Experts say students confident

By Patricia McCormack
UPI Education Editor

Social scientists, college deans, teachers and others peer at contemporary college students and say—"They're different" from those of the Sixties.

Such an observation takes no great talent in analysis. Today's students are not the same humans that filled the schools in the Sixties.

Nevertheless, there's a certain amount of nostalgia along the academic trail for the generation gap that so plainly showed in the Sixties.

No administrator wants to bring back the riots of these years but many would like students who aren't carbon copies of their parents.

At parent's day Kingman Brewster, president of Yale, recently told the moms and dads he sometimes "grows nostalgic for the generation gap."

"Parents, these students are just like you," he said.

The parents, and I for one, didn't know whether to be thrilled or depressed by the remark.

Dr. Ronald Jackson, dean of Student Life at the University of Rochester since 1966, has done something better than just make puzzling remarks about the different crops of students.

Back in 1967 he spoke and wrote about "salvation, trial and individualism"—a report actually on attitudes of Rochester students of the Sixties. And recently he polled contemporary students—probing their attitudes.

Highlights of the two reports:

—In 1960s students showed great faith in the idea of education as key to everything desirable in life. Education had virtually replaced religion as the new salvation.

—Students of the Sixties displayed a kind of basic anxiety and an alienation from adults unparalleled in previous generations. This showed in clothes, manners, morals, politics.

—Students of the Sixties saw themselves as a people untested and very much in need of trials by which they could prove their worth to themselves and to others.

—Students of the Seventies have far less faith in education as a means of solving social or individual problems.

—In contrast to the sixties when they felt no sense of physical challenge, students today are much more involved in the challenge represented by jobs, professional training and earning a living in general.

—Students of yesteryear almost totally divorced from reality outside the education sphere.

—Job goals of today's incoming students are tendering to be broader than previously. This might mean a lessening of individual stress attributable to intense competition for entrance to one of only a few careers.

Dean Jackson feels that today's situation has brought about a reduction in students, negative attitudes toward adults. They actually come to adults for advice again and listen.

He recalled that during a recent issue at the university, the students wanted information from both sides, and didn't want to commit themselves either way until they felt that they had some logical basis for decision.

In the Sixties a partisanship was more readily generated and students could be quickly polarized.

At Rochester and according to reports from other campuses, students today consult university offices more.

Dean Jackson believes student apathy is dropping off and that there is a trend to students wanting to become joiners again. But that's not all.

Students seem to be dressing better. No longer do they use clothing to convey personal despair.

The ethic of extreme individualism of the Sixties seems to be lessening. One result: upper classmen are helping freshmen and freshmen are helping freshmen.

There's less "free floating" hostility on campus now than there was in the Sixties, according to the dean's survey.

The dean also found that student's great alienation from and disillusionment with the system have been tempered in the post-Watergate times by members of the system having been called to account for their actions.

The current crop of students does not include something common in the student body in the Sixties—males who were in college to keep out of the military draft.

It was the first time in history that going to college could save one out of the draft while a "hot" war was going on.

No one ever will know how much such compulsory higher education contributed to unrest and turmoil on the campus in the Sixties.

Today's students of their own free will are in college, that is where they want to be—for an education.

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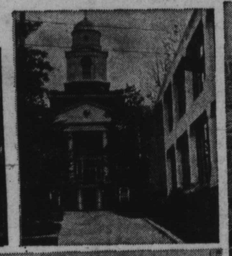
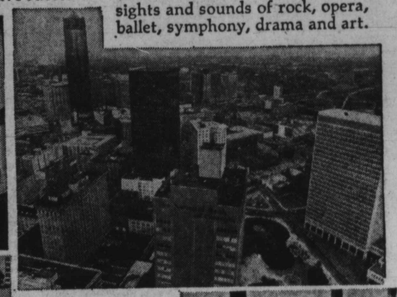

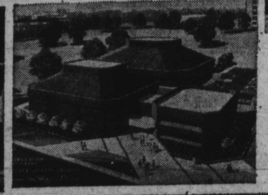

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