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## ABSTRACT

The expanded foreign study and foreign language programs offered at Dartmouth are examined with emphasis on the influence of Peace Corps language programs during the last half-dozen years on American college campuses. The impact of the programs at Dartmouth since 1964 is discussed in terms of: (1) a brief history of language instruction at Dartmouth, (2) a Peace Corps language model in the curriculum, (3) program evaluation, (4) the language dormitory, and (5) the in-country laboratory. (RL)

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New Dimensions  
in Language Training:

# THE DARTMOUTH COLLEGE EXPERIMENT

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John A. Rassias received his doctorate while studying as a Fulbright scholar at the Université de Dijon in France. At the University of Bridgeport, he was Chairman of the Department of Foreign Languages. In 1964, he was appointed to the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures at Dartmouth College. He became Director of Language Training for the Peace Corps programs preparing for service in Francophone West Africa at the College. He has also trained language teachers for the Peace Corps in the United States, Canada, and in Francophone West African countries. This past summer he conducted seminars on teaching for Americans and Africans in the Ivory Coast and Senegal. The success enjoyed by the first total immersion program offered at Dartmouth College in the summer of 1967 led to the incorporation of Pre-training Language Programs into all Peace Corps French-speaking Africa programs.

Professor Rassias has been a pioneer in improved foreign language instruction. He is the principal innovator of Dartmouth's expanded Foreign Study and Foreign Language Programs in which more than three hundred undergraduates have traveled to seventeen study centers abroad during the 1968-69 academic year. They experienced for at least one term a total immersion in the country's language, literature, and culture. At the present time, he is a Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures at Dartmouth College.

# New Dimensions in Language Training: THE DARTMOUTH COLLEGE EXPERIMENT

*John A. Rassias*

**N**ot too long ago the Peace Corps sought to stampede American universities from pastures of intellectual self-contentment by challenging them to assist in the new task of training Volunteers for service abroad. As with most stampedes, chaos ensued.

In the beginning universities engaged "scrub" teams to do their jobs. They found language coordinators who were not integrally involved in their programs; they whipped together teams of non-professionals who were hired by an agency of the university, but not by the departments of languages themselves. Host country nationals brought over from their own countries, or hired from graduate schools in this country along with other native speakers of various languages, underwent intensive language workshops and were converted to semi-professional teachers, who often displayed more enthusiasm, admittedly, than competence. Nevertheless, through constant supervision a highly effective level of proficiency was maintained and the job of language instruction was accomplished; it was accomplished so well that language instruction was often the most outstanding component of many Peace Corps training programs.

Slowly, at first, the impact of the Peace Corps made itself felt. The Agency's prestige heightened when previously accepted methods of language instruction were seriously challenged by the special demands created by training programs on campus. The new techniques that were then brought to focus on the problem made language learning quick, accurate, and enduring. Language instruction proved effective, rewarding, and real. It became so real, in fact, that the acquisition of a foreign language became for many students a useful and inspiring experience. Questionnaires distributed to Peace Corps trainees (and later to our own students when we introduced the new courses) revealed: (1) that language learning was exciting, (2) that language teachers were alive, involved, capable, and (3) that the learning process was a practical, measureable, understandable phenomenon, not a vague, unrelated investment in one's future betterment.

In 1964, Dartmouth picked up the challenge. We have since had five years of experience with the Peace Corps in academe and we are thoroughly satisfied with the results, which have been tested in every conceivable manner.

The Peace Corps became meaningful to Dartmouth College in quite the same way that it has become meaningful to host countries. Its effect was not immediate or radical, but it stirred things up: people began to talk about it; it created a climate of controversy and self-evaluation. Eventually, its influence helped change our approach and our philosophy of language instruction.

We experimented and learned a lot in those years and most of what we learned was channeled into our academic program.

It is obviously not the purpose of this paper to say why language study is necessary. Are there among us those who still need convincing? The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate two points: (1) the impact the Peace Corps exerted at Dartmouth, and (2) a different approach to the fulfillment of a language requirement in a humanities curriculum.

