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The civil rights movement and legislative efforts of the "New Frontier" and "Great Society" served to accelerate acceptance of the idea that universal opportunity also applies to higher education. Many colleges and universities designed experimental and compensatory programs for Negro students with deficient pre-college backgrounds, but few institutions are fulfilling their social obligations. Colleges should conduct open recruiting among high school students to include other disadvantaged groups such as American Indians, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and poor whites in rural and mountain areas, particularly in the South. Academic requirements should be adjusted and techniques should be developed for systematic evaluation of compensatory programs, and dull remedial courses replaced by a new set of stimulating curricular experiences that motivate rather than discourage low-achieving students. The university's obligation extends to the individual student. A broad academic and social counseling and guidance program is necessary, along with provisions for adequate financial aid, for the added burden of loan and job obligations makes scholastic improvement unrealistic. An integrated environment is an important component of equal educational opportunity and minimizes the extent to which disadvantaged students are made to feel rejected or on display. (WM)

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GENERAL UNIVERSITY OBLIGATIONS TO THE DISADVANTAGED STUDENT

A SPEECH

PRESENTED BY

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TO

THE COUNCIL FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE UNIVERSITIES AND LAND-GRANT COLLEGES

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GENERAL UNIVERSITY OBLIGATIONS TO THE DISADVANTAGED STUDENT

The present American University System is, in essence, the result of two great impacts: first, the Morrill Act of 1862 which launched the land grant movement and broadened educational opportunity; second, federal support of scientific research during and following World War II which enlisted many universities in defense and scientific and technological developments. A third impact is now taking form related to a series of developments in the area of human rights, embracing faculty, student and minority group rights. Simultaneously, as the conscience of the nation has been awakened by increasing evidence of the relative inaccessibility of higher education to the lower strata of our society, federal programs (occasionally state and municipal, too) have emerged which have accelerated the opening of higher education, so to speak, to "everyman." In passing, it is interesting to note that the impetus in each stage of change originated in the federal government and in response to a national imperative.

Underlying the civil rights court decisions and legislative efforts of both the "New Frontier" and "Great Society" administrations, there was, we believe, an almost inescapable realization that knowledge has

come to be central to society and that "knowledge, today, is for everybody's sake."[1] With this has come a gradual, and perhaps at times, a rather reluctant and cautious merger of campus and society. The technical universities are as involved in industry and government as the land grant universities ever were in agriculture. New educational media take the classroom into millions of homes. Continuing education involves all of the adult age groups. Various urban areas including downtown sections are serving increasingly as educational laboratories and are involved in university related projects. Clearly, higher education in the United States has added to the land grant idea of service a new dimension of social responsibility. Along with this has come increasing acceptance of the idea that universal opportunity applies to education beyond the high school. Catalytic support for this belief has come from new conceptions of the educability of the "social deprived" and reduced faith in the effectiveness of conventional measures in assessing college potential. As a result, the diversity of college and university populations has increased and a significant segment of educational institutions has deliberately sought to encourage this variety through various experimental and compensatory educational programs especially designed to deal with students presenting weak and deficient pre-college

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1. Clark Kerr, The Uses of the University (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1963), p. 114.

backgrounds.

Although this segment is significant in prestige, it is small in numbers. Although many colleges and universities accept their social obligation in print, disproportionately few participate in practical programs. Those who attempt to fulfill this obligation describe their efforts in an increasing number of publications, but--except for the predominantly Negro institutions--serve very few students.[2] Moreover, these efforts have largely been confined to Negro youth, while this focus, perhaps, reflects the increasingly important role of the Negro people in the life of this nation, it overlooks other disadvantaged groups such as American Indians, Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans and the vast population of socially disadvantaged white youths in the rural and mountain areas, particularly in the South.[3] It is incumbent upon the universities and colleges to correct this neglect.

