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Curriculum for Disadvantaged Students in Higher Education.

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Disadvantaged students are college-age youths who are probably non-white, live in a depressed area, come from low-income families, and need special help in order to be successful in college. Courses in the undergraduate curriculum for the disadvantaged should be built around the identified needs and characteristics of the students and of the surrounding society. The college curriculum has always been designed to make learning an interesting, exciting experience, and to generate intellectual curiosity, a love of knowledge, and an open mind. Since the characteristics of the student population are changing, the curriculum, which has always been geared to meet the needs of students, must also change to provide the same benefits for today's less affluent youth. In educating students for tomorrow's world, cooperative education programs should be adopted on more campuses to train students for supervisory, mid-managerial, and junior executive positions in business and government. Admission and degree requirements should not be lessened, but additional remedial courses will be needed to strengthen the disadvantaged student's ability to cope with regular college work. Ethnic studies that are part of the curriculum should deal with human experience as it complements the study of other cultures, and not offered as isolated educational experiences. With this background of understandings, skills, and attitudes, students will adjust, participate, and contribute to society. (WM)

"CURRICULUM FOR DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION"

(Panel Title: Preparing Higher Education Institutions for the Arrival of Disadvantaged Students of Latent Ability)

Remarks of Dr. Jack H. Aldridge

at the

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CURRICULUM FOR DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Jean Giono, the French writer, once said: "We live in an age in which young people are all so terribly sure of themselves and older people are all so unsure." As an older person, one of the things I'm unsure about is whether or not the college can rescue a youth from a ghetto and put him on a path toward a happy and prosperous future, simply by curricular reform. Yet I'm quite sure that the college must try.

The youth we are concerned with is a socio-economically disadvantaged person of college age, who lives in a depressed area, comes from a low-income family, and is very likely to be unsuccessful in regular college courses without special help. He is probably non-white, but we must not make the mistake (noted by the Rosovsky Committee at Harvard) of referring to him as "culturally deprived" because that can be interpreted as just another assertion of the superiority of the white culture that fails to recognize cultural difference. As some black students say, the only culture they've been deprived of is their own.

In creating a curriculum for this student a functional approach, building courses directly on the basis of his needs and characteristics as well as those of the surrounding society, is the fundamental educational imperative. These needs must be accurately identified, then translated into objectives appropriate to the college. The objectives

should be manageable ones, specifically stated so that their attainment can be measured. By objectives "appropriate to the college" I mean those relating to cognitive and attitudinal change within the individual, not just any worthy end which no other agency desires to pursue . As Jacques Barzun has pointed out, "Faith in education and faith in the integrity and good will of those called educators have accordingly wished upon the mid-century university a variety of tasks formerly done by others or not done at all." I would also exclude objectives growing out of curriculum changes demanded by doctrinaire speakers who hide their age and ambition behind revolutionary phrases. These are the courses whose sole purpose is to bring about immediate social change and whose advocates claim the campus as a medieval sanctuary to defend themselves against the laws of the greater community. Many, but certainly not all, new courses offering credit for "field work" in the ghettoes, among migrant workers, or for tutorial assistance in slum areas, seem to be directed towards ends other the education of the participants.

Even on campus there are those who see the curriculum as providing a base for political action and propaganda. And if the administration does not look with favor upon a proposed course entitled "Instruction in the Theory and Tactics of Guerrilla Warfare" they will set up their own "free university" to offer it the same afternoon. They reject what has been taught before as "mis-education" or "lies" and demand courses of instruction which, to the outsider lacking the gut-ethnic point of view, would seem to be nothing more than bull-sessions with course numbers. The writings of Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, Marcuse, and Chairman Mao, are examined so uncritically as to become a new catechism in such circles.

Irving Kristol, in a recent New York Times article, reported that Harvard now has a course (Social Relations 148) "which enrolls several hundred students and is given for credit, whose curriculum is devised by the S.D.S., whose classes are taught by S.D.S. sympathizers, and whose avowed aim is 'radicalization' of the students."

