



College Entrance Requirements Need Not Be a Problem

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Do college entrance requirements rigidly govern the programs offered by secondary schools? This article describes a study made in this area. It also outlines an actual program in which high school students concentrate upon the particular entrance requirements of the college they expect to attend.

SECONDARY schools have been more reluctant than the colleges themselves to face the problem of adequate preparation of young people for college. Principals and superintendents sometimes remark that colleges are holding up real curriculum im-

provement with their very rigid entrance requirements. This observation, though it is common, is not always necessarily true.

It was only as high school programs began to expand and open new fields of study and activity that the question of

college preparation became a serious problem. A further complication in this respect arose as both the secondary schools and the colleges attempted to meet the immediate challenges and future problems of college preparation. Much has been written and spoken for many years expressing divergent points of view concerning this problem of college entrance requirements.

The guidance services concept is a rather recent development in most secondary schools and colleges. With this newer concept of service, more attention has been focused on the individual and his problems and less on the class or group regarding the problem of college preparation. Even a casual review of college catalogues reveals some of the complexity and the varied aspects of this problem. As guidance workers and administrators have attempted to meet this problem, many research studies have been made in this area. It is significant that many of these studies have resulted as secondary schools have attempted to prepare students well for the instructional program that will be offered them later in the colleges.

While much research has been done, the concept of what constitutes adequate college preparation has been changing so rapidly that by the time a study becomes available to educators it is out-of-date. A continuing type of program is needed in this field of research so that no generation of youth will receive less than the best preparation we know how to plan and initiate.

Under the influence of research workers such as Thorndike, and as Yates (4) of Kentucky, the colleges found it increasingly difficult to prescribe a required pattern of high school subjects for college entrance. When there was

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but one subject pattern—namely, English, history, mathematics, Greek and Latin—the problem was simple. The colleges required what the preparatory schools taught. It was no less difficult to decide what to require when Science replaced Greek in the secondary schools about the turn of the century. Now that we find many so-called “general” subjects preparing for college equally as well as with traditional subjects, the educational waters are really clouded. That the colleges recognize this research may easily be seen by reviewing the catalogues. Recently admission officers have shifted their emphasis in requirements from one of subject pattern to one of predicted ability and success of the individual.

Study Reveals New Trend

In a recent study made by the writer a sizeable number of liberal arts college catalogues and college entrance requirements were reviewed. It was indeed interesting to note that when a college was rigid in the prescribed and required pattern of high school subjects a large amount of space was devoted to “how to enter” the college when the student could not present the “required” pattern of subjects. If the subject pattern required was liberal or nonexistent, the space devoted to how to enter “with conditions” was very limited or not present. Just a casual review of the college catalogues and their entrance requirements will reveal this new trend from subject pattern to a concern for many other factors. The following quotations high-light this observation:

University of Miami, Coral Gables, Miami, Florida, Bulletin, Vol. 26, No. 3: "High school graduates should rank in the upper three-quarters of their class. The university suggests but does not require the following distribution of high school units for admission to the indicated schools."

Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, Bulletin Series 46, No. 2: "The College is aware of the fact that there is variation among school curricula throughout the country. It is willing to give careful consideration to able students whose programs deviate at some points from those suggested above."

Allegheny College, Meadville, Pa., College Bulletin, Series M, No. 5: "The College is more interested in the applicant's general potential for success in college than in the completion of a prescribed pattern of entrance requirements. Each candidate will be judged solely in terms of his individual qualifications."

University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, Bulletin, Vol. 47, No. 17: After describing three different conditions for admission this statement follows. "An applicant who does not qualify for admission direct from high school may later qualify for admission with advanced standing credit if he presents at least 15 semester units of accredited college work with an average grade of C plus (1.50) or higher on all college work attempted, or 30 units with an average of C (1.00) or higher on all college work attempted."

These quotations are not fine print items to be easily overlooked, but rather they constitute a part of the basic policy of the institutions. The four col-

leges selected are quite typical of the nation's colleges. The writer (1) found in 1946 that of 104 liberal arts colleges studied, 60.6% had no specific foreign language requirement, 25.0% required two years, while McKown (2) reported in a similar study in 1923 that he found 7% of the colleges requiring seven years of a foreign language and 11% requiring six years of a foreign language in 1911. Similar transitions have taken place in the fields of mathematics and science. English and social studies are generally recognized by both colleges and secondary schools for their social contribution and frequently do not constitute a part of the listed requirements.

