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ABSTRACT

Public two-year colleges, which enroll more than half of all Illinois undergraduates enrolled in the public sector are bearing the brunt of the shift from "mass" to "universal" higher education. But recent evidence raises serious questions about whether a dual track system in higher education is being established which segregates by academic aptitude, achievement, and thus, to some extent, by SES. Student and institutional expenses at the two-year college far exceed what is popularly supposed. The total academic year budget for the State's junior college students is approximately $1,900, while that for senior college students is approximately $2,100. The taxpayer's cost is approximately 30% higher for the junior colleges than for freshmen-sophomore instruction in the senior institutions. We should examine the comparative costs of junior college remedial work to the cost of doing the job right at the elementary and secondary levels. Questions have arisen about the desirability of encouraging commuter higher education in view of studies showing that some types of students, particularly those from low-income and minority groups, do better at a resident college away from home. Evidence also exists that junior colleges do not increase the proportion of the college-age population who earn bachelor's degrees. But nearly 70% of the junior college operating budgets are expended on transfer programs. We must define what we mean by the qualifications for higher education and determine whether the expansion of post-secondary "opportunities" has reached a point of diminishing returns. Education from kindergarten through the Ph.D. must be considered in determining priorities. (For related documents, see HE 004 271-273, 004 281-289.) (KM)

IV

JUNIOR COLLEGES
HOPES AND FRUSTRATIONS

by

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IV

JUNIOR COLLEGES - HOPES AND FRUSTRATIONS

The need to relieve enrollment pressures on the public senior institutions has contributed to the rapid expansion of the two-year colleges. The financial, academic, and geographic accessibility of two-year colleges has provided additional spaces for a rapidly increasing number of "underqualified" students in post-secondary education. In the face of increasing selectivity on the part of senior institutions the two-year community college has come to represent the most flexible and innovative response available to meet the problems of educational disadvantage.

More than half of all Illinois undergraduate college students enrolled in the public sector are now enrolled in public two-year colleges. In the shift from "mass" to "universal" higher education, the two-year colleges are being asked to bear the burden of absorbing and educating new constituencies as well as some portion of the old constituencies. Higher education in Illinois has met pressures to provide for greater access and opportunity by emulating the pattern of the California "Master Plan." High school graduates, or those "otherwise qualified," are guaranteed a place at some level, usually depending upon some combination of their high school records and aptitude test scores. Through this set of tested ability measures the colleges and universities, as a system, have attempted to resolve the conflict between maintaining academic standards and extending educational opportunities.

In a few areas the accomplishments of two-year colleges have been extremely impressive, and their educational potential is in some ways unlimited. But the evidence that has been gathered is beginning to raise serious questions about whether we are establishing a dual track system in higher education which intentionally designed or not is stratified and progressively segregated by academic aptitude, achievement, and thus to some extent by socio-economic class.

The Cost

The expense at the two-year college, both for the student and for the institution, far exceeds what many people suppose it is. People have assumed that living at home would constitute a considerable savings for students. But for many two-year college students, every year in school is a year of lost income to the family, and at home they are either responsible for room and board, or they are pressured to defer their education until they bring more money into the home. Transportation can be expensive, not just for carfare, but also for the time it consumes -- time which may preclude employment and study. The junior colleges are not free, for tuition constitutes only a fraction of college expenses. Students whose resources are severely limited find that expenses for books, a dictionary, a typewriter, supplies, clothing, recreation, laundry, etc.--accumulate rapidly.

According to the State Board of Higher Education, the total academic year budget for students attending our junior colleges is approximately $1,900 per year (Belleville Junior College--$1,904, Danville Junior College--$1,982, College of DuPage--$2,036, Lake County--$2,012, Wabash Valley--$1,793, Kennedy-King--$1,721, Carl Sandburg--$1,907, Black Hawk--$1,973, etc.). Tuition costs amount to approximately $200. Although junior colleges are "commuter" colleges and no dormitory room and board fees are charged, a "residency allowance" of $1,100 is included in the total junior college budget, this $1,100 being an estimate of what it costs a parent to feed, clothe, and house a student while the student is living at home. An additional $600 is allocated to the cost of travel to and from the commuter campuses, books, supplies, entertainment, and the cost of meals away from home.

