



Qualifications Expected of Students Prior to Enrollment in Tertiary Education (A case of Quality vs. Quantity)

Dr. Faith M. Pereira
Professor of Management & Marketing
School of Business
Dowling College
pereiraF@dowling.edu

We find ourselves submerged in a Tsunami of Statistics; as we read the newspapers and academic magazines; as we watch or listen to the news on Television or Radio, or download details from the Internet. We are tired of noting that we are losing our Global Academic Status. I do not want to inflict on you, those depressing statistics; you have seen and heard them all. Perhaps a look at the lack of importance we place on education in general, does give the impression that education and developing the leaders of tomorrow do not claim our attention and our dollars today.

This paper will include some of the present practical problems associated with the imperative sacrificing of our hitherto comparatively high American Academic Standards at the time of admission of students, with the sole purpose of meeting our planned objectives (the number of students enrolled) each semester. This problem plagues Administrators of Institutions that are "Tuition Driven". They just can't meet their planned quotas; it also causes concerns for Faculty who find that their classes are cancelled, for lack of adequate numbers of students in their scheduled classes.

As we face this Herculean task of getting suitable numbers of students in our Institutions of Tertiary Education, we realize that we are not alone; we seem to share this problem with colleges and universities in other developed countries. In addition to the lower number of students (Quantity), we face yet another very serious problem (Quality).

This paper is mainly based on empirical data; it is the culmination of data collected from decades of my experience as a student who has several degrees in Science and in Business, together with over three decades of Tertiary teaching at all levels. For two

decades I have also been a member of the Board of Trustees of a College in Long Island, and the Chair of its Academic Standards Committee.

Our Academic Standards have stood the test of time; we have been the envy of the world for decades. However, the state of things in recent years seems to have changed considerably.

In the past, we had **many** excellent students, with very high G.P.A.'s; students who could be labeled as *Young Professionals*. To mention just a few: Mr. P.M., Mr. W. McD. and Ms. K.R. I recall that when Mr. P.M. completed his MBA thesis under my direction, his company promoted him to the position of V.P. Later he was transferred to their London Office; there too, he was singled out for another promotion: Executive V.P. Another student, Mr. W. McD. has risen to the top, after having been promoted many times in his corporation; that Dowling included him in their Board of Trustees. A beautiful young woman also deserves special mention. Ms. K.R. She was not a Business major; I thought she was, because she was in some of my Business classes, and did an excellent job in each class. I was disappointed that I could not induct her in our Dowling College Delta Pi Chapter of Delta Mu Delta, the International Honor Society in Business, because she was not a *Business* major. Yes, there were so many outstanding students then. Today we can count on one hand, the total number of outstanding students we have each semester. We must study this situation from all angles or dimensions, and trace the etiology of this decline.

Current demographic data reveals that families in developed countries, particularly, are smaller today. This has a deleterious impact on academic admissions initially; more so at the Tertiary level. Being tuition-driven institutions of education need students. In an attempt to achieve planned academic quotas, colleges and universities, especially the smaller ones, open their doors **wide**, and readily accept everyone who enters the building with "*a check that did not bounce*"; in the words of a colleague. A number of these students come from countries that have a different medium / script. All forms of communication in the English language for those students are major issues. One can

see the problems they go through for every written assignment. To be understood, they take along a local student to speak for them when they go to the different offices to process their admission and other papers. With all these problems, foreign students are admitted in Tertiary education, and we find them in our MBA classes. Understanding what they say is very difficult; trying to read what they write is a challenge, as each paper has to be marked and revised, two and three times over, just to be accepted. What have they understood as they sit in class??? Comprehension is a serious problem. Their first language interference is very evident orally, aurally and literally. Each language has rules that are entirely different from every other.

There is something unusual about the English language: Whereas we readily admit the fact that we have no knowledge of French, German, Italian or Latin; we find it almost impossible to get anyone to admit to a lack of knowledge of English: a language that is rather easy to *learn*; but extremely difficult to *master*. This problem exists, but to an infinitely lesser degree, in many of our local students; most of them have no problem at all with regard to speaking and comprehension in English; but they seem to have serious “writing” problems, especially with words that are phonetically similar. It would appear that Grammar and Spellings were ignored in High School. This is just one aspect of the problem, Realizing that they have this problem, they tend to *keep up appearances*, and avoid doing their assignments, giving a variety of excuses each time. Finally they wonder why they did not get a really “good grade”.

The other popular problem today is that they have serious *personal* problems. They are present in class, but the excuse today is, “Dr. Pereira, at the moment, I have so many problems going on in my **life**... it is now a complete mess. I have serious problems with my Girl/boy-friend; and no one will ever understand how hard life is for me these days”. The student is either absent a lot, or is present physically, coming to class, not having done any homework or class assignments. This situation goes on for well over two weeks. At the end of the semester, all the “missing assignments” are brought in at one time; done in great haste, no doubt. The student could certainly have planned better, since their objective is usually to obtain a good grade..

