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ABSTRACT

The objectives of the conference were: (1) to identify the factors responsible for large numbers of students leaving Tennessee institutions of higher education before graduation; and (2) to promote correction of such factors on individual campuses. The proceedings consist of: (1) lists of the individual participants and the participating institutions; (2) the program; (3) the papers delivered at the conference, which included: "Faculty Contributions to Dropouts." by Sam C. Webb, "Administrative Contributions to Dropouts," by George L. Marx, "Steps to Reduce Dropouts," by Donald W. Irvine, and the discussion following the papers; (4) the special questionnaire for evaluating the conference and the analysis of this questionnaire; and (5) a brief note on plans to arrange for systematic interinstitutional research in this area. (AF)

P R O C E E D I N G S

A
CONFERENCE
on

STUDENT RETENTION IN TENNESSEE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

March 21-22, 1966

The University of Tennessee
Knoxville

OHMER MILTON
Editor

Sponsored by:

The Standing Council on the Improvement of Teaching and Learning
The Office of Institutional Research
The Learning Resources Center

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PURPOSE

TO SHARE KNOWLEDGE AND PROMOTE RESEARCH TOWARD THE END OF REDUCING THE LARGE NUMBERS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN TENNESSEE WHO LEAVE HIGHER EDUCATION PRIOR TO GRADUATION.

OBJECTIVES

1. To identify the factors and forces which seem to be responsible for or related to the problem.
2. To promote alteration in or correction of such factors and forces on individual campuses.

RESEARCH CONFERENCE ON

STUDENT RETENTION IN TENNESSEE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Knoxville, Tennessee
March 21-22
1966

List of Conference Participants

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Director of Admissions
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Vanderbilt University

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Union University

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Carson-Newman College

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Nebraska Mays
Tennessee A & I State University

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LeMoyne College

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Lincoln Memorial University

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Robert E. Stoltz
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President of the Faculty
Senate
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Sherwell Tollison
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Sam C. Webb
Office of Evaluation Studies
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Middle Tennessee State University

Thomas I. Willard, Dean
Owen College

Nofflet Williams
College of Education
Tennessee Technological University

Trafton D. Williams, Director
Testing and Guidance Counseling
Trevecca Nazarene College

In addition, several other members of the faculty from The University of Tennessee and neighboring colleges attended sessions from time to time.

RESEARCH CONFERENCE ON

STUDENT RETENTION IN TENNESSEE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

Knoxville, Tennessee
March 21-22
1966

List of Colleges and Universities Participating

Belmont College
Nashville, Tennessee

Bryan College
Dayton, Tennessee

Carson-Newman College
Jefferson City, Tennessee

East Tennessee State University
Johnson City, Tennessee

Free Will Baptist Bible College
Nashville, Tennessee

George Peabody College for Teachers
Nashville, Tennessee

Georgia Institute of Technology
Atlanta, Georgia

Knoxville College
Knoxville, Tennessee

Lane College
Jackson, Tennessee

LeMoyne College
Memphis, Tennessee

Lincoln Memorial University
Harrogate, Tennessee

Maryville College
Maryville, Tennessee

Memphis State University
Memphis, Tennessee

Middle Tennessee State University
Murfreesboro, Tennessee

Morristown College
Morristown, Tennessee

Owen College
Memphis, Tennessee

Southeastern Louisiana College
Hammond, Louisiana

Southern Missionary College
Collegedale, Tennessee

Tennessee A & I State University
Nashville, Tennessee

Tennessee Technological University
Cookeville, Tennessee

Tennessee Wesleyan College
Athens, Tennessee

Trevecca Nazarene College
Nashville, Tennessee

Tusculum College
Tusculum, Tennessee

Union University
Jackson, Tennessee

University of Chattanooga
Chattanooga, Tennessee

The University of Georgia
Athens, Georgia

University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland

The University of Tennessee
Knoxville, Tennessee

The University of Tennessee
Martin Branch
Martin, Tennessee

Vanderbilt University
Nashville, Tennessee

DISCUSSION LEADERS

Joe Chapman
Carson-Newman College
James Colmey
Memphis State University
Edell Hearn
Tennessee Polytechnic Institute
Ralph Martin
Knoxville College
John Morris
Memphis State University
John Weems
Middle Tennessee State College

SPECIAL PARTICIPANTS

Hal Ramer, Assistant Commissioner for Higher Education, Tennessee
John Henry M. Smith, Provost, Academic Services, Department of Education, Tennessee
Robert Stoltz, Southern Regional Office, College Entrance Examination Board
John Burns, Financial Aid Programs, The University of Tennessee

PROGRAM

Monday, March 21, 1966

8:30 A.M. Registration -- University Center

9:00 A.M. WELCOME: Ohmer Milton, Learning Resources Center, The University of Tennessee

FACULTY CONTRIBUTIONS TO DROPOUTS
Sam C. Webb, Office of Evaluation Studies
Georgia Institute of Technology

Questions from the floor

Coffee

Small Group Discussions

Reports of Small Groups

1:30 P.M. Presiding: Ralph Martin, Director, Technical Teaching Center, Knoxville College

ADMINISTRATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO DROPOUTS
George L. Marx, Director, Office of Executive Dean for Student Life, University of Maryland

Questions from the floor

Coffee

Small Group Discussions

Reports of Small Groups

Tuesday, March 22, 1966

8:45 A.M. Presiding: James L. Montgomery, Director, Office of Institutional Research, The University of Tennessee

STEPS TO REDUCE DROPOUTS
Donald W. Irvine, Division of Counselor Education and Personnel Services, University of Georgia

Questions from the floor

Coffee

Small Group Discussions

Reports of Small Groups

Evaluation of Conference

12:00 Adjournment

FACULTY CONTRIBUTIONS TO DROPOUTS

Sam C. Webb, Director of Evaluation Studies
Georgia Institute of Technology

Let us start by noting there is not very much factual material available on the topic assigned me. The "Proceedings of the Research Conference on College Dropouts," conducted recently by The University of Tennessee, reports that "conferees repeatedly stressed the fact that the faculty of a college plays a vital role in whether or not a student remains in college or leaves before obtaining an academic degree" (Montgomery, 1964, p. 36), but it is not demonstrated clearly just what this role in a causative sense is. On the other hand Summerskill, writing on dropouts in The American College, does not mention the faculty as a cause for dropout, except indirectly to note that "generations of students will testify that college grades are an important determinant of college dropouts" (p. 636).

