

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 031 761

CG 004 322

By-Harding, Francis D.

What Can Happen When There Are Enough Counselors. One Approach at A Two-Year Technical Institute.

American Personnel and Guidance Association, Washington, D.C.; Washington Technical Institute, Washington, D.C.

Pub Date 69

Note-13p.; Presented at the American Personnel and Guidance Association Convention, Las Vegas, Nevada, March 30-April 3, 1969.

EDRS Price MF-\$0.25 HC-\$0.75

Descriptors-*Counseling Programs, *Counselor Functions, *Developmental Guidance, Junior Colleges, Learning Experience, *Technical Institutes, *Vocational Development

Washington Technical Institute (WTI) presents an opportunity to structure a two-year technical education program which will effectively serve the needs of an urban population. The guiding philosophy of the school is that it be student centered with learning objectives stated in measureable behavioral terms. The school is staffed with one instructor to every 16 students and one counselor to every 40 students. To emphasize the developmental aspects of the educational efforts, counselors are called Development Advisors. The development advisors have three facets to their job: (1) aiding the vocational or career development of their advisees, (2) facilitating the learning activities that their advisees are undergoing, and (3) providing necessary supportive counseling in the emotional and psychological areas. Students are encouraged to work part time at a job that has some relevance to their program. The development advisor assists students in getting these jobs. The development advisor is also responsible for: (1) understanding his advisee and his background in relation to the learning aspects of his program, (2) assessing progress so that goals are reasonable, and (3) helping the student to assess his own progress. No statistics are available now, but plans are to develop evaluative techniques for this program at WTI. (SJ)

What Can Happen When There Are Enough Counselors
One Approach At A Two-Year Technical Institute¹

By Francis D. Harding

ED031761

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE
PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS
STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION
POSITION OR POLICY.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

CG 004322

The previous speakers have discussed applications of very interesting research techniques to important aspects of vocational education and guidance. I am somewhat embarrassed because I do not have a package of research data to distribute among you. This is especially painful because much of my professional life was spent as a research psychologist and it has been only fairly recently that I became a productive member of society--as an administrator at a two-year technical institute. As many of you know, in the real world of institutionalized learning, it is an accomplishment to be able to identify the problems, let alone to carry out sophisticated research on them. However, ever so often, there comes along the opportunity to start from scratch and to design the kind of learning environment which will reflect the way things should be. Washington Technical Institute presents an opportunity to structure a two-year technical education program which will effectively serve the needs of an urban population. The plan of this report is to describe some of the situational variables which exist at the school; to outline the plan of action as it relates to counseling activities; and to discuss some specific problem areas.

Let me begin by saying that Washington Technical Institute was established by Congress to provide vocational and technical education to the residents of the District of Columbia so as to prepare them for entry into meaningful occupations.

1. Presented at 1969 American Personnel and Guidance Association Convention as part of a symposium, Vocational-Technical Education: New Horizons.

A pragmatic occupational orientation was evidenced from the start. The selection of curricula to be offered was based upon occupational and manpower surveys of the D.C. metropolitan area. As a result of these surveys, curricula leading to the Associate degree were developed in the areas of Health Science; Business; Engineering Technology; Computer Science; Public Administration; Science Technology; and Criminal Justice. The guiding philosophy of the school is to be student-centered with learning objectives stated in measurable behavioral terms. In an effort to overcome some of the lock step features which so often characterize educational practices, planning and staffing were geared to an individualized learning approach. The school is staffed with one instructor to every 16 students and one counselor to every 40 students. (It is this last ratio of one to 40 that makes W.T.I. unique and, I hope, interesting to this audience.) We opened this past September with approximately 1300 students; now, at the end of the second quarter, we have about 1900 students.

W.T.I. is an open-door, community college, accepting as many applicants as facilities and resources will permit. Because demand far exceeds capacity, admission is on a first come, first serve basis. Applicants are notified of acceptance and asked to report for pre-enrollment testing and interviews. You will note that the tests/interviews are given after notification of acceptance. This was done on purpose to assure the applicant that the interviews and the tests which he is being asked to take are for the purpose of guidance and placement and not as screening devices. The applicant is first given a battery of tests. This year the tests will include the College Qualification Test battery and the Kuder DD.

