CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION AND THE STUDENT PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATOR

by Norm Davis

With the emerging awareness of the need for penal reform most recently evidenced by the uprisings at Attica State Prison, Attica, New York, student personnel administrators may find themselves in the unique and perhaps enviable position of effecting major changes on correctional campuses. Among the recuests which inmates are making are the desires for revision of existing educational services and the opportunity for higher education programs. No longer are convicted felons content to perform the "institutional industries" of washing dishes in the cafeteria and making license plates. Rather, the old concept of "do your own time" is making way for a newer attitude of "find help in prison."

At the Purdy Treatment Center for Women, a new medium security facility located near Tacoma, Washington, experimental vocational classes have been included in the rehabilitation milieu. Residents may now take instruction in secretarial skills and key punch operations. For those women who desire training which cannot be offered at the Center, work release programs allow them to participate in classes at Tacoma Community College. Likewise, the Washington State Penitentiary at Walla Walla, a maximum security unit for men, offers a program in probation and parole officer training in conjunction with Walla Walla Community College.

Such programs place new burdens on the student personnel administrator. Old problems such as financial aid, discipline, and admissions require new defining in order to cope with students having criminal records. Also, in many cases societal and institutional rejection has been reinforced to the extent that this new breed of student will have a difficult time participating in the classroom experience. Case in point, these adults were often the kids who were expelled from high school or grade school and told never to return.

Correctional education presents two situations which bear examination by the student personnel administrator. The first concerns those residents who are eligible to temporarily leave the correctional setting to attend the college campus. The second situation deals with the extension of the college experience to the correctional campus, i.e., offering classes and training to those residents who are not eligible for work release or other such programs and therefore need the courses offered within the prison.

In the first approach, certain responsibilities are assumed by the prison officials. Screening procedures select those people who indicate that they will not be discipline problems. In fact, at the Purdy Treatment Center, work release regulations are so strict that only model prisoners can qualify. Any violations immediately revoke the work release privileges. Financial

assistance is also provided by the corrections system. Vocational rehabilitation programs receive financial assistance from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare specifically designated for reformatory education. Problems which the administrator will face, however, are more subtle and less definable than discipline and finance. The inmate attending classes on the college campus is faced with adjustment problems which are overwhelming. By the fact that he or she is serving time in prison, the resident is constantly reminded that his reason for being incarcerated is linked to his inability to appropriately deal in a socially acceptable manner with certain pressures and situations which he faced on the "outside". His imprisonment has necessitated a degree of institutionalization in that, within the prison setting, the resident has been compelled to re-identify himself and his self-worth in order to survive. Once inside the classroom, however, the prison coping techniques which he has developed are not adequate. The college administrator may find more than one irate faculty member complaining about the amount of foul language or sexual overtures which the new student contributes. The life of the "con" attending classes is a kind of neurotic balance of "playing the game" in both the classroom and behind the walls and yet struggling to maintain for himself a small degree of self integrity.

The second approach to correctional education consists of bringing the college to the prison. Difficulties which the administrator may face are such things as faculty recruitment, motivation, and attendance problems with the residents. Certain limitations with classroom facilities may alter the types of subjects taught. Botany and geology field trips for example will be a bit confined. The administrator will be constantly called upon to discover, present, and defend a curriculum which can both involve and be of benefit to the residents. If the administrator wishes to educate as well as train, he may well find himself establishing a student bookstore and student government, introducing educational policy committees, providing extracurricular programs of concerts, speakers, and intramurals. In short, the college experience is not all classroom on the college campus and should not be intended to be so on the correctional campus.

That higher education has an extension responsibility is not in question. Where higher education chooses to extend itself, however, is the concern and responsibility of the student personnel administrator. A forward look to corrections shows at least one area of direction.