A few professors with whom I have talked informally feel that except for "keeping the pressure up," as one put it, their contribution to this type of student behavior is relatively small.

And, surprisingly enough, students assign relatively little responsibility to faculty for their dropping out.

In a study of 84 students who left the University of Georgia in good standing, Irvine (1965) classified about a third of all first reasons given for dropping out (26 out of 84) as academic, and about half of these (12) pertained to instruction and relations with the faculty. Only one of the 26 students giving academic reasons did not attend college elsewhere.

In an informal check of the exit interview forms of about 200 students who were dropping out of Georgia Tech, there were only 10 that mentioned academic factors as contributing to their dropping out.

Since there are little concrete data, one way to approach our topic is

to consider the reasons students give for dropping out that might suggest dropout behaviors to which faculty members might contribute. Of course, reasons reflecting academic difficulty in the form of poor grades or outright academic failure are the most frequent.

The percent of students reporting academic difficulties as causes varies from school to school and according to methods of data collecting. In reports I have seen, it ranges from none in the studies of Jex and Merrill (1962) and of Holmes (1959) to 62% in the report of Eckland and Smith (undated). Over-all figures given by Knoell (Montgomery, 1964, p. viii) suggest that at least 1/3 of dropouts have had academic difficulties; while Summerskill estimates that up to 1/3 of dropouts are due to poor grades and academic failure (1962, p. 637).

Other type reasons given that seem relevant include lack of interest (mentioned by Iffert, 1957, 48% for men and 33% for women; Cowhig, 1963, 15%; and Koelsche, 1956), dissatisfaction with classes (Jex and Merrill, 1962, 4%; and Gekoski and Schwartz, 1961, 16%), and lack of or conflicts in motivation (see Summerskill, p. 638-643). These data suggest ways that the faculty may contribute to dropouts; but before looking at these, we shall describe a fairly broad frame of reference within which to consider them.

Let us begin by assuming that within our society, a major function of the college or university is to provide for the transmission of learning and for the development of skills for organizing and manipulating learned materials. Let us also assume that the faculty is that segment of the personnel of the college that is assigned the responsibility for carrying out this function. Finally, let us assume that the student attends college for the major purpose of availing himself of the opportunities for learning. If these assumptions are correct, then it should follow that decisions for

dropping out would be made primarily on the basis of evaluation of interactional behaviors or lack of interactional behaviors involving student and faculty, with the "evaluations" being made by either faculty or by the students independently or in rare cases by both jointly. This statement implies a set of expectations on the part of the student of how the professor is to perform when in contact with students and a set of expectations on the part of the faculty of how the student is to perform when in contact with the faculty. Also implied is a sense of responsibility on the part of student and faculty alike for fulfilling the other's expectations. It is not assumed, however, that each knows which of the other's expectations it is legitimate or necessary for him to perform in order for effective learning to take place; nor is it assumed that each knows how to perform the expectations it is legitimate for him to perform.

The fact that we are talking about behaviors and decisions that are based on interactions, makes the assignment of causation or of responsibility to one group or the other difficult and sometimes impossible. So in speaking of faculty contributions to dropouts, let us keep in mind we are looking at only one side of a two-sided system. However, in considering the ways that the faculty might behave in interacting with students, it is possible to suggest certain families of behaviors or roles performed by faculty that seem on a logical basis related to student dropout.

I suggest 6 such roles:

1. The role of curriculum developer.
2. The role of instructor.
3. The role of evaluator.
4. The role of maintainer of standards.
5. The role of counselor or advisor.
6. The role of stimulator and supporter.

Let us consider each in turn.

1. The role of curriculum developer.

In this role the faculty is expected to decide what areas of knowledge are to be included in the curriculum and what topics are to be discussed in a particular course and at what level the instruction is to be pitched. While there is some possible conflict between the proper fulfilling of this role and one subsequently to be mentioned (maintainer of standards), it seems fair to assert that to the extent that the faculty includes material considered irrelevant by the student, or material that is beyond or below the difficulty level appropriate for the students with whom they are dealing, to that extent the faculty is contributing to drop-outs. A rough estimate of student concern that this role be performed properly by the faculty is given by data from an informal study conducted by the speaker concerning the expectations that mechanical engineering seniors have of their teachers at Georgia Tech. In this study 8% of 506 statements provided by 100 seniors related to the matter of course content. The oft noted idea that you must begin with the students where they are seems relevant here. Failure to meet student expectations will most probably influence the incidence of student mortality.

2. The role of instructor.

The educational literature is replete with studies enumerating and evaluating activities and personal characteristics presumably associated with teaching or instructional effectiveness. These studies essentially say that in respect to instruction, the professor should, regardless of methodology involved, provide students with a clear well organized and forceful presentation of materials selected with adequate explanation of what is expected from the student as a response to this instruction, and with adequate opportunity for students interaction in relation to materials that are not clearly understood. In order to fulfill these functions, it

seems expected that the faculty must have a thorough knowledge of subject, must follow appropriate procedures of presentation, and must possess certain personal characteristics (see Knopp, p. 303). For example, in the Tech data 17% of the statements related to manner of presentation, 8% related to the instructors knowledge of the course, and 4% related to personal characteristics. In short, about 1/3 of the statements were related to this function.

There thus appear to be certain expectations associated with the instructor role, and to the extent that these are not properly fulfilled, the faculty may contribute to dropouts.

Poor or inappropriate presentation of material may well result in a failure on the part of students to grasp the essential facts, and this may lead to the students' falling behind, becoming discouraged, and dropping out. However, in view of the inconclusive nature of studies on the evaluation of teaching and the tremendous variability of student response to instruction, the making of categorical judgments about the relation of instruction to dropouts is difficult. Lehmann (1966) presented data showing no essential difference in the perception of a "good college teacher" as provided by enrolled seniors and dropouts. In a study of dropouts at Temple University, Gekoski and Schwartz (1961) reported that whereas 21% of a withdrawal group rated the faculty as poor or very poor, only 4% of an enrolled control group so rated them. Similarly, whereas 43% of the withdrawal group rated the faculty good or very good, 64% of a control group so rated them. But since student ratings are apparently influenced by satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the college experience, their meaning in respect to our concern is not unambiguous.