Included in the CQT battery are Verbal, Numerical, and General Information subtests, as well as the Davis Reading Test. For students who are applying for a particular curriculum such as Computer Science, appropriate specialized aptitude tests will be administered. As is usually the case when population is drawn from the so called inner city, one has to be extremely careful in drawing conclusions until local norms and validity studies are accomplished. We are in the process of doing this, but, as I will indicate later, I feel that certain non-cognitive motivational factors are of much greater importance than those factors measured by the above instruments.

After the tests have been scored, the individual returns for an interview. A feature of this interview is the retracing of the decision-making process that was used to decide which curriculum area the applicant was interested in pursuing.

Although the applicant indicated a curriculum choice at the time he applied, we have learned to be somewhat suspicious of such declarations. Among our first class, we found that about half changed their curriculum area as a result of the interview. We feel that this was because of lack of sufficient information available to make realistic decisions. For students from the inner city this is especially true: the conditions of higher education or the nature of technical-professional occupations are not too well understood. Thus, the information-giving function of the interview is very important. Also important, is the exploration of the aspirational and motivational aspects of the choice of curriculum. Consideration of the reasons for attending college or for desiring a particular kind of a career can provide a firmer basis for decision making. It is important that the student make as good an initial decision as possible because students in

a two-year institute are forced to specialize from the outset. They are not afforded the luxury of shopping around for a semester or two before settling in a major field.

The integrating of test data into the individual's choice of curriculum area and expected level of attainment is also very critical. Many inner city students have not been exposed to educational guidance given under favorable conditions. This tends to lessen the predictive value of previous academic performance and group test data that may be recorded on high school transcripts.

During the interview we do not attempt to force an individual to undertake a particular curriculum, no matter how suitable it may be for him. The counselor apprises him of all the facts - his possible options; his probability of success.

The decision is the applicant's. The counselor has a rather delicate role to play: he must insure that the applicant has as much information as possible, and he must guide the decision-making process while letting the choice be the applicant's.

Our use of such a large number of counselors is based upon this premise: during their stay at W.T.I. our students are developing socially, culturally, and vocationally, as well as educationally. To assist them adequately along all these dimensions, a large commitment in professional personnel is required. To emphasize the developmental aspects of our efforts, we have called our counselors "Development Advisors". Hopefully, this will aid in the establishment of the proper image. The Development Advisors have three facets to their job. The first is to concentrate on the vocational or career development of their Advisees. The second function is to act as a Learning Specialist so that they may understand and facilitate the learning activities that their Advisees are undergoing.

The third facet to the job is to provide the necessary supportive counseling in the emotional and psychological areas.

Let us first consider the Development Advisors' activities in the area of vocational development. An important activity is the encouraging of a mature attitude toward one's potential career.

An individual's preparation for a career includes not only the acquisition of required skills and knowledge but also the development of a vocational readiness or maturity. The latter may be described as the kind of behavior which permits an individual to be accepted on a job and to advance at a normal rate. The attainment of such maturity can be a complex process. For students in a two-year technical institute, this development must be compressed into half the time allowed to graduates of a four-year school. We therefore attempt to "force-feed" vocational maturity by encouraging students to work part-time in jobs which are related to their curriculum areas. Most of our students have jobs, but some are far afield from their educational efforts and thus do not contribute much to their preparation for the careers they will enter upon graduation. One task of the Development Advisor is to seek out suitable part-time employment and "feed" his Advisees into appropriate positions. We have endeavored to develop a system which will coordinate our efforts in this area so that the leads one Development Advisor uncovers will be available to the whole group. We try also to stress the close relationship of our educational efforts and vocational pursuits by proclaiming that "the name of the game is jobs". We hope that this emphasis will enable the student to see the relevance of his studies and work experiences to his future career.

How successfully this interpretation is accomplished has much to do with the motivational level of our students. Students want to see real prospects for getting good jobs upon completion of their training. At a new school which was established to provide a supply of skilled manpower where none existed before, a certain amount of strain is placed upon the credulity of the students who are asked to accept a good deal on faith alone. For inner city youths, this is all the more difficult because of the scarcity of successful technicians. Thus, the student sees little evidence of the pot of gold at the end of his individual rainbow. Our Development Advisors must be constantly cognizant of this problem and do everything possible to make job prospects more real for their Advisees. One way to do this is to interpret manpower surveys in a personally meaningful way which will indicate the potential need for the kind of skills our students are acquiring.

