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Charles G. Eberly

Eastern Illinois University, cgeberly@eiu.edu

Eugene J. Cech

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Charles G. Eberly and Eugene J. Cech

Residence Hall Program and Perception of University Environment

The need to make optimal use of available human potential becomes critical as demands increase for college-educated citizens in our complex society. Educationally low achieving students are one possible source of talent which may be developed to fill society's demands. In recent years institutions of higher education have increasingly given such students opportunity for continued education (Childers, 1965; Gibson, Higgins, and Mitchell, 1967). Results have been discouraging. Whether by design or lack of design, such "trial" programs have usually proved to low-achieving students that they are incapable of college work. The human result is alienation toward the education needed for meaningful participation in modern society.

While Wisconsin State University-Oshkosh (WSU-O) had in the past promoted a "trial" summer program for students graduating in the lower quarter of their high school class, little had been done to provide a planned program for those admitted. The 1965 summer "trial" program provided a screening and preadmission counseling and evaluation interview unique to Wisconsin higher education, plus a developmental reading program through the University Counseling Center, Testing Research and Services Center, and University Reading Clinic. However, no attempt was made to provide enriching experiences in the university's summer school program to compensate for the cultural disparities between student background and academic milieu. In spite of the added services, students appeared to have a strong negative orientation toward higher education and specifically toward the university at the end of the session.

In summer, 1966, a pilot project to improve the attitudes of lower quarter high school graduates toward college academic motivation and success asked whether a residence hall program could be developed which would supplement the traditional academic program and concurrently encourage positive attitudes toward higher education and WSU-O. This article discusses the changes in students' perception of university environment between the time they entered and left the "trial" program.

Eugene J. Cech is a staff member at Wisconsin State University, Oshkosh and Charles G. Eberly is a staff member at Michigan State University, East Lansing.

Some tentative conclusions regarding the effect of a residence hall program on the total perception of university environment by students regardless of academic ability are suggested.

Method

All 39 male freshmen living on campus (regularly admitted and lower quarter "trial" students) were randomly assigned to separate living areas in Fletcher Hall, a men's residence, housing all on-campus male summer school students. The unique structure of Fletcher Hall, which tends to limit any interaction in the building between residents living in separated wings, permitted the operation of two different residence hall programs, one traditional to the WSU-O residence hall system and the other experimental.

Null hypotheses were: (1) there are no differences in academic achievement between students living in the experimental hall program environment and those living in the traditional hall environment; (2) there are no differences in perception of university environment between students experiencing the traditional or the experimental hall program.

Difference in mean grade-point average was used to test the first hypothesis, and difference in pre-session and post-session perceptions of University environment measured by the College Characteristics Index (CCI) was used to test the second hypothesis (Stern, 1963). Students were asked to complete the CCI during the afternoon of their first day of classes, and again three days before the end of the eight-week session.

The randomly selected control group consisted of 14 lower quarter students and six regularly admitted freshmen. The experimental group consisted of 17 randomly selected lower quarter students and two regularly admitted freshmen. Only one of the eight "regular" freshmen ranked in the upper half of his high school graduating class; thus it was assumed that their motivation to attend summer school was similar in nature to the lower quarter students—a test of their ability to do college level work. Comparing lower quarter students only, there was no difference in academic potential between the two groups as measured by the Composite Score of the American College Test.

The control group received the traditional hall program. The residence hall environment of the previous summer was duplicated as closely as possible. It consisted of the presence of an experienced undergraduate resident assistant, information about campus activities, and two co-educational social events.

The experimental group received an experimental program designed to increase student motivation. An attempt was made to promote an environment of interpersonal support which emphasized a cultural and academic milieu congruent with the goals of the instructional program. It was assumed that in relation to students with a higher probability of success the lower quarter high school graduates were likely to be deficient in (1) study and reading skills and habits, (2) social confidence, and (3) ability to control impulse behavior (Gibbs, 1965). Aspects of the experimental program are described below.

A guidance and counseling graduate student called a counselor-in-residence lived among the students in addition to the regular undergraduate resident assistant. The purpose of the counselor-in-residence was to provide individual and group guidance to the students, as well as to observe the group and anticipate possible individual

problems for referral to the University Counseling Center. He was not involved in any way with individual or group discipline.

