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AUTHOR Konrad, Abram G.
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a conceptual framework for conducting followup studies as an integral part of an institutional evaluation program. Data obtained from followup studies should become part of an overall information system designed to provide data for institutional decision-making. Such data should be conveniently stored and readily available for a wide range of evaluative studies conducted over time. Followup studies have three dimensions: (1) who or what is evaluated; (2) how the evaluation is done; and (3) who uses the findings. Most followup studies seek to evaluate student performance and/or opinions about the institution; data about students and evaluative feedback from students should be collected on a systematic basis from the day they first contact the institution. There are two methods of data evaluation: the congruence mode, in which actual data is compared to desired performance; and the contingency mode, in which data is used to identify new needs and directions. Findings may be used by any one of the three functional subsystems of the college: the institutional subsystem, which determines societal needs and sets institutional goals; the managerial subsystem, which facilitates the achievement of these goals; or the technical subsystem, which takes particular action to fulfill specific goals. (DC)

". . . and Rode Off Madly in All Directions"

Abram G. Konrad, Associate Professor
University of Alberta

The title refers to Stephen Leacock's proverbial horseman who lacked a sense of direction, yet was enthusiastically active. Canadian post-secondary institutions, like the horseman, sense the need for activity, but in the eyes of some observers, also appear to be going in several directions.

Not only are new institutions emerging to meet the increasingly diverse demands for tertiary education, but the traditional purposes and structures of well-established institutions are also being challenged. Along with rapid changes in the functions and structures of post-secondary education, there is a growing socio-economic demand for accountability in education. Notwithstanding the complexity of defining and measuring educational goals and the degree to which these are being achieved, greater efforts toward institutional and program evaluation must be launched. This paper advocates the adoption of a systematic approach to follow-up studies in post-secondary education as an integral part of such evaluation.

FOLLOW-UP AS EVALUATION

A systems approach places follow-up studies into the broader domain of educational evaluation. Systems thinking seeks to avoid duplication of effort, and to identify and fill gaps in a set of institutional functions. Evaluation of a small part of a college should not be undertaken without fitting it into the larger whole to which it belongs. A rigorous approach to evaluation requires careful planning and thus fosters both efficiency and effectiveness.

See Figure 1 in Appendix

A follow-up study is defined as a form of evaluation designed to obtain data, information, or opinions about or from former participants in the educational process. While most follow-up studies focus on students, such studies could also elicite information from administrators, teachers, or other former members of an institution. In a follow-up study, the data relate to events or experiences that have already taken place. In essence, the follow-up procedure asks former participants in the educational process to reflect back on their experiences and uses this information together with institutional data for evaluative purposes. Some of the information which such studies provide is already tempered by experiences obtained after leaving the system, complementing data collected from participants during their educational career.

Follow-up methodologies can be integrated with an overall information system in providing data for institutional decision-making. In order to build a comprehensive information-system in a college, data about students and evaluative feedback from students should be collected on a systematic basis from the day they first contact the institution. Such data should be conveniently stored and readily available for a wide range of evaluative studies that may be conducted over a period of time.

A FRAMEWORK FOR FOLLOW-UP STUDIES

In its simplest form, evaluation comprises three dimensions: (1) who or what is evaluated, (2) how the evaluation is done, and (3) who uses the findings.

See Figure 2 in Appendix

The first dimension in a follow-up study concerns itself with student flow in the system. An individual or cohort "passes through" the educational system in stages at which different types of data are generated about the student and about the educational process. What characterizes the students in the different programs from each other? Who applies but is not accepted? Or who is accepted but dosen't matriculate? Why do some students complete the program and others step-out? is the graduate more successful in job placement than the non-graduate? A systematic approach to follow-up studies emphasizes the need to generate data on these and other questions throughout the educational process. The flow concept stresses the importance of identifying data required for evaluation before the time arrives for gathering them.