#### The Institutions! Dinosaur in Perspective

Historically, language held its position in the humanities curriculum principally because of its contributions to general culture. Language training was not conceived primarily as an instrument to teach conversation or communication in any mundane sense; it concentrated largely on reading skills so vital to the appreciation of literature in the original language. Literature, that refined expression of a gentleman's liberal education, was viewed as the most important facet in language instruction. There is a strong case to be made in favor of this argument; however, our disagreement is less with the traditional assignment of priorities than with the injudicious use of these priorities.

A University, one instinctively feels, should deal in elevated thought. Literature, philosophy, history, science and the like are fitting and proper for study. Language learning, a more mechanical process, ought not therefore to be taken seriously by a respectable institution. The ethereal zones of thought cannot tolerate struggling utterances and—logic dictates—this mechanical and mechanized instruction ought to be consigned to high schools. A most respected member of our profession told me some time ago that language study is of such unsophisticated intellectual stature as to preclude it from ever being taken seriously, and a language teacher cannot consider distinguished instruction in this area a reason for promotion. This form of reasoning is still widespread in our universities and some language departments treat books by grammarians as inferior pedagogical garbage; further, they assign the most inexperienced staff members to the instruction of languages. What new Ph.D. does not dread such courses? And given the conditions under which most Ph.D.s are reared, it is difficult to find a cogent argument to change their attitude.

The accumulation of experience over this long span of time should have wrought radical and frequent changes in the instruction of languages. Instead, language instruction became entangled in ivy-cloistered concepts of a gentleman's education.

Dartmouth College catalogues reveal certain mutations in the concept of language instruction through the years. (Catalogue, as a term, appeared first in 1820, but courses were not described to any extent until 1895.) In 1876 the study of French began in the sophomore year with Knapp's *Grammar and la France littéraire*.

In 1895 French was studied in the Freshman Year. In 1900 the word "pronunciation" appeared in the description of the "First Year Course," and held its place in all subsequent descriptions until 1956. Apparently, little was done to make pronunciation a part of language learning through realistic conversation; it was studied in a disembodied form, and never articulated properly to the language. The 1900 description then stressed: "Elements of Grammar (Fraser and Squalr's *French Reader*, Erckmann-Chatrian's *Contes fantastiques*); memorizing and simple paraphrasing in French of portions of the text read."

The substance of the French 1 courses continued approximately the same up to 1918, when "Reading, writing, and speaking of easy French prose" appeared in the description. World War I taught members of the Department that, like Monsieur Jourdain, what they were actually speaking was prose, and in 1919 a significant change was made: one was taught the "speaking [of] simple French."

No further change was made until 1946 when Professor François Dencoeu offered a substitute course for French 1, labelled "French 3-4 [credit for two courses], Intensive Course for Beginners." The course met nine hours per week and aimed at a thorough grounding in spoken French and a "considerable ability in rapid silent reading." In 1947 the optional French 3-4 continued for two credits and three of the nine meetings were devoted "to very small conversation groups."

In 1958 Dartmouth replaced the semester system by the trimester and its French courses were patterned this way:

**French 1:** An Introduction to French as a spoken and written language. The work includes regular practice—both in class and in the laboratory—in understanding and using the spoken language. Elementary reading materials drawn from literary and other sources serve for vocabulary building, analytical exercises, and discussion.

**French 2:** Extensive reading of French classics of intermediate difficulty, with intensive analysis and interpretation of passages selected from them. Continued vocabulary building and more advanced practice, both in the classroom and in the language laboratory, in the use of the spoken language.

**French 3:** Further development of fluency in reading, skill in literary analysis, and oral competence, through the study of representative major works, discussed as far as possible in French. Laboratory exercises designed to complete mastery of basic language patterns and active vocabulary."

The optional French 3-4 was dropped, and the new 1, 2, 3, courses remained the same until 1963, when the phrase "drawn from literary and other sources" in the French 1 description was eliminated.

In 1966 a new approach was attempted. A double course (French 1-2: Intensive Introductory French) was designed to achieve in a single term maximum proficiency in the spoken language. "Class preparation," the catalogue reads, "is largely replaced by supervised work in the classroom and in the laboratory. Special language tables and dormitories provide maximum contact with the language. Course enrollment limited to twelve students."

The results obtained were acceptable, but not spectacular—in spite of the fact that students devoted two out of their three courses to the study of French. The program was perhaps still too "academic" and needed a stronger dosage of vigor and reality. We dropped this program from the curriculum after the first term, but it was a start in the right direction.

