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ABSTRACT

A report focusing on the academically disadvantaged minority group students is presented. Perceptions of administrators in public two-year colleges as to the major reasons for attrition of this group are examined. A pre-coded questionnaire was developed to gather information concerning programs of compensatory education in two-year colleges. It was sent to the chief administrative officer of all two-year institutions participating in an annual research program. One item of the survey instrument listed ten reasons commonly cited in the literature for the attrition of academically disadvantaged minority group students. The chief administrative officer listed the three most important. These were inadequate finances, inadequate emotional stability, and inadequate motivation. A large percentage of respondents indicated that there was a lack of institutional support of such students and inadequate institutional finance for such programs in their institutions. It is concluded that if public two-year colleges are to adequately perform their role in providing educational opportunity for those who thus far have had little chance for higher education, greater effort in terms of energy, financial resources, and support and training of an adequate administrative and teaching staff is essential. (CK)

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Why the Disadvantaged Drop Out: The Administrators' View

In the late 50's the shock of Sputnik forced American educators to gear up their science programs; in the late 60's the militancy of minorities pressured educators into establishing programs for the "disadvantaged student." Today, the demand for such programs in higher education is unequivocal. The two-year college, and particularly the public two-year college, is an institution which has been designated to assist those classified as "disadvantaged" in overcoming their handicaps, be they educational or cultural, and thereby, to assist them in their academic and social advancement.

There are many ways of defining disadvantaged students. For example, the Federal government has defined such a student as possessing one or more of the following characteristics: (1) inadequate high school preparation, (2) recipient of welfare or vocational rehabilitation program benefits, (3) lives in public housing for the poor, (4) has standard English as a second language, and (5) has a cultural heritage not sufficiently or accurately represented in the traditional curriculum.¹

Behavioral scientists view disadvantage in cultural or social terms. Kneller, for example, describes disadvantaged students as those from the lower classes who are academically backward, "the second characteristic being generally, though not always, a consequence of the first."² More importantly,

according to Knellner, the parents of disadvantaged students have not been able to provide the background and preparation essential for formal learning which the middle-class parent imparts to his child as a matter of course. In essence, disadvantage refers to the variety of social, economic, and ethnic-interracial factors which inhibit full-freedom of choice and which seriously impede an individual's right to obtain upward mobility.³

Other investigators have defined disadvantaged students in terms of their social differences when compared to the student body of most schools, their membership in minority groups, their lack of parental or self-support to enter or attend college, and their desire and spirit to enter a new situation where there is a high chance of failure.⁴

Despite the range of characteristics that disadvantaged students represent, however, almost all of these students come to colleges academically disadvantaged. Many come from minority groups and have characteristics so different from the regularly accepted student body that they require special assistance for their success.

In this report, therefore, we will focus upon the academically disadvantaged minority group students. Specifically, we will examine the perceptions of administrators in public two-year colleges as to the major reasons for attrition of this particular group of students.

Methodological Considerations

In the spring of 1971 a pre-coded questionnaire was developed to gather information concerning programs of compensatory education in two-year colleges.⁵ This questionnaire was sent to the chief administrative

officer of these two-year institutions participating in the annual research on "National Norms for Entering College Freshmen" conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE). The sample designed by ACE may be considered, for all intents and purposes, representative of all public two-year colleges in the U.S.⁶

Analysis

One item of the survey instrument listed ten reasons commonly cited in the literature for the attrition of academically disadvantaged minority group students. The chief administrative officer of each institution was requested to indicate the three most important of those listed. As Table I demonstrates, 48 percent of our respondents listed inadequate finances as a major reason for attrition, 39 percent listed inadequate emotional stability or immaturity of students as a major reason, and 37 percent listed inadequate motivation. It should also be noted that a large percentage of our respondents also perceive that inadequate institutional finances (listed by 35 percent of our respondents) and inadequate academic abilities (listed by 34 percent of our respondents), and the lack of supportive peer relationships (listed by 28 percent of our respondents) as important reasons for the attrition of minority group academically disadvantaged students. It is most interesting to note that 28 percent of our respondents cited inadequate institutional support of students as one of the three major reasons of attrition. Seventeen percent cited inadequacies in administrative staffing as one of the three major reasons for attrition; and 14 percent cited the lack of parental support. Only six percent of our respondents cited the lack of qualified faculty as one

of the major reasons for the attrition of minority group academically disadvantaged students, and none of our respondents cited disciplinary problems as a cause for attrition.

