

The Impact of Scholarship Awards

How are young people's lives affected today by the various pressures connected with scholarship awards? New research is needed to answer this question.

SCHOLARSHIPS have always received much attention from the press. One event that highlights this attention took place last summer when Congress was debating the removal of scholarship grants from the National Defense Education Bill. This writer is pleased that the scholarships were removed from the Bill. The whole picture of granting this type of financial aid is a cloudy one. The granting of such aid needs much investigation before such an expanded program can be handled in an efficient manner by educational institutions. Whether loans are *the* answer is doubtful. At least there seem to be more safeguards in a loan approach than with a scholarship approach.

Studies prove that there are numerous able youths in the United States who should go on for more advanced training and who do not. But, can we safely assume that the chief reason they do not go on is because of lack of money? Scholarships have become so revered that the literature presents very little in the form of honest and frank discussions of this very important problem.

Let us attempt to give the term, scholarship, an operational definition. Its main meaning in the past has been

the granting of financial aid because of scholastic excellence. Included in this excellence have been achievement and academic potential. The weighting of either factor has depended upon the donor's evaluation of the prognostic quality of the achievement record or tested potential. Of course, it was understood that there was no financial obligation involved in repaying this aid. A second area considered for the granting of a scholarship has been personal qualifications. However, these have been used to supplement the academic achievement and potential rather than to decide the award. A third prerequisite, need, has always been present but the emphasis on it has developed in the past few years. In fact, need has become the number one requirement in the granting of many scholarships after a certain minimum accomplishment in achievement and potential has been attained.

In part this emphasis on need stems from the movement that stresses the fullest possible development of our human resources. This movement has emerged since World War II and has especially emphasized the academically talented. Sputnik tended only to underline it, adding the phrase, "for our coun-

try's survival." One of the factors giving thrust to this movement was the G. I. Bill of Rights. The academic success of the veterans affected by this legislation, many of whom would never have been in college except for its help, spawned studies to find out actually how many of our academically talented youth were not going on to college. Havighurst (3) in Illinois and Berdie (1) in Minnesota reported such studies. Berdie pointed out that there was real cause for concern. In Minnesota, about one-third of the academically talented youth were not going on to college. Approximately 50 percent of this group stated that they would have gone on to college if they had had the financial resources. These and other studies have been misinterpreted to mean that financial aid alone will instill the feeling of an academic "noblesse oblige" in this group.

What about the other 50 percent of this talented group? Berdie points out that there are many complex factors involved, centering around family cultural levels and the presence of a "college attitude." The question should also be asked whether the 50 percent who talked in terms of going on if financial aid were available, would actually have gone on if this were so. There is little information to give us an answer to this important question.

If we assume that the chief goal of scholarships today is to help the abler student to reach college and remain there, we should ask the question, how have scholarship programs been progressing toward this goal? Let us particularly look at the scholarships based on competitive testing—the kind that have received so much publicity of late. Are they actually bringing those able students into college who would normally not be there, or are they merely

shifting choice of college for those already college-bound? Berdie (2) thinks the latter case is true; but he does feel that scholarships help those attending college get a better education. His thought is that there are too many students burdened by a work load who could well afford to spend more time in the many activities of college which make for a well-rounded education. Thistlethwaite (4) points out in a study of the 1956 Merit Scholarship winners that over 50 percent of those students believed that the scholarship they received encouraged them to go to a more desirable college. This is especially interesting when one considers that one-third of the winners of the 1956 Merit Scholarships received only an honorarium of \$100 because they could already afford to go to the college of their choice. The literature produces very little research in this area.

A similar situation exists in the high school in the present writer's own school district. Approximately 50 percent of our seniors go on to college. Thirty-five scholarships have been awarded in the past four years ranging from the \$1,800 continuing type to the \$100 freshman type. Only one scholarship could be considered as enabling an academically talented student to go to college who would not have been there otherwise. Furthermore this scholarship was motivational in effect rather than financially needed. The rest of the students who received scholarships merely changed their choice of college.

Scholarship Prestige

The difficulties of administering scholarship programs are well-known on both college and high school levels. Part of this trouble can be attributed to the confusion in the public's views on

whether scholarships are granted on the basis of honor or need. This confusion is translated into the extreme prestige connotations scholarships are acquiring. Honor is still the ruling factor in the public mind. Need becomes a rationalization by many of those parents who can afford to finance the college education of their child. They will even go so far as to encourage a more expensive college in order that scholarship help might be offered. Wilson (5) has candidly pointed out that this problem of placing scholarships on a pedestal can be far-reaching in its effect. He writes of "career children" who with "career parents" set scholarship getting as one of the chief tasks of socially making the grade.

