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## ABSTRACT

Student personnel services in United States colleges and universities largely ignore the needs of married students and their families. This report serves the following purposes: (1) to discover needs of the married student population for student services; (2) to propose programmatic endeavors to serve the needs discovered; and (3) to develop and present a needs assessment procedure with general applicability in planning for higher education student personnel programs. To explore the area of student selfhood support and development, the study developed a needs assessment instrument based on 24 criterion probes to compare desired student status with actual student status. Deficiencies between actual and desired status represent student needs. The investigation also attempted to identify subgroups of married students sharing similar needs. While finding a high degree of satisfaction among married students, the study discovered seven problem areas: supplemental income, affiliation need, family involvement, relationship with college, child care, job information, and college expectations and opportunities. The author suggests four alterations in student personnel services to meet these needs. (Author/LAA)

STUDENT PERSONNEL PROGRAMS  
FOR MARRIED STUDENTS:  
A NEEDS ASSESSMENT<sup>1</sup>

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Prior to 1945, senior colleges and universities in the United States gave little encouragement to the married student and, in fact, in some cases barred his or her enrollment. Marriage, it was felt, would unduly interfere with the pursuit of academic excellence. In 1925, for example, the faculty at Yale University suspended in his junior year their All-American football tackle, Century Milstead, for having violated a rule forbidding undergraduates to marry (Newsweek 1957). It has been estimated that prior to 1945, married students accounted for only three to six percent of the total U. S. college and university student enrollment (Madalia 1962; Christopher-son 1960).

In 1945, due in large part to the end of World War II and the availability of the G. I. Bill, married student enrollment in U. S. colleges and universities jumped to 20 percent (Christopherson 1960). This percentage has never dropped, and census reports for 1958 and 1967 show married students comprising approximately 22 percent of the student population in United States senior colleges and universities (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1959; U. S. Bureau of the Census 1969).

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Student personnel services, however, have not kept pace with this changing enrollment. Repeated studies have concluded that the campus remains an environment equipped primarily for the needs of the unmarried young adult (Dressel 1965; Haun 1967; King and Fess 1969; Moore and Hinkle 1970; Morrill and Oetting 1970; Murray 1961; Riemer 1947).

This is a report of an investigation occurring in 1971-72 which proposed to serve three parallel purposes:

1. To discover needs of the married student population in institutions of higher education for student personnel services within a selected area of institutional responsibility.
2. To propose programmatic endeavors which can serve the sum of the needs discovered.
3. To develop and present a needs assessment procedure which will have general applicability in planning for higher education student personnel programs.

Student personnel work was defined in the organizational sense, i.e., as a set of assignments to various production stations within an organization, in this case an institution of higher education. It was viewed as a specialty with the functions of (a) supporting the execution of the formal academic teaching function through centralizing and performing selected student-related services, and (b) complementing the formal academic teaching function in creating an institutional environment which facilitates the personal and social development of the student. In planning student personnel programs to provide these services, it was deemed necessary to explore student and institutional needs.

To explore these needs, the application of a formal needs assessment procedure was attempted. Needs assessment is a procedure recently devised to deal with educational program planning based upon client needs.

Needs assessment rests upon the assumption that organizations are designed to satisfy social aims or goals. These social goals are expressed as desired client statuses. Needs assessment then is an attempt to compare desired client status with actual client status. Deficiencies between actual and desired client status are termed "needs".

### PROCEDURE

Needs assessment may proceed from the goals of the organization in which the study is being done. Such a study is institutionally-based. The present investigation, however, attempted to produce results generalizable to the college and university married student population as a whole; as such its areas for exploration were derived from descriptions of those responsibilities of student personnel work which are advocated by the student personnel profession.

To identify these responsibilities, three authoritative pronouncements of the profession's programmatic responsibilities were selected (Williamson 1949; COSPA 1964; Grant 1970). From these, sixty responsibility statements were isolated. These statements were synthesized under the major responsibility headings of:

- Student Assessing and Accounting
- Student Control
- Student-institution Communication
- Sub-system Maintenance and Development
- Student Selfhood Support and Development

Of the sixty responsibility statements, fifty-one fell within the Student Selfhood Support and Development area of responsibility. This area of student personnel work was chosen for exploration.

