THE DISADVANTAGED STUDENT AT A LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

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In the fall of 1969, a program to expand educational opportunities (EEO) for economically disadvantaged students was initiated at Macalester College. During the first three years of the program, the percentage of non-white students at the College rose from 3% to approximately 15%.

Average grades for the EEO students were approximately one standard deviation below those of a random non-EEO sample, similar to the differences in high school grades between the two groups. However, the EEO students persisted at Macalester College at a slightly higher rate than non-EEO students. The EEO students also were more likely than non-EEO students to major in the behavioral/social sciences and less likely to major in the fine arts, humanities, and physical sciences.

Clearly, one of the significant directions for American higher education is the expansion of educational opportunities for the disadvantaged. As early as 1964, Gordon and Wilkerson (1966) found that nearly 37% of the institutions listed in the “Education Directory” (1962-63) reported offering compensatory programs of some kind. However, most of these programs served fewer than 30 students and provided minimal supporting services to the enrolled students, primarily white. In the late 1960s, attention focused on assisting potential students from racial minorities who, because of financial and/or educational deficits, would not be eligible for admission to college.

Theoretically, programs for the disadvantaged are based on the premise that the university or college can and must do more for young people, who, because of their poor academic preparation and low socioeconomic status, would not normally attend college (Astin et al., 1972). Although compensatory programs are becoming more numerous, research on such programs has lagged behind. Most of the research to date has not been aimed at collecting data about compensatory programs at a single institution, but rather has relied on a broader group, e.g.,

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students in a nation-wide sampling of various colleges and universities who said they had participated in a program for the disadvantaged.

In studying success at college, DiCesare et al. (1972) found that among a sample of black undergraduates, 13% did not return at midyear while 15% of the white undergraduates did not return. On a one year basis, a survey conducted by the College Board (1970) indicated that the return rates after one year for both minority and non-minority freshmen was 70%. Klingelhofer and Longacre (1972) studied an Educational Opportunities Program (EOP) at a western college and found that after seven semesters, 31% of the EOP students were not in school and had not graduated compared to 25% of the non-EOP students. Klingelhofer and Longacre also found that in spite of similarities in rates of progress, the EOPs earned much lower grade-point averages than a matched sample (2.05 vs. 2.64, p < .01), had a much higher incidence of unsatisfactory grades, and "flunked out" in significantly greater numbers.

Besides investigating persistence rates and college grades, most researchers report similar findings with regard to the selected or probable college major of disadvantaged and special program participants (Astin et al., 1972), black high school students (Panos and Edgert, 1972), and black college freshmen (Bayer, 1972; Kimball et al., 1971). Astin found that generally the disadvantaged choose social science for a major with teaching the most frequently selected career. Among black college-oriented high school students, business is the most often selected major with the social science fields second in popularity.

MACALESTER'S PROGRAM TO EXPAND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Macalester College made a major commitment in 1969 to increase the educational opportunities it provided to the disadvantaged. Specifically, the College sought to recruit a significant number of disadvantaged students each year (75 students per year for the first two years of the program and 40 new students in each succeeding year) with most of these students coming from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds. Each of the participants in this Expanded Educational Opportunities (EEO) program received a total financial aid package (i.e., grants for tuition, room and board).

Along with an increase in minority students, the College increased its number of minority faculty and staff members. The number of faculty from the non-white community increased from one in 1968 to eleven in 1969 and represented nine disciplines. The non-white administrative staff increased from one to twelve.

One objective of the EEO program was to enrich the curriculum with courses of particular interest and relevance to the new group of students. In the first year of the program this need was met through "Topics" courses and courses in Black History, Black Theater, and Black Music that were taught by members of the