

THE FRESHMAN DILEMMA: A NEED FOR SOMETHING UNIQUE

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The average American college and university has tended to forget about its most important, visible, and salable product--its students. Much time and effort has gone into developing new major areas of study for new outlets of employment, but comparatively less has been spent assisting the student in discovering which field(s) of concentration best coordinates with his personality, attitudes, expectations, and goals. This discovery could well be facilitated by the implementation of a student personnel service agency--a college agency broad enough in scope to keep abreast of curricular, occupational, and general career information trends on the college level, and yet small enough to pass this wealth of knowledge on to prospective college freshman on a personal basis, in addition to offering individual academic and personal counseling to the freshman once he is enrolled.

Because many high school students receive inappropriate or outdated information about what to expect at college, a source of information is necessary which presents many possible behaviors at college as well as discussions of what colleges do, what they are supposed to do, and what options students have. No single volume could ever depict all possible behaviors because of the great variation in students' personalities and in the colleges themselves. (Barclay, Crano, Thornton, & Warner, 1971)

High school counselors cannot be expected to keep as well informed of these changes as they would like. Even college counselors have difficulty digesting the curricular changes and current computer research printouts indicating the marketability of certain careers.

Career and occupational guidance in addition to assistance to the exploratory or undecided student is a problem of serious nature--socially and psychologically. A student not being able to realistically pinpoint his wants and desires is, according to his peer group, not demonstrating the ability to think clearly, to perceive, or to have a positive self-concept.

The subjective side of the sociological picture that has been described, centers about the importance of the choice of an occupation for a young person's perception of himself. Until he finds the place where he fits in the world of work, the young man often has not discovered the kind of person he is. 'In general it is the inability to settle on an occupational identity which disturbs young people.' It is little wonder that students flock to prestige majors in an effort to support their buffeted sense of self through the college years. (Beardsley & O'Dowd, 1960)

This trauma increases as the student prepares for college, considering specifically of course the undecided student, who constitutes approximately 20% of enrolling freshmen. (Beardsley & O'Dowd, 1960) At the student's onset in a university, he usually must choose a degree-granting area within the academic structure to which he will belong for at least four years, therefore obligating him to a specific area with

specific requirements. The only way to become unattached from this obligation is either self-dismissal, or a confrontation with the bureaucracy of red tape encountered when transferring to another area within a university. In other words, it becomes more obvious to a student of age 17, that he must choose his life's occupation in order to accommodate the university structure. How can he better know the alternatives before entering, and throughout the indecisive years of his college career?

Many universities rely on a counseling center to aid the student problems described. However, remedy seems available only for those that are ambitious or forlorn enough to seek assistance. In addition, most counseling centers are not oriented to academic advisement, nor do they have time to keep abreast of curricular changes. They are often more involved with emotionally related cases and the individual testing and analysis service--and rightfully so. In fact, such information provided by an efficient counseling center proves invaluable to an academic and career counselor. Even though career guidance is a vitality in a good counseling center, its reputation of involvement primarily with emotional cases tends to negate the students' utilization of the center. A referral source outside the counseling center must be activated, and created in a position valid enough to assess and relate to the student at the most timely juncture in his college career--as a freshman. This source would deal with freshman and indecisive upperclassmen.

The more complex the structure of a university, the more important it is to have an agency which a freshman can consider unique to him. This agency should be a reliable source of information and guidance from the time a student develops an interest in college until he actually makes some substantial decisions as to his field of concentration. In order to establish validity and a sound, productive base, this agency should have the authority of a college within the university structure. In other words, a college of entry for all students, a University College as it may be called, should exist in every university of any magnitude.

Such a division could make available information about different areas of study, and full-time University College counselors in cooperation with a Dean could encourage the student to consider patterns of interest unique to his individual personality. The prospective freshman would thus be afforded an opportunity to introspect and discover his talents and limitations, in addition to giving him a broader perspective of collegiate opportunities. A student might realize that several fields may interest him, and no specific decisions are necessary until these interests are further explored. In states where small, rural high schools exist, even the basic courses needed to introduce a student to a highly technical, specific major concentration are non-existent. The high school counseling staff, if available, has difficulty keeping abreast of new and various career choices. At this point it becomes the function of a University College to provide this information to the high school staff, and most importantly to the student.