Another way in which we are attempting to facilitate our students' vocational readiness is by the preparation of Job Fact Brochures. This is an attempt to package together all kinds of information about a particular career field. The types of information contained here include: 1) fairly detailed descriptions of entry-level positions and more general descriptions of positions which come later as the individual progresses within the career field; 2) job requirements; 3) rates of pay; 4) descriptions of working conditions; 5) availability and location of possible employment. Because of our location in Washington, D.C., definite attention will be given to the problems of entering and progressing within the Civil Service system.

Let us turn to the second facet of the Development Advisor's role - that of being a specialist in learning. The major question in this regard is how does the Development Advisor help the student learn? As he is not a subject matter specialist and may not be qualified to serve as a resource person in substantive or technical matters, his influence must be more in the area of facilitating the individual learner's efforts. He should be aware of what behavioral modifications are being sought in a particular learning situation and be ready to assist the learner in acquiring the modifications. A Development Advisor's contribution is greatest in the context of an individualized learning environment where he can concentrate on one or a few individuals in a particular learning situation. To be effective, he should be perceptive of the skills, knowledge, habits, learning style, etc. that the student brings to the situation. Based upon earlier discussions with the subject-matter expert, the Development Advisor should understand the objectives of the learning exercise and optimally have discussed with the instructor various teaching strategies. His role should complement the instructor's efforts in the formal teaching process. This is the essence of the team approach mentioned earlier.

To accomplish this rather sanguine concept of a team in which teachers, development advisors, and learners work together is a major undertaking not devoid of pit falls (as I am finding out). It requires on the part of all concerned a level of competence and maturity which must be carefully nurtured. Old roles and relationships must be cast off and anxieties about status repressed for the common good. Let me mention some attributes that I think a Development

Advisor should possess to operate effectively. He should have an understanding of those facets of educational psychology which can be manipulated in the practical learning situation. By this I do not mean that he has to be cognizant of all the nuances of learning theory, but he must have more than the nodding acquaintance of learning theory usually gained from a survey course in educational psychology. He should be familiar with and competent in the use of the various media that has resulted from the educational technology explosion.

At this juncture I would like to stress as clearly as I can, a conviction that I have that the counselor - student relationship that the Development Advisor has with his Advisee is that added ingredient which makes him more effective than the educational technologist. The Development Advisor has a deeper understanding of the student as a person than the educational specialist can be expected to have. I realize that it is gratuitous of me to mention the importance of the social and psychological factors that affect an individual's learning performance. However, to foster efficient learning, such influences must be considered and managed. I think the counselor relationship which our Development Advisors achieve helps us to do this. As one of my D.A.'s has said "If you really care about a person, you will take the trouble to understand him". This is very important in this age of racial tensions and generation gaps.

This role of the Development Advisor takes him out of his office and puts him where the action is - and in an educational institution, the action is learning. I would be less than honest if I were to say that all my Development Advisors or all the instructional staff fully subscribe to such active participation by D.A.'s. However, I think they are learning the desirability and necessity of

such an approach. One reason for such involvement is the matter of the students' readiness to benefit from an educational experience built around a multi-media, individualized approach. Many students have been victimized by poor educational practices and I am not speaking just of our particular group of students but of students graduating from many of our secondary systems throughout the country. They have not been challenged or motivated enough to achieve up to their potential. In fact, it has only been very recently that there was any reason for many of them to participate actively in learning. Now, with many of our institutions of higher learning actively recruiting students from the inner city and poorer rural sections, we are confronted with a situation in which we are reaping the results of our earlier failures. The resulting frustrations have been a major contribution to student unrest. It is my contention that a more responsive counseling effort would do much to alleviate some of these conditions.

Let me speak specifically to what all this means to our Development Advisors as they endeavor to facilitate their Advisee's learning. We find that some of our students bring with them educational deficiencies in arithmetical computations. This inhibits the full utilization of the opportunities available to them. I have come to realize that it is naive to think that because students have access to advanced educational media and technology they will attack learning voraciously and not only overcome their short-comings, but will spurt ahead to new levels of achievement. The sad truth is that they are unable to do so because of previously developed ineffective study habits and unfavorable attitudes toward educational activities. In such situations, directors of learning should realize that their efforts must extend beyond the mere providing of the opportunity to learn.