3. The role of evaluator.

In this role the professor is usually expected to pass judgment

on the progress of the student in learning the substance of the course for which he, the professor, is providing instruction. In more familiar terms, he is expected to grade the student. The adequate performance of this role would seem to require not only a passing of judgment, but of communicating the judgment to the student in ways that would assist the student in learning what is wrong and why, and of expressing the evaluation, more specifically, the grade, in ways that are consistent with acceptable grading practices.

There are several aspects about this role that may be of interest. (1) This is a role the faculty does not like to perform but which is usually thrust upon them by administrator and student. Have you ever heard of a teacher, who, after grading 100 papers, said, "Well, I really enjoyed that!" (2) There is evidence to suggest that when this role and the instructing role are performed by the same person, instruction is less effective than when the two roles are performed by different persons. Further, at least in terms of learning theory, there is some question as to whether formal grading is essential. For since there are ample data to show that satisfaction from learning per se can provide sufficient motivation for learning, there are strong suggestions that formalized grading may be harmful to student morale and self-esteem to the extent that it may cause withdrawal from college.

Paul Heist (undated), for example has noted that grading systems tend to reward the conforming plodder and penalize the imaginative student who is likely to make a significant contribution. The discouragement and neglect creative students tend to receive are expressed in grades. According to Heist, the expression of dissatisfaction and even displeasure that grades allow teachers to make is almost certainly a potent factor in causing the flight of potentially creative students from the college. He guesses we lose more creative students than we educate.

But so long as formalized grading is practiced, students expect it to be properly done (20% of the Tech statements related to tests and grading); and professors should attempt to grade in accordance with the best available evaluation practices. For a young sensitive freshman accustomed to being graded on a fairly lenient scale, to be evaluated in terms of a much stiffer scale with little indication of what is wrong and why can be traumatic and discouraging.

This role overlaps somewhat with the next role.

4. The role of maintainer of standards.

In this role the faculty is expected to assist various social, professional, or institutional groups in the setting and maintaining of certain standards of excellence in respect to the level and content of courses and to the evaluation of student academic progress. This role is somewhat unique in that it is an expectation required of other groups to be fulfilled by faculty in their interactions with students. Just how the evaluative norms the faculty are expected to apply are determined is difficult to state, particularly in regard to grading practices. But there is very definitely a relation of the fulfillment of this role and the faculty's contribution to dropout. The higher the level of instruction and grading standards are set relative to the achievement and ability levels of the students, the higher will be the number of dropouts because of failure or academic difficulties.

While it is difficult to tease out the part played by a number of factors, it is just possible that the fulfillment of this role contributes substantially to the fact that dropout rates have remained substantially unchanged over the past 40 years. There is ample evidence to show that as academic or grade getting potential of students enrolled in a particular college rises, the grading standard rises, so that while the percent of

dropouts due to academic failure or difficulty may be somewhat reduced, the increase in measured student achievement does not keep pace with that which would be expected. This assumes, of course, the maintenance of the same grading standard over a period of years. This phenomenon can be seen in the records of any college that has become increasingly selective in its admissions procedures. It is dramatically illustrated in data I have collected on the liberal arts college of Emory University (1965). These are shown in the Tables and Figures of the hand out.

The first row of Table 1 shows the average predicted average of enrolled students from 1951 to 1964. During this period the average increased from C (20) to B (30). Row 2 shows the average earned first year average. This has increased from approximately 20 to 21 in 1951 and 1956 to 23 to 24 in 1962 and 1963. Row 3 shows that over the period, the percent of students expecting to make C, using the 1951 formula, increased from 53 to 99.8. But the percent actually making C rose from 53 to only 71%. Table 2 considers data of students with predicted grades ranging from B to A and indicates that while the percent of the enrolled students in these categories has been steadily increasing, the percent making C or better has been dropping. Finally, data in Figure 1 shows the changes over the years of percent of students in various class intervals of predicted grade who have been actually making earned averages of C or better. All these lines are seen to slope downward; those in the 20 to 25 range show the largest slope; those in the 26 to 40 range show some slope; and those in the 0 to 19 range now are seen to have no chance at all of making an average of C or better.

While the rights of each institution to set and change its grading standards are to be fully respected, steps to clarify these standards and to assure a reasonable agreement on standards to be applied within individual

schools could assist in clarifying how the faculty goes about fulfilling this role of maintainer of standards.

5. The role of counselor or advisor.

In this role the faculty is expected to work with groups of students or with individual students in the making of educational and vocational plans and in solving personal problems.

It would seem reasonable to say that to the extent the faculty fails to fulfill this role, to that extent they contribute to dropouts. However, to this writer, a state of confusion exists as to the degree of acceptance of and qualification for the performance of this role by the faculty, and as to student expectations of the faculty in respect to this role.

For whereas parents would like to know that the faculty plays this role in respect to sons and daughters and while college deans and administrators may be pleased that faculty play this role, though they do not reward them for it, the role does not seem to be one that is appealing to many faculty members.

On the student side, students may not strongly feel the need of the assistance of the faculty in this role; for example, in the Tech data, statements related to this role are notably absent. And Gekoski and Schwartz found that: (1) whereas 63% of controls had had personal contact with advisors, only 45% of withdrawals had had such contacts; (2) while 22% of his controls could not name their advisors, 52% of the withdrawals could not name theirs; and (3) whereas 41% of controls felt their advisors had had a favorable effect on their progress in school, only 5% of the withdrawals so felt toward their advisors. Thus, even assuming faculty interest in advising students, special skills seem to be required to effect students who are prone to withdraw.

This statement serves to point up the further difficulty that, with the exception of some faculty members who are very conscious of and sensitive to the needs of students, many faculty members by reason of temperament, dis-interest, and lack of preparation do not appear well qualified to perform this function. As a consequence, many are prone to analyze student difficulties in terms of superficial categories, such as, lack of ability or motivation or persistence, and be unable to understand the basic dynamics underlying the student's problems, so that their attempts to help may really be no help at all.

All these complications make it difficult to determine just how many dropouts could be prevented by an effective and forceful faculty adviser program. At this point I will only say that there are evidences to suggest that when students and their problems are approached in an organized and personal way by faculty, dropout rates can be reduced.

6. The role of stimulator and supporter.

In this role the faculty is expected to stimulate students, encourage them to develop their potentialities, and provide them the recognition as persons and the emotional support required to sustain them while learning adequately to cope with the anxieties that may be aroused by ideas that challenge their values and fundamental orientations toward life. This role is to some extent ambiguous in that the expectations are perhaps poorly defined, and it is not clear just how acceptable these functions are to the faculty.

