

## Student Bodies

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# Student Bodies

*The Influence of*

STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES *in*  
AMERICAN SOCIETY & MEDICINE

*Heather Munro Prescott*

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## Foreword

ALEXANDRA MINNA STERN

✍ HOWARD MARKEL

Today, almost any college student suffering from seasonal allergies, in need of a flu shot, or interested in contraception takes access to the university health service for granted. Little does he or she know that this now integral part of the university system has a long and fascinating history that stands at the intersection of medicine, education, and adolescent health.

Luckily for us, Heather Munro Prescott explores this important topic in *Student Bodies: The Influence of Student Health Services in American Society and Medicine*. The result of extensive research in university archives throughout the country and informed by the author's broad expertise in the history of child and adolescent health, this book traces the evolution of university and college health services from the mid-nineteenth century to the present. As Prescott demonstrates, this is a story of how medical advancements and priorities affected young Americans as well as a tale of "bringing outsiders in"—of the increasing diversification of student bodies in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, and other forms of social identity.

As Prescott insightfully shows, the concerns and capacities of university health services were shaped by the context and era in which they arose. For example, at the turn of the twentieth century, apprehension over the university admittance of the "weaker sex" was often expressed as admonitions about women's supposedly frailer physical constitution and the potential

damage that increased brain activity might have on the female reproductive system. Such gender anxiety in turn affected men, who were expected both to acquire the manly skills of rational thinking and athletic vigor and to avoid the menace of “unnatural” homosocial intimacy. This was the case at white- as well as black-serving universities, such as Tuskegee and Howard, where faculty and administrators were particularly concerned with properly educating young African American men to “uplift the race.”

Later, during the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s, universities frequently became the epicenters of student protest. Clamors for the transformation of many aspects of student life and campus administration, including health services, were heard from Cambridge to Berkeley. Many student activists were incensed by the perceived medical paternalism of campus doctors, and various constituencies, including ethnic minorities, the disabled, and gays and lesbians, demanded representation on university health boards as well as in national groups such as the American College Health Association. This process only intensified with the appearance of AIDS in the 1980s, as many students insisted on HIV testing and “safe sex” education, which eventually became a routine part of life for most young Americans in college.

Anyone who has attended college or university will recognize many of the book’s overarching themes. Indeed, *Student Bodies* aptly illustrates the adage that the more things change, the more they remain the same. College students long have been understood as a vulnerable group making the delicate transition into adulthood and autonomy. It is striking that more than 150 years ago, the faculty at Amherst College warned parents of the “dangers” particular to “College life,” citing drunkenness, smoking, sexual improprieties, and gambling, among many others, as potential problems. Fast-forward to today, when parents and faculty alike share many of the same concerns about the deleterious impact of binge drinking, unhealthy eating, and drug abuse on college students.

Just as *Student Bodies* documents how universities and key organizations such as the American College Health Association and the American Social Hygiene Association helped to create the specialized field of college health and mechanisms for prepaid health coverage, the book also emphasizes the critical role of students as historical actors. This message could not be more relevant today, when the percentage of high school graduates enrolled in college or universities is at a historic high of nearly 70 percent. If we care about the generations who will lead this country into the future,

it behooves us to care about access to and the quality of health services at American college and universities. *Student Bodies* illuminates how university health services developed over time to become what they are today; a wide set of stakeholders—students, faculty, administrators, doctors, nurses, educators, and lawmakers—will determine the future role of these services.

## Acknowledgments

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Numerous archivists and librarians have helped with the research on this project. At Central Connecticut State University, I am especially indebted to the tireless efforts of Interlibrary Loan librarian Kimberly Farrington and her staff for their speed and efficiency in handling my voluminous requests. Radcliffe archivist Jane Knowles, reference head Ellen Shea, and other staff at the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America have provided invaluable assistance throughout this project, beginning when I was an honorary visiting scholar at the library in 1998-99. My first foray into the history of college health was

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