By contrast, before the recently imposed tuition hikes, the total annual college budget for a student attending a senior institution was estimated by the State Board of Higher Education to be about $2,100. The total academic year budget is reported to be $2,113 at the University of Illinois, $2,130 at Northern Illinois University,

$1,947 at Western Illinois University, $2,128 at Southern Illinois University, etc. When total costs to the student are considered, it has not been all that much more expensive to attend a public senior institution in the State of Illinois than it has been to attend a public junior college. And in those cases where students attend junior college while living away from home, there is no difference other than tuition charges.

Another important piece of information missing from current deliberations concerning investment priorities in higher education is objective cost data comparing the taxpayer's cost of providing junior college instruction to the taxpayer's cost of providing equivalent instruction at senior institutions. An unpublished 1969-70 junior college cost study performed by the State Board of Higher Education shows the average total cost per student credit hour in the baccalaureate "college-track" programs to be $42.02. In the occupational programs of the State's junior college system the cost is $59.65 per student credit hour; the general studies programs cost $48.32 per student credit hour; the adult and continuing education programs cost $47.95 per student credit hour. Overall, for 1969-70, 2,340,180 student credit hours were taught at a total instruction cost of $110,059,669 for a composite average unit cost of $47.05 per student credit hour. Of the $110,059,669 total expenditures, $69,833,721 is being expended in the baccalaureate "college-track" programs. The junior colleges estimate that about 7,000 of their 1969-70 graduates transferred to senior institutions that year. The junior college freshman class of 1968 numbered approximately 70,000 students.

The comparable average cost for freshman-sophomore instruction in all public senior institutions was $36.64 per student credit hour taught in 1969-70. In other words, the cost to taxed citizens of the State for instruction at the freshman-sophomore level is approximately 16% higher in the junior college baccalaureate programs than it is in the public senior institutions. The junior college composite average is approximately 30% higher than the freshman-sophomore instruction in the senior institutions.

In studies performed for the Office of Education, Joseph N. Frumkin confirms that on the average the cost of instruction of lower level undergraduates is no less in

junior colleges than senior State institutions. (And he also notes that private institutions spend more on undergraduates than public State institutions.)

It may be perfectly appropriate for instructional costs to be higher in the junior colleges than in the public senior institutions for they attract a highly diversified group of students, including a substantial number of individuals from minority groups, low-income families, or educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. Remedial education does not come cheap! But, we might want to examine the comparative costs of junior college "remedial work" to the cost of doing the job right in the first place at the elementary and secondary school levels. Much more information needs to be generated before intelligent priority decisions can be made. One thing is certain--there is trained manpower aplenty to do the job in elementary and secondary schools while there reportedly exists a shortage of junior college teachers.

The Location

Questions have arisen about the desirability of encouraging commuter higher education. Studies have been performed which show that some types of students, expecially students from low-income and minority families, do better and meet with more success in their college career if this career is pursued at a resident institution away from the home environment. Professor Louis J. Pearl of Cornell University has observed that

> To the extent low-income students attend college, they keep the cost of this investment low by living at home, by working for pay, by living in low-quality housing, or by attending low-input colleges which charge low tuition levels. However, these reductions in input also reduce these students' chances of graduation . . .
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> First, for the student deciding whether or not to attend college, the model suggests that the success of this investment depends heavily on the student's ability level and the financial capital available to him for this investment. Students whose ability level is low or who, because of inadequate financing, must work for pay while they are in college, are substantially less likely to graduate or to attend graduate school than those with adequate financing and precollege training. Living at home to reduce the costs of college attendance also reduces the student's likelihood of college graduation.

