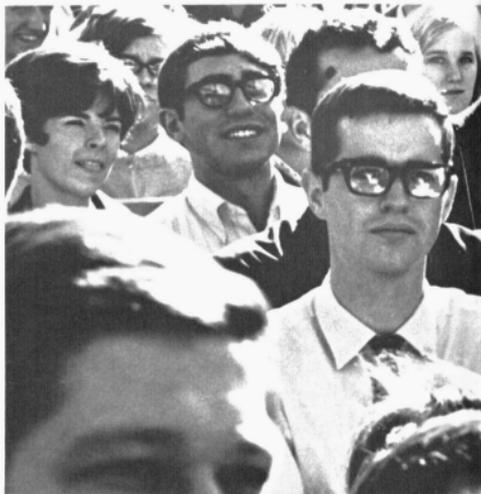




## STUDENT ATTITUDES — POLITICAL ISSUES

By TOM BAKER and DAVID LEUTHOLD

Surveys show Columbia campus students to be "respectable and middle class," although somewhat more liberal than their elders, especially in the area of civil rights



Many alumni undoubtedly have been perplexed and amazed at the actions and attitudes of today's college students. The Berkeley student revolt of 1964 marked the beginning of a new era in student demands. One might guess that a few grads wished that their generation had exhibited the spunk of the Berkeley students, but most probably disapproved of this type of student behavior.

Student uprisings soon spread across the country, even hitting campuses like Central Missouri State College and Lincoln University. Although the Columbia campus has been relatively quiet, students have engaged in a number of protests and demonstrations, the most notable being a 1967 "chalk-in" when 1000 students gathered at the Boone County Court House to protest 30-day and 45-day jail sentences imposed on students who had chalked such slogans as

"Free Love For Sale Here" on a campus sidewalk. Last fall the threat of student demonstrations were thought to be real enough that campus Young Democrats cancelled a campaign appearance by Governor Warren Hearnes after hearing reports of planned protests.

It is, of course, very difficult to explain the whys and what-fors of the student movement, but some preliminary indications about the characteristics and attitudes of today's students are now available from surveys of University of Missouri-Columbia students. A random sample of 175 students on the Columbia campus was interviewed in December 1966 and another random sample of 105 students was interviewed in April 1968. Because some of the questions in the two student surveys had also been asked in two state-wide surveys, June 1965 and May 1968, comparisons can be made of the attitudes of



students and other Missourians, giving some indication of the amount of agreement or disagreement between students and their elders.

The student interviews, about 30 minutes in length, were administered and coded by trained students. The 1966 interviews were conducted in person while the 1968 interviews were conducted by telephone. In each case interviews were completed with only about 60 per cent of the original sample with many of the non-respondents being commuters who lived in nearby towns. This comparatively low response rate and the relatively small number of interviews in each survey increase the potential for error, but the demographic characteristics found on each survey are sufficiently similar to leave us with some confidence in the data. The state-wide surveys were conducted by the professional staff of the Public Opinion Survey Unit, University of

Missouri-Columbia, with interviews being conducted with about 900 Missourians chosen as part of a probability sample. Such surveys are conducted regularly in order to provide faculty and students with research data on the characteristics and attitudes of Missourians.

A campus in mid-Missouri would not seem the most likely gathering place for a group of radicals, and data from the student surveys indicate that the student body is predominately middle class and respectable. Two-thirds of the students come from white collar and professional homes, though such homes constitute only one-third of the state's total. Most of the students who think in terms of social classes consider themselves as part of the middle class. Church attendance is apparently as high on campus as across the state.

Some indication of the extent to which the

## Attitudes of Students and Missourians on Selected Issues

“Here is a list of public issues that people have debated for years. With regard to each one, should it be increased, decreased, or stay as it is?”