A second dimension combines a variety of methologies, strategies, and rationales for collecting data into two "modes." In the congruence mode, evaluation is concerned with comparing actual with desired performance; in the contingency mode, evaluation becomes the identification and assessment of new needs and directions for education in the system (Stufflebeam, 1971). An example of a follow-up study using the congruence mode is one that seeks to measure how well a program has accomplished its goals. A follow-up study that solicites feedback from college graduates in an attempt to redirect and adjust its program illustrates the use of the contingency mode.

A variety of incumbent's roles, as well as persons who potentially require information to make decisions, are collapsed into three functional subsystems comprising the third dimension. The institutional subsystem

determines societal needs and sets system goals; the managerial subsystem facilitates the achievement of these goals; and the technical subsystem takes particular action to meet specific goals (Parsons, 1965). A follow-up study may concern itself, for example, primarily with matters in the jurisdiction of the managerial subsystem in coordinating the technical activities of a system. Is there a duplication of course offerings between various departments? Should an existing program be discontinued or a new one established? Follow-up procedures could provide data that administrators would find useful in reaching decisions to such questions.

FOLLOW-UP STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Education is conceptualized as a continual, but non-linear process. Learning is continuous, but a person may be in and out of an educational institution at various times and for different purposes. Thus a variety of activities and decision points encountered by individuals throughout their lifetimes relate to educational alternatives. The flow of students through a college can be shown as a sequence of stages; these stages may or may not be discrete for any one person. The existence of a sequence of stages facilitates the conceptualization of this part of the model.

See Figure 3 in Appendix

The flow of students through the college may also be interpreted as a sequence of stages at which various types of potential data can be generated. The crucial importance of a systems approach to follow-up

studies can now be clarified: These potential data can be delineated before evaluation commences in order that they can be obtained when the activities which generate them are occuring. Many types of data cannot be recovered effectively at a later point in time. Reasons for attending an institution or changing a program should be obtained when the decision is first discovered. Similarly, withdrawal interviews or procedures are much more accurate in determining why students leave college prematurely than subsequent questionnaires. The kinds of data to be gathered and the manner in which they are best obtained must be a part of the planning for institutional evaluation.

CONCLUSION

This paper has presented a framework for conducting follow-up studies as an integral part of a total evaluation program. Systems concepts were used to argue against the practice of fragmented follow-up studies using data gathered only after the studies were designed.

In essence, a follow-up study should utilize data that are generated as soon as they are available and then stored in a management information system until analysis can be undertaken. Only as colleges develop a systematic approach to follow-up studies can the difficult task of educational evaluation be approached with confidence. Adopting such an approach may not change the direction of the proverbial horseman, but at least he will knowwhere he is headed and how well he is progressing towards that goal.

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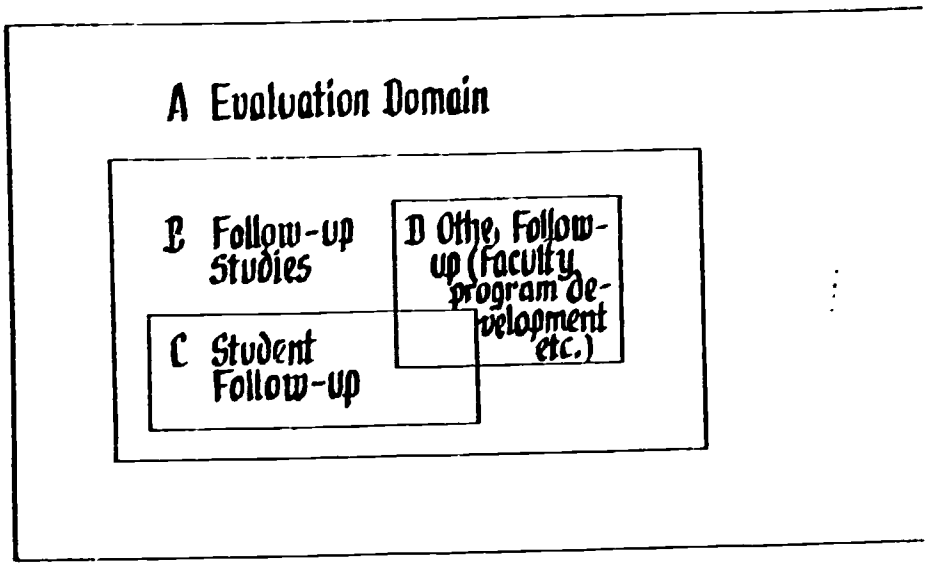

