Students first entering college as freshmen often find that they are in the largest classes, the least experienced teachers, and the most boring coursework. Thus, many students do not continue their educations past the freshman year, if they even finish that year. Changes, both in academic and nonacademic areas, need to be made on college and university campuses to improve the freshman experience. One higher education institution is now offering special guidance programs and facilities for freshmen students, and another offers a peer-tutor program in which all freshmen participate. Academic innovations taking place generally center around an interdisciplinary approach to introductory freshman courses, with emphasis on close student-faculty contact. Evaluation of such programs indicates that students are adjusting better to college life and that retention of students in later years is much greater. (HS)
RENOVATING THE FRESHMAN YEAR

by Lora H. Robinson

Educators' concerns about the freshman experience recently have become more visible. In the fall of 1971, the American Association for Higher Education sponsored a series of regional conferences in the Midwest focusing on the topic "Justice for Freshmen." These well attended meetings provided a sounding board for those increasingly concerned with the nature and quality of freshmen educational experiences on campuses. This paper will summarize the nature of the concerns about freshmen, the proposed and extant types of changes affecting freshmen, and the efforts to evaluate changes that have already taken place. Research in Education (RIE) was the primary source for the programs outlined in this paper. There was no attempt to undertake a systematic survey of existing freshmen programs. Some additional materials did surface as a result of contacts with people directly engaged in the freshmen programs listed in RIE.

WHY THE FRESHMAN YEAR?

A good reason for starting institutional revision with the freshman year is that students begin college with high expectations or the freshman dream as they anticipate a stimulating, rigorous, and challenging educational experience. Commentators on the freshman experience feel that colleges and universities can hardly be viewed as putting their best foot forward in meeting these expectations when their academic regime is in many cases much the same as high school: when courses are not much more demanding, when classes are large and impersonal; when the learned scholar and good teacher are invisible: when the variety of teaching-learning techniques offered is narrow (lectures only); when scheduling the standard course load becomes a juggling act: when the normal program consists of a series of unrelated courses, and when the educational goal for 4 years means meeting or beating the requirements.

In addition, there is the need to create a college environment suited to unique freshmen needs and problems. These would include problems of transition from high school to college, the problem of relating various academic studies to life and career goals, and the task of attracting freshmen students to intellectual life and scholarship. Although thorough renovation of the freshman year may be needed to reach freshmen more effectively, on many campuses this may not be possible. Therefore, the following discussion of changes while considering the freshman year from a broad perspective will contain fairly specific suggestions that could be implemented.

PROPOSED CHANGES

Valuable ways to enhance a freshman program exist. They range from large-scale commitments, such as the creation of a special freshman counseling or advising team, to small-scale alternatives like a freshman class project. Additional suggestions from Marchese include: a freshmen year publication: a freshmen office, an outside grant for the freshmen program or a director's discretionary fund: a freshmen dinner, trip or concert: a lecture series, or a faculty-freshman-class field day. Fournoy and Hobbs (1972) describe some unique ways specific institutions have provided freshmen with experiences similar to those already suggested. For example, at Berkshire Community College all freshmen students are exposed to a weekly series of presentations on educational and cultural topics called the President's Hour. The two-credit course is coordinated by the college president and consists of film presentations: concerts, readings, lectures by the faculty and community people, and presidential poetry readings.

So far most items for enhancing the status of freshmen have dealt with nonacademic aspects. Marchese (1972b) also has a number of suggestions for revitalization from an academic vantage point. He proposes starting academic programs from the following proposition: given this student's background, ability, interests, and goals, what would be the most worthwhile way for him to spend a freshman year? Answers to this question are likely to lead to a number of changes. Introductory courses would probably be shortened and would stress what practitioners in the discipline actually do. More interesting subject matter would be introduced into courses. More varied academic patterns that set college courses apart from those of the high school might appear—for example, some courses.

Research Currents is prepared by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, The George Washington University, Washington, D.C. pursuant to a contract with the Office of Education. U.S. Department of Health. Education and Welfare. Points of view or opinions do not necessarily represent official Office of Education policy. Publication of the series is made possible by a grant from W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Copies of Research Currents may be ordered from the Publications Department. American Association for Higher Education. One Dupont Circle, Suite 780. Washington, D.C. 20036, at the following rates: 1 to 10 copies 15c each; over 10 copies 10c each. Payment must accompany all orders under $5.00.