Before the present courses were established, we reviewed the entire panorama of language learning, its role in the humanities, and what we wanted it to accomplish.

#### **Peace Corps Language Model in the Curriculum**

In the past, then, our courses embraced the following priorities: development of the student's speaking and comprehension capacity in French 1; improvement of the student's speaking ability, along with the enrichment of his vocabulary through literature and culture in French 2; deeper concentration on literature and culture in French 3.

Our experience in regular Peace Corps language training taught us that a beginning student can comfortably attain a speaking level of S-2+<sup>1</sup> in one month under immersion pressure. We decided to concentrate on achieving a year's goal in one term (10 weeks), if possible, and in two terms at the most.

This new approach would not neglect training in reading and writing, lest the end result be the creation of orally fluent illiterates. Nor would we depart from the humanities tradition, for along with the excitement of language instruction in a new mold, we wanted to continue broadening a student's comprehension of culture and literature. We would attempt to do the job more efficiently by making it possible, according to accomplishment on the College Board examinations, for a beginner to proceed to relatively sophisticated literary studies in his second term.

A thorough overhaul of procedures was required. We decided to block off the amount of time a student traditionally devoted to a course and immerse him in language study during that time span. A team-teaching staff was established to carry out the operation. We assigned five hours per week to classroom study of the language with a faculty member (master teacher), five hours to drill in a class with a qualified undergraduate (apprentice teacher), and five hours to work in the language laboratory under the close supervision of a qualified student monitor. We based our scheduling on the traditional and unwritten law which commits a student to two hours of preparation for every hour devoted to class. This gave us a combination of five hours of actual class time, together with ten hours of controlled study time—a formula that obviously excluded unstructured homework. The student would receive one course credit for his work.

We designated our French classes for pilot experimentation, along with one class of Modern Greek. Further, we decided to make all sections intensive: no freshman had a choice in deciding whether to study these languages in the "traditional" or in this "new" way. In our second year we included Spanish and Italian in the program.

Once the schedule was decided we took a close look at our instructional needs. I have defined elsewhere the qualities we sought in our Peace Corps language teachers;<sup>2</sup> we used the same criteria to staff this new program. In a word, along with indispensable professional competency in the language, we sought vitality in our people. Our teachers must be in total command of the language, and they must also be firebrands and actors. Dynamism and histrionics are requisite not only to convey the subject matter more effectively, but also to give students a model of the uninhibited suppleness they will need to live the language experience more thoroughly.

We were aware that some of the apprentices would seek careers in teaching. The vitality we insisted on served notice to them to abandon our ranks if they could not lose the stuffed-shirt dignity that prevented them from exuding the reality of a language. "Language," we said in our workshop for teachers, "is a living, kicking, growing, fleeting, evolving reality, and the teacher should spontaneously reflect its vibrant and protean qualities."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>A short definition of this level of proficiency, established by the Foreign Service Institute, Washington, D.C. is S-2: Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements with confidence but not with facility; S-2+: Exceeds S-2 primarily in fluency or either grammar or vocabulary. (See Faculty Paper No. 1, To Speak as Equals by Allan Kulshow, p. 6).

<sup>2</sup>A Philosophy of Language Instruction, John A. Rassias, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, 1966.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

Our professional staff was asked to dedicate itself to the task by accepting the many new strains this program would place on them. This degree of commitment is rarely demanded in a normal academic setting.

Next, we turned to our most qualified undergraduates—French nationals on campus, senior students (majors or non-majors) who had spent some time in France and whose spoken French was excellent—and invited them to attend a workshop one week prior to the Fall term. These students knew that they would not all be selected for positions, and the atmosphere of competition was electric.

Again, using the same techniques we employ in language workshops for the Peace Corps, we conducted demonstration lessons in modern Greek for the apprentice teachers. Each demonstration covered a variety of teaching skills: backward build-up, pattern drills, dialogue learning, conversation exercises, testing the learning of materials, and means of energizing a class. Greek was used to acquaint the apprentice teacher with the problems his peers have when they approach the study of a foreign language.