A Married Student Needs Assessment Instrument was then developed. To create this instrument, the 51 identified responsibility statements were first consolidated and stated as behavioral goals. Interviews were then held with married students and with those familiar with married students in order to determine the relationship of these behavioral goals to the married student population. As part of this approach, it became necessary to define the institutional responsibility to families of married students. With this information in hand, then, statements were written of those conditions which married students and their families would experience upon the institutional fulfillment of the derived behavioral goals of student personnel work within the Student Selfhood Support and Development area of responsibility. These statements were then used as criterion probes. These criterion probes expressed a desired status and were designed to elicit from married students their perceptions of their actual status in comparison with this desired status. For each criterion probe or statement of desired status, several illustrations were added which related directly to potential areas of married student needs. An example of a married student desired status or criterion probe and its illustrations follows:

Financial resources and prospects are conducive to reasonable security and maintenance of a low-medium standard of living.

### Illustrations

1. Basic necessities for clothing, food, shelter, and transportation are met.
2. Health care and health insurance costs are met.
3. If spouse is employed, housekeeping and/or childcare are not sub-standard.
4. Unpaid bills for household and college expenses are within capacity to pay and are not mounting.
5. Ability to meet college and living expenses for the next college year is reasonably secure.
6. Financial dependence upon parents or other sponsors is not beyond their reasonable capacities and/or willingness to assume.
7. After-college debts incurred or to be incurred can be paid off with 10% or less of prospective annual income.

Twenty-four of these criterion probes with accompanying illustrations were developed from the behavioral statements of the goals of student personnel work within the Student Selfhood-Support and Development area of responsibility.

Before submitting these twenty-four criterion probes to a sample of married students, it was necessary to set criterion levels for the existence of the stated conditions. That is, it was assumed that some degree of nonsatisfaction with present status within the married student population was presumably inevitable. The question was, in the practical sense, when does the requirement for additional institutional response exist?

To determine these criterion levels, copies of the criterion probes were submitted to a jury of six active student personnel professionals. From these jury members' judgments, criterion levels for each of the twenty-

four criterion probes were derived. The resulting criterion levels were accepted for the purposes of this study as expressing those levels of self-reported married student satisfaction which were minimally acceptable with respect to the conditions stated. The levels for the various criterion probes ranged from 74% to 93%. For example, for the criterion probe with the 74% criterion level, the acceptable level of married student satisfaction with present status as it compared with the desired status or condition expressed by the criterion probe statement was set at 74% of the responses received. If less than 74% of the respondents expressed satisfaction with their present status as it compared with this particular criterion probe statement, the interpretation was to be that a need existed and the magnitude of that need was to be the percentage deficiency between 74% and the percentage level of satisfaction reported. On the other hand, if the level of satisfaction within the respondent group was found to be greater than 74%, the interpretation was to be that no need existed with relation to that criterion probe statement.

An additional attempt was made in this investigation to determine those cases in which discovered needs attended to identifiable subgroups of married students. Such information, it was felt, would have two potentially valuable uses. First, it would be useful as an aid in determining the design of program activities to serve the needs discovered. Such program activities might differ in form when designed for different subgroups. Second, it was felt that information on the subgroup loci of needs could be used to guide both the geographical location of these program activities and the communication of their existence.

To identify subgroup loci of the discovered needs, a personal data or information sheet was included with the needs assessment instrument. The respondents were asked to note on this information sheet certain of their personal descriptive characteristics. Subgroup loci of the discovered needs were then determined by comparing the descriptive characteristics of those respondents to which needs attended with the characteristics of the remainder of the respondents.