Each individual learner must be convinced that he can learn, and that the benefits to be gained are worth the efforts required. Accordingly, Development Advisors should be involved with the student's efforts to evolve a new self-image. In addition, students need frequent recharging of their motivational batteries. Two years is a long time and many difficulties must be overcome before the student graduates. The D.A.'s must be prepared to provide support to their Advisees so that their enthusiasm remains high. To accomplish the kind of learning we have been describing, it is necessary that continual assessment and feed-back take place. Not only does the student need frequent reinforcement; academic instructors must have information on which to base their teaching strategies. The Development Advisor plays a key role in the feed-back function of assessment. His close relationship to the student makes him a natural channel of assessment information. His demonstrated interest in the student's development enables him to present the feed-back in a supportive rather than in an evaluative fashion. An important aspect of his efforts should be explaining to the student the implications of the assessment. In some cases he may find himself having to explain the teacher and student to each other. The Development Advisor can add an overall viewpoint to the assessment process. He should collect and synthesize evaluations from the student's various courses and be able to add his own evaluations of the student based upon his many contacts with the student. His inputs might well provide insight into the student's performance which would go unnoticed if classroom behavior were the sole source of observations. The Development Advisor can relate his assessments to the aptitudinal and aspirational data collected from early contacts with the student.

It is essential that the student's long range objectives be kept in mind. Continuity is something that often is lacking in the counseling a student receives. The Advisor should endeavor to provide this needed stability.

Assessments can only be effective when there is a free exchange of information. Lack of understanding or mutual trust can defeat the purpose of assessment. Instructors and students must view the information as helpful in attaining their objectives. This is sometimes difficult to do because the evaluative process can be quite anxiety-producing. Such difficulties can be minimized by a careful spelling out of objectives and behavioral criterion. The less ambiguity in the desired terminal behavior, the easier it is to do a proper assessment of the learning process.

Some of the outcomes of assessment have impact beyond the revising of teaching strategies and course assignments; they will have long range effect on the lives of the students. As a result of assessments, some students will need to be redirected toward alternative educational or vocational objectives, rather than be allowed to pursue their original choices. It is a fact, that at some point, the Open Door policy of a school must become somewhat selective. At W.T.I. we try to give the individual every possible chance to demonstrate his capabilities, rather than to pre-judge and to assign him to a particular niche on the basis of data of doubtful validity. While I subscribe to the precept "that the best predictor of future performance is past performance" this is only as true as the conditions remain similar. I would hope that W.T.I. presents a learning situation which is an entirely new deal for many of our students, and that past performance may not be such a good predictor. Therefore, we try to keep several options open for our students. Some may be able to raise their

objectives higher than they had supposed possible while others may have to lower their levels of aspiration and accept the fact that they can not reasonably expect to obtain associate degrees. The Development Advisors work just as hard with the student who can't profit by continuing his efforts toward a degree as they do with their more successful Advisees. They attempt to obtain suitable employment and to maintain contact so that the drop-out will obtain maximum benefit from his connection with W.T.I. This may well be one of our most important contributions.

One final comment on our efforts to launch this massive guidance and counseling effort. I would like to discuss for a moment how we intend to evaluate the effectiveness of our program. This is a vital question, not only for us but for those responsible for any counseling program. Subjectively, I am sure that we have had a beneficial effect on the school and on the students but I sometimes wonder just how much we really are adding to the overall good and welfare. If we didn't exist, students would perhaps, still achieve their learning objectives, be graduated, and enter technical careers. I must say that I share some of the skepticism with which our efforts are viewed by others. Because of this, I have stressed the need for extensive documentation and program review. While we won't be able to compare ourselves to any control group, we can at least develop objective records and carry out longitudinal studies. What are some of the criteria which we should use to measure our effectiveness? An obvious set of criterion data should be concerned with attrition figures. What is the drop out rate? What are the reasons for attrition? What is the course failure rate? - by Development Advisor? Conversely, does amount or kind of

advising have any effect on excellence of performance? Is there any difference in the rates of pay for those who obtained employment as a result of a counselor's efforts as compared to those students who didn't use the help of a counselor in obtaining a job? In the area of learning, how do you measure the effect of counselors on learning progress?

We haven't had time to obtain answers to such questions yet. However, I am sure that such an objective evaluation is as important as anything we can do. I hope that we are up to the task of such a program evaluation because it is only on the basis of such facts that counseling will become less of an art and more of a science.