

Occupational Education and the Community College

FOR years there have been pronouncements on the functions of a comprehensive public community (junior) college. Many of these statements have indicated that these are institutions designed to meet the needs of the community in which they are located through an educational curriculum consisting of college-parallel programs, occupational programs (vocational, technical, semi-professional and terminal), and through broad adult education offerings. Unfortunately, however, many junior colleges have been preoccupied with their college-parallel or transfer function and have become basically academic institutions.

In 1953, a study of community college occupational programs (identified as terminal by many community colleges) showed that 80 percent of the occupational curricula offered were concentrated on the campuses of five percent of the 302 community colleges studied (1:7-10). In 1964, the status of occupational programs in the approximately 700 public community colleges of the United States was analyzed by an expert in the

field as follows: (a) approximately 70-80 community colleges have near-model comprehensive programs; (b) approximately 100 additional colleges have good occupational programs although limited in scope; and (c) the remainder have made little effort to develop programs characteristic of a comprehensive community college (2:2).

At a community college conference held in the summer of 1964, Thomas B. Merson, Assistant Director for Commissions of the American Association of Junior Colleges, stated that "One of the major missions of the two-year community college is to provide occupational training in one-year and two-year programs for pre-employment, and intensive evening programs for employment up-grading and retraining for adults" (2:2). His use of the term "mission" was appropriate, for occupational education today does not exist as a major function in many community colleges. It remains as a goal for visionary college administrators to strive for. It is, nevertheless, a mission that all community colleges must involve themselves in if they are to become truly comprehensive institutions serving the educational needs of the communities in which they exist.

It must be acknowledged that in the

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first 60-odd years of its existence the two-year community college has not succeeded in achieving the goals proposed for it in the area of occupational education. We should recognize, however, that today there are encouraging elements present that could lead to more realistic comprehensive sequences of study offered by these institutions. There are at present well developed occupational programs in some community colleges that can be used as examples for administrators to follow as they consider possible curricular expansion in their institutions.

Encouraging Signs

The federal government has recently given monetary and vocal support to the further development of vocational programs in the community college. State governments have emphasized the need for vocational and technical programs in state master plans for community colleges. Private foundations have backed research in the area of community college curricula. In addition, the American Association of Junior Colleges, through its Curriculum Commission, has vigorously involved itself in a study of how the community college can contribute to national manpower training needs.

An examination of present occupational offerings in community colleges indicates that students can enroll in them on a credit or noncredit basis, attend classes as full-time day students or in adult education classes at night, enroll in one or two year sequences of courses or in individual courses according to their needs and competencies. The majority of course offerings in these programs are in the area of business; however, institutional catalogs indicate a broad range of courses of study in other occupational areas.

Besides a strong college parallel program, the College of Marin (California), for instance, affords its students the opportunity of studying in any one of 25 occupational areas ranging from dental assisting to dietician aid, from photography to law enforcement. Los Angeles Trade-Technical College, obviously oriented in the direction of occupational education, offers study in 99 areas which include opportunities for training in such varied programs as aircraft electronics, men's tailoring, heavy truck and diesel, piano tuning, plastics technician, and vending machine repair. The Daytona Beach (Florida) Community College curriculum includes seven areas of occupational training ranging from building and contracting technology to hotel-motel management. Henry Ford Community College (Michigan) offers occupational education opportunities for its students in the technical fields, skilled trades and in business. Through such programs of study as die making, industrial hydraulics and products design, the college contributes to the educational needs of its geographical area.

The various branches of the Chicago City Junior College are in the process of expanding their course offerings in this field. At present, 29 programs are available including six associate degrees in business. Other one and two year study areas such as home economics, commercial music, industrial chemistry, medical secretary and bacteriologic technician are available to students enrolled in that junior college system. Mohawk Valley Community College (New York) uses the term "career-oriented" curricula, rather than technical, vocational or occupational, to classify their courses in advertising design and production; banking, insurance and real estate; retail business management; electrical, me-

chanical and civil technology; and secretarial science.

Program Planning

The occupational programs mentioned here are but a sampling of those available for study by community colleges that are now having second thoughts about the place of course sequences of this type in their curriculum. Obviously there are other prime examples of good occupational programs to be found in the community colleges of various states. In general, these programs should be planned in depth. That is, they should exist for those students who have little or no training in specific occupational fields as well as for those students who are ready for advanced training in the same fields. Metropolitan College (California), for example, offers business courses ranging from beginning typing to data processing in COBOL, FORTRAN, IBM and UNIVAC programming.

The occupational programs should also be planned to provide students with the opportunity to involve themselves in general education as well as in courses that stress occupational skills. The two year architectural design program at Dutchess Community College (New York), for example, includes six hours in English, six hours in mathematics, six hours in social studies, and two hours in general education electives as well as health and physical education. The law enforcement sequence at Miami-Dade (Florida) requires six hours in communication, six hours in social studies, three hours in mathematics, and three hours in psychology besides health and physical education.

The recent strides made by some community colleges in occupational edu-

cation, however, have not proceeded at a pace fast enough for those individuals and agencies who see the community college as a prime source of trained manpower for the occupational and technical fields. These individuals and agencies are now engaged in a major effort to persuade community college administrators to assume a more vigorous role in community manpower development.

The federal government, through the National Defense Education Act, Manpower Development and Training Act, and the Vocational Education Act, has encouraged many community colleges to become more active in the occupational fields. During 1963, seventy-eight community colleges in twenty states had 128 MDTA projects in operation. These projects involved 5,300 trainees. John P. Walsh, Deputy Director of the Office of Manpower, Automation and Training, recently stated that "The junior college, admirably situated astride the pulse line of the community it serves, is properly positioned educationally and philosophically to make a major contribution to the manpower development movement" (3:12). Secretary of Labor Willard Wirtz has voiced the same opinion. State governments, through documents such as the recent New Jersey County College Bill and the Illinois Master Plan for Higher Education, have made strong recommendations relative to occupational and technical programs in their community colleges.

Non-governmental agencies including the Sloan Foundation and the Kellogg Foundation have added their support to community college progress in this curricular field. Perhaps one of the best publications in the area of technical education in the community college,

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we could not secure during the day were presented in settlement house programs in the evening. On the days that we had released time for reporting to parents, the settlement house arranged bus trips to industrial centers for the boys. Every opportunity to give the boys a broad perspective of the world of work was given. The program had appeal; our boys, our parents and the greater community responded enthusiastically to the project. Our boys generated a new sense of importance.

Our success stories include the rehabilitation of one of last year's greater disciplinary problems. He was a bright boy, but disgruntled with everything. He has, however, cooperated wholeheartedly this year. I understand also that he made a voluntary declaration to cooperate with the school to a group worker at the Peoples Settlement House prior to the opening of school.

Our project continues. This year the program has been extended to the girls. Our assembly participants will include a large number of non-college graduates, though we plan to include college trained workers in some of our programs. We do not want to put a ceiling on the aspirations of our children.

Our excursion through the "boys project" has carried us far. The children now are far better acquainted with people in the mainstream of the work-a-day world. They are also having opportunities to learn a great deal more about successful adults. We hope this experience and insight will help the children in sloughing off some of the debilitating influences which surround them in the community where they now live.

Who knows—some of our children may go to college.

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At present, community colleges enroll approximately three college-parallel or transfer students for every student enrolled in occupational programs. This ratio will have to be altered if these colleges are going to function as truly comprehensive two year institutions whose philosophy, curriculum and guidance services are oriented in the direction of upgrading their occupational and technical manpower training programs to the level of their offerings in the college-parallel area.

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