

Report of the Study Group on Student Involvement

*Phyllis -
Please read for
Friday's Strategic
Planning meeting
Piscataway
5-6-86*

The Charge:

Our study group was given the following assignments:

1. To examine the level of our students' involvement in the educational, cultural and social life of this campus.
2. To make recommendations, based upon our findings, to the Strategic Planning Committee on ways for deepening the level of our students' commitment to their own educational experience.

The Instrument:

To aid us in our study we decided to "pirate" a questionnaire entitled "The College Experience" (undoubtedly in violation of copy-right laws!). This questionnaire is the creation of an educational research group at U.C.L.A., and has just been used by this campus and by several other commonwealth campuses as part of a national survey on student involvement. We are awaiting the results of this survey in hopes that, besides giving us more information, it will provide us with some reliable normative data.

"The College Experience" contains about 200 separate items. These items are grouped into major categories as follows:

1. Background Information
2. Library Experience
3. Experiences with Faculty
4. Course Learning
5. Art, Music, Theatre
6. Student Union
7. Athletic and Recreational Facilities
8. Clubs and Organizations
9. Experience in Writing
10. Personal Experiences
11. Student Acquaintances
12. Science/Technology
13. Topics of Conversation - Information used in Conversations
14. Reading/Writing
15. Opinions about College
16. The College Environment
17. Estimate of Gains

Under each of the categories the intent of the questions is to assess the student's 'Level of active participation' in a particular aspect of his/her college education.

The Sample:

- 100 copies of this questionnaire were distributed as follows:
- 10 - To an evening section of EE807 students;
 - 30 - To a section of music 5 students;
 - 30 - To another section of music students;
 - 30 - To a section of English 15 students;

We felt this would result in a reasonable cross-section of our student population. Of the 100 questionnaires distributed we managed to get 41 completed and returned.

These 41 respondents fell into the following comparative sub-populations:

Male	<u>29</u>	Female	<u>12</u>
Full-time	<u>31</u>	Part-time	<u>10</u>
Technology-Science-Engineering	<u>20</u>	All-Others	<u>21</u>
Live-At-Home	<u>21</u>	Dorm-Students	<u>3</u>
Sophomore	<u>13</u>	Freshman	<u>28</u>

The students failed to follow our instructions to indicate if they were associate degree candidates or baccalaureate degree candidates, as a result, we were unable to make comparisons between these two important sub-populations.

The Analysis:

The responses on each major category (except for a Fraternity/Sorority Section) were used in several ways:

1. To obtain profiles of sub-populations by using the corresponding sub-samples.
2. To form indices to reflect each student's weighted score on each section. ((The weights are relative to the value of a "maximum" score to a particular question. For example: A "very often" response = 3, so that an "occasionally" response = 1 would be weighted as $.33 = 1/3$.)
3. To make comparisons between sub-populations for example: To compare Technology/Engineering Students' responses on the "Science/Technology" section with Non-Science Students' responses on the same section.

By the way, we found no statistically significant difference here!!

We will not go into any more detail in this section. (If you are interested in the details you can take up your questions with J. Graham who did the statistical analysis.)

A Profile

Of course there is no such thing as an "average" person. Having made this disclaimer, however, we will proceed to profile the "AVERAGE PENN-STATE W-B STUDENT" and to describe some of his characteristics.

Our "average" student is male. He is about 19 or 20 yrs. old. He is pursuing a Technology/Engineering curriculum. He is taking about 15 hrs. of classes per week and studies about 15 hours per week outside of the class room. He works between 10-20 hrs. a week in off-campus employment. He is receiving financial aid; lives at home and neither of his parents are college graduates. His grades average between C+ and B+. He is white.

Library:

His most frequent use of the Library is as a quiet place to study. Occasionally he will ask the Librarian for help in finding material on some topic; however he hardly ever runs down leads cited in his text books; nor reads specialized collections or references.

Experience with Faculty:

He has occasional contact with the faculty in non-classroom situations but

these are usually classroom related. He does not socialize with faculty nor does he discuss personal problems with faculty members.

Course Learning:

This is his most active area of participation. He attends class; takes notes; studies for exams. but only occasionally will he do extra reading beyond the texts used in his courses.

Art/Music/Theatre

He has no interest in any of this. He does not attend concerts; does not go to plays and he has never been to an art gallery.

Student Union

He often has a snack in the Commons and often sits around talking with his friends. He does not use the Commons as a regular study place nor does he use the lounges or meeting rooms to meet with a group of students for a discussion.

