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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at the University of Maryland to determine if high ability sophomores differed from sophomores in general on their responses to the 1969 University Student Census (USC). The responses of 359 high ability sophomores, defined as those with Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores over 599 on both Verbal and Mathematics, were compared with USC responses of 6,293 sophomores who represented about 99 percent of the class. Responses of the high ability group were also included in the overall group. High ability sophomores tended to live more often in residence halls, enjoyed academic work more, had higher aspirations for graduate study, were more critical of the university, were more positive in their attitudes toward recruiting black students, and saw more racism at the university than sophomores in general. (Author/SW)

COUNSELING CENTER

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UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

College Park, Maryland

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HIGH ABILITY SOPHOMORES AND SOPHOMORES IN GENERAL AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

Anne M. Collins and William E. Sedlacek

Research Report # 7-70

Summary

The purpose of the study was to determine if high ability sophomores at the University of Maryland differed from other University of Maryland students on their responses to the 1969 University Student Census (USC). The responses of 359 high ability sophomores, defined as those with Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores over 599 on both Verbal and Mathematics, were compared with USC responses of 6,293 sophomores in general. High ability sophomores tended to live more in residence halls, enjoyed academic work more, had higher aspirations for graduate study, were more critical of the University, were more positive in their attitudes toward recruiting black students and saw more racism at the University than sophomores in general.

High aptitude students have received considerable attention from researchers in education in the last ten years. Most of the attention, however, has been focused on the academic achievement or non-achievement of high aptitude students. Very little research has dealt with the non-academic characteristics and perceptions of bright students.

The recent studies of subcultures on campus (Feldman and Newcomb, 1969) have shown that students of different backgrounds and abilities have divergent perceptions of their environments on non-academic as well as academic parameters. Research has uncovered differences between bright students and students in general on personality characteristics, reasons for attending universities, and perceptions of the university environment (Maxwell, 1962; Mason, Adams and Blood, 1968; Gottsdanker, 1968; Hartman, 1968; Baker, 1966; and Faunce, 1968.) A study at Indiana University (Snyder, 1968) found that identifying a sub-group of incoming freshmen with high aptitude scores and low academic achievement and offering them a special orientation program during their freshman year cut the failure rate of such students from 95% to 44%.

In this study, it was hypothesized that high ability students at the University of Maryland differ from other University of Maryland students in their perceptions of the environment and their future goals. Since the University's annual student census provides data on both demographic variables and perceptions of the University, the present study examined the 1969 University Student Census (USC) responses of high ability sophomores and sophomores in general to see if the responses of the two groups differed significantly.

The study was essentially exploratory. Its purpose was to determine if differences do exist between the perceptions of the two groups.

Method

Two groups of sophomores enrolled at the University of Maryland in the fall semester of 1969 were chosen for the study. One group was selected to represent students who are above average in scholastic aptitude: the other was picked to represent students in general.

Group A, hereafter referred to as "high ability sophomores," was defined as the group (359) of sophomores who had Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) scores over 599 on both the Verbal and Mathematics tests. The group only included sophomores who had been admitted to the University of Maryland by June 15, 1968 for the 1968 fall semester, who had SAT scores sent to the University and who took the University Student Census in September, 1969 .

Group B, hereafter referred to as "sophomores in general," consisted of approximately 99% of the sophomores registered on the College Park campus in September, 1969, that is, those sophomores (6,293) who took the University Student Census (USC) in September, 1969. Sophomores in this group were determined on a self-report basis.

Since the sample sizes are so disparate and large and essentially represented the entire population studied, no significance tests were employed in the study. It should be noted that the high ability sophomores are included in the sophomores in general group. However, since the high ability group is only about 5% of the total, it was felt that there would be a negligible effect on reported percentages.

Results and Discussion

The differences between the USC responses of Groups A and B can be divided into three types of items. One set of items is general: the second deals with differences in academic goals between the two groups; and the third deals

with differences in attitude about the University.

General Items

A greater percentage (49%) of high ability sophomores (group A) lived in University dormitories than did sophomores in general (38%) (group B), and a smaller percentage of Group A (5%) lived in off-campus apartments than Group B (14%). Fifty-one percent of Group A reported that they have 4 or fewer dates a month, compared to 41% of Group B. While 59% of the sophomores in general said they study 15 or more hours a week, only 49% of the high ability sophomores reported 15 or more hours of study weekly. Twenty-four percent of the high ability group said they study nine or less hours a week, compared to 14% of sophomores in general.

Group A appeared to be more interested in using the Counseling Center than Group B. Thirty-five percent of Group A would seek counseling regarding vocational and educational plans and 11% would be interested in counseling regarding emotional and social concerns. Only 27% of Group B would seek educational/vocational counseling and only 7% of that group expressed interest in emotional/social counseling. Only 8% of Group A was interested in "learning to study more efficiently," compared to 17% of Group B.