Another issue is the rather high cost of higher education. Students are aware that it is absolutely essential today; so they take on additional jobs to make their tuition payments. As a result they have *no time* for homework and books.

Also, students who are included in the “tuition exempt” status, based on sports or family working in the Institution, often reveal a lack of appreciation: with missed classes, poor attendance and equally poor study habits.

Yet another reason for our problems of today is the fact that in most families both parents work. Students tell me that they had no supervision growing up, and that *they were brought up by themselves*. Mom is at work all day, so is Dad. For not being a *stay-at-home* Mom, she feels guilty. She works to help supplement the family income. Her *guilt* prompts her to adopt the practice of being overly tolerant, to compensate for her absence; so she showers cash and gifts on the poor *deserted* sixteen year old teen. She avoids correcting or admonishing him, only to win him over. She thus develops a “*buddy relationship*”, instead of a “*parent-child*” relationship. As a result, the teen does not learn how to accept *correction* and complete the follow-up. This situation is repeated in class, where Professors, most of whom have children of their own, practice the same principle. They do not correct their children for the mistakes they make: big and small. In the classroom, they deal with their students just as they deal with their kids. Respect for authority seems to have volatilized into thin air. As a result many young people, our students, have little or no respect for authority; and not even for themselves. When students question the size or number of class assignments, the professor gives in and the students win. The assignments are reduced, just to *give in* to the demands of the students. Professors *plan to please* the students at any cost. (Quality of Education is thereby sacrificed, as the Quantity of assignments is reduced).

Today’s students love the professor who does not take the attendance, who does not question them if the assignments are not done, and who gives good grades in the end. I had a student who asked me to find out what classes Professor XYZ will be teaching for

the next semester. When asked why that student wanted that information, I was told, "Dr. Pereira, just look at my grades. I have D+, D-, F and Incomplete grades, but in that class, I got an **A**, and **I did not even buy the text book!** Is this a case of faculty hoping to win a *Popularity Contest*, or a test of the Academic Achievement of our students? If this is what is happening in Tertiary education in our Country, we are dragging down our Academic Standards to solve some personal issues (Promotion or Tenure).

Even though it is generally believed that Performance Appraisals should be conducted by trained professionals, Faculty are aware that their Tenure and Promotions depend to a great extent on those *student responses*; so they lower their academic standards to accommodate their students, who are pleased with the lowered expectations, and demonstrate their gratitude with really great reviews for that Professor. Since most of my good friends today were my *exceptional students* of the past, I am aware of these details. These students are confident that I will *never* betray the trust they have in me, and disclose their names; so I know details unknown to most. When we had these great students, the Professors who got great evaluations, were the really great teachers. This is not so today, when really great teachers get negative evaluations, only because they believe in maintaining the original high standards.

To make matters worse, I found out recently that many students do not really know how to study. A student asked me why she got a C- grade for the mid-term. She said that she *studied really hard* for that exam. I asked her to describe that "**really hard**" studying that she had done for my class. I was shocked to hear her say, "I read it once". Are we to infer that all her life in school, High School particularly, *she had not learned how to study?* Well, I found out later that she was not alone. I then suggested that I would meet them after all my classes, and teach them HOW TO STUDY. To my surprise, very few students attended those **special extra classes**. Most said they had to work, or lose the day's salary. The students who did attend, showed great improvement: from a D, D+ or C-, to an A grade. This semester a young student told me that whereas she does ALL her assignments on time, she has NEVER done well in tests. Well, I worked with her at the special sessions. This time she did extremely well.

She was so prepared, she answered the surprise questions that I ask in class, just to remind them of the important issues in basic / "Principles" classes. She believed that she was doomed to fail, when all she needed was special attention, concentration, determination and repetition. I have now helped many students who had given up on 'test-taking", only to wonder at their success after my special sessions.

All we can say is that we have a major problem of Quality and a chronic problem of Quantity in Tertiary Education today. It was a universally accepted fact that our Education System **was** the *best in the world*; but for the reasons just stated, we are gradually sliding down a slippery slope. The obvious result is that the Academic Standards of the class, the School, the State and that of our Country is being dragged down by all these forces, causing an *Academic Hemorrhage*, and we have no alternative but to put a stop to the *academic bleeding* right away.

Every time we read or hear about the decline in the American Education System, we rush to blame the Teachers and Professors. Have we forgotten that there are two other sets of people on whom we can *pin the blame? the students in question and the Parents*. Our parents were very much involved with our Education, even though our families were much larger, and many of the conveniences we enjoy today, were *non est* in those years.