For those students who already have employment, or who wish to attend school part-time, or who are needed to help in some way at home, there really is no alternative, and the choice is between commuting to college or no college at all. But there seem to be adequate justifications for the high priority investment in providing opportunities for qualified students to attend college, and to reside, outside of the immediate locale of their childhood. The pricing policies and subsidy policies for the whole Illinois system of higher education are currently in a serious state of confusion because of recent rapid changes thrust upon our institutions and their students. In a study of dropouts in good academic standing at Urbana-Champaign this past fall, it was discovered that

> . . . those who are not here are enrolled in other schools or are working, and most give financial reasons for their decision. What has changed most is not whether the student will attend, but where and when he attends. Financial constraints are limiting the choices for students seeking the most from our statewide system of higher education--limiting their choices of institutions and, in fact, their ability to stay in the system without dropping out for a semester or two.

The Role

There is evidence that while junior colleges actually increase the proportion of the college age population who enter college, they do not increase the proportion who earn bachelor's degrees. Robert Berls points out that while California leads the nation in the percentage of its high school graduates who enter college, it ranks next to last in the percentage of its public college enrollment that eventually receives bachelor's degrees.[1]

A study by John Folger, Helen Astin, and Alan Bayer finds that for both men and women ranking within the top 40 per cent in "measured ability," *the proportion of two-year college entrants who have attained a bachelor's degree is less than half that of those students of the same ability who entered four-year colleges.* They suggest on

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[1]Berls, Higher Education Opportunity and Achievement, Office of Education, 1969.

the basis of this data that while the two-year colleges have increased the chances for college entrance, and they have provided the prime access to higher education for lower ability and lower socio-economic status students, these colleges appear to be increasing the socio-economic differentials in four-year college completion.[2]

> Given the current tendency to siphon first-generation collegians into colleges with high attrition and second-generation collegians into colleges with low attrition, the over-all attainment gap between children from different cultural backgrounds may well continue to widen for some time to come.[3]

There is a widespread misunderstanding of the developing role and function of the junior college system.

> The main difficulty lies in the enormous range of student deficiencies to be overcome and the lack of adequate information about the motivational and learning patterns of disadvantaged students . . . . Another obstacle is the lack of wide-spread public understanding of the problems involved in training the type of students enrolled and the unwillingness of government at all levels to give adequate support to this effort. Effective remedial and developmental programs are expensive because they normally require a low student-faculty ratio.[4]

In a very short time the junior colleges seem to have achieved some success in raising the educational attainment of youth who elect to delay their entrance to the labor market by one or two years. However, a disparity exists between the aspirations created by the selling of the junior college system as a route to the baccalaureate and the achievement of those aspirations. Aspirations to transfer to a s nior college apparently exceed performance by a considerable margin. And a considerable proportion (nearly 70%) of the junior college operating budgets are expended on just these programs.

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[2]John K. Folger, Alan E. Bayer, Helen Astin, Human Resources in Higher Education, (New York, 1970).

[3]Jencks and Riesman, The Academic Revolution, (New York, 1968).

[4]The Education Professions, 1969-70, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, OE-58032-70.

One wonders what effect the large supply of seventeen-year-olds during the 1960's has had on the decision to delay entrance to the labor market by enrolling in junior college, a phenomenon which Riesman calls "post-secondary holding stations for the swollen labor force." Chronic unemployment in the post-high school age group may well have induced this delay, but the 1970's will bring a leveling of this age group and the 1980's will witness a decline in their real numbers.

Results and Alternatives

From a system of mass higher education which provides access and certification to any student with the documented potential to meet the established criteria, we are moving toward an inefficient and expensive system of universal higher education, in which the two-year colleges extend a function of the high school- identifying the academically able, shunting the less able into technical, vocational, or general education, and allowing the least able to drop out. The educational process is being stretched out beyond high school, with minor accomodating adjustments and without major alteration.