Lora H. Robinson is a research associate at the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education.
Many of the best teachers would teach freshmen. Class size would vary to make certain that incoming students had a chance to participate in very small classes. Teachers would be more accessible to students, and there would be more opportunity for informal contacts. Also, there might be more concern about both the location and aesthetics of learning sites.

**ACTUAL CHANGES—NONACADEMIC**

When reviewing materials for actual and probable ways to enhance the freshman experience, an attempt was made to consider only those changes designed to include (or which could include) all freshmen and those designed to span at least the first year. This policy, in effect, eliminated orientation honors, and programs for disadvantaged students. On the whole, there have been a number of changes on campuses that affect freshmen, but very few have been widespread. The greatest breaks with tradition are found primarily with those institutions planning for or revising undergraduate education. Examples include Brown University-Pembroke College (Van Dyne, 1969: Freedom to Learn. 1969; and Intermediate Report and Recommendations, 1969); the Evergreen State College (Gehret, 1972. The Evergreen State College Bulletin 1972-73: The Evergreen State College Catalog Supplement 1972-73); Baraza College (Marchese, 1972a); Rutgers University (Susman, 1968); Hampshire College (Bromell, 1971); and Oberlin College (Preliminary Report of the Education Commission. 1971: Proposals of the Education Commission. 1971). (See also those case studies in Ladd. 1970.)

Most small inroads toward changing the freshman year have been concerned with aspects of curriculum. Two sources which describe exceptions are Bloom (1971) and the Basic Education and Enrichment Program (1969) at Elizabeth City State College. Bloom reports on a pilot project designed to benefit those freshmen who volunteered to participate. The hope was that anticipatory guidance would provide preventive intervention, especially with respect to retention. Guidance was provided in two ways—topical articles were distributed dealing with such subjects as campus unrest and human sexuality, and summaries were prepared of the cohorts' responses to periodic questionnaires, such as 'The First Month,' that covered freshmen reactions to their university experiences. Bloom found that 1972 cohort members were overwhelmingly favorable in their reactions to the project, and that there was a statistically significant difference in the survival rate between cohorts and a comparison group. Data from 'Cohort 74' is currently being analyzed.

Students at all levels now use the services offered by the Basic Education and Enrichment (BEE) program. Originally it was a peer-tutor counseling program in which all freshmen participated. Trained by instructors and under the guidance of counselors, the upperclass work-study tutors determined the total needs of freshmen tutees. General purposes of the program were to strengthen communicative and study skills; to strengthen adjustments to college; to provide academic and cultural enrichment; to alleviate academic deficiencies; to familiarize students with standardized tests; and to assist freshmen in meeting the academic demands of their classes. Although the BEE now serves a different constituency, it would be possible for other campuses to develop a peer-tutor program to help freshmen in ways similar to the BEE described.

**ACTUAL CHANGES—ACADEMIC**

Many innovations in the freshman year are primarily curricular. Morstam (1972a, 1972b) describes a learning-experiment at the University of California Davis. Those students who chose to participate in the Experimental Freshman Year Program were housed in a coed dormitory along with their resident upperdivision student leaders. The freshmen take one common course along with the rest of their academic program of regular university offerings. The 1971-72 theme was: Self in Society. Three professors were responsible for the weekly multimedia, multisource meetings. In addition students worked on individual study or joint projects within primary groups of 10 to 12 under a resident assistant.

Other innovations in the freshman curriculum parallel the UC Davis experiment with respect to the introductory interdisciplinary course. They vary as to the sites taught (dorm or classroom), the type of course requirements (assigned readings, daily journals, portfolios, and projects), teaching styles (team teaching, individual responsibility for small group peers), student constituency (students elect representative freshmen, all freshmen), and type of course evaluation (no credit, conventional grades, grades self-assigned, pass fail, grades no credit, pass no credit). For the most part, the intent of these academic experiences is to introduce students to intellectual study and thought processes through the exploration of topics that have direct bearing and immediacy to the student and his life. Campuses where such attempts were or are being made include: Beloit College (Marcuson, 1970); Bowing Green University, 'Little College (Roller et al., 1972); University of California Berkeley (Tussman, 1969); Cornell College of Engineering (Berth and McNeney, 1972); Earlham College (Smith, 1969); Hofstra University, New College (Kohler and Dean, 1971); Mercer College, Miami University and Ohio University (Flournoy and Hobbs, 1972); Baasel, 1972); University of New Hampshire (Fried, 1970); and Wilmingon College (Marcuson, 1970).