As has been stated in the literature, principals should not make the accusation that the colleges are holding up curriculum enrichment or revision. The colleges have liberalized their requirements more than most men in the field are aware. Students in high school should be guided to pursue courses devoted to preparation for general living, as far as would be permitted by the entrance requirements of the college that they intend to enter. This necessarily requires an early concern for what college is to be entered or at least which type of college is to be entered. An emphasis on scholarship rather than subject pattern is the concern of most college admission officers today. Personality development has taken an almost equal stature with scholarship in the policies of college registrars. One of the thorny problems at both the secondary and college levels, is the unworthy distinction between academic and nonacademic subjects. All subject matter that contributes to the social well-being must be recognized by edu-

cators with equal zeal and respect. The answers to most of our problems in the area of college entrance requirements will come when we show concern for the individual student at the high school level, with reference to his needs in entering the individual college of his choice. As students elect subject patterns with reference to their needs, college entrance requirements will become professional recommendations rather than hurdles.

One School Meets the Problems

In the Butler, Pennsylvania, senior high school, graduation is based on the work completed by the students in grades ten, eleven and twelve. The junior high school program has very few electives and is exploratory in nature. All specializing is deferred until the students enter the senior high school. In this three year interval the students must complete satisfactorily thirteen Carnegie units of credit. English, social studies and health education are required of all students. These required classes make up five units of work and the remaining eight Carnegie units are elective. Since the program is one of constants with variables, the usual fixed "course" subject patterns are completely missing. In this student body of 1700 each student has a subject pattern arrangement that he and his parents have planned and elected. It is mere coincidence if any two student schedules are identical. Each student plans his three year elective program while in the ninth grade. This plan is reviewed and brought up to date each year with the guidance counselor, the student and his parents participating. A class counselor works with each class for three years. Changes in plans

are quite common as the student matures, changes his plans, develops new interests or learns of new opportunities. Each student schedule is written individually during the summer months based on the program of classes and activities the student has elected. All programs are audited as to vocational plan, aptitude, past achievement, intelligent compromises for superior students, and common sense in the light of the professional training, experience and judgment on the part of the counselor.

Students planning to prepare for college are urged while they are attending ninth grade to select the colleges they plan to enter. Frequently this is thought to be an early date by the student and his parents. Few parents, however, fail to appreciate the necessity of knowing this decision before intelligent planning can take place for the senior high school years. If the specific college cannot be agreed upon at this time, at least the general type of college and geographic location is usually identified. The fact that this challenge comes early is very significant for many students and is conducive to wise planning and effective preparation for college. The program described above has been in effect in this school for three years. No longer do students elect two years of a foreign language in the "College Preparatory Course" and then find that the college chosen requires three years' study in a foreign language. More engineering students now learn early that specific combinations of subjects are required with others being highly recommended. Under this plan the student can tailor his high school program to dovetail perfectly with the college recommenda-

tions. Quite early, too, students become aware of the emphasis colleges place on the many variable factors aside from subject patterns. Students secure catalogues for colleges of their choice, have interviews with field personnel and plan intensively for the college entrance function.

In this early college planning, students likewise make another very significant observation: namely, colleges vary widely in their offerings, opportunities, entrance standards, costs, social programs, academic ratings and traditions. The students do not study college preparation long until many of the loose statements made by college graduates are properly catalogued as true perhaps one day but not today. Thus their planning is based on current college recommendations.

With this practical approach to the problem of meeting the college going function, probably more students of ability get to college than would be found under one of the more traditional methods. The student in this school is aware quite early in the high school career that colleges vary widely in many respects and that college entrance is really an individual problem between the student and the college. He is quite aware that a fixed subject pattern will not serve him well but that in addition to what subject he elects he must have this hard-to-describe "predicted success" quality about him and his work.

The students and counselors have built up a very valuable file of what the several colleges entered by students of

the Butler schools consider college preparatory subjects. There is a great variation in this information which is the very factor that makes it so valuable. Both students and counselors are aware that entrance requirements of colleges not entered by Butler students make little difference to them. Considerable effort is spent in doing better the job of college preparation for the colleges the students do enter.

The administration of this school can find no evidence of any college or group of colleges hindering the improvement or expansion of the curriculum of the school. In fact the colleges of the area encourage this expansion and improvement program. College entrance requirements are not a problem in this school except for the individual student and his self-discipline.

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