
The central theme of this book is well summarized by the old saying, "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink." Milton begins his book by questioning whether what the college teacher does in the classroom is really important. Students who learn on their own, without the benefit of the classroom, perform just as well on examinations as do their "more advantaged" counterparts, and he cites research evidence to support his argument.

For professors previously convinced of their own importance, this is sure to cause deep-seated unease for thousands. Milton does not stop here but raises a wide variety of other questions sure to strike fear in a tradition-minded profession: Are some students actually being harmed by being kept in school too long? Is there a relationship between formal education and on-the-job performance? Does the scramble for grades and credentials promote or hinder learning?

Milton appears to have some clear answers to these and other questions—answers based on documentary evidence and his own 20 years of teaching and experimentation in the classroom. Indeed, there is reference even to basic research on learning in the course of his discussion (much of it outmoded), in itself an unusual feature in a book on higher education. These arguments are sufficiently well documented as to require that informed faculty members, administrators, legislators, and trustees give his ideas a fair hearing.

The major flaw in this book, as I see it, is that it deals with the problem of student learning in isolation. Many of the changes he suggests (most of which are still open to serious question) have implications not only for student learning but for other equally important functions of higher education as well, particularly at the university. If it is true that most college students can learn independently of the classroom, the question arises as to how college professors (and administrators) ought to spend their time. Perhaps for some it is appropriate that they develop closer personal relationships with their students. But, for others no doubt it might be better that they spend more, not less, time in the creation of new knowledge, in writing the books, and in giving lectures on material not contained in available books. These are the sources from which students and others may learn. (It may be worth noting in passing that, as Milton himself suggests, those professors and administrators who are most open to the sort of "alternatives" proposed are most often precisely those who are the least productive and creative in their research and scholarship.)

Although I am skeptical of some of the author's proposals, the book is well written and has a number of redeeming features (e.g., Milton makes the important suggestion that "much of the significance [in current research in higher education] may be submerged in statistics"—in the future, research should examine more closely the learning of individual students). For these and its other good qualities, I recommend the book to those in higher education who are interested in "alternatives."—JOSEPH M. SCANDURA, University of Pennsylvania.