Discussion

Inspection of the data presented above indicates that administrative officers view the major causes of attrition among minority group academically disadvantaged as being inadequate motivation, inadequate student finances, inadequate emotional stability or maturity, and inadequate academic abilities. Interestingly enough, a large percentage of respondents from these colleges indicated that there was a lack of institutional support of such students and inadequate institutional finances for such programs in their institutions.

It should be noted that the factors of motivation, academic ability, lack of parental support, lack of adequate finances, and "immaturity" are not only factors often mentioned as reasons for attrition in the literature (and by our respondents), but are also descriptors of minority group academically disadvantaged students in the first instance. Therefore, it is not surprising that these are given as major causes for the attrition of such students. What is noteworthy is the recognition that causes for attrition of minority group academically disadvantaged students may also be the lack of institutional support of these students as characterized by inadequate institutional finances, and inadequately trained administrative and teaching staffs. Such recognition is encouraging, and indicates that if public two-year colleges are to adequately perform their role in providing educational opportunity for those who thus far have had little chance for higher education, greater effort in terms of energy, financial resources, and, perhaps most importantly, the support and training of an adequate administrative and teaching staff is essential.

Table I: ADMINISTRATOR PERCEPTION OF THE MAJOR REASONS FOR ATTRITION OF
MINORITY GROUP ACADEMICALLY DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS IN
PUBLIC TWO-YEAR COLLEGES^a

Reasons	Public Percent Affirmative	Weighted N
Inadequate Finances (Student)	47.9	166
Inadequate Emotional Stability or Immaturity	38.6	129
Inadequate Motivation	36.8	123
Inadequate Finances (Institution)	35.0	117
Inadequate Academic Ability	34.4	115
Inadequate Institutional Support of Students	28.1	94
Lack of Supportive Peer Relationships	27.8	93
Inadequate Qualified Administrative Staff	17.4	58
Lack of Parental Support	14.1	47
Lack of Qualified Faculty	5.7	19
Disciplinary Problems	0.0	0

^aThe Chief Administrative Officer of each institution surveyed with more than nine academically disadvantaged minority group students and who had either a special program, courses or services for such students, was asked to cite the three (3) major reasons for attrition. In effect, each qualified institution in our sample had three "votes"; the "percent affirmative" column represents those "votes."

Footnotes

¹Anthony Downs, Who Are the Urban Poor? Revised edition. CED Supplementary Paper, Number 29.

²Kneller, George F. Educational Anthropology. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1965, p. 147.

³Beck, John M. and Richard W. Saxe. Teaching the Disadvantaged Pupil. Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1967, pp. ix,x.

⁴See, for example, the work of Cross, K. Patricia. "Higher Education's Newest Student." Junior College Journal, 39:1 (September 1968); Egerton, John. Higher Education for High Risk Students. Atlanta: Southern Education Foundation, 1968; and Roueche, John E. Salvage, Redirection or Custody? Washington, D.C.: American Association of Junior Colleges, 1968.

⁵The resulting report by the present authors, Compensatory Education in the Two-Year College (University Park, Pa.: The Center for the Study of Higher Education) may be obtained upon request from the publisher.

⁶The rationale for the ACE sample design may be found in the following ACE reports: Creager, John A. General Purpose Sampling in the Domain of Higher Education: ACE Research Reports, Vol. 3, No. 2. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1968; and Creager, John A. National Norms for Entering College Freshmen 1969: ACE Research Reports, Vol. 4, No. 7. Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1969.