At the same time this information is being offered, a student should become somewhat less anxious and frustrated with the demand for decision, or at least realize that he will have another year of exploration in a college environment before he decides his future.

Among experts in the study of vocational choice the importance of a self-concept in orienting the young person to the occupational world has been given much attention. Super (1957) has suggested that locating a place in the world of work represents in part an attempt to implement one's concept of self as well

as a means of refining and extending it. In Super's system the self-concept can be thought of as a series of hypotheses about the self, which are systematically tested and adjusted to the reality of an occupational role. Bordin (1943) proposed a similar theory of occupational choice in which beliefs about oneself are matched with stereotypes of the characteristics of various occupations in the process of selecting a career. Finally, Roe (1956) points to the fact that occupations are instrumental in the satisfaction of many physiological and psychological needs. They derive much of their importance from the vast range of satisfactions that are controlled by them. (Beardsley & O'Dowd, 1960)

A student who takes advantage of, and properly interprets his year or two of fluid exploration in a University College, should be less frustrated with his indecision and "fictitious" lack of self-concept.

Coupled with the liaison activities in the high schools, a successful University College must provide individualized academic advising and counseling to its incoming patrons. Whether or not this is done during the summer months and/or in conjunction with an orientation program, each university should provide this personalized service before the bulk of upperclassmen appear on campus. Recognizing the diverse profiles of incoming students and the nationwide acceptance and participation in CEEB's (College Entrance Examination Board) advanced placement program known as CLEP (College Level Examination Program), it becomes even more mandatory for individualized program planning. Complete counseling and registration of the new student should occur before the upperclassmen return to campus. This private counseling period would allow each freshman an opportunity to visit extensively with an academic counselor about individual goals and interests, and would make the student feel more a part in the decision making of his destiny and future coursework. It would also give the counselor a chance to deviate from recalling and referring only to test scores, and be more indicative to the student about the importance of the self-concept, attitudes, etc. As William Ambler of Haverford says, "Promise as a student and promise as a person involves much more than scores. Motivation, drive, strength of character, maturity. . . we find important." (Fitzgerald, Johnson, & Norris, 1970)

Once the student is somewhat settled in a university environment, a University College should keep abreast of a student's progress. All undecided and exploratory students should be advised by the University College counselors and given special attention and vocational testing. This should help the student determine a worth and an awareness as he progresses toward a career goal. Feedback to the high schools concerning these and other students will also enable the high schools and the university to better evaluate curriculum, procedures, and changes necessary to improve the transitional stage.

Of course a University College system cannot disregard the existence of the student who already has goals and plans in mind. This student, however, should be assigned an adviser in the specific chosen discipline, with the knowledge that he can alter that decision at any given time. Faculty advisers are not necessarily innately gifted in counseling techniques, which creates the need for a University College and the counseling center to combine talents and provide in-service training programs for such advisers. Such a program should consist primarily of informational sessions, describing and promoting the availability and location of career information. Additional stress should be placed on a follow through of the exploratory theory of "no obligation" for at least a year, thus discouraging faculty from overly promoting their own area of academics.

Closer contact with deficient students would also be a prime responsibility of a University College through its advisement program. The crux is not being placed in any one area of a university, but because a freshman finds himself confronted with a variety of choices and the necessity to eventually make a decision, it becomes exceedingly important to him that he have able and sympathetic advisers available to him--in the faculty, in the University College, and in the counseling center. The responsibility for promoting such activity, however, should be in the University College, if for no other reason than its position within the university hierarchy.

The primary goal of a University College is to provide one central location where freshman students know they can go for assistance or referral for any problem. Many students become lost in the educational riff-raff and don't realize their malady until graduation.

A University College should provide a base for a student entering the university as a freshman until he has chosen the degree college, earned a satisfactory grade point average for admission to the college of the major, and/or met whatever prerequisites the degree college wished to require before admission. A University College could also consider the probability of becoming degree granting for students involved in individualized Honor's Program work, and the two year associate degrees.