To stimulate and challenge students will to many be appealing; but the idea of supporting students emotionally will smack too much of coddling to be acceptable to many members of the faculty. On the other hand, since 17% of the statements of the Tech students seem relevant to these role demands, there is some evidence that students expect from faculty behaviors of the

type subsumed under this role.

In view of the numbers of students who, according to data previously cited, report they drop out because of lack of interest, one can only wonder how many might have remained in school had they been intellectually stimulated by a well organized and properly sustained educational program conducted by an enthusiastic faculty and had they been provided the emotional support required to sustain them until suitably oriented and organized to pursue a challenging curriculum.

In summary, I have considered the contributions of faculty to the problem of dropouts within a framework in which decisions for dropping out are viewed as being made on the basis of evaluation of interactional behaviors involving student and faculty. Within this interactional framework, there exist sets of behaviors or roles that faculty are expected to perform or fulfill in the course of their interactions with students. I have defined six such roles as relevant to the dropout behavior of students, and I have asserted that to the extent faculty does not adequately fulfill these roles, they contribute to the problem of dropout. However, it has not been possible to estimate the proportion of dropouts that can be attributed to inadequate performance of these roles.

Further, I have stated or implied that difficulties in properly fulfilling these role expectations by the faculty may result from reluctance to accept responsibility for the roles, from conflicting demands which interfere with role performance, and from lack of skills or temperamental qualifications for fulfilling the role.

As a kind of postscript, it seems appropriate to note that there are also in this interactional setting describable roles that students are expected to perform. And, since they have not been discussed, the presentation has been a one-sided one. Also, since there are other role demands

imposed on both faculty and student that have not been described here, the discussion has been focused on the point of interaction, but has not considered the effects of these additional role demands on adequacy of role performance of faculty and student in situations of mutual interaction.

* *

Discussion Questions

Q. Will you elaborate upon the study in industry in which grading was not done by the instructor?

A. There were two groups of new telephone company employees. One group was instructed by a supervisor in the usual fashion, while the other one was taught by a supervisor and then graded and evaluated by another person. It was found in this second group that more questions were raised and that there was more lively discussion during the instruction period. This investigation was a dissertation at Columbia University in 1956 by J. C. Ross, entitled, "Role Specialization in Supervision."

Since college students are both taught and graded by the same person, it may be that their passivity and reticence to question and disagree with the instructor are, in part at any rate, a reflection of their fear of offending and thus reducing their grades.

Q. There is a small liberal arts college in Texas where only 10 or 12 faculty members serve as advisers. They reported that dropouts decreased by more than 50%. Will you comment on this special arrangement?

A. I tried to work with the Emory faculty on this type of arrangement over a long period of time. I have concluded that some faculty members are just not interested in advising and that there are others who don't know how.

Q. A small group of faculty members at L. S. U. was given intensive training for advising some years ago. It was found best not to use too young ones or too old ones. Would you say that the fulfillment of the advising function is related to the degree to which the faculty can provide the objectives of instruction clearly?

A. I think so. This situation varies, of course, from school to school, but it is clear to a faculty member that he is not going to be rewarded for counselling with students. He is going to be rewarded for the research he produces. When the administration and the school as a whole are able to clarify the role of the faculty, then the faculty will try to fulfill these goals.

Q. Let's continue to focus on the faculty. Rewards come mainly from colleagues in the form of acclaim and respect. They are the ones who don't care about working with students.

A. That's right. I overheard two chemists talking about another who showed great concern for his students. He was considered an "odd ball" by his colleagues.

Q. Do you have any evidence to support a system whereby the advisee selects an adviser or the other way around?

A. I don't know of any.

Q. Are we saying something about a formal advisory system for handling details of registration in contrast to one that involves a sort of personal relationship?

A. I talked with one professor who pointed out how the faculty nurtures graduate students; he mentioned that he gets close to only two or three undergraduates per year. Most of them come to the faculty about trivial

matters -- this is very irritating.

Q. There are numerous students who do not know an adviser. Aren't there students who do not need advisers?

A. Perhaps many of us did not have advisers. I never had one and perhaps that is why I am so maladjusted!! I have a feeling if the faculty would say: "Look, this is what we are going to do" in such a fashion that students can understand what is being attempted, that they might "perk-up" and participate more. Students are generally reasonable sorts of individuals who will accept a reasonable challenge.

Data on Changing Grading Standards

Emory College

1951-1963

Table 1

Changes in the Grading Standard

	1951	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964
Predicted Average (1951 Formula)	20	23	25	25	25	27	28	28	29	30
First Year Earned Average	21	20	22	21	21	22	24	24[1]	23	?
Percent Expected to Make C or Above (assuming grading standard for '51)	53	63	76	75	87	97	99.2	99.3	99.2	99.8[2]
Grading Standard (Percent Making C or Above	53	54	59	57	55	62	73	76	71	?

[1] From 1962 on, the earned average was based on all courses for which the student received credit. Previously Physical Education was omitted, but it was found that the two estimates of grade point average were so similar as to make a recomputation of averages by this office unnecessary.

[2] All students except one boy are predicted to be at or above the 20 level.