Athletic and Recreation

Here again he makes little or no use of the Athletic facilities. He may occasionally play some intra-mural sports and at times some spontaneous group sports.

Clubs and Organization

He may look at the school newspaper. He does not belong to a club, and does not work on any student committees. He has some interest in student government issues but not a great deal.

Experience in Writing

He often uses a dictionary and has often spent hours writing and re-writing papers and essays. This is another area of more active participation but again it is mostly classroom related.

Personal Experiences and Student Acquaintance

He seems to have some good friends on campus - even some whose interests are very different from his. But neither he nor his friends discuss personal problems nor do they seek out counselors or specialists about personal problems. Their topics of conversation are girls, parties, movies, jobs, money and careers - in about that order. He does not often talk about social issues or current events and never talks about Philosophy or Art.

Science/Technology

He memorizes formulas, definitions and terms and sometimes tries to express a set of relationships in mathematical terms. He has had some experience with computers but not a great deal. He seems to be ambivalent toward science. It may be important to his chosen career but he does not seem to be highly committed to mastering the skills needed in serious scientific

inquiry.

Opinions about College

He seems to like college (so far) and would "probably" choose Penn State W-B if he had to do it over again. He sees this campus as fairly strong in academics; in vocational training; and in doing a good job of training him to think critically.

Estimate of Gain

Here again there seems to be some ambivalence about what he perceives that he is gaining from his college experiences. He is not very excited about this thing called a college education.

An Overview:

Our "average" student seems to be somewhat committed and involved in his education however, his level of involvement is minimal. It is interesting to note that he is maintaining a C+ to B+ average in his courses with probably less total time spent in school and on studying than he spent earning the same grades in high school. In fact, his profile could just as well have been a profile of a "typical" high school student. Except for more copious note-taking in class, just about the same "Strategies For Getting By" work as well in the 'new' college environment as it did in the 'old' high school environment. Is there good reason to believe that there will be changes in his "studenting" behavior patterns when, at least to his mind, there is no corresponding changes in the educational environment? If these changes are not self motivated and self initiated and if we would want to see changes in these behavior patterns then, perhaps, it must be initiated by us by changing the way we treat him. For example, by raising the level of what we expect from him both as a student and as a person a notch higher than anything in his previous experiences; or perhaps by setting higher standards for acceptable scholarship and sticking steadfastly to these standards. In short, we may be nurturing his lack of involvement through our failure to shift an equitable portion of responsibility for his education from our shoulders on to his shoulders. This shift must begin in the classroom. The classroom should be a place where both the hardwork and rewards of learning are "shared" but how can this occur when, very often, the only person prepared for class each day is the instructor!

This campus can not be an exciting, challenging and lively place for students until all our classrooms are! If we are to make any meaningful recommendations at all, the classroom must be the primary object. Everything else is merely cosmetic.

Recommendations:

We strongly urge:

1. That a "Bill of Rights For Students" and a "Bill of Rights For Teachers" be drawn up and displayed side-by-side in each classroom at all times. These "Bills of Rights" could serve students as a frame of reference for evaluating teachers and conversely could serve teachers as a frame of reference for evaluating their students. But more importantly, they would serve as a constant reminder to each of their

shared responsibility in the classroom

- *2. We recommend a convocation, of all teachers and administrators for the purpose of sharing ideas and strategies to increase active participation by the students in the classroom and in the life of the campus in general.
3. We recommend the adoption of a uniform attendance policy uniformly applied to all students.
4. We recommend that student orientation be extended into a course for freshmen dealing with their college experience.
5. We recommend that as many students as possible be given the opportunity to participate in on campus employment.
6. We recommend particularly close monitoring of the progress of students who enter with academic deficiencies.
7. We recommend a thorough review of our cultural programming for students.
8. We recommend a thorough review of our varsity & Intramural Athletic programming in light of the coming gymnasium.
9. We recommend that we continue to try to attract greater numbers of female students to our campus. *Female students have shown a statistically significantly higher level of involvement in the life of the campus than their male counter-parts.

*For example: Why couldn't instructors in sociology require each student to participate in at least one student club or organization? Why couldn't instructors in music require students to attend at least one live concert or ballet? Why couldn't an instructor in English require each student to submit an article for the school newspaper, or attend a play or write about his impressions of certain works of art found at a local art gallery? Why couldn't instructors in mathematics and science require students to write reports on topics which would necessitate using special references and periodicals found in our Library? Or have small groups of students work on 'research' projects and, periodically, have them make progress reports to the entire class. In other words, why couldn't we start using the classroom in more creative ways which could stimulate student involvement both in and out of the classroom setting?