Beyond this, there are several additional responsibilities regarding the problems of the disadvantaged with which the academic community must deal. First, in many situations, current efforts to attract socially disadvantaged students tend to collide with the trend toward higher and higher admissions standards. Consequently, a number of institutions tend to recruit only those deprived students

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2. Gordon and Wilkerson, Compensatory Education for the Disadvantaged (New York: CEEB, 1966), pp. 153-154.

3. Ibid., p. 154.

with conventionally measured academic promise. It is clear, however, that a genuine acceptance of responsibility requires a commitment to delve into the core of the problem and, therefore, should result in open recruiting and enrolling of "risk" candidates among disadvantaged high school graduates. This, obviously, does not mean, though, that the level of risk should be lowered to such a point that chances for success are not realistic.

Second, more attention needs to be given to the formulation of useful guidelines and instructional principles as a framework for future development. Therefore, it is imperative for the colleges and universities to develop designs and techniques for the systematic evaluation of the various compensatory and remedial programs.

Third, it seems to me that standard compensatory and remedial programs are not sufficient in and of themselves. What is needed is a new set of exciting, challenging, fresh curricular experiences reflecting a complete departure from the dreary pattern of non-credit remedial courses to which low-achieving students have been exposed in the past. It is our belief that these tend to discourage rather than to motivate and to accelerate a kind of academic recoil rather than to promote or stimulate receptivity.

Finally, there is every indication that a commitment on the part of the higher education community to cope with the problem of

the disadvantaged student automatically and realistically involves a decision to enter directly into the field traditionally confined to secondary education. The very existence of this problem clearly suggests that the public school systems have not and probably cannot, without reorganization, devise satisfactory programs for educating socially disadvantaged young people. The institutions of higher education must, therefore, take the lead in discovering and formulating effective teaching and curricular patterns for dealing with the students and then, hopefully, satisfactory teacher preparation programs for the production of the kinds of teachers needed at the secondary level to work with the disadvantaged.

Turning now to a consideration of the university's obligation to the disadvantaged student as an individual, the first point which comes to mind seems so obvious as not to require comment and that is that every effort should be made to provide a comfortable, accepting situation and climate which, particularly in the case of the visibly different students, minimizes the extent to which they are made to feel as though they are rejected or "on display." Even when the motivation in regard to the latter is obviously kind, tensions are inevitably created by either extraordinary attention or specially prescribed expectations, such as assuming the minority student to be unusually knowledgeable about "his group." This

demand frequently leads to a defensive posture. This point is effectively and succinctly made in an interesting article by Arnold Rose on graduate training for the culturally deprived.[4] In addition, although not mentioned by Rose, it is the opinion of this writer that this obligation also requires the same effort with regard to the people and services provided for students in the surrounding community. Frequently, institutional silence about known discriminatory and/or exclusionary practices in the host community creates a suspicion in the disadvantaged student with reference to the fullness and reality of the university's commitment. This suspicion simply adds to his general discomfort, encourages his withdrawal and, we believe, tends to reduce the scope of his learning exposures. Psychologically, this is, in essence, the etiology of the learning disabilities of the disadvantaged.

Parenthetically, it should be noted that institutional surrender to demands for separate dormitories for blacks, separate minority group centers, and other expressions of separatism is not a dimension of the obligation which I describe, but rather a violation of it. While American colleges and universities have grossly neglected a

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4. Arnold Rose, "Graduate Training for the Culturally Deprived," Sociology of Education, Volume XXXIX, 1966, pp. 201-208.

number of legitimate areas of scholarship, including the area of the culture of the blacks, this inexcuseable ethnocentrism cannot be erased or reversed by encouraging equally inexcuseable racial chauvinism in any segment of the student population. If we are committed to the concept of integration, then we must be guided by a basic law of sociology which, in brief, asserts that the more one group accentuates and displays its "out-groupness" the greater is the hostility generated within the "in-group." In other words, a campus community cannot solve its inter-group relations problem by simple symbiotic accommodations, if for no reason other than the fact that humans are more complex than plants and relate to each other best when the barriers of racial and cultural differences are minimized rather than emphasized by ecological spotlighting and symbolism.

