophomores,
26% were juniors, 34% were seniors, and 6% were graduate students.
Most students were self-identified members of the middle class (84%)
and the modal education level of their parents was 12 years of formal
instruction. Fifty-seven percent of the sample reported living in the
suburbs, while 26% lived in urban areas and 17% in rural localities; the
population of their parental homes was typically between 10,000 and
50,000 people. Ideologically, 15% identified themselves as
conservatives, 36% moderates, and 49% liberals; politically, there were
more Democrats (37%) than Republicans (11%) and high percentages of
independents (30%) and nonidentifiers (22%).

When compared with the demographic characteristics of the universe
from which it was drawn, the sample exhibits a slightly higher

percentage of females and tends to be over-represented by upperclassmen. These deviations, however, should not measurably affect the results reported here, especially since this correlational study is more concerned with hypothesis-testing, not generalizing to the SIU-C student body as of 1973.

Importance of Excellence

The first topic relevant to students' attitudes regarding academic excellence to be discussed concerns students' views about the importance of achieving excellence in the university. When asked "How important is attaining excellence at SIU-C to you?," a clear majority of the students sampled indicated that attaining excellence at the university was indeed important to them. In fact, 86% of the sample responded in this manner, with only 14% saying that the achievement of academic excellence at SIU-C was unimportant to them. Thus, consistent with the assumption regarding student interest, awareness, and involvement, effecting excellence for these students is clearly important.

Evaluative Ratings

Having established that the realization of academic excellence at SIU-C is an important goal among students, and by implication that academic excellence in the minds of these students has not been accomplished yet at the university, it may be appropriate to investigate those aspects of the university where such improvement is most required. As a means of collecting such data, a nine-step "university excellence ladder" was constructed. Questionnaire respondents were instructed that rung nine of the ladder represented the most excellence for the object being evaluated and rung one the least excellence; with these two frames of reference as guides, the respondent was asked to place each of the seven objects to be evaluated on the excellence ladder. The placement distributions on the ladder for all objects then constituted the objects' relative excellence ratings. These ratings appear in Table 1.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from these excellence ratings. First, according to SIU-C students, none of the seven objects evaluated appear to be ranked especially high with regard to excellence. Indeed, the faculty, receiving the highest ranking of the seven objects, receives a median rating of rung five. Second, university decision makers plus the student government, receive the lowest excellence ratings of the seven objects evaluated, with the university

TABLE 1. Students' Excellence Ratings of University Objects

Rung	University	Board of trustees	President	Administrators	Faculty	Student government	Student body
9	0.2%	0.7%	1.1%	0.2%	0.9%	0.4%	1.3%
8	0.7	0.7	2.5	0.4	6.0	1.3	2.4
7	7.6	3.4	3.4	3.8	16.9	2.9	7.3
6	15.8	6.1	7.0	9.8	22.2	8.5	16.3
5	25.4	12.4	7.9	17.7	22.2	15.3	25.2
4	21.4	20.4	12.7	19.0	14.4	15.7	18.3
3	15.4	20.6	15.4	23.9	10.4	14.8	14.9
2	7.3	18.8	17.2	13.4	4.7	20.7	8.9
1	6.2	17.0	32.8	11.6	2.2	20.2	5.3
Median	4.5	3.2	2.5	3.6	5.3	3.1	4.6

president, with a median rating of 2.5, ranking seventh among the objects. In line with this distribution of ratings, it would seem that these students tend to basically differentiate between leaders and nonleaders in evaluating these objects, perhaps in a sort of "us-them" fashion. This hypothesis is borne out when these data are subjected to a factor analysis. The factor analytic results show that, in fact, the board, the president, and administrators do fall on one orthogonal dimension and the faculty, the student government, and the student body fall on a second orthogonal dimension. Interestingly, evaluations of the university itself remain undifferentiated, falling on both dimensions. When the correlations between these two evaluative dimensions and the university excellence rating are examined, however, the leadership or administrative dimension is found to correlate at a higher level ($r = 0.48$) with university excellence ratings than the nonadministrative dimension ($r = 0.41$). This finding may in part account for the university's excellence ranking of 4.5.

Leadership

If academic excellence is to be secured in the university, some form of leadership is necessary to bring it about. Four aspects of this topic would seem particularly germane as subjects of investigation: (1) the seriousness exhibited by various campus constituencies in seeking academic excellence, (2) students' perceptions of the sources of responsibility in the excellence attainment process, (3) the perceptions of students concerning the capabilities of various campus constituencies in the process of achieving excellence, and (4) students' perceptions of sources of restraint in the university hindering the accomplishment of excellence.