Figure 1

Relation Between Follow-up Studies and Other Types of Evaluation

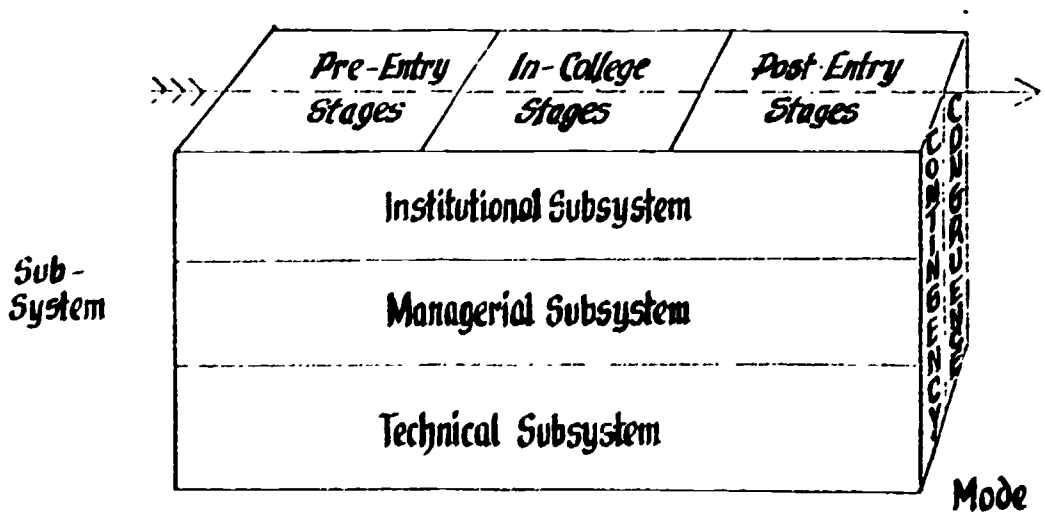

Figure 2

Three Dimensions of Post-Secondary Educational Evaluation