The undergraduate resident assistant was responsible for all minor disciplinary actions in the hall as well as for maintenance of study hours. Since the lower quarter group is characteristically more socially immature, less sensitive to others, and less able to control impulse behavior, the resident assistant (an experienced senior) was directed to enforce a stricter-than-usual study environment in the living area. He accomplished this by being more available to the students (in his room on duty every possible night), requiring quiet during study hours, and providing immediate disciplinary action for those individuals breaking residence hall rules and regulations.

Since past experience indicated that lower quarter students were likely to be deficient in important aspects of social and cultural development, the educational program attempted to acquaint students with the university, its programs, development, and faculty, and at the same time to provide incentives for the individual to improve himself. Students were strongly encouraged to attend Summer Theater programs and other activities promoted by the University Student Union. In order to acquaint students with faculty members on a social level, interested professors were invited to a reception after each Theater event on Wednesday evenings. In addition to the receptions, a number of faculty speakers such as a popular professor of biology (the campus "sex talk"), the vice president for development, the dean of students, and the director of testing were invited into the hall to give programs based on their areas of interest. In as many areas as possible educational films and a display on the subject preceded the speaker. Finally, the head resident led a number of group sessions involving study skills and techniques and personal adjustment to university and residence hall life, and the counselor-in-residence held a series of individual and group counseling sessions.

The academic program taken by both groups of students included three credits each of Freshman English and Western Civilization, and one credit hour of Physical Education. All lower quarter students were enrolled in a reading development program.

Results

The CCI contains 300 items distributed evenly among 30 scales designed to measure conditions in the college environment likely to encourage or inhibit various "behavioral manifestations of personality needs" (Stern, 1963). The scale scores are further factor-analyzed into eleven second-order factors which roughly describe the intellectual and non-intellectual climate of the institution. Difference in perception of WSU-O was measured by comparing pre-test and post-test factor scores between the groups, and pre-test and post-test factor scores within each group. Significance of difference was determined, using Stern's table for standard score means (1963, p. 26).

Pre-test scores between the two groups revealed no difference in perception of college environment. As Stern has indicated for freshmen (1965)² both groups held an unrealistically high view of the institution's academic press. Both groups felt that WSU-O faculty and administration encouraged and set high standards toward which students should aspire, and that the institution had qualities of staff and plant specifically devoted to scholarly activities and academic excellence in the humanities, arts, and social sciences. They expected the campus to be active socially, with a profusion of dating and athletic activities. Although they anticipated considerable on-

Table 1. Significance of Difference of Mean Factor Scores on CCI

	Experimental Means (N=19)			Control Means (N = 20)		
	Pre	Post	Diff.	Pre	Post	Diff.
<i>WITHIN GROUPS:</i>						
1. Aspiration Level	.934	.848	-0.086	-0.030	-.582	-.552
2. Intellectual Climate	.567	.045	-.522	.236	-.955	-1.191
3. Student Dignity	-1.480	-2.279	-.799	-.481	-1.307	-.826
4. Academic Climate	1.330	.744	-.586	1.450	1.106	-.344
5. Academic Achievement	2.260	1.259	-1.001	1.568	-.079	-1.647*
6. Self-Expression	3.649	3.424	-.225	4.088	1.720	-2.368**
7. Group Life	1.125	1.144	.019	.830	.064	-.766
8. Academic Organization	.555	.098	-.457	1.331	-.611	-1.942**
9. Social Form	2.258	1.986	-.272	1.869	1.346	-.523
10. Play-Work	2.951	2.938	-.013	2.138	2.938	.800
11. Vocational Climate	.989	1.168	.179	1.343	.854	-.479

BETWEEN GROUPS, PRE-SESSION:

1. Aspiration Level	.934			-.030		.964
2. Intellectual Climate	.567			.236		.331
3. Student Dignity	-1.480			-.481		.999
4. Academic Climate	1.330			1.450		.120
5. Academic Achievement	2.260			1.568		.692
6. Self-Expression	3.649			4.088		.439
7. Group Life	1.125			.830		.295
8. Academic Organization	.555			1.331		.776
9. Social Form	2.258			1.869		.389
10. Play-Work	2.951			2.138		.813
11. Vocational Climate	.989			1.343		.354