Curriculum modification has recently been used on many campuses as a concession device to quiet student rebellion through the addition of hastily put together new courses, changing titles of old ones, and dropping prerequisites on others. Avoiding the socio-politically relevant courses insisted upon by the activists does not mean, however, that the college curriculum has nothing to offer toward the eventual solution of urban problems, the plight of racial minorities, the Viet-Nam War, and the individual adjustment problems resulting from a rapidly advancing technology. The undergraduate curriculum cannot address itself to the task of providing final solutions for all problems but it can equip its students to face life's problems intelligently and effectively. It should furnish him with that background of understandings, skills, attitudes and appreciations which he should have to enable him to adjust, to participate, and contribute effectively to the society of which he is a member. As John D. Rockefeller 3rd observed in his article "In Praise of Young Revolutionaries" a few months ago, "for the most part, young people attempt to work within normal channels to present their grievances and establish a dialogue. . . Many of them are preparing for long-term efforts to change society." If they are to be successful, they will need what has been traditionally described as a liberal education, competence in verbal skills, especially the ability to read and write--to use language effectively in the identification and classification of facts and in the formation and and communication of ideas, as well as skill in mathematical computation, the techniques of analysis and generalization, and the capacity for reasoning and a commitment to reasonableness. Efficiency in running a highly technical economy and administrative society places a premium on verbal skills.

Two facts must be acknowledged if we are to educate for to-morrow's world; first, an increasingly larger number of people who have learned to think scientifically will be needed, and, second, most of these people will have to continue to learn throughout their working lives. The implications for the nature of the curriculum are

readily apparent. We are all familiar with the old saw about how giving a man a fish differs from teaching him how to catch a fish for himself. So we should organize the curriculum not so much to concentrate upon subject matter as to make fundamental the nature of conceptual innovation and the processes of conceptual thought. Lewis B. Mayhew, in Eurich's Campus 1980, predicts that "By 1980 the skills most needed to survive will be those of communication. The management and conceptualization of knowledge will become much more important, because the rate of increase in knowledge will be so rapid that concentration on specifics will be futile."

But the curriculum should aim for more than just teaching the student how to think--it should further the real ends of liberal education in college by providing the means of making learning an interesting if not exciting experience; it should effectively generate intellectual curiosity, a love of knowledge, and an open mind. Rather than "turn students off" it should encourage a genuine desire within them to create, as well as to magnify the self, establish personal identity and foster individuality. And all of this must be done for students from impoverished backgrounds, whose parents did not finish the sixth grade, just as it was done for other, more affluent, students in the past.

If the curriculum is designed to meet the needs of students and if the characteristics of the student population are changing, as in fact they are, it follows that the curriculum must change. As institutions of higher education open their doors to more and more persons unlike those who have attended in former years, and these same institutions adjust their purposes to accomodate new requirements, curricular problems intensify. The questions of what should be taught and why, and what should no longer be taught and why, consume much time and energy in countless committees on all campuses. Meanwhile the drive to recruit ever increasing numbers of disadvantaged students for next fall's freshman class goes on. A prominent (but unnamed) professor on the faculty of the College of the City of New York was recently

quoted in the Times as saying: "It's possible City College will become a school to teach reading and writing to black students. This would be a real disaster for blacks as well as whites. It could make the college the level equivalent of a ghetto high school." The importance of curricular questions can be seen in that they rank comfortably along with constitutional rights, personnel policies, and military-oriented research as issues providing the spark that sometimes leads to ugly confrontations between militants and administrators.

Before attempting to design a curriculum, we should be able to describe in behavioral terms the kind of change we hope to bring about in the disadvantaged student. Is the teaching of an employable skill our overriding concern? Do we want him to develop critical thinking ability? Do we want to instill in him a new set of values? Or, do we want to make him just as much like the rest of us as we possibly can? Should he have a voice in the curriculum-designing process? Shall we ask him what he thinks would be a "desirable change" in himself? The correct answers to these questions will vary from one institution to another, depending upon the circumstance and the long-range image the college has of itself. But they had better be answered correctly. Once having decided upon the change deemed beneficial, we must realistically assess our capability of actually causing it to happen, keeping in mind Philip Jacobs' finding, of some years ago, that colleges aren't really successful in changing students' values.