Perhaps the earlier successes of our colleges and universities have conditioned society to ask too much of them. There is no panacea in sight. It is sheer folly to promise equal opportunity when higher education, by itself, has neither the power nor the resources to bring forth the performance requisites to provide it. There isn't agreement about the desirability of achieving "equal opportunity" or even a common understanding of what the situation would be like if we had it.

If our four year institutions do not expand their capacity to enroll freshmen and sophomores, and if our senior institutions are forced to raise their tuition charges, then many of the "better" academically qualified students graduating from Illinois high schools during the 1970's will be induced to attend local junior colleges. While this phenomenon may tend to improve the junior college retention rates and thereby increase the numbers of their graduates transferring to the senior institutions, it will have

to occur at some cost in lost student potential unless the nature of academic preparation changes throughout all of the junior college institutions. These changes, if pursued, will take time and money, but the enrollment pressures at the end of this decade will subside and we could very well experience an over capacity for baccalaureate preparation in our junior colleges.

From the standpoint of eventual graduation, we know that living away from home has a positive effect on the student's academic performance in college. We know that similarly qualified students currently do better in four year colleges and universities than they do in junior colleges. While forcing more of the better qualified high school graduates into junior colleges may enhance the performance of the junior college system in the long run, it could very well impair the overall post-secondary performance of the whole high school graduating class unless the junior college experience can be transformed uniformly into something approaching the educational experience now provided by our senior institutions.

But junior colleges are dependent to a great degree upon the tax base of their geographic locale. In this respect they share the dilemma of financing the operating costs of our primary and secondary schools. Unless tax reform becomes a reality, the "better" junior colleges will turn out to be those junior colleges which enroll the "better" academically prepared products of the "best" public school districts. Nothing will have changed, no improvement in opportunity will have been experienced by low income families. The treadmill and the routes to opportunity which exist today will persist through the 1970's. Students living in the "best " neighborhoods will be provided the greatest opportunity for higher education because, in part, they have the greatest access to the "best" common school preparation and the "best" junior college preparation.

Furthermore, if State government elects now to fund an increasing proportion of the junior college costs without first examining current junior college expenditure practices and without the accountability applied to senior institutions, priorities

will not be set at the local level. If priorities are not set at the local level, then the State will be approached to pick up a larger share of the costs of the common schools as well as the junior colleges. If priorities are not set at the State level, then the federal government will be approached to pick up a larger share of the costs of all the education system from kindergarten through the university level. All this "buck passing" can only result in more taxes coming out of different pockets of the same people, in higher level coordination, control, and bureaucracy.

We need in Illinois to design policy which will capitalize on existing successes of our educational system and which will focus resources upon existing student deficiencies where these deficiencies can be corrected with the maximum return on educational investments.

The basic problem is to define what we mean by "who qualifies for higher education" and to determine whether the expansion of post-secondary "educational opportunities" has reached a point of diminishing returns. Clearly, our State is not yet affluent enough to afford another tripling of costs to double again the college enrollments and provide college education for all--nor is it an obviously desirable goal, regardless of its cost.

We must consider the whole spectrum of education from kindergarten through the Ph.D. level in making priority decisions for limited resources. We must decide which is more important--to provide expanded post-secondary educational opportunities for those graduating in the bottom half of their high school classes or to provide them with higher quality primary and secondary education, better tailored to their needs? To provide expanded post-secondary educational opportunities for those less able to master it at the expense of leveling the quality of educational opportunities now available to those students who can more likely benefit the society and themselves from existing programs? To provide expansion of opportunities for post-graduate work at the expense of raising the overall quality of primary and secondary educational attainment of all the youth? How much education is enough for different individuals and for society and where can existing deficiencies and needs best be met at what cost and to whom?

A committed effort toward compensatory education, flexible and innovative academic structures, individualized placement programs, and more effective distribution, will require a direct financial input of considerable magnitude, as well as a continuing support of institutional resources. This investment will be in addition to that required in order to eliminate the economic barriers confronting students of tested quality.