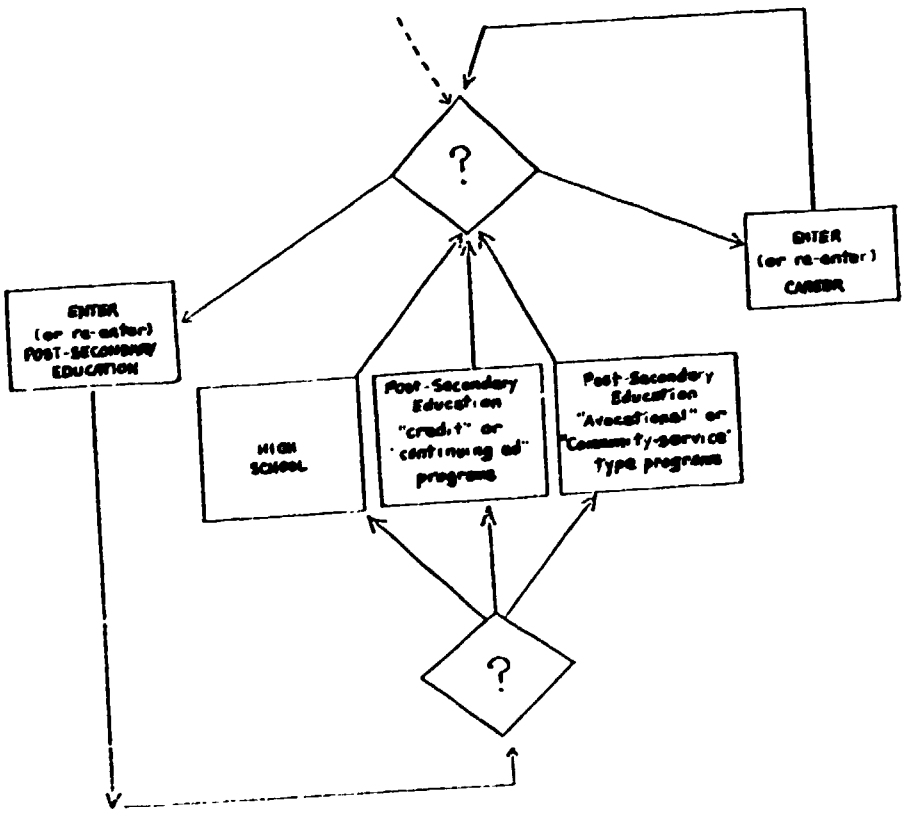

Figure 3

Career Education Alternatives and Decision Points

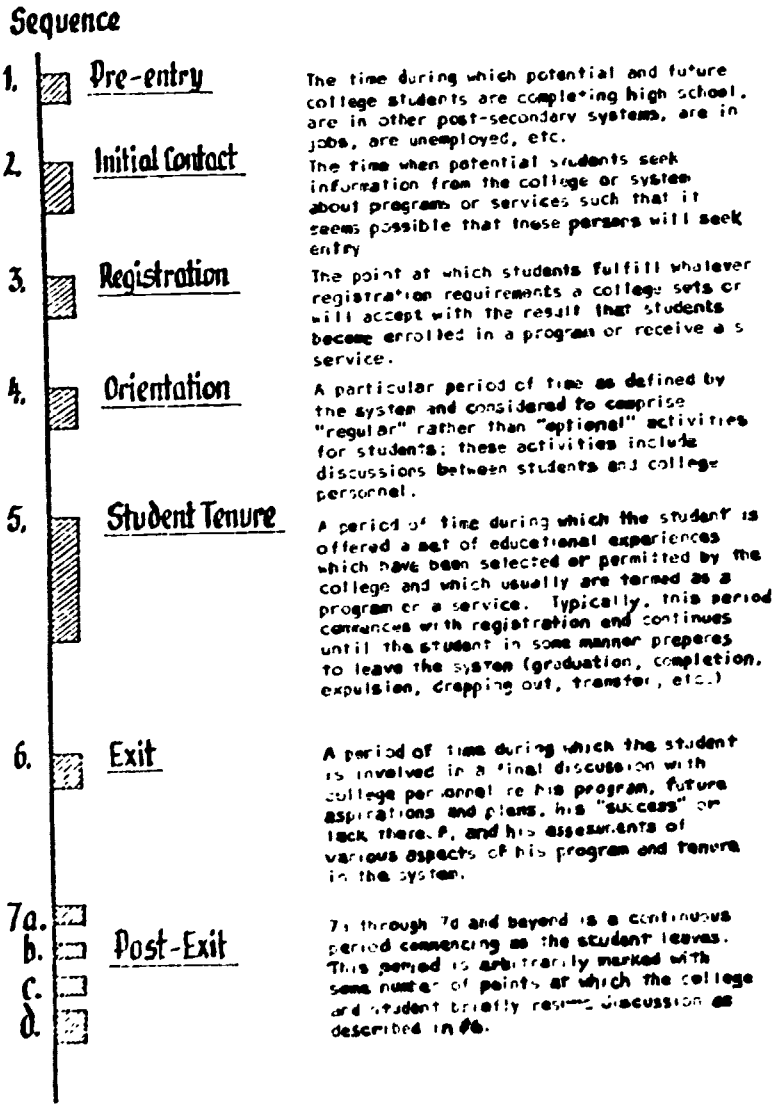

Figure 4

Sequence and Stages in Student Flow Through Colleges