The author believes that today's college freshmen do not wish to be persuaded into any career field until they have personally explored and assessed the situation. They desire informational assistance, but they themselves want to determine their marketability as a product and make certain they can be sold to an employer. They want the choices to be their own and not those of a given bureaucracy. A University College provides this flexible framework in which today's college student can initially begin to discover, to generate, and to create situations that will help him find his self-concept.

According to traditional definitions of a student personnel agency, a University College may appear too academic for consideration, but the realization exists that

Another purpose of student personnel work is to individualize higher education. We recognize the presence and significance of individual differences and hope to structure the education of each individual accordingly. Many educational patterns are required if the needs of most students are to be met and the student personnel worker is concerned not only with helping each student discover what his needs are and make appropriate choices but also with helping the college develop the alternatives and resources from which students can make wise choices. We are doing this when we discuss with students their abilities and interests and attitudes, and help them select from the many available resources. We are doing this when we encourage the development of new educational programs. (Berdie, 1966)

A University College would provide a sound, professional, resource center, strategically located in the university hierarchy to promote the total development of the student, and assist in the on-going process of curricular change and institutional definition.

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SUMMER INTERNSHIPS

More and more students are finding it valuable to acquire as much practical experience as possible while they are completing a Masters in College Student Personnel. A year ago in the IUSPA Journal an opportunity was given for persons to volunteer their campuses as off-campus internship sites. This summer, thanks to some of the Alumni, we had five off-campus sites. Students served as Assistant to the President, on the Dean's staff, working with Summer Orientation, and in working with total housing programs.

If you can provide an hourly wage, can provide a room, (a residence hall room is usually free in the summer!) and are willing to have an observer at staff meetings, Indiana can provide you with an Intern for the summer. You will be given basic references of those indicating an interest in your campus, every attempt will be made to provide an opportunity for interviews, and you make the final selection of an Intern. It can and should mean some excellent staff assistance for six, eight or ten weeks. Check your budgets and contact Dr. Elizabeth Greenleaf if you are able to consider a Summer Intern or if you have further questions.

ORIENTATION--IT CAN HAVE AN IMPACT ON STUDENTS

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What would happen if college students moved into the residence halls on Sunday night and started classes Monday morning? Without any prior warning or preparation, would they be prepared for the culture shock of college life? Would a week of dances and movies give them a realistic preview of college, or does an institution of higher education have the responsibility to the student for providing a better transition between living at home and living on his own? It is the contention of these authors that each student does, in fact, need a period of transition, and it is the obligation of the institution to provide such a transition period.

"Orientation" is the vehicle most frequently utilized to provide this transition for the student, but at many institutions the programs labeled "orientation" do little to orient the student to college. Because orientation is, in many cases, the first contact the student has with higher education, it is important that that contact is indicative of college life. It would seem, then, that orientation is important enough to warrant a solid commitment from the institution. It is the intent of this paper to discuss methods of making orientation a fruitful learning experience, representative of college life.

It seems necessary, at this point, to define orientation, as it is viewed by the authors. Orientation is any effort made by the institution to acclimate the student to college living, other than the registration process. This definition has several implications. First, orientation needs to acclimate the student to college living throughout his entire four years. Second, it needs to provide programs for all students, not just for freshmen. Third, orientation needs to provide insight into all facets of college life, not just the social aspects.

In the authors' work with orientation at Indiana University, it was discovered that there are some major problems facing orientation, and these problems need to be recognized before orientation can be realized to its fullest potential at Indiana and probably at other institutions. (1) There seems to be a lack of definition of orientation. That is, administrators, faculty, and students have not taken the time to decide exactly what they want to accomplish with orientation. For example, at Indiana University, one office views orientation as a registration process for freshmen, while another views it as a social and student development process. (2) It is not clear whether orientation should be directed by students or by staff. The authors' experience indicates that it has not been determined if orientation should be left predominantly to the students or if staff should take an active leadership role. (3) Orientation presently is not centralized within one office. Problems exist at Indiana because two major campus agencies share orientation responsibilities. Such a structure brings about problems of accountability, communication, and coordination. (4) Faculty is a valuable resource which has not been utilized fully in the planning and implementation of orientation. Little effort has been made to include them on planning committees or as orientation speakers. (5) An adequate budget has not been allocated to those persons who are responsible for orientation; therefore, innovative programming becomes difficult to institute. (6) Too frequently,