

Prepare for a Distinct 2020 New Student Vision

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Assuming that our campuses will function in a relatively normal fashion in the fall, what sort of student life might we anticipate? Aside from the health precautions which might limit formal class meetings and student activities, our colleges will welcome a transformed student population. *Whether they be returning or new, these students will have a new vision of life in America.*

Some will have been actively involved in protest activities and witnessed first-hand an American reality that is contrary to the country's stated values. Others will have been daily/hourly exposed to pictures, videos, and other media that explicitly portrayed the ugliness of racism. Yet another segment will be confirmed in the notion that no injustices really exist. Regardless, the student population will have been sensitized to an environment that is changing.

There have been discussions comparing the protests of the late 1960s to the present time. Having been involved in Student Affairs between 1967 and 1978, I can see some similarities and many differences. My college was located in a suburb of Chicago where racial tensions and physical confrontations extended into the campus.

The student population was all-male, 90% White, and largely from Chicagoland's southside. The Black students constituted a very small minority and were from the city as well as the East Coast. Beside Viet Nam protests, there was a rising awareness of racial injustices in society at large as well as within the college. Along with many other higher education institutions, our college was ill-prepared for the sharply distinct lines between Black and White students. Few White students had the experience and understanding to see the world, even briefly, through Black students' eyes.

A major difference in the 2020 White students is the fact that they have had opportunities, through education, team sports, music, etc., to understand and empathize with their Black and Brown counterparts. They have even confiscated and copied their music. And even more importantly, they have literally marched together this summer.

As a result, our 2020 students will come to campus with new insights and awareness of one another. Armed with this new consciousness, they will expect more from our schools' leadership, faculty, and staff. Our educational mission and values will be tested and challenged for their sincerity and credibility. How can we capitalize on this rare opportunity?