Group A found the hardest parts of adjusting to college were budgeting time (23%) and selecting a field of study and/or a career (17%). Group B found studying efficiently (22%) and budgeting time (20%) the most difficult areas of adjustment. Group B also expressed more concern about getting satisfactory grades (14%) than Group A (5%), but was less worried about getting to know other students.

Academic Goals

A higher percentage of Group A (15%) than Group B (8%) listed enjoyment of studying and academic work as their most important reason for staying in college. Fifty-four percent of sophomores in general cited reasons such as "college graduates get better jobs," "a college degree is the only way by which I can enter my chosen job," and "college graduates earn more money" as the most important reasons for staying in college, compared to 43% of high ability sophomores. Fifteen percent of Group A said the necessity of having a degree to enter graduate or professional school was their most important reason for staying in college compared to 11% of Group B.

Thirty-nine percent of the high ability group said they chose the University of Maryland because it is relatively inexpensive, compared with 25% of the sophomores in general. Only 19% of the high ability sophomores said the University's geographical location was their main reason for choosing it, compared to 28% of the sophomores in general. Twenty-one percent of Group B said they chose Maryland because of its academic program, compared to 19% of Group A.

The two groups of sophomores differed widely on the amount of education they expected to get in their lifetimes. Forty percent of the sophomores in general said they would complete their education with the bachelor's degree, while only 25% of the high ability sophomores checked that option. Thirty-seven percent of the high ability sophomores expected to finish school with one or two years of graduate or professional training and 17% expected to earn doctorates. Of the sophomores in general, 32% anticipated one or two years of graduate training and 7% expected doctorates.

Thirty-two percent of Group A said they were "absolutely certain" they will get college degrees, compared with 23% of Group B. A larger percentage of Group A (16%) than Group B (11%) said that "disinterest in study" might cause them to leave the University before graduation. Fewer members of Group A (5%) than Group B (13%) thought that lack of academic ability or inefficient reading and study skills would cause them to leave the University.

Attitudes

The way the University of Maryland is run was its worst feature according to 33% of the high ability sophomores and 23% of the sophomores in general. Thirty percent of the sophomores in general said its large size was the worst thing about the University, along with 16% of high ability sophomores. Fifty-three percent of Group A disagreed with the assertion that students have "ample opportunity" to participate in University policy-making, compared to 37% of Group B. Group A also disagreed more strenuously than Group B with assertions that channels for students' complaints are readily available. (Group A - 47% disagreed ; Group B - 35% disagreed); that University events draw lots of support and enthusiasm (Group A - 38% disagreed; Group B - 29% disagreed); and that "most courses require intensive study and preparation outside the classroom" (Group A - 36%, Group B - 19%).

High ability sophomores appear to be more liberal on the subject of race than sophomores in general. Forty-six percent of the high ability sophomores thought the University should actively recruit black students, while only 32% of sophomores in general held this view. Twenty-three percent of Group A said the University's racist image discourages black students from attending, and 9% said the University's "racist practices" cause the low black enrollment.

Only 15% of Group B thought the University's image discouraged blacks and 8% thought racist practices account for the low number of blacks at the University.

Twenty-two percent of the sophomores in general thought blacks prefer to go to black colleges, compared to 17% of the high ability sophomores. When asked the best way for the State of Maryland to provide higher education for blacks and whites, 31% of Group A suggested working to draw blacks to white colleges and whites to black colleges, and only 11% recommended letting things "happen naturally with no further program." On the same question, 21% of Group B suggested letting things happen naturally, and only 19% urged working to attract whites to black colleges and blacks to white institutions .

The responses of Group A were also examined by sex, with 235 males and 124 females in the high aptitude group. Only a few items showed any substantial differences between the responses of both sexes, and these tended to correspond with differences in the total USC response data when analyzed by sex.

A higher percentage of females than males in Group A live on campus (F- 64%, M- 40%), knew more than one faculty member and dated frequently. Fewer females than males (7% to 22%) intend to get doctorates and more females (41%) than males (17%) intended to complete their education with a bachelor's degree. The females reported enjoyment of study and the chance to meet people as strong reasons for staying in school, but 29% of the high aptitude females said they might leave college because of marriage. Only 4% of the males in Group A thought marriage might cause them to withdraw from college.

The females in Group A held fewer jobs than the males and indicated a stronger interest in student activities. The females also appeared to hold more liberal views on higher education for black students than did males in Group A.

Conclusions

The overall results of the study indicate that students with above-average SAT scores do perceive the University differently than students in general. High ability sophomores tended to live more in residence halls, enjoyed academic work more, had higher aspirations for graduate study, were more critical of the University, were more positive in their attitude toward recruiting black students and saw more racism at the University than sophomores in general. The number of hypotheses which the results might support are numerous and further research on this sub-group with environmental assessment instruments might provide valuable information for working with the above-average student more effectively.

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