I think that this increased prestige emphasis has emerged from the testing approach that is being emphasized in the country-wide scholarship programs of the past few years. From the parental standpoint, if my child doesn't do well, it's a reflection on me. When the chief selection method was based upon grades, parents could still rationalize on the theme of "boys will be boys."

The high schools are also involved in this game of scholarship prestige. Schools are being classified by how many scholarships are granted to graduating seniors. I saw one newspaper total that looked startling, and upon further investigation I found out that the financial total of all scholarships offered (one girl received four) had been published in order to give the school the proper status in the eyes of scholarship-minded parents. School personnel themselves have become enmeshed in this type of think-

ing. Overheard conversations in meetings of counselors or principals go something like this, "You mean you didn't have any students who scored high enough on the Merit Tests to be at least a semi-finalist?" The intimation here is double-barreled in effect: it may be "What kind of teaching job are you doing in your high school?" or "Have you got *that* type of student body?"

Colleges are very much involved in this game also. That they are competing for the abler student is no secret. College prestige adds to scholarship prestige and vice versa. The colleges themselves have manipulated the terminology, adding the expression, "work scholarships."

The question arises, do other forms of financial aid have a chance with prestige-loaded scholarships? I think they do. At the freshman level, we still have grants-in-aid (called a scholarship by admiring parents) and part-time jobs. In our culture, the latter are socially quite acceptable. However, it is a different matter with loans. Most colleges grant loans only after the freshman year. This, of course, is quite logical because the colleges want to find out the extent of the pupils' intellectual collateral. The new Education Act will change this picture somewhat. Loans have low prestige value because they denote that a person is a "have not" in relation to a scholarship. Another reason is that the question arises, "Doesn't your family believe in you enough to help you out?" A large scale selling job of the advantages of loans will have to be performed if loans are going to fulfill the expectations of Congress. An important question that arises with loans is that they are already directed toward the college oriented student. How do we convince the non-college oriented students that a loan is the financial solution they are looking for?

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"Gradeitis"

If scholarships are of such importance, what impact do they have on the college oriented student in high school? I think the most prominent area is the one dealing with grades. Grades are the key for getting into college in the first place and are that much more important for scholarships. The student constantly hears from his teachers about his needing to be in the upper one-fourth, or that goal of all goals, the upper ten percent. In lunchroom conversations, teachers tend to deplore this emphasis on grades. Yet, in the classroom, they are likely to be the ones who give extra credit work and emphasize the "honor roll." Parents respond in like manner by rewarding good grades and punishing for bad grades. The whole system of marking is based on the assumption that the higher the grade, the better the student has learned the subject matter. Learning research has made this assumption a tenuous one.

One area that suffers from "gradeitis" is a realistic choice of a vocational goal. Doing a thorough job in choosing such a goal and then formulating one's plans to achieve it, points up a mature approach to one's life work. However, a student with "gradeitis" chooses the subject not on the basis of what he can learn from the subject and what it contributes toward his goal, but on the basis of what grade can he get. He thinks in terms of "Will my average suffer? What is the easiest foreign language I can take? You mean the course in college I am thinking about requires three years of math? Perhaps I should be changing my vocational plans."

Then we come to the types of vocational decisions resulting from those subjects the student "does best in." The idea seems to be that if he follows the line of

least resistance, he can get the grades that put him in the running for a scholarship.

Another variation of the "gradeitis" theme is choice of college based on possible financial aid rather than based on the fact that the best training for the vocation concerned is offered there. For example, "I think I'll go to the college from which my mother graduated because I will have a better chance for a scholarship there."

Thistlethwaite (4) mentions in his study of Merit Scholarship winners that a statistically significant number of students change from science to non-science areas after their first year of college. He hypothesizes that students seeking financial assistance may think that their chances of success are better in the scholarship market if they propose to enter a scientific field of study.

One kind of student particularly affected by the scholarship game is the college-oriented overachiever. The American tradition of "if you work hard enough you will accomplish your goal," plays an important part here. The overachiever has some feelings of anxiety about his potential because he is on the academic firing line enough for even small glimmerings of reality to seep through in spite of himself. His parents do not have this opportunity, so they reinforce the "you can do it" theme. However, parental anxiety feelings are still present and depending upon the intensity of such feelings, these families become very involved in the scholarship game. To calm their own anxieties, they ignore whether the boy or girl will be accepted by particular colleges and move on to scholarships as if acceptance by the colleges is a "fait accompli."