Table 2

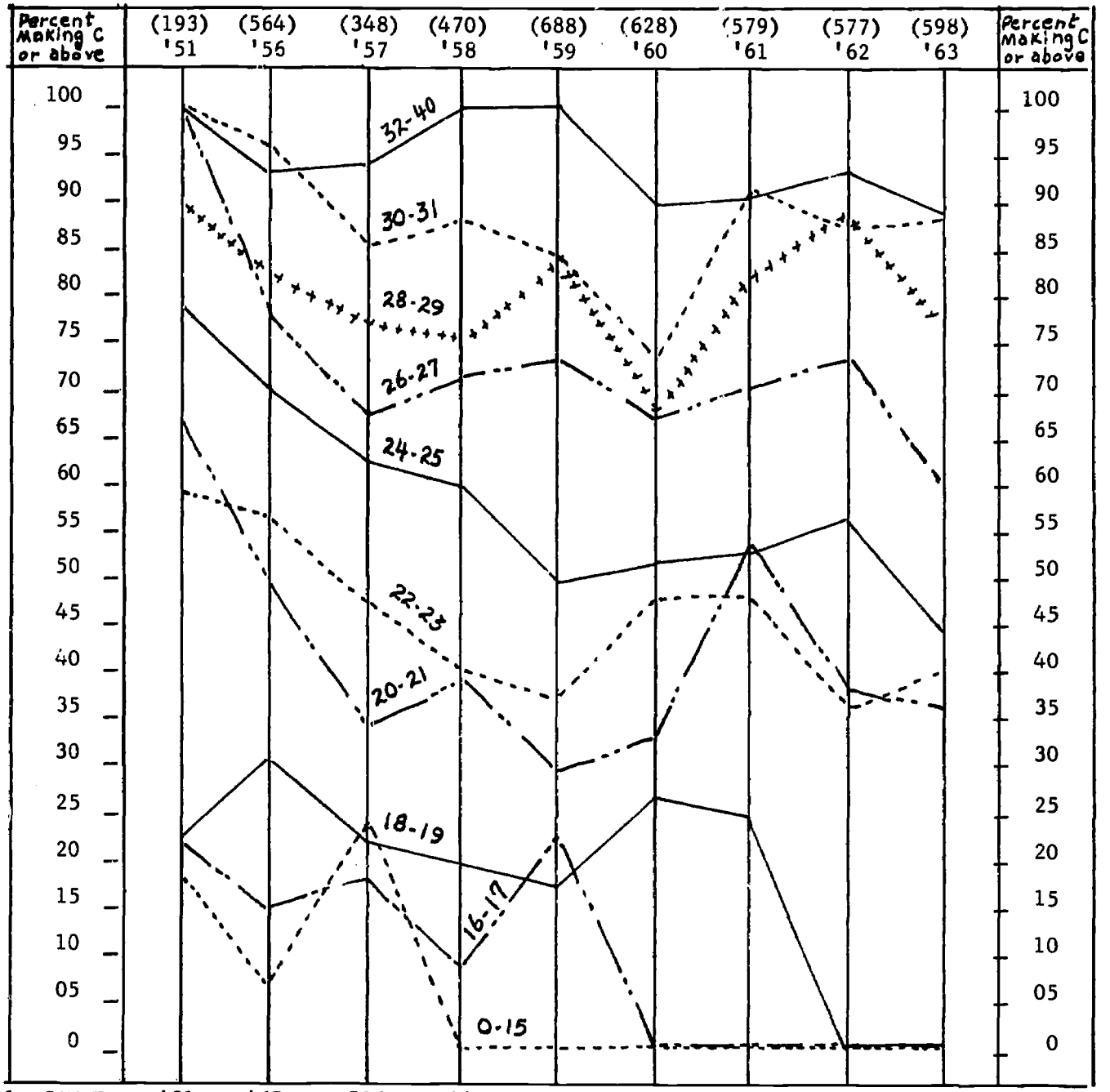
Percent of Students in High Predicted Grade Intervals
Who Made Averages of C or Above

Quality Level		1951	1956	1957	1958	1959	1960	1961	1962	1963
38-40		--	100*	--	100*	100*	100*	100*	100*	100*
36-37		100*	100*	86*	100*	100*	94	90	100	90
34-35		100*	100*	90*	94	96	91	86	93	94
32-33		100*	86	100	100	100	86	87	88	81
Students in the 4 levels	No	7	38	32	54	72	106	102	124	151
	%	4	7	9	12	10	16	18	21	25

*Indicates percents based on less than ten students.

Figure 1.
Percent of Students in Selected Predicted Grade Intervals Who Made Averages of C or Above
(1951 Prediction Formula)
Plotted Lines Indicate Quality Level Groupings

Number of Students and Year of College Entrance



1. SAT-V	431	467	506	504	502	536	546	554	562
2. SD:SAT-V	99.4	95.7	90.5	89.6	84.0	83.9	80.7	86.8	80.7
3. SAT-M	464	485	516	516	512	553	566	584	596
4. SD:SAT-M	101.5	99.0	82.6	85.3	83.8	78.0	68.2	70.1	69.0
5. HSA	29	30	32	32	32	32	33	33	33
6. Pred. Av.	20	23	25	25	25	27	28	28	29
7. 1st Yr. Av.	21	20	22	21	21	22	24	24	23
[illegible]	.78	.67	.60	.62	.76	.54	.55	.59	.55

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Chapter 18

ADMINISTRATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO DROPOUTS

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I would like first of all to express my appreciation for the opportunity of speaking to you today, although I must confess that this appreciation is tinged with a certain amount of wariness. The wariness comes from a real question as to whether or not I can present any striking new information on the question of college dropouts, or specifically, "Administrative Contributions to Dropouts." All of you are probably familiar with the Proceedings of the Research Conference on College Dropouts which was reported by Jim Montgomery of The University of Tennessee. You are also probably familiar with the excellent article and its accompanying bibliography by John Summerskill appearing in the book, The American College. You have all probably received the U. S. Office of Education publication entitled, "College Applicants, Entrants, and Dropouts." Each of these represents a significant contribution to the literature on dropouts.

The facts contained in those and other comprehensive writings are discouraging -- discouraging in both what they reveal and what they leave as unknown.

As a prelude to my remarks on "Administrative Contributions to Dropouts," I thought I would review briefly some of the conclusions.

1. About half of those who enter higher education drop out before completion.
2. The role of attrition has not altered appreciably in the last forty years.
3. Attrition occurs at all levels of ability.

I would like to comment briefly on each of these.

1. The attrition rate is roughly fifty percent of those who enter.

While some may agree that not all dropouts are necessarily failures or that it may in some instances represent the best decision, I would maintain that to some extent, every college dropout represents to the individual, to his family, to the institution, or to society, elements of failure.

The individual who enters a four year institution does so with the expressed expectation that he will complete a four year program. (At least this is true with 90% of those who enter the University of Maryland.) Thus the stated goal of 50% of entering freshmen is not fulfilled with the concomitant sense of failure and frustration.

Similarily, the expectation of parents is to have their son or daughter complete a four year program. When the parents of 500 marginally achieving high school students in the pre-college summer session were informed of the fact that less than half of those who enter a four year institution complete the program, the vast majority still indicated that they fully expected their son or daughter to complete a degree. Less than 10% of this particular group did, in fact, complete a degree program.

