

## EDUCATION AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Thomas J. Espenshade's research focuses on diversity in higher education. He is directing the National Study of College Experience, funded by the Mellon Foundation. It is a multi-institution collaborative study whose purpose is to better understand how pre-college courses, activities, social networks, and people's race and social class backgrounds affect their experiences in applying to and attending academically selective colleges and universities in the United States. Results from the NSCE will give a 20-year perspective on the paths that different students follow through selective colleges and universities, with a particular focus on the race and social class dimensions of elite college admission and campus life. There are approximately 250,000 student records in the NSCE institutional data base, supplied by ten participating colleges and universities on all their applicants for admission to the fall semester of 1983, 1993, and 1997. In addition, more than 9,000 students responded to a student survey. An innovative feature of the NSCE is that it gathers data on all applicants for admission, not just all enrolled students. This makes it possible to examine how students prepare for admission to top schools, how these strategies differ by race and class, and which ones are ultimately effective and which ones are not. A book based on this project, titled *No Longer Separate, Not Yet Equal: Race and Class in Elite College Admission and Campus Life* (with Alexandria Walton Radford), was published in 2009 by Princeton University Press.

Espenshade has begun new work using the NSCE data. In one project, Espenshade and statistical programmer Chang Chung are investigating the strength of race-based affirmative action when it is assumed that admission deans at selective colleges and universities are evaluating applicants in the context of other candidates from the *same* race-ethnic groups instead of all students in the applicant pool. In related work, Espenshade and Chung are studying the implications of decisions at an increasing number of selective colleges not to require scores on the SAT and ACT tests. Micro-simulation analysis will permit an examination of the impacts on racial and economic diversity, as well on measures of academic performance among admitted students, when scores on standardized tests are ignored and more weight in admission decisions is given to high school grades, strength of the high school curriculum, and extracurricular activities. A paper by Espenshade and Chung titled "Diversity Implications of SAT-Optional Admission Policies at Selective Colleges" was presented at a conference on Rethinking College Admissions at Wake Forest University. A book chapter is forthcoming in 2011.

Espenshade and sociology graduate students Joanne Golann and Kerstin Gentsch are using the NSCE data to explore whether the "mismatch hypothesis" characterizes the academic behaviors of Latinos at elite colleges.

To understand better the opportunities and challenges posed by greater racial diversity on America's college campuses, Thomas Espenshade is working with other faculty at Princeton University to direct the Campus Life in America Student Survey (CLASS) project. The CLASS project is an educational research and policy study focused on two areas: how campus life and learning are affected by diversity; and how institutional policies and programs can best be organized to maximize the benefits of diversity. This study examines students' engagement in and satisfaction with diversity experiences at six colleges and universities. One set of questions involves students. What impacts are these transformations having on students? How are things going from the students' perspective? Does a diverse educational environment help to shape students' behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions? Are students engaged in these transformations or relatively distanced from them? How involved are students with members of other

racial and ethnic groups? How satisfied are they with their diversity experiences? The University of Michigan has so far successfully argued that there is a compelling need for diversity in higher education. Can we quantify the educational benefits of diversity? Do students learn more about themselves and the world around them when working and studying in a racially diverse environment? Do they develop more tolerant attitudes if they are in contact with students whose racial and ethnic backgrounds are different from their own? Wave I of the CLASS project collected survey data from 12,000 freshmen and juniors at the six participating institutions as well as programmatic and policy data directly from the institutions themselves. Student data have addressed engagement in and satisfaction with campus diversity, extent of social interaction, and academic underperformance. These data will be linked with institutional practices to understand what campus administrators can do to maximize the educational benefits of diversity. In Wave II, the investigators sought to re-interview all students who responded to the Wave I survey and who were freshmen in September 2004. The re-interview response rate was over 50 percent.

Espenshade, Scott Lynch, and sociology graduate student Jayanti Owens are beginning new work using CLASS project data to examine the determinants of academic underperformance. They are modeling academic aspirations at the beginning of the freshman year in college; academic performance during the first two years of college, including how performance is related to initial aspirations; and how academic performance in college may modify academic aspirations that are expressed at the beginning of the freshman year in college.