Two of the most ambitious freshman-year programs are the one initiated by the Institute for Services to Education (ISE) (Steif, 1970; Blake, 1972; Humphries, 1972; Parmet, 1971; Turner, 1971) and the one at Hartman College (Morgan, 1970, 1971). In 1967 the ISE began by implementing the Thirteen-College Curriculum Program (TCCP) at the member institutions of a 13 college consortium. The number of colleges participating in the program grew to 27 in 1971, and new ones will be added in the near future. Thus, the TCCP affects more freshmen than any of the other programs reviewed.

Rather than being interdisciplinary or only centering on one course, the TCCP focuses on new curricular materials and teaching techniques for freshmen in the areas of English, mathematics, social science, physical science and biology, and in the sophomore year humanities and philosophy. Students from the TCCP then proceed into the regular college program. New teaching styles evolved from the desire to reduce lecturing, increase student participation, and foster an inductive-study process. Curricular revisions were based
ment from complicating factors such as initial student differ-
reflected growth on the "Omnibus Personality Inventory"
lower rate than a comparably sized group of freshmen. and
believed it to be the best in their first quarter at the uni-
Green University's Little College praised the course highly
For example, freshmen in an experimental course at Bowling
administrative aspects of their program.
their experiences were the means used to assess these
students' perceptions of the college environment. students'
tive efforts reviewed focused on the student. Dropout rate.
grade-point average. student personality structures, stu-
educational attitudes, and student ratings of segments of
their experiences were the means used to assess these
educational experiments. Only Hiram College reported the
of ISE is (1) for each institution to expand the program to
include all freshmen and teachers and (2) to make the pro-
program integral.

Hiram College is continuing an interdisciplinary curriculum
which began in the fall of 1969. The program is intended
to foster the development of favorable freshman attitudes
toward education and to generally strengthen the freshman
year of the college's program. Constituents of the program
include the Freshman Institute, the Freshman Colloquium,
and the Twentieth Century course. The Freshman Institute
provides all freshmen, in groups of 13, with an orientation
to college that includes intensive study of and practice in
communication skills. On a credit no credit basis, students
engage in workshops, writing and speaking exercises, panel
discussions, and movie making.
The Freshman Colloquium is designed to continue the stu-
dents' close contact with a faculty member, the development
of effective communication skills, and the cultivation of vau-
rious intellectual skills. Faculty devise a variety of topics for
the colloquia centered on one theme, but not overlapping
introductory course material in the academic disciplines. Stu-
dents participate in two colloquia in the first year on a
credit no credit basis. The faculty member for the first col-
loquium serves as the student's academic advisor until the
student selects a specific area of concentration. The Twen-
tieth Century course is a year length examination of current
issues from a historical perspective. The whole freshman
class meets 3 or 4 times a week for faculty lectures, invited
speakers, and films. In addition, smaller groups led by upper-
classmen discuss issues raised at the meetings of the whole
class, assigned readings, and students' papers.

EVALUATION OF CHANGES

Some colleges have evaluated changes made in the
freshman year, e.g., Hiram College (Morgan, 1970, 1971b),
the Thirteen-College Curriculum Program (Blake, 1972;
Turner, 1972), Bowling Green University (Roller et al., 1972),
Hofstra University New College (Hofeltier and Deann, 1970),
and the University of California at Davis (Morstain, 1972a).
Unfortunately, none of the evaluative reports detailed the
financial costs of the program. Since cost is an important
consideration, it would be helpful to others if such analyses
of innovative programs were to be made public. The evalu-
ative efforts reviewed focused on the student. Dropout rate,
grade-point average, student personality structures, stu-
dents' perceptions of the college environment, students' edu-
cational attitudes, and student ratings of segments of
their experiences were the means used to assess these
educational experiments. Only Hiram College reported the
administrative aspects of their program.

On the whole, the experiments have proven to be of value.
For example, freshmen in an experimental course at Bowling
Green University's Little College praised the course highly
and believed it to be the best in their first quarter at the uni-
versity. Furthermore, they dropped out of college at a much
lower rate than a comparably sized group of freshmen and
reflected growth on the "Omnibus Personality Inventory" measure of intellectual development.