### ADMINISTRATION OF THE INSTRUMENT

One purpose of this study was to provide results somewhat generalizable to the married student population as a whole. Therefore, samples of married students were drawn from two institutions of higher education. These were the University of Texas at Austin, a large urban university with a well-developed graduate program, and Southwest Texas State University, a smaller rural university with only about 4% of its students enrolled at the graduate level. By a numerically-based random sample technique, a total of 688 married student families were selected from these two institutions for inclusion in the study. A copy of the Married Student Needs Assessment Instrument and the accompanying personal data sheet were mailed to each. For the two institutions together, 43% of the instruments mailed were returned in usable form..

### ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES

The analysis of responses occurred in two phases. The purpose of one phase was to determine the prevalence and incidence of needs across all respondents. The purpose of the second phase was to compare responses

received from the two institutions in order to explore the generalizability of the results obtained.

Perhaps the most impressive empirical finding of this entire study was the low incidence of computed needs as reported by the married student population. Of the twenty-four condition statements in relation to which need might have been found to exist, need was discovered to exist in relation to only seven. With respect to the other seventeen condition statements, the married student group was found to be satisfied at an acceptable level with its present status. Of all responses received on all instruments, only 10.6% were expressions of dissatisfaction with present status. This indicates that a generally high degree of satisfaction exists within the group here studied with respect to those conditions of their life situation considered by this study. The conditions of the married student life situation with respect to which, by the definitions used in this study, no need exists are:

The student and the family are knowledgeable concerning practices which will facilitate their good health.

The health of the student and the family are conducive to their high-level utilization of college and community resources.

Satisfying marital and family relationships exist.

A reasonably well-developed system of values allows the student to evaluate with consistency the worth of alternative behaviors.

Student and spouse possess reasonable well-developed social and human relations skills.

The organizational and leadership skills of the student are good enough to get by with for the foreseeable future.

Student and spouse are equipped as well as the average family to rear children constructively.

The student and spouse are adequately informed concerning community, state, national, and international affairs.

Financial resources and prospects are conducive to reasonable security and maintenance of a low-medium standard of living.

The student exercises effective prudential control and application of the family's financial resources.

A reasonably-complete awareness exists of college and community services, facilities, and events available to the student and the family.

Housing arrangements are conducive to family welfare.

Career objectives are chosen and plans for the attainment of those objectives are reasonably well-developed.

The student possesses study skills and work habits which facilitate efficiency in learning and producing.

The student and the family have an acceptable range of interests and occasions to exercise them.

Family members are experiencing accelerated intellectual and cultural growth.

At the time of entrance, the student had information (adequate for his needs) concerning the adjustments in life-style required by the new environment.

It was concluded that married students and their families perceive their requirements in the above areas as being presently satisfied at an acceptable level.

In some areas, however, there are married student requirements which are not being satisfied at an acceptable level. These deficiencies are the needs which this study sought as one of its major purposes to identify.

The seven condition statements with respect to which need was discovered to exist and the percentage magnitude of that need with respect to the total group of married students is given below:

CONDITION STATEMENTS	PERCENTAGE MAGNITUDE OF NEED
1. Sources of supplementary income available to the student and his or her spouse are sufficient to maintain family support.	10
2. A sense of affiliation with the college and community exists, and the family is accepted by at least one specific group within the college or community.	13
3. Student and family enjoy an ample volume of group activity and involvement.	14
4. The college in its routines recognizes and gives consideration to married students and their families.	17
5. Arrangements for child care are affordable, convenient, and contributory to the child's (children's) development.	3
6. Those about to seek career employment have information about job availability and job seeking procedures.	5
7. At the time of entrance, the student possessed crucial information concerning the college's expectations of and opportunities provided for students.	9

Responses to the more specific illustrations of each of these condition statements were studied in order to better interpret each need. For example, the results indicated that program-makers would be misled if they interpreted the need for a "sense of affiliation..." to mean that students do not "feel at ease on campus". They do feel at ease on campus but they don't feel they are recognized by the institution.

The characteristics of those respondents reporting dissatisfaction with regard to these seven condition statements were then analyzed. Unexpectedly, this analysis revealed little relationship between specific needs and specific subgroups of married students. The conclusion was that the locus of these needs is the married student population without reference to age range, etc.