It is a loss to the institution. Iffert reports that the cost of a dropout to the college is approximately $1,000. While the monetary cost provides one measure, the cost of in terms of reputation, esteem, and acceptance is difficult to ascertain. As Sheeder stated, "The nature and extent of student losses constitute one measure of the efficiency of any educational institution."

There is loss to the society. The progress and welfare of this country will inevitably be adversely effected by the failure of able students to continue their education to levels commensurate with their capacities. The Federal Legislation in the form of NDEA, and the Higher Education Act, as

well as recent statements by President Johnson, clearly indicate the extent to which the proper utilization of talent is in our nation's best interests.

We have been cognizant of the effect of dropouts, and the Research Conference at Gatlinburg as well as this conference indicate our desire to find out more about the phenomenon of the college dropout as well as specific ways in which the pattern can be altered.

Our motivation to concern ourselves with dropouts in the past stems, in part, from our underlying concept that the American college is organized as a training center, and students who fail to persist have failed in our objectives.

However, there appears on the horizon a new basis of concern. This concern has been expressed recently in court cases dealing with student dismissals. In the past, courts have taken the position that a college education was a privilege, and as such, the courts were reluctant to enter into college judiciary procedures. The new orientation on the part of courts is that a college education is now an economic necessity and that a student should not be deprived of the right to a college education without due process. To the extent that the dropout problem is institutional as opposed to individual gives us cause for concern from a moral as well as a psychological or psychometric basis.

2. The rate of attrition has not altered in the last forty years.

This consistent statistic is discouraging and at the same time helpful in understanding some of the variables, especially institutional, which may be operating. It is discouraging in that in the last forty years, we have seen tremendous developments in the area of psychological sophistication. It was only about forty years ago that the first group

scholastic aptitude test was developed. It has been in the last forty years that we have developed satisfactory measures of personality, in the last twenty years that admission tests have been used, and in the last ten that we have seen tremendous technological changes in data processing. The introduction of counselors into the high schools has occurred in the last forty years, and only in the last twenty years have they become relatively common. All of these changes have occurred - each logically related to the concept of self knowledge, individual differences, and effective problem solving - and the dropout rate has remained constant. This, I think, we find ironical and inconsistent.

The constancy of the dropout rate in spite of all the changes occurring in our society and particularly those in education, may be evidence that there are some factors associated with higher education which need to be altered before appreciable alterations occur in the dropout rate. We are all aware of the fact that secondary schools have improved in quality, that entering classes in colleges have appeared brighter on standardized tests, and that admission procedures have become more selective. We know these things, and at the same time we know that the grade point averages have remained constant or even decreased, and that our dropouts - 1/3 for academic reasons - have continued. If it is any comfort, we can say that we are failing better students than we used to, or that it takes more brains to fail-out than it used to. It may well be that we have a built-in function operating that demands that a given proportion be terminated -- as if by some magical normal distribution.

Over the last forty years, our knowledge about the dropout has remained minimal. We know that a large proportion of those who dropout do so for reasons of motivation, but we don't have any means to discern student motives. Maybe, as Dr. McConnell has commented, if we rub our noses in

messy facts long enough, we will try to clean up the mess and reach a tidier state of affairs.

3. Attrition occurs at all levels of ability.

While one-third of those who drop out do so for academic reasons, it does not follow that they do not have the ability to succeed. For other students with equal or less scholastic potential do, in fact, continue to graduation. It has been said that there is a college from which any qualified high school graduate could finish or could satisfactorily meet the criteria of success. The difficulty, and I maintain one of the chief administrative contributions to college dropouts, is the failure on the part of colleges to communicate sufficient information in order for the student to make a realistic choice. If 90% of students who enter college expect to complete the program, then it follows that half of them have not selected an institution where the motivation or interest or feasibility for this is likely. In other words, they have made unrealistic choices of a college. I maintain that part of the reason for this is that they have had insufficient information on which to make choices. Information which is crucial to the decision has not been available to them, to their parents, or to high school counselors.

Mark Hopkins has said that his idea of college was a stimulating professor on one end of a log and a student on the other. If there were a college like this, it would probably be described in the handbooks like this:

> Log University - has a small faculty and highly selective admission requirements. Only 30 percent of applicants are accepted and pressure for academic achievement appears to be extreme.

Colleges, which are aware of the popularity contest going on among potential students, try for the most part to sound like the Big Ten schools

that everyone wants to enter. The increasing emphasis on the desirability of a certain few glamour schools has left many fine schools with a recruiting problem, even in this era of exploding enrollments. All things considered, you probably need more than a log now to make a good school, but if it is a log, it should be so described. Not only has this tendency to attempt to appear as the few been prevalent in the printed materials, it has existed elsewhere as well. The vast majority of institutions have persued a copy-cat policy, following the footsteps, insofar as dollars permit, of a few prestigious colleges and universities. Most colleges, in spite of admitting very different types of students with respect to backgrounds and abilities, continue to evaluate themselves against one or another of the prestigious colleges. They ask themselves: how does their system of elective courses compare; are their general education courses similar in content and scope; shouldn't they, too, institute an honors program, etc. So long as credits based upon hours in the classroom and the same course titles are deposited with the registrar in approximately the same academic amounts as they are at the other highly respected colleges, it is pretty much taken for granted that the same effective educational job has been done at old Siwash as at Harvard - maybe it has - or it may be that given what old Siwash had to work with, it has done a better job. As long as we evaluate a college by its input as opposed to the relationship between the input and output, we will never know. It may be said that the merit of certain institutions lies less in what they do to students than it does in the students to whom they do it. Or stated another way, its hard to do much harm to a high ability, well motivated student, once he gets into college.

The point, then, as related to administration contributions to dropouts is that there is a wide diversity in institutions and in the academic

and non-academic characteristics of students -- with a pretense that they are similar, or at least such is communicated to prospective students, to their parents, and to high school counselors.

The research literature in the area of dropouts indicates clearly that while ability and achievement are related to dropouts, it is not enough to concern ourselves with these as other variables - i.e., motivation variables are also operative. We should be interested, also, in interest and personality variables that may be found among student groups for the research indicates that they are determiners of persistence. We are faced with real difficulties of both a practical and research nature. Ability and achievement testing is fairly widespread in higher education; furthermore, the various tests that are available are roughly comparable in content and purpose. In the areas of interest and personality measurement, however, we are faced with a far lower frequency of general use, a larger number of different instruments, and a poorer theoretical foundation. When individuals in higher education are asked what personality traits are important and what tests are adequate for their measure, the number of different replies is equal to the number of respondents. However, the following characteristics of students appear most frequently in the research as related to college success:

A. The general authoritarian complex; Sanford.

B. Broad factors of sociability - job implications; Terman and Roe.

C. Conformity versus rebellion; Gough and Sanford.

D. Task oriented versus ego centered individuals.

E. Theoretical or value system orientation versus pragmatic or economically determined orientations.

In summary, then, I would see these sets of circumstances as "Administrative Contributions to Dropouts":

1) Lack of recognition of diversity of problems in institutions of higher learning -- most of them are patterned after Ivy League schools.