Realistic planning is an arduous task in this type of situation. Alternate goals,

that are doubly necessary here, are regarded as a sign of weakness. Rationalizing on the merits of various colleges becomes a continuous process as the refusals come through, and the seeking of any type of financial aid to prove academic virility becomes more intense. The school, of course, receives most of the blame when this whole structure collapses. This situation is emerging as a common one and will become even more so when colleges are more selective as the pressure of applicants increases. The public press has aided this development with coverage of the very few scholarships that are not granted because of excessive restrictions.

"Gradeitis" has another important effect on the high school scene. This is when the high school attempts to section the more able students in various subject matter areas. The purpose, of course, is to do a more effective teaching job with these particular students. The first thing the grade conscious student asks when placed in such a section is, "What will this do to my grades?" In fact if given a choice, many times the student will refuse to go into such a section because he is afraid that it will hurt his average. Even when the grade range is restricted, such as, for example, when only A's or B's are given, the tension level is so high in the grade-oriented student that learning in that course becomes for him only secondary. The problems of "gradeitis" are very real ones in high school. Sometimes school regulations must enter in where the student should have some freedom of choice in order to save the student from his own fears.

Needed Research

The reader of this article may get the impression that the scholarship pic-

ture is a dismal one. I think there are some bright spots. One important advantage is that research has been stimulated by the various national scholarship programs. I hope this research can encourage further research at individual colleges and high schools. For example, in the follow-up studies which many high schools do make, questions on scholarships granted might well be added, which would give us much needed information.

Another encouraging note is the number of articles appearing in the literature concerning the early identification of academically able students. This is where a good guidance program can prove its worth in a school system. The counselor can act as a coordinator of efforts in the identification of these students, and with the help of the faculty, can give these students the proper encouragement. Included in this encouragement is bringing in the parents at an early stage and pointing out possibilities of training after high school for their son or daughter. Building parents' feelings of pride in the talents of their own offspring is important. If this is done, the parents themselves can become college oriented and will not only tend to encourage their child, but also translate this feeling into helping financially. A school emphasizing the above approach needs a flexible program and adequate counseling services. It bespeaks the comprehensive high school that Dr. Conant is supporting.

I think that in getting the more able student to college, we must look further than merely to supplying financial aid. The family attitude is very important and early identification and encouragement can help rectify this situation. This does not eliminate the need for financial aid, of course, but places this

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there is only about one chance in 14 that he will make an outstanding record, no matter how highly his teachers think of him.

One important caution was made by John M. Stalnaker, head of the National Merit Scholarship program:

One of the current dangers of our entire educational system is the tendency to reward conformity and to place a high premium on the lad usually described as the well-rounded, all-American youth . . . a society such as ours . . . encourages . . . the organization man, the social and intellectual conformist, the well-balanced and well-adjusted individual, and tends to discourage if not suppress the unique, the different, the independent, the pioneer. For the pupil who has special abilities, special interests, and ample energy, there is no reason why he should not be encouraged to be himself, and if that self does not fit into the standard "round" mold, perhaps we should let him have a few sharp edges and not attempt to smooth them off. (p. 25-26)

The conference heartily endorsed the movement sponsored by the National Science Foundation to pay teachers for summer study that fosters greater scholarship on the part of the teacher. Teachers of English, foreign languages, mathematics, and the social studies should likewise have their way paid for such study, and if private funds cannot be secured, school moneys should be used for the purpose. Emphasis was placed on graduate study and research in the subject field—not that educational method is scorned but at present teachers are likely to be more adequate in method than in subject, at least for work with brilliant students.

The conference recommended ability grouping, recognizing that the method must vary from school to school. In some schools this means grouping within a

classroom; in other schools, ability selected classes. Another alternative is the special group, or seminar, composed of able pupils from several classes, several grades, or even several schools.

These brief highlights of the book illustrate the scope of the conference. For those readers who wish to discover, in highly concentrated form, what 200 leading educators and concerned laymen are thinking about the gifted, this book is highly recommended.

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aid in a sounder perspective. We should think of this aid as supplementing the process of getting the student to college rather than as the basic reason for his going to college.

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