



COURTESY ANTIOCH COLLEGE, YELLOW SPRINGS, OHIO

*An Antioch student works on animal drug research at the New Jersey Neuro-Psychiatric Institute, Princeton.*

# COLLEGE AND THE WORLD OF WORK

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IT IS our belief that the world of work and the colleges not only can but must relate to the needs of the individual. Regardless of the definition of work, people in our culture are, of necessity, vocationally oriented.

The needs of individuals vary. For the present generation at least, there is a continuing necessity for everyone to satisfy the need that he be able to use time productively. Beyond this, at a time when the acceleration of change is unprecedented, there is need for students to verify the meaning of their abstract learnings in real life situations. Application of knowledge does not come from the armchair, but from the engagement.

## **Study-Plus-Work Plan**

In the belief that the world of work, the colleges, and the needs of the individual are inextricably and properly interwoven, Arthur E. Morgan (Antioch's president 1920-36) introduced the cooperative study-plus-work program of education to Antioch College 45 years ago. Under this program all students in all departments alternate periods of study on campus or abroad with periods of employment on regular jobs for regular pay in this and other countries.<sup>1</sup>

During his five years at Antioch, the student is involved directly in employment situations for some 18 months. By graduation he will ordinarily have held four to six different jobs. The strategy of the cooperative plan is to extend, enrich and intensify the education of the student. Some of the more obvious advantages of the plan—exploration and preparation for a career and earning money—have tended to overshadow its great contributions in stimulating the student intellectually and developing his personality.

Colleges not using the cooperative plan can secure some of its benefits by carefully designing summer employment programs for their students.

<sup>1</sup>In the 1964-65 academic year, Antioch's list of cooperative employers included 607 in 34 states and 24 other countries.

## World of Work

Out of our experience at Antioch, we believe that we can say a few things about the world of work which may be useful. One is that whatever students may need or expect from this world, they will not be content with employment simply for wages which insure their existence. They want, and will get, a more complex set of gains than this. Whatever employers want or expect to get from the relationship, they will not as a rule employ college graduates for routine work. This means that the world of work needs to make some sophisticated definitions of expectation, that the college student needs to have some direct experience with the broad spectrum of possibility in the work-for-pay situation, and that the college is going to be forced increasingly to help the student relate his needs to the world of work.

Here our experience suggests two points that might be useful:

First, it is possible to employ the student in responsible work roles, and he is capable of performing well in many extremely demanding situations. In our cooperative job placements, we are continually surprised that qualifications are so general and skills are so easily acquired for what seem to be some very complex patterns of work.

For example, we have had first-year students perform well as circulating assistants in operating arenas during complicated surgery. In another area, students with only a year or two of background have worked with many state highway departments as inspectors of bridge building and on similar projects to the complete satisfaction of the employer and with the acquisition of necessary skills in a very short time.

We have placed students in chemistry laboratories throughout the country in what would seem to be positions of advanced responsibility, and the results have been excellent as judged by the students' testimony and the continued employment of students in these laboratories. This suggests a general conclusion: young people can be employed in the world of work at rather high levels of creativity and productivity, thus fulfilling many of their own and their employers' needs.

Second, the jobs that are seen by the students as most creative, viewed by the employer as most productive, and found by the College to be most educational, are those in which the immediate supervisor enjoys teaching about his work, enjoys this aspect of the supervisory role with young people, and is a productive person himself. There is no substitute for the excellent supervisor in making it possible to relate the world of work to the needs of the individual.

### Test of Relevance

The world of work implies a broader context for living than the relatively few hours of employment for wages. It also implies engagement with the complexities of the adult role and of "making one's way." The individual seeks satisfaction of extremely varied needs which change continually; he seeks context and test situations in which to validate his beliefs and behavior.

He will inevitably assess the college to which he comes by a rather rigorous test of relevance. This is almost primitive in its simplicity and brutal in its effects if

the college does not pass the test. In this event, the student then devotes his energies to placating his teachers, evading the system, or seeking combinations of experiences that may have no relationship to what the college offers or does. This can lead to a kind of bemused and nebulous dialogue which is frequently frustrating to the institution and ludicrous to the individual.

There are certain institutional situations where it is almost inevitable that the college will fail in the continuing dialogue. The causes for this may be as varied as conflicts of needs in the college's many communities (as happened recently at Berkeley) or the conflicting needs of an individual student which may be so complex and confused that they are sometimes unsolvable. Nevertheless, we would still say that colleges must continually keep as a goal the necessity of meeting the test of relevance. There is a clear possibility for engagement in the extensive education of the student which enables both the institution and the student to meet their educational needs.

### **Role of the College**

The college must take as part of its charge the task of helping the student in every possible way to find varieties of communities in which he may practice and perfect his techniques of being an adult in society and may learn to use his abilities and skills in productive ways. This means, in part, the world of work.

At Antioch College we allocate a considerable amount of our resources to a number of faculty and staff who give their full energies to the arrangements for students in the various communities off campus. We seek and get employment situations for all students for every other quarter they are enrolled at the College. We do this in consultation with students and employers. Our entire faculty is engaged in and committed to the use of a variety of communities and situations in the learning process.

The assumption that we can lead an individual to a learning process and then assume that he will learn without follow-up and discussion and questioning is, more often than not, nonsense. Unconsidered or partially considered experience has little impact on value, behavior or learning. The world of work and the colleges can only relate to the needs of the individual if the job supervisor and the professor will take time to sit down with him and help him find the answers to such questions as "What am I doing? Why am I doing it? What do I propose doing next week and next year?" In short, "Who am I, and where am I going?"

Our particular experience with students and the world of work leads us to conclude that the colleges must relate to this world and to engage with it in the education of students. Turning this around, we also conclude that anyone who employs college students or graduates needs the assistance of the colleges to understand what they are seeking and the ways they can get it and use it effectively. In order that the combined efforts may relate to the needs of the individual, they must pass the test of relevance which the student will apply to both the college and the world of work.

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