The apprentice teacher was obliged to prepare and present several lessons every day during the workshop. Each session was followed by general criticism, self-criticism, and group evaluation: strengths and weaknesses were frankly evaluated in relation to the method. We worked hard to establish the ultimate model of teaching effectiveness. The commandments we use as guidelines for the Peace Corps were carefully reviewed and the relevancy of the concepts were discussed with the apprentice teachers. The basic and inescapable theme was that no other method would be tolerated in this program. Some of the "commandments" which the apprentice teacher learned to obey are:

1. Always stand, move about; your animation should be natural and should involve the class.
2. Do not be too slow or too fast. Always speak at your normal conversational pace.
3. Pronounce everything distinctly.
4. Keep students' books closed.
5. Do not name the student before asking him to recite. Make all students participate in the class. Indeed, if you do not name them or give other outward indications before asking a student to recite, all the students will be on the alert since they know that it may fall arbitrarily upon one of them to answer. In order not to lose a single student's interest, use a "shotgun" approach, *viz.*, look at one student but point to the one whose turn it is to recite after you pose the question. Like lightning, the question should strike first, and like the thunder that follows (simulated by a loud finger-snap), you should immediately designate the person to be queried.
6. Do not follow a set pattern in your interrogation. Do not ask questions in the order of Student A, Student B, then Student C, etc., but change the pattern of interrogation each time.
7. Do not wait for a delayed answer. If the student hesitates, go to the next person and then return to the one who did not answer.
8. Correct every mistake and make the student repeat the correction properly.
9. Do not abandon a subject which the students do not grasp.
10. Speak only in the target language—in and out of the class.

The need to close gaps in time, experience, and expertise was apparent here, as with Peace Corps training. To teach skills to teachers who are largely

inexperienced calls for a well-conceived methodology to which all staff members must subscribe. Our problem was more difficult because we were dealing with students who had never taught before in their lives. They not only lacked experience and the resources of imagination that experience creates, but also the confidence so necessary to an effective classroom presentation.

To withhold instruction to the staff because of some sense of misdirected academic freedom, or to allow the staff to do as it pleases, might cause differences of a harmful nature to arise. Teachers may gain or lose popularity by their individual performances, but students will, in general, suffer the consequences.

It is important that all master teachers and apprentice teachers adhere to one system in order to make possible staff rotation. This allows the student to be exposed to various accents, intonations, and speaking personalities which are part of language or which in fact are language. Peace Corps has taught us that one person—the teacher—is not the language. It is too great a danger to allow one model to serve as a symbol of the country. This may lead to an identification with the teacher's deficiencies, creating psychological blocks toward the whole country. One then runs the risk of developing love or hatred for the language by exposure to a single model. In addition, rapid rotation creates new pressures which keep instructors and students alert. The instructors gain more objectivity through the changes; the students lose any sense of over-confidence or other bad habits developed under one instructor (for familiarity also breeds tolerance). Thus, benefits accrue from rotation and no time is lost by forcing students to adjust to individual techniques.

After the workshop training, the apprentice teachers were ready to begin teaching. They worked in close cooperation with their master teachers and they met with me weekly to discuss problems in teaching. These weekly sessions also involved continuing shock lessons in Greek, in order to remind the apprentice teachers of the necessity to adhere to a single methodology.

To reinforce further the necessity of our methodology I visited daily as many classes as other duties would allow, and then gave each of the apprentice teachers a critique of his work.

It is important to stress that the apprentice teacher never attempted to instruct material not previously covered by the master teacher and reviewed by the students in the language laboratory.

We also decided that the apprentices may work only two of the three terms in any given year. This is a precaution we exercise so that they will in no way neglect their own studies.

In our first year of operation we employed twenty-two apprentices in French in the Fall term, nine in French and one in modern Greek in the Winter, and in the Spring, one in French. In our second year (1968-69) we employed twenty-seven apprentices in French, eleven in Spanish, two in Italian in the Fall, sixteen in French, six in Spanish, two in Italian, one in modern Greek in the Winter, and in the Spring, five in French.

It has been pointed out that the amount of energy apprentice teachers channeled into their teaching generated a greater interest on their part in different levels of departmental activity. This interest was demonstrated partially by more frequent discussion with the professorial staff. More to the point, this new system encouraged the present generation of students to become directly involved in education at Dartmouth.

