

Improving Undergraduate Education in America: The Views of Faculty and Graduate Students.

Do faculty and graduate students differ in their opinions on how to improve undergraduate education in America? Data from the Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education provided an answer to the above question. The data for this study were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA), www.TheARDA.com, and were collected in 1975 by Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, Survey Research Center, University of California, Berkeley.

It was a national survey of faculty and graduate students with samples of 25,262 faculty members and 21,851 graduate students. The survey had five common questionnaire items for both faculty and graduate students on how to improve undergraduate education in America. The items had four responses, strongly agree, agree with reservations, disagree with reservations and strongly disagree. The stem of common items was, Undergraduate education in America would be improved if:

All courses were elective.

Grades were abolished

Students were required to spend a year in community service at home or abroad.

Course work was more relevant to contemporary life and problems.

More attention was paid to the emotional growth of students and if there were less emphasis on specialized training and more on broad liberal education.

Frequency distributions of faculty and graduate students' responses on the items were computed and analyzed. The results were compared to determine if there were significant differences in the opinions of the two groups on how to improve undergraduate education in America.

A large majority of faculty and graduate students disagreed that undergraduate education in America would be improved if all courses were electives. About 88% of faculty and 79% of graduate students did not believe that making all undergraduate courses electives would improve undergraduate education. Neither did they believe that abolishing grades would improve undergraduate education in America as indicated by 82% of faculty and 67% of graduate students who disagreed with elimination of grades as a means to improve undergraduate education.

Differences between faculty and graduate students were found in the intensity of disagreement with all elective undergraduate courses and elimination of grades. Sixty percent of faculty as compared to 41% of graduate students "strongly disagreed" with all elective undergraduate courses. More than half, 56% of faculty members "strongly disagreed" with abolishing grades. Only 32% of graduate students felt the same way. In general more graduate students than faculty believe that if students were required to spend a year in community service at home or abroad, course work were more relevant to contemporary life and problems and more attention were paid to the emotional growth of students, undergraduate education in America would be improved. Many faculty members agreed with reservations to the above strategies for improving undergraduate education. The frequency distributions of

both faculty and graduate students on the common questionnaire items showed quantitative differences in their opinions. In addition, there were also within group statistically significant differences in opinions on how to improve undergraduate education.

The faculty group consisted of 78% males and 22% females. The data showed statistically significant differences between the opinions of males and females on how to improve undergraduate education in the nation.

From all elective courses, no grades, one year of community service at home or abroad, courses relevant to contemporary life and problems, more attention to students' emotional growth to less emphasis on specialized training and more on broad liberal education, females were more likely to agree that the above list of changes would improve undergraduate education in America. For example, 75% of females compared to 62% males agreed that undergraduate education would be improved if more attention were paid to the emotional growth of students. i.e., the odds of a female agreeing that more attention to students' emotional growth would improve undergraduate education were about 1.8 times the odds of a male agreeing to the same statement. , The opinions of faculty members who characterized themselves politically as liberal on how to improve undergraduate education were as expected.

Liberals were more likely to agree on the specific changes suggested in the questionnaire items than faculty members who described themselves as conservatives. On some items, the differences between liberals and conservatives were quite substantial. In particular, responses to the item "Undergraduate education in America would be improved

if there were less emphasis on specialized training and more on broad liberal education” showed that the odds of a liberal endorsing this statement were about 2 times the odds of a conservative endorsing the same statement. There were similar differences in opinion on the questions within the graduate students. On all the items, elective courses, no grades, one year of community service at home or abroad, courses relevant to contemporary life and problems, or more attention to students’ emotional growth, significantly larger percentages of females than males indicated that they would improve undergraduate education. Like faculty liberals, graduate students who characterized themselves politically as liberals were more likely to agree that all the items would improve undergraduate education than the conservative graduate students.

Summary

The results of the analysis of faculty and graduate students’ data show that there were similarities and differences in the opinions of the two groups on how to improve undergraduate education in America. Faculty showed more reservations in their endorsements than graduate students. Analysis of within group opinions revealed that female faculty members and female graduate students were more likely to agree that the changes would improve undergraduate education. Liberals in both groups were also more likely than conservatives to agree that the suggested changes would improve undergraduate education in America.

LV11101