BETWEEN GROUPS, POST-SESSION:

1. Aspiration Level	.848			-.582		1.430*
2. Intellectual Climate	.045			-.955		1.000
3. Student Dignity	-2.279			-1.307		.972
4. Academic Climate	.744			1.106		.262
5. Academic Achievement	1.259			-.079		1.338*
6. Self-Expression	3.424			1.720		1.704*
7. Group Life	1.144			.064		1.080
8. Academic Organization	.098			-.611		.709
9. Social Form	1.986			1.346		.640
10. Play-Work	2.938			2.938		.000
11. Vocational Climate	1.168			.854		.314

Statistic: Student's *t*

*Significant at .05 level

**Significant at .01 level

portunity for self-expression, neither group expected to have much opportunity in the campus setting to exercise self-discipline or to manage their personal affairs. Since both groups anticipated the university environment to include a high press in almost all areas measured by the CCI, it appears that they held upon entrance a rather undifferentiated, optimistic view of the university.

At the end of the eight-week session, the experimental group still held an optimistic view of the university with no significant change in any of the eleven factor scores. Significant changes in perception were observed in pre-session to post-session scores of the control group compared with itself, and compared with post-session scores of the experimental group. In comparison to its pre-session scores, the control group's post-session scores indicated the university environment promoted significantly less opportunity for self-expression and little press for academic organization (both at the .01 level), and that high academic achievement was not encouraged (.05 level).

When the experimental group post-session factor scores were compared with the post-session control scores, the control group perception of university environment again indicated less opportunity for self-expression and academic achievement, and in addition, viewed the university environment as encouraging a lower level of aspiration (all at the .05 level).

Congruent with the more favorable perception of university environment found in the experimental group, 9 of its 17 lower quarter students qualified to enter the fall semester (2.00 GPA required), while only 4 of 14 lower quarter students in the control group qualified for fall entrance. However, using Student's *t* ($\alpha = .05$, 29 df, two-tailed test), there was no difference between the two mean grade-point averages of 1.770 for the lower quarter students in the experimental group and 1.423 for the lower quarter students in the control group (Hays, 1963).

Discussion

The empirical results indicate that the first hypothesis must be accepted: students living in the experimental hall environment earned grade-point averages no higher than students experiencing the traditional hall environment. Based on the results of the CCI, however, the second hypothesis was not accepted. Students living in the experimental hall environment did leave the summer session with a more favorable impression of the university. This would appear to indicate that type of residence hall program can affect student perception of overall university environment. While it may be argued that the experimental hall program as used in this pilot project simply preserved an unrealistic perception of university environment, it would appear more desirable to encourage the development of student habits and behavioral expectations favorable to the university in a summer "trial" program as preparation for further adjustment to academic living, than to do nothing and permit the successful "trial" student to enter the regular term with an already negative reaction to the university and its offerings. This aspect of the project also has implications for regular residence hall programs. If the program described can maintain enthusiasm in students with low expected motivation, what is its potential for average or highly motivated students?

Although results were mixed, this study does lend some support to the value of a comprehensive residence hall program in the development and maintenance of a

positive perception of university environment. Such perception is important to the university and higher education in general if it is to increase the quality and quantity of its educational output.

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assess their goals and find values in higher education which they previously failed to perceive. They return to college determined to obtain their baccalaureate degrees. Although, for the majority of these students, obtaining a baccalaureate degree is in the far distance, they have clearer goals, are more serious and determined in their studies, and have raised their academic standings. Therefore it would seem that these students are capable of pursuing a higher education.

The results of this study raise several questions. Can personnel in institutions of higher learning provide greater assistance to students in the transition from high school to college? Can students who are capable and willing to pursue higher education be given greater guidance and assistance? Or should students leave college for a time and then return when they are more mature and have clearer goals?

Finally, can programs and policies be established which will retain high standards and at the same time minimize the number of dropouts? This is the challenge that increasingly confronts personnel in institutions of higher learning.

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