The student teachers were placed in demanding circumstances and every one of them benefited from the experience. They were forced—like Peace

Corps Volunteers—to function at their highest level of ability. Unlike regular teachers in university work, they could not afford not to be at their best every day. And this experience had salubrious effects in more than a personal sense: the apprentice teachers' grades all improved in their academic subjects during their employment.

#### Some Measurements of Achievement

What did this course accomplish? A very distinct rise in morale and achievement occurred. On the first day of classes we asked the students not to question the validity of our procedures at the outset. We asked them to cooperate and let time, their good-will, and their assiduity prove the efficacy of our methods.

Interest in foreign languages rose sharply, along with the belief that knowledge of a foreign language makes one a better student. Not only did student morale attain levels never before encountered in language instruction at the College, but the morale of our instructors rose accordingly. One wrote to me, and I quote at length:

"There is no question in my mind that the new French 2 . . . represents a vast improvement over the old French 2. Above all the students enjoyed the work in this course, partly because the material they dealt with was stimulating, partly because they realized that after many years (some of them had already had some high school French) they were at last learning some French.

The increased exposure to public oral practice and drill through the use of drill masters meant not only the student's work was under close supervision and available for immediate correction of errors, but that he had ample opportunity to overcome his fear and self-consciousness at speaking in a foreign language. The students did not evince resentment of the teaching role assumed by their peers . . . The presence of the drill masters had a salutary effect in that it was a constant reminder to the students that French could be learned by others like themselves.

They gained in this course a spontaneity in all skills which they lacked in the past. The improvement in student response and the new level of morale in French 2 more than justifies continuing this course under the present new system."

Statistically, we were able to raise the scores on the College Board examinations. We had truly outstanding results in comparison to previous years. In French 2 the average mid-term increase of each student in CEEB scores in our first term of operation was seventy-five points. Although we were pleased with the results of the Fall term, those of the Winter term were conclusively superior. A comparison of the average grades earned by our students in both the Reading and Listening exams at the end of the Fall and Winter terms shows an improvement over the "old," traditional methods, and further demonstrates that students prepared in French 1 at the College (under "new" methods) do decisively better in French 2 than their classmates prepared elsewhere.

In no case do we abandon liberal arts values in this new approach. Our experimentation in language never strays from the liberal arts tradition of shaping the whole man; as efficiently as possible we want to give that man more than one voice. We value the aid language learning contributes to thought processes, but we also recognize the stark necessity of working up to that goal, rather than starting from the top with the hope that the oral phase will somehow take care of itself. For one to appreciate what language

can do he should logically appreciate what it does. We considered communication our fundamental goal and got fully behind the attempt to realize that goal.

In reviewing our class structure, we decided that normal class sizes would have to be lowered to accomplish the task. Adapting Peace Corps criteria to class enrollments, we placed a ceiling of fourteen students on each class with the regular faculty, and reduced our drill sessions to seven each. Student involvement in class increased considerably and morale rose as our students found themselves talking, participating in the language. Language, as they experienced each day, could be lived and they were living it.

Students indicated in a questionnaire that their participation in the work and their steady, measurable progress in speaking, comprehending, reading, and writing, were among the course's outstanding features.

Our priorities were: (1) communication, (2) cultural orientation, (3) literature.

Behind each class was a concept of dynamism that carried instructors and students through hard work. Not one minute was wasted in the business of teaching and learning. No slackness in pacing induced sleep; no distractions led students off their course. We used telephone calls to inject realism in the language, psychodrama to force students to use their vocabulary in conditions of stress, and debates and interviews to create the unpredictable nature of language usage.

### The Language Dormitory

Supplementary motivation was designed into this program by the addition of two distinctive features: (1) a language dormitory, and (2) the possibility for any student after one term of language study at Dartmouth to continue study and involvement in-country.<sup>4</sup>

We deem it essential to house in one dormitory language students involved in the on-going phase of our Foreign Language program. The language dormitory has language berths available for use at any time.

It is in the language dormitory that we will benefit from the expanded education and outlook of students returning from foreign study and eager to communicate new information to their classmates, as well as to speak in the foreign language with them. This exchange of views and the additional practice in language better prepared our prospective foreign study students for their stay abroad.