Data on the initial topic, the seriousness dimension, appearing in Table 2, were collected through the use of a questionnaire item which asked, "How seriously do you think the following individuals and groups take the quest for excellence at SIU-C?" Clearly, student perceptions on this subject seem to show that the administration and faculty are viewed as taking the pursuit of academic excellence more seriously than either students or the student government. However, even the former group typically falls into the "somewhat seriously" category, not the "very seriously" category. Furthermore, as was the case with the excellence ratings, students again manifest a perceptual distinction on this topic, with the faculty being perceived as exhibiting the most serious intent; the president, board, and administration manifesting somewhat less serious intent; and the students and student government showing the least serious intent concerning the

achievement of academic excellence.

When student perceptions of responsibility for the achievement of academic excellence are investigated, a somewhat different pattern of responses emerges (Table 3). When asked, "To what extent do you feel the following groups and individuals at SIU-C are responsible for achieving excellence in the university?" the students and faculty are perceived as possessing the most responsibility, while the board, administration, president, and particularly the student government are viewed as being less responsible.

Student perceptions of capability appear to be congruent with their perceptions of responsibility in the achievement of academic excellence (Table 4). In response to the question, "To what extent do you feel the following groups and individuals at SIU-C are capable of achieving excellence in the university?," students assign the faculty and themselves the highest capability ratings; the student government the lowest ratings; and the president, the board, and the administration intermediate ratings.

An even more distinct perceptual pattern occurs in Table 5 when the students are asked, "To what extent do you think the following groups and individuals at SIU-C hinder or prolong the attainment of excellence in the university?" Here, the faculty, students, and student government are generally viewed as providing "little hindrance" to the achievement of excellence, whereas a "moderate hindrance" is associated with the president, administrators, and board of trustees.

It is noteworthy that student perceptions of serious intent, responsibility, capability, and obstruction in the attainment of academic excellence are typically perceptually dichotomized, with leaders and nonleaders falling into distinct groups. Of most interest in this context is the finding that students perceive faculty members as being allies rather than as being confederates of the administration.

In summarizing this section, then, it should be emphasized that the initial findings regarding students perceiving themselves as being less serious in seeking academic excellence than the faculty or administration, while contrasting with their perceptions of responsibility, capability, and obstructionism in the achievement of excellence, can be reconciled if the relatively powerless position of the student body at the university is taken into account. Thus, while they perceive themselves and their allies as being both responsible and capable, as well as providing little hindrance, they may ascribe less student seriousness to the task of effecting academic excellence because they perceive no realistic grounds upon which to base that serious intent—that is, a lack of perceived serious intent follows a lack of perceived student influence in the academic governance process.

TABLE 2. Students' Perceptions of Serious Intent Among University Constituencies for the Achievement of Excellence

Level of seriousness	Board of trustees	President	Administrators	Faculty	Student government	Students
Not at all seriously	12.1%	16.6%	8.2%	2.4%	19.7%	15.8%
Not very seriously	22.1	18.6	23.4	16.2	38.1	43.5
Somewhat seriously	42.2	28.5	47.5	57.7	33.3	32.5
Very seriously	23.6	36.3	21.0	23.7	8.9	8.1

TABLE 3. Students' Perceptions of Responsibility Among University Constituencies for the Achievement of Excellence

Level of responsibility	Board of trustees	President	Administrators	Faculty	Student government	Students
Not responsible	20.0%	19.7%	12.3%	4.0%	28.1%	11.4%
Somewhat responsible	23.3	20.0	25.7	16.6	24.1	18.9
Moderately responsible	22.2	21.5	30.6	33.9	27.2	28.1
Very responsible	34.6	38.8	31.5	45.5	20.7	41.6

TABLE 4. Students' Perceptions of Capability Among University Constituencies for the Achievement of Excellence

Level of capability	Board of trustees	President	Administrators	Faculty	Student government	Students
Very incapable	11.4%	17.1%	6.9%	2.7%	15.3%	3.6%
Moderately incapable	9.1	9.8	6.2	2.9	12.9	6.2
Somewhat incapable	9.6	9.1	10.5	4.0	15.8	6.9
Somewhat capable	21.6	18.0	25.2	18.4	21.8	24.9
Moderately capable	21.4	18.9	29.0	35.8	20.2	26.7
Very capable	26.9	27.1	22.3	36.2	14.0	31.8