Continuing now with general obligations to the individual student, several can be dispensed with rather quickly because they simply represent common sense observations which are included herein only as reminders, so to speak. First, if an institution decides to develop a program for the disadvantaged student, to entice them without provisions for adequate financial aid is to encourage failure. Michigan State University reports that 90 per cent of their inner-city students require 90 per cent or more of total aid.[5] From ex-

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5. Gordan A. Sabine, College Board Review, Fall 1968, No. 69, p. 11.

perience in our own situation where some 2900 students out of 3200 receive some form of aid, we are keenly aware of the fact that if our aid packages involved more out-right grants rather than scholarship-work combinations, loan-work combinations or partial aid formulae, scholarship would improve because students would be less inclined to seek supplemental off-campus employment. It is unrealistic to saddle disadvantaged students with a heavy burden of loan and job obligations where, because of the heavy element of risk in their admission, they need to devote maximum time to their studies. Second, our experience suggests that a broad program of guidance and direction is necessary, focused not only on the ABC's of college life but on the dimimution of those personality and behavioral components reflecting the accumulated bitterness and frustration toll of the student's social station. This program may even involve attention by counselors to problems and pathologies alien to and violative of their frame of values, related to student-family relations, student-police relations, civil rights, amoral and immoral postures regarding sex, money, and responsibility and many other areas. The Vice President for Special Projects at Michigan State[6] has referred, in a recent typology of the disadvan-

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6. Gordan A. Sabine, Ibid., p. 13.

taged student, to the "disorganized-disadvantaged" and it is this group particularly which requires the type of counseling referred to above and may even require such, on more than the relatively informal basis of general college counseling. Incidentally, the two other types described at Michigan were the "poverty-disadvantaged" and the "behind (academically)-disadvantaged." The latter suggests the third of this set of obligations, namely, the need to provide some mechanism for tutoring in the tool subjects (i.e., English, speech, mathematics and arithmetic operations, and reading) and for additional "catch-up" experiences as needed in active support of college level study.

Although not in the category of general institutional obligations it may be helpful to express a bias based on some years of experience with programs for the educationally disadvantaged and that is the need to avoid homogeneous groupings and any other stigmatizing identifications. This is advised not so much because such arrangements may not be successful, but rather because students so identified usually develop initial resentments which delay acceptance and understanding of the beneficial goals intended. Any type of format where remediation and compensatory upgrading can be achieved at an individualized pace and with a minimum of institutionalization would seem most desirable.

Finally, we come to a point towards which the writer has ambivalence but which is, perhaps, quite appropriately within the context of the type of obligations under consideration. In some quarters, particularly those characterized by anti-middleclass and anti-establishment views, American higher education is criticized for encouraging the idea that education for the disadvantaged is a means of escaping the wretchedness of the ghettoes. Instead, it is claimed, universities and colleges should emphasize the view that such education is for the purpose of developing leaders who will return to the ghettoes and work for the upward mobility of the ghetto community.[7] It is difficult, of course, not to subscribe to the principles inherent in this point of view, but the question remains whether where a person will ultimately work is not a decision for the individual based on the wisdom derived from his education rather than a proposition to be taught. But then again with the new functional dimension of social responsibility, such an emphasis, in the light of the widening social crisis in this country, may be entirely appropriate. Suffice to say the point needs further examination and discussion.

The disadvantaged student thus compels American colleges

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7. Francis J. Barros, "Equal Opportunity in Higher Education," Journal of Negro Education, Summer 1968, pp. 310-315.

and universities to formulate new answers to the age-old question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" His challenge is that they answer not with affirmations but with deeds, that they devise means and develop programs that will include him. Only when such programs become the norm can American colleges and universities either provide or protect equality of educational opportunity.