Limitations of time preclude broad discussion of training in specific occupational fields for disadvantaged students. Despite the rapid obsolescence of knowledge there are still possibilities but the burden of precise technical training in the future will be borne to a far greater extent by employers because they alone will be able to provide the newest equipment with which to train individuals for specific tasks. Currently, work experience programs, often referred to as cooperative

education, are found in many colleges, junior colleges, and technical institutes. They provide an excellent way to train youth for a particular occupation by supplementing classroom and laboratory instruction with the learning opportunities of an actual job. These cooperative education programs are effective and should be adopted on more campuses. No longer related only to manual skills, many programs are now offering internships for students who aspire to supervisory, mid-managerial, and junior executive positions in business and government, as is being done successfully at Borough of Manhattan Community College. One danger here is that the work-experience program can become simply an adjunct to the college's financial aid program rather than an educational offering.

Acceptance of the notion that higher education is no longer a private privilege but a public responsibility carries with it the obligation to insure that the lowering of admission barriers is not simply an exercise to give the disadvantaged further practice in failing. Such failure would be inevitable, in most cases, if no modification were made in the traditional curriculum with all its reputed lack of relevance. Instead, if degree standards are to be maintained at graduation, some low-level, basic introductory courses must be offered to strengthen the student's ability to cope with regular college work. All colleges have some courses of this kind now, whether they refer to them as remedial, compensatory, or enriching. More will be needed. As one experienced teacher of the disadvantaged remarked not long ago: "Give them remedial reading--even if you have to call it Nuclear Physics!"

One of the greatest obstacles to equal opportunity in higher education is the motivational barrier. This pertains to the students's self-confidence, his personal desire to gain status and his expectations as to how the world around him will react to his efforts. As Kenneth Martyn and others have found, the relationship between a disadvantaged student's self-concept and the likelihood of his being successful in college can hardly be overstated. What one member of the United

Mexican American Students at the University of California, Los Angeles, had to say about this is noteworthy here:

> Basically what we're talking about is the problem of identity and image. All of our people, black and brown, go through the system and the only image they have is a negative image because the only way that the black and brown people are treated in our books and in our classrooms by our teachers is in a negative way. The end result is that by the time they get to the college level many of them have tried to become white, something that is physically very difficult to do for some of us. And the problem is this, they have also tried to become white in a cultural sense, because they're ashamed of their cultural background and they're ashamed of their second language, if they have it, they're ashamed of the various sociological aspects because they've been taught that it's incorrect.

To deal with this problem of self-image as a barrier to motivation, cadres of radicals, black separatists, community leaders, and some of the most distinguished educators in America have demanded that programs of ethnic studies be included in the undergraduate curriculum. The absence of Afro-American course offerings is much more than a matter of academic or pedagogic concern to black students. Certainly the traditional omission of such courses across the nation has been the single most potent source of black student discontent and unrest. As the Rosovsky Committee stated it: "The lack of such courses can strike the black students as a negative judgment by Harvard University on the importance of these areas of knowledge and research, and, by inference, on the importance of black people themselves."

An ethnic studies program should not be an isolating educational experience for those who enter into it as students or teach in it. Rather it should deal with a field of human experience that is complementary to the study of other American cultures and non-American societies. Otherwise, the program could entrench or even deepen America's racial cleavage by aggravating the strong feelings of alienation which already exist among students of ethnic minority origin. Whether it is an Afro-American, Latin-American, Asian, or even Native American (as proposed by the Third World Liberation Front in the recent strike at Berkeley) curriculum, it must be aimed not only at scholarship and personal awareness, but at competition in, not isolation from the mainstream of American life.