### SUPPORT SCORES\*

	July 1965 State	Dec. 1966 Student	May 1968 State	April 1968 Student
Government ownership or control of natural resources, things like oil wells, atomic energy, or electric power	.48	.45	.45	.46
Use of federal government money for slum clearance and public housing	.71	.74	.68	.80
Enforcement of the Supreme Court's orders to integrate public schools	.51	.66	.56	.79
Foreign aid	.26	.35	+	.30
American military involvement in the Viet Nam War	.52	.54	+	.42
Defense or military spending	.56	.54	+	.42

+ not asked

(Higher scores indicate greater support)

\*Support scores are determined by giving a weight of 1.0 to each “increase” response, 0.5 to each “stay as it is” response, and 0.0 to each “decrease” response, summing these weights and dividing by the number of respondents who answered the question. **Thus scores closer to 1.0 indicate greater support, while scores closer to 0.0 indicate less support.**

Sources: State-wide surveys in 1965 and 1968 by Public Opinion Survey Unit, University of Missouri-Columbia. Student surveys in 1966 and 1968.

student body is radical, if it is, can be gained by comparing student responses with state-wide responses on questions of public policy. These data are summarized in the table. Questions about the desired magnitude of two domestic economic policies, government ownership or control of natural resources, and slum clearance and public housing, showed student attitudes to be almost exactly the same as state-wide attitudes. The similarity is, in fact, surprising because these students are disproportionately descended from families who usually hold more conservative views on domestic economic policies. It may be that student views, while similar to those of the state-wide citizenry, are nevertheless a little more liberal than the views of their parents.

On the issue of foreign aid, both students and Missourians were, on the whole, opposed, but students gave slightly stronger support to it than did citizens across the state, with the strongest support coming from the students with higher grade-point averages.

The data on militarism and Viet Nam are not sufficiently comparable to make firm conclusions. When asked about the magnitude of American military involvement in Viet Nam, student responses in 1966 were almost exactly the same as state-wide responses in 1965, — about one-third of each group asking for an increase, and one-fourth asking for a decrease. These results, which seem surprising in view of the student protests against the Viet Nam war, should be considered cautiously because the student survey was taken about 18 months after the state-wide survey, and the American involvement was greatly increased during this interval. Furthermore, by 1968 student support for military involvement in Viet Nam had decreased sharply, and campus opposition was widespread. This opposition also was reflected in a decrease of support for defense spending, an issue on which student attitudes in 1966 had been similar to those for the state in 1965. Unfortunately, simi-

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lar questions were not asked on the 1968 survey to determine state-wide attitudes.

A distinct difference was found between student and state-wide views on one issue — civil rights. When asked their views about "enforcement of the Supreme Court's orders to integrate public schools," students were much more in favor of increased enforcement than state citizens. Such a difference should be expected because previous studies have shown that more highly educated persons are more liberal on civil rights. Student attitudes suggest, however, that civil rights is the hallmark of this college generation, since current students are even more liberal than those state respondents who have at least some college education. The suggestion is strengthened by the finding that, among college-educated state-wide respondents, the most substantial support for civil rights came from the 20 to 24 age group. Furthermore, the amount of student support for civil rights increased much more sharply between 1966 and 1968 than did the amount of state-wide support.

In summary, students at the University of Missouri-Columbia are respectable and middle class, holding views much like those of their elders, except on the civil rights issue. Civil rights is probably the historical key, because civil rights was one of the first areas in which protests and demonstrations proved politically effective. Consequently it is not surprising that other groups who felt that they were outside the formal power structure, such as students at universities, adopted these techniques.

In the December 1966 survey students were asked if they had ever participated in a protest or demonstration. Only 3 per cent had, but on a campus of this size, 3 per cent was equivalent to 500 students. In addition the 3 per cent were, for the most part, top students academically. (A May 1967 survey of student body Senators — the elected representatives — showed that 19 per cent of these leaders — a much higher percentage — had engaged in such activities.) These data would indicate that we can expect more and more students to engage in such protests on issues which are important to them. The surveys indicate that civil rights and opposition to the war in Viet Nam are such issues at the present time. □