The language dormitory permits immersion to occur in the language. The vocabulary involved in this area—the daily living routine—reinforces the basic elements in language learning and permits class hours to become involved in more sophisticated patterns of thought. This environment has also proved conducive to relatively sophisticated "bull sessions" in the foreign language.

The language dormitory serves as a Foreign Language Center in which students have the opportunity to meet and present papers. They also have the opportunity to read foreign language newspapers and periodicals. The Foreign Language Center houses collections of records, tapes, and books.

Ultimately, the language dormitory will serve as the home for a visiting

<sup>4</sup> We have been operating a Foreign Study program since 1954. Today we have Foreign Study centers in seventeen cities in ten countries. Participation in the Foreign Study programs requires an advanced knowledge of a language (six courses), and is open to all students regardless of major. Foreign Language programs are available to any student who takes one course of beginning French, Spanish, or Italian.

writer in residence whose function will be to talk to our students on subjects of his personal interest. He will not teach a regular course but will, on occasion, call seminar sessions to discuss contemporary topics, or his own work.

#### **The In-Country Laboratory**

In 1968 our first group of students to go abroad in the new Foreign Language program reported to Dartmouth on August 25. They were immersed in French. The schedule was a straightforward eight hours per day in language classes for four weeks, including one hour of language laboratory per day. In addition to their daily classes, they shared a common dormitory and ate together in an isolated dining room on campus. All of our Peace Corps expertise was put into action by three dynamic teachers (one master teacher and two apprentice teachers). On September 25 they flew to Bourges, France, where they continued their studies in our Centre d'Enseignement Intensif du Français.

In Bourges they lived with French families (one student per family) and took on a heavy program of studies. The students devoted four hours each morning to intensive language study in small groups with native instructors who had been prepared in our methodology of teaching. The students took all their meals with their French families. In the afternoon they were involved in one course in culture-civilization and another in literature. All told, they devoted forty-four hours weekly to study in class and to homework assignments.

Our experience with the Peace Corps in in-country training programs enabled us to establish a substantive approach to immersion in French culture, and not merely to involve our students with languages in a French setting.

We tried to structure the courses so that the students would be completely involved in what they wanted to learn, while maintaining a sound academic control on presentation of the subject matter. To introduce the subject of religion, for instance, we had the students first read topical articles involving the role of religion in contemporary France. We discussed its meaning in the cultural life of the city, and then we brought in a priest to give his own views and answer student questions. When the local press was discussed we had the students study local newspapers and we arranged for the director of the *Nouvelle République* to speak on the influence of the regional press on French political thinking. This was followed by a review of the political structure in France. The pattern was always similar, i.e., study of articles on the subject, discussion in class, confrontation with spokesmen in each area, and continued discussion of the subject in the homes. In this light the families chosen to participate in our program gave us full assurance of their willingness to become involved in all necessary efforts.

In the second year of operation (and over three terms) we sent seventy students to Bourges, France, to continue their in-country training, and eighteen to San José, Costa Rica, for study of Spanish in the Spring term.

Upon returning to campus these students took the CEEB examinations. Their scores were the highest we have ever recorded at Dartmouth. Their oral facility was uniformly excellent, as established by FSI testing.

#### **Conclusion**

Our continuing goal is to serve the cause of the humanities in an effective way. (Students in our Foreign Language Centers will be able to apply

two course credits toward fulfillment of the humanities distributive requirement, in addition to satisfying the language requirement.) More significantly, we want to place our students in the culture and give them the opportunity to realize the goals of a true education in the humanities by actually communicating with other people and by actually understanding them. Then, in the best meaning of John Stuart Mill's definition of a liberal education, they will return--as a result of this experience in language--as sensitive students to become sensitive doctors, sensitive engineers, and sensitive lawyers.

A substantial number of students who participated in these programs continue their studies of literature, carrying over into their work an entirely different set of attitudes compared to their non-participating classmates. They do not worry about performing in the language; they move rapidly into our most advanced courses. They have experienced a process of change and growth in another culture and these new dimensions in a liberal education have made them more sensitive, more curious, and more concerned students.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> I am pleased to report that the Esso Foundation reviewed our program and granted its support (\$48,000) through 1970. At the end of this time a publication will recapitulate all aspects of the program and will be available to anyone interested.

Copies of the following papers are available in limited quantities. Address all requests to:

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