In other cases it is hard to separate the effects of the experi-
ment from complicating factors such as initial student differ-
ences and the program's Hawthorne effect somewhat similar
to a halo effect. For example, Morstain compared the edu-
cational attitudes of students who chose the experimental pro-
gram at UC Davis and those who did not at two points in
time. In this case, although students in the experimental pro-
gram changed more and in perhaps more valuable ways, it
is difficult to determine whether the change is a result of
the Hawthorne effect, the experimental program, or initial
student differences. There is some indication that students
valued the learning experiences in the experimental program
more than in their regular courses.

Both the evaluations of experiments at Hiram College and
Hofstra University New College derived into students' ratings
of different aspects of their experimental programs and
found certain elements much better received by students
than others. Hiram found two out of three parts of their new
freshman curriculum received student satisfaction ratings
superior to the regular freshman courses of the previous year
(Morgan, 1970).

In addition to ratings of program components, Hiram Col-
lege took a broader look at the program's impact. They
studied the comparative effect of the new and old curriculum
on general satisfaction ('Satisfaction with Hiram Scale',
'College Student Questionnaire'), achievement (College
Board English Composition Exam', 'Survey of College
Achievement'), and attitudes of students ('Omnibus Person-
ality Inventory', 'College Student Questionnaire'). On the
basis of these measures, Morgan (1971) found that with the
new curriculum, there was significantly less disillusionment and more satisfaction with almost all aspects of the College,
that students achieved as well or better, and that students became 'more liberal, socially concerned, and culturally sophisticated.'

Efforts to evaluate the Thirteen College Curriculum Pro-
gram have led to similarly impressive findings in its favor.
Sixty-three percent of students from the experimental pro-
gram entered their senior year, in contrast to 47% of compar-
able students in regular programs. There were also signifi-
cant differences in cumulative grade-point averages (junior
year) in favor of the new program. In addition, TCCP students
were more likely to have leadership roles in student organiza-
tions.

To explore differences between the TCCP and regular
academic program, a questionnaire covering teaching prac-
tices, expected student behavior, course materials, and
course content was administered to TCCP and control senior
students. They were asked to rate how true each statement
was with respect to their freshman, sophomore, and com-
bined junior and senior year. Results of the questionnaire
show clearly that TCCP students had totally different learning
experiences than regular students in such areas as: teachers
who experimented freely with new methods of teaching,
teachers who did not rely on the lecture as the primary form of
classroom instruction; conditions that encouraged consid-
eration of individual differences in background; and demon-
strated concern for problems of undergraduates (Turner,
1972).

On the whole, evaluative efforts have proven the merit of
efforts to upgrade the freshman experience. The programs
effects have even reached well beyond the freshman year.
Thus, it might be worthwhile for others to review institutional
priorities in this light. Although new programs require money
and the current financial stringencies might be pressing. Marchese (1972b) has suggested two ways institutions might pay for programs within existing budgets. First, an institution might redistribute funds more equitably among the four years. Currently, freshman educational costs are much lower than those of the upper-division. Equalization of educational resources in terms of both money and manpower would support some very ambitious changes in the freshman year. Secondly, there is the possibility that providing a satisfying initial experience to students might ensure their return in significant enough numbers above past return rates to more than pay for a freshman year program. Regardless of the source of financial support, freshmen deserve programs and treatment from colleges and universities that will maximize their development as human beings. An institution that takes more than a passing interest in the quality of its educational environment for freshmen will be demonstrating that it takes the development of its students' potential seriously.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Basic Education and Enrichment Program Elizabeth City, North Carolina: Elizabeth City State College Office of the Coordinator. June 1969. ED 037 171. MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.


Marchese, Theodore J. Justice for Freshmen. Opening presentation at six Midwest Regional Conferences sponsored by the Midwest Regional Council of the American Association for Higher Education. September-October 1971. HE 003 424. MF-$0.65, HC-$3.29.


The Study of Education at Stanford: A Report to the University. Undergraduate Education 2 Stanford, California: Stanford University. November 1968. ED 032 845. MF-$0.65, HC-Not available from EDRS.


To order documents in the bibliography identified by an ED number, write to EDRS Document Reproduction Service (EDRS), P.O. Box Drawer O, Bethesda, Md. 20014. Documents with HE numbers are presently being processed by EDRS and will be assigned ED numbers upon publication in Research in Education (RIE). In ordering, ED numbers must be specified. MF indicates microfiche and HC denotes hard copy; payment must accompany orders of less than $10.00; and all orders must be in writing.