TABLE 5. Students' Perceptions of Hindrance Among University Constituencies in the Achievement of Excellence

Level of hindrance	Board of trustees	President	Administrators	Faculty	Student government	Students
Great hindrance	32.0%	45.9%	21.5%	4.7%	16.4%	10.3%
Moderate hindrance	38.7	27.1	44.6	25.4	26.2	29.5
Little hindrance	22.0	19.3	26.2	51.3	38.4	40.8
No hindrance	7.3	7.8	7.8	18.5	18.9	19.4

Quantitative Change

Student perceptions of the temporal dimension in the academic excellence attainment process are of particular relevance in this discussion because they provide an additional indicator of the perceived level of excellence at the university. Especially important here are ideal and real perceptions of the time required to establish academic excellence at the university, and even more significant is the discrepancy between these two estimates. Furthermore, an additional measure of excellence level which deserves investigation is the amount of student perceived structural change needed in the university to effect academic excellence.

As the data in Table 6 show, when asked "Ideally, how long do you think it would take to achieve excellence at SIU-C?," the median response among the students sampled was four to five years. Conversely, when asked for a more realistic estimate, these students responded that it would probably take between six and ten years to achieve excellence at the university. Obviously, these median response rates can be interpreted differently, depending on one's perspective, but it is clear that according to student perceptions, their university is not on the brink of achieving excellence. These findings, particularly those regarding the realistic estimates of excellence achievement, also indicate that one-third of the students sampled felt that academic excellence could not be achieved within a period of ten years, and almost one-fifth of the students felt that academic excellence could never be achieved at the university. Needless to say, these findings may partially be a function of these students' conceptions of academic excellence.

One method of tapping these conceptions is to investigate students' perceptions of the quantity of change requisite to the achievement of academic excellence. Thus, students were asked, "In attempting to achieve excellence at SIU-C, how much improvement do you feel the university structure needs?" In this instance, the median response was between "some basic changes" and "many basic changes." In addition, over 50% of the students sampled felt that either "many basic changes" or "widespread radical change" was necessary if excellence was to be secured, whereas 17% of the sample stated that either no changes or minor structural changes were necessary. These findings, therefore, would tend to support the more pessimistic interpretation of the perceived time estimates cited above.

It has been established thus far in the analysis that while students report that they personally feel that it is important for the university to attain an academically excellent status, they perceive the student body as taking the attainment of such status less seriously than other groups

TABLE 6. Students' Perceptions of the Time Required to Achieve Excellence

Time period	Idealistically (%)	Realistically (%)
< 2 years	10.1	1.8
2-3 years	28.8	8.6
4-5 years	30.3	27.7
6-10 years	14.1	29.0
> 10 years	5.1	15.8
Never	11.6	17.1

of actors in the university system, perhaps because they manifest greater feelings of academic alienation. By way of contrast, however, these students perceive themselves as being very responsible for and quite capable of participating in achieving academic excellence; in addition, they view themselves as being less of a restraining force in the process of change. Ideally, students expect that academic excellence could be attained in a five-year time period, but, more realistically, they state that the process, if it can be realized at all, might take at least ten years and require basic structure changes in the university to be successful.

Qualitative Change

Having dealt with various aspects of students' perceptions of the academic excellence process, it would now appear advisable to explore specifically what students mean when they utilize the concept of academic excellence. Two open-ended questions were employed to collect data on this subject. The first of these items asked, "If you were president of SIU-C, how would you attain 'excellence?'" As can be seen in Table 7, students' responses to this item could be reduced to five fundamental categories. The most frequently given response to the question pertained in some manner to academic improvement. Typical responses coded into this category concerned general improvements in course offerings, more relevant graduation requirements, better teaching quality, tightening entrance requirements, more challenging courses, and upgrading evaluational standards. The second most frequently mentioned response dealt with attaining excellence through greater student power in the university political system. Examples of responses falling within this category included references to greater student inputs in the decision-making process, greater student authority in the formulation of university policy, more student impact in course

TABLE 7. Students' Change Preferences Regarding The Achievement of Excellence (%)