In order to inform the question of the generalizability of the results here discovered, the responses received from each of the two involved institutions were compared. This comparison revealed that the objects of dissatisfaction within the two institutional groups of married students were remarkably similar. Of the 24 condition statements, both groups indicated an "excessive" degree of dissatisfaction with regard to an identical seven condition statements. They indicated a "less than excessive" degree of dissatisfaction with regard to an identical 14 other condition statements, and they failed to express identical judgments with regard to only the remaining three statements. These three statements were seen as need-related by one institutional group but not by the other. The conclusion is that the subject-content of student personnel-related needs or deficiencies identified by married student groups at different institutions seems to be markedly similar and perhaps generalizable.

#### PLANMAKING FOR REDUCING MARRIED STUDENT NEEDS

Needs assessment is a commonly-advocated "step" in the discipline of planmaking. Haskew has identified one variety of planmaking labeled

"Development-Span" (Haskew 1970-71). This is planmaking which focuses upon the production of additional or improved achievements by an organization at the end of a three to five year span of time.

The major sequence in this planmaking is:

1. Needs assessment
2. Objectives determination
  - a. Product objectives
  - b. Process objectives
3. Operations design
4. Programming to implement operations and achieve objectives
5. Description of evaluative information flow
6. Summation of resource requirements

Following these steps, this investigator produced a plan for organizational response to the discovered needs. This plan proposed four distinct alterations or additions to the present form of college and university student personnel services over a period of five years and resulting in the alleviation of the married student needs discovered. These four alterations or additions were the creation of an Office of Married Student Services, action to persuade existing units of the institution to take notice of married students, the addition of certain programs specifically for married students, and the expansion of existing institutional services to satisfy related married student needs. For an institution of 40,000 students including 8,000 married students, resource requirements over the full five year period were estimated at \$250,000 and the addition of five staff. Continued funding would occur at the level of \$78,000 per year.

Plan production furnished a key test of the technology employed in the needs assessment procedure. The conclusion was that the needs assessment procedure as employed produces sufficient information for the rational derivation of concrete organizational actions. Specific information becomes available as to deficiencies in organizational goal achievement. Both the subject content and the magnitude of these deficiencies are revealed. This knowledge is transformable to equally-specific quantitative objectives for programmatic action. Criterion levels set during needs assessment become product objectives during subsequent planmaking. Discovered needs become process objectives (based upon magnitudes of change required). Information also becomes available as to those subgroups of the target or client population for which the programmatic actions are to be designed and at which they are to be aimed.

### CONCLUSIONS.

The needs assessment procedure presented has certain difficulties. For example, the investigation depended chiefly upon the opinions of clients as expressed through structured questionnaires for the determination of needs. This presents the potential for bias due to a partial return. In addition, it assumes that the clients recognize what is possible and recognize their own status in relation to these standards. Actually, a prime opportunity and necessity for student personnel programs may be to cultivate student awareness of norms and statuses of which the students are presently unaware.

An additional suggestion is made. The present investigation was restricted to needs of married student families while in residence at an institution. No attempt was made to explore the life situations of married students and families following their departure. However, if the responsibility of the institution is to prepare students for a satisfying and contributing life experience, then such a follow-up exploration is crucial. Information gathered through such a post-departure needs assessment could serve as feedback to indicate further adjustments or additions required in married student personnel programs.

The final conclusion of this study is that the needs assessment procedure developed does have general applicability in planning for higher education student personnel programs. Needs assessment is one of a wide array of rational or goal-oriented tools being experimentally developed and modified for use in educational planning and evaluation leading to educational accountability. This movement is in a rudimentary stage but holds the promise of eventual maturity and wide adoption. With its capability for revealing deficiencies in goal achievement and identifying the elimination or reduction of those deficiencies over time, needs assessment should become an integral part of this movement. It is hoped that this study will lead to further refinement and application of the needs assessment procedure in student personnel work and education in general. At a minimum, the procedure will force us to clearer thinking about what we are attempting to achieve.

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