

Preparing Graduates as Media Specialists

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CONFINING students to the classroom when they are increasingly aware of local, state, and world problems handicaps the university as well as its students. Mass media keep students instantly informed and constantly frustrated by articulating problems to which most classroom activities bear little relationship. The university must learn to capitalize on the enthusiasm and commitment of its most valuable resource—its students—by providing ways for them to confront problems that make a difference.

The focus on commitment places a high priority on the formulation of objectives. Students who are committed because they see the relevance and personal meaning of their programs of study will more likely achieve. This does not mean that we should decrease our efforts to provide more and better ways to learn, but rather we should encourage the expending of additional energy toward identifying concerns and capitalizing on one of the most potent of all human characteristics—the desire to contribute, to vest life with meaning, to be able to say, “I made a difference.”

Two Imperatives

Current emphasis on placing each student on his own track can result in artificial isolation just as the classroom frequently establishes unnatural groups. Too much energy is spent on providing ways to solve problems before concerns are identified. This

leads us to the first imperative for individualized instruction:

Students must play a major role in identifying learning objectives.

The second imperative for individualized instruction is causing a very visible controversy because it challenges the unique ability of the university to provide an optimal learning environment:

The multiple learning environments that exist must be made available to students in order that all potentially effective means may be explored and utilized.

Auburn's Answer

With financial assistance from the School Library Manpower Project,¹ the Department of Educational Media at Auburn University is developing a graduate program for the preparation of library media specialists which allows students to formulate their own objectives and to use the state as their learning laboratory.

Early in each student's work he completes an objective test designed to identify strengths and weaknesses in his knowledge

¹ Auburn University was selected for one of the six experimental programs for the preparation of school library media specialists by the School Library Manpower Project which is funded by the Knapp Foundation of North Carolina, Inc., and administered by the American Association of School Librarians, a Division of the American Library Association.

of the field of educational media. This instrument is used in conjunction with his previous experience to help the student build his program. Since the student plays a major role in identifying and planning the experiences which make up his program of studies, he must become completely familiar with the array of competencies valuable to media specialists.

After the student has acquired a clear understanding of the role of the media specialist in modern educational programs, he participates in a series of conferences which are designed to help the student plan and develop systems for monitoring his program. Each student is provided with several sources of information which elaborate on competencies valuable to media specialists. The tentative design of each core experience is engineered to move the student from where he is to where he needs to be.

Constructive alternatives are provided as a means to achieve objectives. Individualized monitoring systems are designed by student-faculty groups. Students are currently working on individualized study modules, setting up new media centers, designing in-service educational experiences for specific user populations, working on teaching teams, attending conferences and other professional events, designing storage and retrieval systems, helping formulate policies for participating media centers, developing media, evaluating media, and a multitude of other activities as a part of their core experience.

A series of learning experiences designed for each student makes up what is called the graduate core. The core replaces 25 to 30 quarter hours of course work. A minimum of 48 quarter hours is required by Auburn University for the master of education degree. Only two elective courses and two required courses must be included in the student's program of studies. Electives are selected which provide in-depth or prerequisite experiences in areas not included in the core program.

Opportunities for experiences identified in the graduate core naturally separate themselves into three basic groups. Some

activities can be classified as fieldwork, which includes on-the-job training as well as problem identification and resolution. Other experiences concentrate on independent study, which includes learning packages, small group work, tutorials, and other impromptu assemblages which tend to be task oriented. The third group of activities consists of the participation in educational events, which include professional meetings, workshops, conferences, book fairs, film festivals, and so forth.

An exit test is administered when the student completes his program of studies. This test is not a comprehensive examination in the traditional sense. Rather, the instrument is designed to test the effectiveness of an individual's program of studies.

Persistent Problems

Changed instructional programs do not eliminate problems. Instead, faculty and students find they simply exchange one set of problems for another. However, the questions growing from the Auburn program seem to be more relevant than those which concerned the faculty a year ago. Seven problem areas have been identified:

1. How can we develop diagnostic packages that test competencies rather than knowledge?
2. What constitutes an appropriate learning environment for specific objectives?
3. How can we ensure that students have access to materials designed for their particular level?
4. How can we assemble the multidisciplinary team needed to help students solve the complex problems identified?
5. How can we make the community more accessible to students?
6. How can we manage and monitor such a diverse group of activities?
7. How can we open channels to provide information needed for continuous program improvement?

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