Academic improvement	39.5
Student power	27.0
Change priorities	8.9
Administrative change	5.4
Other	19.2

evaluations and curricular planning, the provision of specific institutionalized channels for students to express demands to the system, greater representation of student sentiment on existing decision-making bodies, etc. The changing priorities category most frequently included references to the allocation of state funds to more academically or student-oriented projects; of particular concern here were objections to increased administrative salaries, the costs of the athletic program, and funding for support facilities, such as the university security force. Student responses coded into the administration category were concerned primarily with the quality, training, and quantity of administrators. These responses mentioned terminating many administrators, hiring less replacements, and recruiting only the highest quality candidates. The other category, in this instance, contained very specific citations and solutions to existing problems, which could not be coded into the four other categories, which were not mentioned frequently enough to warrant the creation of an additional coding category, and which were quite particularistic in nature, e.g., improving the food quality at a specific residence hall, extending the hours of the campus library on Sunday evenings, criticism of a specific faculty member because of his grading policies, etc.

The second open-ended item used to elaborate the academic excellence concept asked, "If 'excellence' were attained at SIU-C, how would the university differ from the way it is now?" Again, five distinct coding categories resulted, with the most frequently elicited student responses occurring in a class labeled "better learning environment," which, in contrast to the "academic improvement" category in the preceding analysis, pertained more to pedagogic climate, teaching quality, and curricular impact. In this case, students seemed to desire less grade-generated anxiety, courses tailored more to their personal concerns and values, and more intimate and intellectual relationships with their instructors. The democratization category was similar to the student power category in the last item but was devoid of the influence component and, instead, stressed a concern for a rather

TABLE 8. Students' Perceptions of Changes Effected by the Achievement of Excellence (%)

Better learning environment	40.2
Increased status	11.5
Greater democratization	9.7
Improved cultural atmosphere	4.3
Other	34.3

generalized participatory democracy model applied to the university, with almost all decisions resulting from a process of group consensus. The increased status category of responses was relatively novel in that it embodied an overt concern for academic status on the part of the respondents. These students were aware of the academic, and more importantly administrative, reputation of their university, were dissatisfied with it, and did not wish that notoriety to reflect on them. In contrast to the other response categories, though, no suggestions for amelioration were provided, only the problem and its source. On this question, a relatively small percentage of students were quite concerned with the considerable lack of cultural activities on the campus, felt that their education would be enhanced by such offerings, and viewed the university's general climate as benefiting from this emphasis. Finally, the "other" category, gaining even more responses than the last item, dealt with very specific, nonclassifiable, miscellaneous replies to the question.

In summary, then, these students appear to hold to a conception of academic excellence which embodies two fundamental concerns. First, and most important, academic excellence pertains to a pervasive intellectual-affective milieu which fosters the learning process and which deals substantially with personally relevant subjects confronted within a warm, noncompetitive atmosphere. Second, when students employ the concept of academic excellence, they, to a lesser extent, refer to a more student-oriented university decision-making process based on a generalized model of participatory democracy, with students sharing in policy making in meaningful ways.

Ideological Constraint

One of the fundamental assumptions underlying this investigation concerns the structure of university reform beliefs held by students. This assumption is that these beliefs do not exist independent of one another, but rather form a coherent whole, manifesting a certain degree of constraint or mutual association. To this point in the empirical

TABLE 9. Intercorrelations (r) Between Indicators in Students' University Reform Belief Systems

	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1) Administrative seriousness	-.32	.34	.20	-.39	-.02	.24	-.01
(2) Administrative hindrance		-.28	-.12	.45	-.04	-.36	.08
(3) Administrative capability			.43	-.36	.16	.26	.13
(4) Administrative responsibility				-.19	.15	.17	.10
(5) Administrative excellence rating					-.14	-.40	-.18
(6) Importance of excellence						.21	.26
(7) Reform orientation							.22
(8) Time perspective							

Note: r = .07; p = .05

analysis, university students' attitudes regarding academic excellence have been found to relate rather consistently with feelings of academic alienation. It would now seem appropriate to examine the relationship between these excellence- or reform-oriented attitudes. If, in fact, they do appear to relate to one another, then the above assumption would be supported and the argument could be forwarded that these attitudes, particularly as they correlate with feelings of academic alienation, constitute a rudimentary belief system, one which may be a portion of an even larger academic belief system.

The data pertinent to this discussion appear in Table 9. Of the 28 correlations appearing in this table, 25 attain statistical significance. Furthermore, with a mean correlation of 0.22, the data in this matrix provide support for the existence of a moderately constrained system of academic reform beliefs.