If students of today have not attained the age of reason and responsibility at the time they have reached the Tertiary level of Education, they must examine their own consciences. Parents especially, cannot shirk their responsibilities, and place all the blame squarely on the shoulders of Teachers and Professors. You have been the FIRST TEACHERS of your children. If those young people are not good today, perhaps YOU have been their bad First Teacher. As stated earlier, by no means are Professors exempt from the *culpa*.

Noting the **success** I achieved with those students who decided they would *work with me*, even though they were convinced that they are **bad Test-takers**, I realize that I had

used on them the same methods I used myself when I was studying for my degrees in Science and Business. In both cases I had no related previous courses, and no **Pre-requisite classes**.

When I was in High School, I had not studied any Physics & Chemistry. Physiology & Hygiene was what we learned in Catholic Schools for Girls. Since I decided to major in **Science**, (that demanded a rather high GPA for admission), I noticed a change in my study habits. Once accepted, I had to compete with the 180 boys in my classes. They had a big advantage over me: they had studied Physics & Chemistry for years in High School. To learn all those theories, formulae, charts and laws, I developed a technique to compensate for my *handicap* in Science: Attention, Concentration, Determination and Repetition. I used *this formula that I developed*, even as I decided to study courses in **Business**. There too I had *never* studied a single Business course in my life: I was a pure Scientist. I was the only woman in the class. I came from a Developing country. I had no BBA, and no Business background too. My colleagues in the Doctoral Program were all V.P.'s who had majored in one or other Business discipline: working as **Specialists** in the top Multinational Corporations. As we introduced ourselves, I was scared. I knew nothing of Business; and yet, from the start, when we received our grades from our first assignment, they were all shocked to note that my grade was the highest. I was shocked too, even though I studied very hard, slept very little, and spent much time planning my assignments. This happened over and over again. One day I approached the Director of the Doctoral program and asked him about the situation. He said that even though I do not have a background in Business, my approach to every subject is far superior to the others. Perhaps that is why it was I who received the President's Award for our Doctorate. I credit this success to my *Science education*. I therefore suggest that to succeed, students should take at least one science class in their first year. Pace College was re-named Pace University on time to award me with its First Doctorate Degree. Pace now has several Doctoral Programs: Law, Medicine...

When I arrived at Pace College, I was interviewed by the President, Dr. Mortola, and three of his V.P.'s. After they read my C.V., Dr. Mortola informed me that the NY State

Education Board expects that all foreign national students be tested in the English language, to note their reading, writing and comprehension skills, prior to being admitted. Dr. Mortola then stated that in his opinion, I speak, read, and write much better than most locals; so to comply with the Law, he officially requested that I be exempted. He also sent them a copy of my CV. I was asked if I would teach those classes. I respectfully declined, saying that all my Business courses are *foreign* to me, and will demand my full attention, if I plan to do really well in this challenging program.

Based on my experiences, my suggestion to improve our academic standards today should start with Dr. Mortola's *modus operandi*: All foreign national students must first, hand in *documented proof* of their Academic profile in their home country. Also, we must have every *foreign national* tested to make sure that they meet the N.Y. State standards. We must also test our *local students* for their efficiency in writing & spellings, and in every case, include at least one course from a Science discipline, in the first semester.

Science helped me, and I am hopeful it will benefit everyone in the Long Term (Quality). Let it not be said that we chase after the Short Term (numbers of students: Quantity) only. For if we do, it could be said that we have a serious problem; and the world would say *Quo Vadis USA?*

To counter this major malady, we must set our objectives, aim high and do all we can to delete the obstacles that are bound to come our way. Twist them and turn them into opportunities, and make them lead us to achieve our objectives.

Rather than curse the consuming darkness of despair, let us start by lighting this candle of Hope, for we are Americans, and Americans do NOT fail. Remember, we did not win the race into space, but we won the prize; we made the historic landing on the moon. We believe that *In God we Trust*, so let us not keep those words in the archives of our History books; let us live up to this challenge that is facing us today; put into practice

those profound words, so that they are not mere platitudes. Yes, trust Him, when just to trust Him is the hardest thing of all.

REFERENCES

Astin, A.W.1993. *What Matters in College? Four Critical Years Revisited*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Balduf, M. 2009. "Underachievement Among College Students". *Journal of Advanced Academics*. 20:2. Pp. 274-294.

Ballard, B.1987. "Academic Adjustments: The Other Side of their Export Dollar". *Higher Education Research and Development*. 6:2. Pp. 109-119.

Betts, J.R. & Morell, D., 1999. "The Determinants of Undergraduate Grade Point Average: The Relative Importance of Family Background, High School Resources, and Peer Group Effects". *Journal of Human Resources*. 34:3. Pp. 268-293.