2) Lack of knowledge about the non-cognitive attributes of students in various settings.

3) Most importantly, lack of effective communication of the characteristics and goals to prospective students. It is not unreasonable to expect, then, that a number of students enter a given school only to find that the institution does not fit their needs -- educationally, vocationally, or psychologically.

4) Whereas Dr. Webb presented grading practices as a problem of the faculty, I would add that it is also one of the administration. As he pointed out, as students become more capable, failure rates also increase. This suggests to me that we must arrive at new criteria, and hopefully those which are meaningful, for grading.

* *

Discussion Questions

Q. To what extent should general information about the student and his prior academic record be made available to faculty members?

A. Generally, colleges do not use this type of information -- greater utilization of it might prove beneficial for students.

Q. To what extent have institutions of higher education made commitments to students who have decided to depart?

A. We should ascertain why the student is withdrawing and provide him with concrete information about other lines of endeavor he might pursue -- such as details about transferring to another school.

Q. Didn't you make the point that much of the administration's responsibility rests upon the fact that inadequate and misleading information is

being transmitted to the student?

A. Yes. One way of dealing with this is "admission on a trial basis." For example, a summer session was instituted at the University of Maryland -- students take an eight week course, counselors are provided, and study information is supplied. At the end of the session, only 250 of an original 1,000 were eligible for regular admission. The potential dropouts were thus reduced from 1,000 to 250. In this connection, 60% of entering students have not made vocational choices; it has been demonstrated that fewer drop out who have made vocational choices. Thus assistance in this regard would help.

Another thing is the distribution of accurate and honest information about the school.

Q. You mentioned five ways in which institutions might be typed or categorized. Will you please elaborate?

A. Yes, it has been demonstrated that certain campuses tend to draw students with special characteristics; for example, there is more conformity on some campuses than on others. The University of Colorado does not demand as much conformity as does the University of Maryland. Thus the beatnik type would not feel comfortable at the University of Maryland and the chances of that type student dropping out would be higher at Maryland than at Colorado. One can find similar contrasts within a university, that is, the Arts and Sciences College versus the Engineering College.

Q. What instrument would you recommend for determining the "climate" of a particular college?

A. The College Characteristics Index. This one and others are discussed in Sanford's book, The American College. Moreover, we need to know why a student selects a given college.

Q. Wouldn't we get answers the students want us to have?

A. I think this would depend upon what we are going to do with the data. My position is that we get a clear picture of the student and an accurate picture of the school. In extreme cases, if we know the chances are high the student won't fit, then refuse admission -- if, for example, he is the beatnik type and our school demands a high degree of conformity. In other instances, give a clear and honest picture of the "climate," and leave the decision to the student.

Q. How can we make the judgment that a particular student can succeed in our college?

A. Admittedly, this is a tough question. I would say as a general rule that too much information is as useless as too little information. Socio-economic background of the student appears to be most important in selection. Too, the climate of the college, as we have already discussed, seems to be more important than the number of books in the library or the number of Ph.D's on the campus. It would be helpful, too, to point out the average score on the ACT, or whatever your instrument is.

Q. Do you think that many colleges are willing to say of themselves, "We are such and such type of college"?

A. Many are reluctant to do just that. Yet if they did, certain students would not be attracted, and there would be fewer dropouts.

STEPS TO REDUCE DROPOUTS

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In order to amerliorate the dropout situation, it would be desirable to know just what is meant by terms such as "dropout," "retention," "attrition," "persistence," and "withdrawal." Research studies may report as dropouts persons absent from a college campus for as short a period of time as one term, or they may reflect sporadic attendance during a period of 10 or more years. Whether students who leave one college and enroll in another should be regarded as dropouts by the first institution is another question for which there is no commonly accepted answer.

Census-type studies report graduation rates of entering freshmen from about 15 to 70 percent; the lowest rates usually apply to four-year ones from a single institution, whereas the long-term rates, which take into account graduation from other institutions, often run much higher.

Stated reasons (see Table 1) for dropping out of college can be helpful in understanding the dropout problem, but certain limitations involved in this type of study should be recognized. There is the likelihood that stated reasons will include distortion -- intentional or unintentional. Also, the stated reasons of persons who were not allowed to return to college are questionable; stated reasons might be thought of as secondary or contributory in such cases. The reasons given by students for dropping out seem to suggest that financial reasons are probably most often combined with other reasons, such factors as lack of motivation or discouragement. Scholastic difficulty does not fully explain a very

large proportion of the withdrawals. Lack of interest, discouragement, and not finding college as expected are frequent reactions; sometimes these are accompanied by the criticism that the faculty and administration are distant or unconcerned.

Predictive studies, based on information available prior to admission, seem to hold limited promise as a method for reducing dropouts. Such techniques might be improved by supplementing test data with personality measures tapping such factors as vocational attitudes, ego-strength, achievement motivation, and desire to change. At best, prediction data alone can tell us "who" but not "why."

A study by Levenson (1965), a psychiatrist, suggests that we may get further in understanding dropouts if we can view withdrawal from "inside the person," rather than taking an external view of their characteristics as mere variables to throw into the prediction hopper. Levenson observed that dropouts have often escaped with little work via "conning" their teachers through their verbal glibness, and that they often start assignments in a grandiose manner but become discouraged easily. Perhaps the most striking insight was the fact that some of their fathers, even though ambitious for their sons, nevertheless offered them "rewards" not to succeed in college, e.g., a trip to Europe, a new car, or a place in the father's business. It is suggested that colleges can reduce dropouts by describing themselves honestly to students and by having respect for each student, even when this respect is not reciprocated.