Two rather general conclusions can be drawn from these data. First, it is clear that within this system, the most constraint is found among beliefs regarding administrators' roles in the reform process; second, less restraint is observed when students' beliefs about nonadministrative matters are considered, especially those concerned with the time frame involved in the achievement of excellence and the ideal period in which reform can be effected. To return to the central issue, however, moderate constraint is exhibited among these beliefs about university reform.

Excellence and Academic Alienation

Among the assumptions which prefaced this paper was one which posited a causal relationship between students' feelings of academic alienation and their desires for academic reform. More to the point, it is hypothesized here that feelings of powerlessness, cynicism, and estrangement will correlate with each of the nine components of academic excellence which have been discussed. Since the foregoing analysis clearly established a differentiated cognitive-perceptual process on the part of students, distinguishing between administrators and nonadministrators, and since it is assumed that university administrators provide an essential source of academic alienation among students, only those measures tapping student perceptions of administrative conduct, where relevant, will be utilized.*

The correlations reported in Table 10 would appear to offer rather strong confirmation of the hypothesis. Thus, feelings of academic alienation by students do correlate with a view that the achievement of academic excellence is an important goal for the university, that the university administration is lacking in excellence, that the

TABLE 10. Intercorrelations (r) Between Indicators of Academic Alienation Feelings and Desires for Academic Reform

	Academic estrangement	Academic cynicism	Academic powerlessness	Academic alienation
Administrative excellence rating	-.45	-.38	-.60	-.67
Administrative seriousness	-.24	-.23	-.38	-.39
Administrative hindrance	-.34	-.34	-.45	-.49
Administrative capability	-.25	-.24	-.44	-.43
Administrative responsibility	-.16	-.19	-.27	-.26
Importance of excellence	-.19	-.22	-.11	-.18
Administrators' reform orientation	-.36	-.34	-.56	-.56

Note: r = .07; p = .05

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administration is not serious in its motivations toward academic excellence, that the administration should not be responsible for nor is capable of achieving excellence in the university, that the administration may well prolong the excellence-realization process, that the attainment of academic excellence will require a considerable amount of time for realization, and that basic structural changes will be necessary for its implementation.

In addition to these rather general findings, a number of more specific findings deserve mention in Table 10. First, it is significant that of the three indicators of academic alienation used in this study, students' feelings of powerlessness in the university governance process appear to be the best predictor of their attitudes toward academic reform. Second, it is noteworthy that students' ratings of administrative excellence would seem to be the best predictor, or, to be more precise, postdictor, of their feelings of academic alienation, again, particularly feelings of powerlessness. Third, it should also be underscored that all four indicators of administrative involvement in the excellence-attainment process generally perform equally well in postdicting feelings of academic alienation, especially those concerning powerlessness in university governance.

By way of contrast, when the students' open-ended responses regarding qualitative changes in the academic environment occasioned by the realization of excellence are correlated with the academic alienation indicators, much less variance is accounted for. Indeed, with the exception of the correlations between increases in student power and the alienation measures, almost no significant relationships appear in Table 11. And, even then, the significant associations appearing still exhibit little predictive power. These rather disappointing results may reflect a methodological artifact resulting from the rather unique distribution of student responses on the two open-ended items exploring conceptualizations of academic excellence, or it may be that these responses are much too specific and that even more generic orientations are necessary for more accurate associations to occur.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Seven major findings were reported in this study of university students' attitudes toward academic reform. First, the students sampled in this research were found to be overwhelmingly in agreement that the attainment of excellence at their university was important to them. In evaluating excellence levels among various constituency groups in the university, the students perceived excellence to be generally lacking among all groups, especially among administrators, and tended to

TABLE 11. Intercorrelations (r) Between Indicators of Academic Alienation Feelings and Students' Academic Reform Preferences and Perceptions

	Academic estrangement	Academic cynicism	Academic powerlessness	Academic alienation
Student power	.10	.10	.08	.12
Academic improvement	.04	.09	.01	.03
Change priorities	.00	-.02	.01	-.02
Administrative change	.00	.06	-.04	.02
Greater democratization	.09	.03	.03	.06
Better learning environment	.00	.03	.04	.01
Increased status	.02	.02	-.06	.05
Improved cultural atmosphere	.10	.06	.05	.09

