

AN UNDERGRADUATE'S CONCERN ABOUT STUDENT PERSONNEL
by Margee Greenfield

The undergraduate who indicates any interest beyond the intention to enroll in Student Personnel after graduation is met with charges of impatience and narrow-mindedness. Student Personnel is not an academic discipline, he is told. Those with more varied backgrounds are being placed first and in the most prominent positions. In addition, an undergraduate, it seems, is too close to or too much a part of the nucleus of advisees with whom a student personnel worker comes into contact, and can only achieve the proper maturity and objectivity with the awarding of a diploma. In other words, interested undergraduates are being advised to, "Come back when you grow up." They are discouraged from attempting, in any way, to incorporate their interests into an academic program and are forced to look at graduate school as the only way to gain proper educational-vocational training. In Student Personnel, a department that by definition deals with the plight of the undergraduate, this philosophy seems highly inconsistent.

In defense of Student Personnel and its related opportunities, it must be mentioned that forty junior and senior students were hired this year by the Dean of Students office in the position of Undergraduate Resident Assistants (URA). This does, however, contradict the previously-mentioned "age-maturity-objectivity" contention. Ideally, one would expect URAs to be working with and observing the older and more experienced Resident Assistants. In reality, undergraduates have been dealt, and in most cases have readily accepted and skillfully carried out, equal work loads in both counseling situations and program advisorships, despite the distinction in title and remuneration. Age and situational proximity, expected to be major problems, have in many instances proven to be notable advantages. Other assets include their knowledge of the campus, as well as the unique aspects of residence hall living at Indiana University. They are also acquainted with the administrative red tape that can be avoided or must be endured, and, because of shared academic and social experiences, can offer special insight and empathy to fellow students, especially freshmen. These qualifications, often not held by a graduate student from another campus, when combined with a degree of maturity, which Undergraduate Resident Assistants are assured was a major factor in their selection, offer a valuable and promising contribution to the residence hall program. Only graduate students, however, are offered an academic curriculum and coordinated studies to bolster their residence hall experience.

Student Personnel is not an extremely visible option. A number of students are floundering in psychology, sociology and altogether unrelated fields, wondering where to channel their knowledge, experience, and interest in working with students. Many have a general idea regarding their vocational plans, but are unaware that Student Personnel exists, or that it encompasses such a wide variety of student services. Even academic counselors

seem to overlook the entire area, or, at best, refer to it in terms of future administrative training. With no specific undergraduate requirement for admission to the Student Personnel program, and no available undergraduate course work in the field, students are, in many cases, choosing majors in order to get through their four undergraduate years as painlessly and quickly as possible, so that in graduate school they can continue to pursue the necessary training and exposure in their area of interest.

Ideally, Indiana University could offer a limited undergraduate internship program for those students who are finding their interests and experiences unfulfilling in their major areas, or who merely desire a more challenging, informative exposure to Student Personnel. Interested undergraduates on this campus are, in some cases, willing to offer their services to the Dean of Students office with no request for monetary or curriculum reward, but merely for the opportunity to observe more closely the many areas which it comprises. It is significant that there are not great numbers of undergraduates interested in Student Personnel, but only a few who are anxious to get involved and explore now. They are willing to present their past academic records and experiences, and be exposed to any number of selection processes, in order to gain more exposure.

If in Student Personnel, "the professional personnel worker's chief concern is with creating a campus environment which facilitates the individual's behavioral development,"¹ it seems that the lack of concern shown to sincerely interested undergraduates, indicates a definite inconsistency in their philosophy. In addition, if "the emphasis is to a greater extent on meaningful involvement of students in those activities and concerns which affect their living and learning experiences,"² is it then unreasonable for undergraduates to request a minimum of information and academic experience concerning their future field of study? Is it presumptuous to suggest that the Department of Student Personnel might benefit from its association with informed and concerned undergraduates who have the ability to add a new dimension to the field?

EDITOR'S NOTE: It is of extreme importance to the Student Personnel profession that the voice of undergraduates be heard. Reactions to this or any other articles should be sent to: Editor c/o Dr. Elizabeth Greenleaf, School of Education Room 319, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47401.

¹Walter F. Johnson, "Student Personnel Work in Higher Education: Philosophy and Framework," in College Student Personnel, ed. by Laurine E. Fitzgerald, Walter F. Johnson, and Willa Norris. (Boston, 1970), p. 10.

²Ibid. p. 10.