Trow (1962) has pointed out that most college campuses represent each of four student cultures to some degree. These include: 1) the collegiate culture (best represented by interest in athletics, fraternities and sororities, dates, cars, and campus fun), 2) the vocational culture (whose symbol might be said to be the placement office), 3) the academic

culture (composed of students seriously involved in study and ideas), and 4) the non-conformist culture (represented by students who deviate in attitudes, dress, or speech). Trow raises questions as to how well colleges are serving the needs of each of these groups and what the responsibilities of the institution are to each one.

The importance of grading practices in student welfare and in persistence is often ignored as being a sacred area under the unbrella of academic freedom. It is difficult to think of a chaotic system of grading as contributing to a well-thought-out set of institutional objectives.

Relatively little attention has been given to the unique problems of transfer students. Some institutions may award as many as half of their Bachelor's Degrees to students who did not begin their work there. Yet many of them have not arranged policies with other institutions which make it reasonably possible for a transfer student to graduate within four years and without significant loss of credit.

The topic of institutional objectives encompasses much more than problems of retention and withdrawal. Institutional self-studies are needed to bring together many autonomous aspects of a college or university. Data about students as well as direct "feedback" from students are vitally important in this regard. Unfortunately, research personnel do not have the authority -- and in many cases the broad perspective -- to implement or revise policies.

Although student withdrawal is a major institutional and national problem in itself, it is hoped that <u>all</u> efforts to make instruction and other aspects of the college experience more meaningful will reduce unnecessary and undesirable departure prior to graduation.

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Discussion Questions

Q. Tuition seems to be increasing each year. Isn't this a major factor in creating financial problems? Sometimes it is socially unacceptable on a given campus to take a part-time job.

A. I agree that rising fees will increase financial problems. There are difficulties, though, in identifying students who will suffer financially, because "financial excuses" are socially acceptable. At the same time, all students who need to work cannot do so and maintain the necessary "C" average.

Q. Perhaps one of our troubles is that we have not explained the difference between actual costs and hidden costs. Do you agree this might be a useful distinction?

A. Yes, indeed! Many costs of socializing are hidden ones. And a student can become discouraged if he cannot socialize like the rest because of lack of funds. If automobiles are allowed on a campus, it is very important to a student psychologically to have one. Social life, very definitely, produces dropouts.

Q. Don't some students give medical reasons or excuses for dropping out?

A. Yes! And students are much like the faculty when we make excuses.

Q. How can we reduce dropouts?

A. In addition to the suggestions already made by others here, I might add that of having respect for students who do not respect us. What is our responsibility to the non-conformist groups -- those who burn draft cards? Some of us look at them as tumors that need to be removed. Yet there are reasons for believing that they are having a hard time finding themselves, and that we might help them with identification. On large

campuses, a rearrangement of physical factors might help. Instead of large rooms or lounges, have small ones. And each residence hall might be a sort of community.

Another suggestion has to do with transfer students. As all of us know, many of these lose time and credit. And some leave college entirely because of difficulties in transferring. With the population becoming more mobile, however, transferring should be facilitated.

TABLE 1

REASONS FOR LEAVING COLLEGE

(N = 1,162,000)

Reason	Men(%)	Women (%)
Lost interest	15.4	14.6
Poor grades	5.5	0.5
Lacked money	27.6	11.1
Took job	21.5	20.5
Military service	8.9	0.3
Marriage	6.9	35.1
Other	13.8	17.6
Not reported	0.4	0.3

J. D. Cowhig, "Why Do They Leave College?" School Review, 71:330-36, 1963.

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(no p.36)

SPECIAL QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EVALUATING THE CONFERENCE
"Student Retention in Tennessee Colleges and Universities"
March 21-22, 1966

1. In your opinion, conferences such as this one should be beamed primarily toward: (please number in order of importance -- 1 through 5, with 1 the most important)

_____ new faculty members
_____ experienced faculty members
_____ department chairmen
_____ administrative officers
_____ advanced graduate students

II. Mention two strong points of the conference:

_____

_____

_____

III. Mention two weak points of the conference:

_____

_____

_____

IV. Mention one other topic or problem in higher education for which you think it would be desirable or appropriate to conduct a conference of this sort.

_____

_____

V. "Proceedings" of this conference will be duplicated. How many copies would you like for your school? _____
State name and address of the person to whom they should be mailed:

Name _____

Address _____

_____

VI. Other comments you think would be helpful.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR THOUGHTFULNESS.

ANALYSIS OF THE SPECIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

I. As for future conferences of this type and to whom they should be directed primarily, there was general concensus that participants should be (in order of importance):

Administrative Officers
Experienced Faculty
Department Chairmen
New Faculty Members
Advanced Graduate Students

II. Strong points of the Conference, mentioned most often, included:

1) Ample opportunities for asking questions and for discussions (mentioned far more frequently than any other positive comment).

2) Stimulating speakers and outstanding content (in spite of statistical data).

3) The fact that printed materials were supplied both before and during the Conference.

4) Interested and carefully selected participants representing a variety of schools.

5) The focus upon action.

III. Most often mentioned weak points of the conference were:

1) No clearly defined goals or instructions for the small groups.

2) Too much repetition of statistics.

3) A final session devoted to specific plans for action was needed.

4) There were too few faculty members as participants.

IV. Future conferences should consider such topics or problems as the following (each was mentioned by several participants):

1) Coordination and cooperation between all the institutions of higher learning within the state.

2) Classroom testing and grading procedures and practices -- this

would include the consideration of greater utilization of standardized instruments.

3) Advising and counselling of students -- for example, the desirability of different arrangements for freshmen and upperclassmen.

4) How to motivate students to learn.

5) Improvement of the intellectual climate of campuses.

6) Coordination and cooperation between high schools and institutions of higher learning.

7) The facilitation of transferring from school to school.

V. There were many "other comments." They can be summarized in three categories:

1) Conferences about various problems in higher education which bring together participants from various schools are very useful -- there should be more of them.

2) There should be even greater involvement of faculty members.

3) "Homework" in the form of bibliographies and materials to read and study would facilitate programs.

ADDENDUM:

Ida Long Rogers, representing the Tennessee College Association Center for Higher Education, suggested that she would be glad to take the lead in arranging for systematic inter-institutional research. Twenty of the participants indicated their willingness to assist in such an endeavor.

An initial planning meeting was held subsequently on April 22, 1966, and specific recommendations were made to the Executive Committee of the Tennessee College Association on April 26, 1966.

The Committee endorsed the undertaking and encouraged Dr. Rogers to develop plans and procedures expeditiously.