Note: r = .07; p = .05

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differentiate between administrative and nonadministrative groups in
making these evaluations. A third finding relates to the students'
overall rejection of university administrators as their preferred agents
in effecting excellence in the university, with students viewing
administrators as not being serious about attaining excellence, as being
incapable of and lacking responsibility for its achievement, and as
being a hindrance in the process of accomplishing academic excellence.
Not only did students feel that basic structural change in the university
was necessary for its accomplishment but they felt that a considerable
amount of time would also be necessary. In conceptualizing the
excellence construct, these students tended to describe it as embodying
fundamental reforms in the intellectual-affective learning environment,
as well as pervasive democratization of the university governance
process. These attitudes were found to manifest a moderate degree of
interrelatedness, and it was suggested that they comprised a
rudimentary academic reform belief system. Finally, a rather strong
link was reported between a reformist orientation and feelings of
academic alienation, especially feelings of powerlessness in affecting
university policy making.

What conclusions might be drawn from these research findings?
First, it should be recognized that university students are not always
viewed as legitimate participants in the governance of the university or
as possessing the right to voice preferences in university decision
making, either because it is felt that they are uninterested in engaging
in these activities or because they are viewed as espousing radical
viewpoints which are considered irrelevant to the administration of the
university and impractical to implement (Corson, 1960; Baldridge, 1971;
Richman and Farmer, 1974; Balderston, 1974; Foote et al., 1968;
Richardson, 1974; Meyerson and Graubard, 1975). Much of the
evidence discussed here and in other related papers would tend to
refute these contentions. These students exhibit a considerable degree
of academic involvement, interest, and desire for further participation.
In addition, although they clearly manifest a strong reformist
sentiment, it is academically oriented and not the projection of a
full-blown sociopolitical ideology. In a word, these students are voicing
a desire for academic and political reforms in the university which not
only can be met, but which in selected circumstances have, in fact,
been effectuated.

There are obviously many arguments for and against greater student
participation in university governance and reform (Dressel and Faricy,
1972; Parsons and Platt, 1973; Touraine, 1974; Corwin, 1974; Carnegie
Commission, 1973b). There are also newer models to be employed
describing the university student as an academic citizen in a quasi

political system and as a problem-sensitive consumer of services in an academic market system (El-Khawas, 1975). Similarly, there are certain psychological and educative consequences resulting from greater student involvement and responsibility in university decision making (Rogers, 1969; Chickering, 1969; Heath, 1968; Freedman, 1967; Trent and Medsker, 1968; Katz et al., 1968; Feldman and Newcomb, 1969). It should be obvious however, that at the present time, at most universities exemplifying a traditional governance framework, it is virtually impossible to effect student-centered change of the type discussed here (Keniston, 1970; Wood, 1974; Vickers, 1975; Taylor, 1971).

Commenting on this state of affairs, Vaughn (1973) notes that

> Education is so organized that differential images of the knowledge process are built into its routine operation. Conflicting images of what education is and should be occur within a context of unequal power distribution. The present arrangements in which educational outcomes are shaped are predicated upon the principle of dominance. This asymmetrical distribution does not permit the unrestricted exchange of ideas or the advocacy of certain actions derived from the knowledge process. It does permit to a considerable extent the exchange of ideas, but these occur within a predetermined context that is itself not subject to discussion. Because of the nature of the existing framework, only certain kinds of questions make sense (1973: 244).

This appears to be the essential message conveyed in the data analyzed here. It seems to be a message which is being increasingly voiced by university students and one which probably will not fade with time:

> Dissent against society and participation within the academic affairs of the campus are the new manifestations of the intermittent three-century-old drive of students for a position of greater influence, and use of TV and political lobbying are among the new tactics. This drive seems, at the moment, to be in low gear. We do not believe, however, that this signals an end to all further attempts at forward motion. We believe, rather, that the long-run student concern for greater influence, while rising and falling in intensity of expression, will continue into the indefinite future. The problems of the recent past with student demands for power have not disappeared forever. They need to be faced either now or later. It is our conviction that it is better to examine them now, in a period that allows careful consideration, than it is to postpone examination until some later date when sober reflection may be more of a luxury (Carnegie Commission, 1973a: 62).

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FOOTNOTE

* These measures were derived through factor analytic procedures using an orthogonal rotation, which in each case generated two dimensions, one comprised of an administrative factor and the other comprised of a nonadministrative factor.

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