Bonazzo, C.B. & Wong, Y.J. 2007. "Japanese International Female Students' Experience of Discrimination, Prejudice and Stereotypes. *College Student Journal*. 41:3.Pp. 631-639.

Brodigan, R.2005. "Demographic Perfect Storm: New England Confronts a Shortage of College-Bound Students". Postsecondary Education Opportunity & US Department of Education...

Cohn, E., Cohn, S., Balch, D.C., and Bradley, J. 2003. "Determinants of undergraduate GPA's: SAT scores, High School GPA and High School rank". *Economics of Education review*. 23:6. Pp. 577-586.

College Entrance Examination Board. 2003. *The College Board Handbook. 2004. 41st Edition*. Plano, TX: College Board Publications.

Douglass, J.A. & Edelstein, R. 2009. "The Global Competition for Talent – The Rapidly Changing Market for International Students and the Need for a Strategic Approach in the US" *Change Magazine* & Universities Going Global. University of California, Berkeley.

Douglass, J.A. 2006. "The Waning of America's Higher Education Advantage: International Competitors are no Longer Number Two and Have Big Plans in the Global Economy. CSHE 9:06.

Ewell, P.T. & Jones, D.P. 1993. "Actions Matter: The Case for Indirect Measures in Assessing Higher Education's Progress on the National Education Goals". *Journal of General Education*. 42. Pp. 123-148.

Feldman, K. & Newcomb, T. 1969. *The Impact of College on Students*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Forelle, C. "Many Colleges Ignore New SAT Writing Test". *Wall Street Journal* – Eastern Edition.

Freedle, R. 2003. "Correcting the SAT's Ethnic and Social Class Bias: A Method for Re-estimating SAT Scores". *Harvard Educational Review*. 73:1. Pp. 1-43.

Gose, B. 2007. "Author! Author! Colleges Struggle to Evaluate Applicants' Writing". *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

Hamp-Lyons, L. 2005. "What is Writing? What is 'scholastic aptitude'? What are the Consequences? SAT 1 Writing – a trip down memory lane". *Assessing Writing* 10. Pp. 151-156.

Hawkins, D.A., & Lautz, J. 2005. State of College Admission. Alexandria, Virginia: National Association for College Admission Counseling. Retrieved February 7, 2008 from <http://www.nacacnet.org>.

Honawar< v. 2005. "Colleges Hesitate to Embrace SAT Writing Test". *Education Week*.

Kelley, R.L. 2007. "Report on Admission Standards for First-Time Entering Freshmen (F.Y. 2006-07). Ref.: Act 629 of 1988, *The Cutting Edge* & [Section 59-104-10(A)] & [Section 59-103-45(3)].

Macan, T.H., Shahani, C., Dipboye, R.L. & Phillips, A.P. 1990. "College Students' Time Management: Correlation with Academic Performance and Stress. *Journal of Educational psychology*. 82:4. Pp.760-768.

MacGowan, B. 2005. "The Student Written Essay and the New SAT". *Journal of College Admission*. 186. Pp.2-3.

McFadden, K. & Dart, J. 1992. "Time Management Skills of Undergraduate Business Students". *Journal of Education for Business*.68:85-88.

Nonis, S. A. & Hudson, G.J..2006. "Academic Performance of College Students: Influence of Time Spent Studying And Working". *Heldref Publications*. Pp. 151-159.

Rhine, S.L. 1989. "The Effect of State Mandates on Student Performance". *American Economic review*. 79. Pp. 231-235.

Selvadurai, R. 1992. "Problems Faced by International Students in American Colleges and Universities. *Community Review*. 12:1-2. PP.27-32.

Tatar, S. 2005. "Classroom Participation by International Students: The Case of Turkish Graduate Students". *Journal of Studies in International Education*. 9:4. Pp. 337-355.

Turner, Y. 2006. "Students from Mainland China and Critical Thinking in Postgraduate Business and Management Degrees: Teasing out Tensions of Culture, Style and Substance". *International Journal of Management Education*. 5:1.pp. 3-11.

Wadhwa, V., Saxenian, A L., Freeman, R., Gereffi, G., Salkever, A. 2009. "America's Loss is the World's Gain. America's New Immigrant Entrepreneurs", Part IV. Kauffmann Foundation.

Zhao, C-M, Kuh, G.D. & Carini, R.M. 2005. "A Comparison of International Student and American Student Engagement in Effective Educational Practices". *The Journal of Higher Education*. 76:2.Pp. 209-231.

Zwick, R. 2007. "College Admission Counseling". Report for *National Association for College Admission Counseling*. Pp. 1-44.