

INDIANA UNIVERSITY, GARY CENTER  
ACADEMIC COUNSELOR'S REPORT--APRIL, 1962

Two years ago, Mr. Lawrence E. LaFave, Academic Counselor at the Gary Center in 1959-60, wrote an extended document explaining his own practices in counseling and expressing his views as to the course that counseling should take at the Gary Center in the future. Mr. LaFave's position reflected his special interpretation of his training as social psychologist in that he was much concerned with the nature of Gary as a cultural community, with questions of the counselor's status in the academic hierarchy, and with the role that the University should play as a critic and transformer of society, rather than as mere reflector. And though one might well question some of the assumptions in Mr. LaFave's statement, his searching look at the Gary Center contains, I think, many valid insights. I shall directly say nothing further about the report by my predecessor as it is appended to the minutes of the Gary Center Faculty Organization meeting of March 28, 1960. It may there be consulted by all interested parties.

Indeed, Mr. LaFave's remarks, as well as mine which follow, are part of a long series of statements about counseling and related administrative concerns which are on file in Center and Divisional offices. If the problems I will refer to are not yet solved, it is not because they have not been considered. In fact, my remarks may well be considered an echo of things in the air, since the recently formed Survey Committee for Center Development will surely be considering problems of counseling at great length.

My general knowledge of practices at the Centers over the past seven years, coupled with my personal experience as Academic Counselor in the last two years, leads me to the observations and recommendations which follow. Everything that I say is said in the hope that extensive internal administrative change and development will, in fact must, assuredly come soon to the Gary Center. New administrative titles and exact job specification can await that change, but certainly the counselor of the future cannot be expected to combine the functions of guidance officer, psychological counselor, psychometrist, public relations officer, registrar, admissions officer, student affairs supervisor, informal aide to the director, teacher, scholar, "dean" of students, "dean" of faculties, and general factotum. To be sure, no counselor in the Division has been and done all of these things--at least not at the same time--but the fact that he is and does so many of them reflects a time past when the Centers were essentially part-time night schools for the working adult or the impoverished young.

I have three main recommendations: first, the Academic Counselor of the future should be a person specifically trained for his job; second, the Center faculty, particularly the full-time faculty, should take more responsibility for the academic aspects of program-planning and related academic guidance; third, many of the most time-consuming aspects of counseling should be eliminated by revision of certain general administrative procedures.

My first recommendation is, I suppose, the most radical. For years, it has almost been taken as a priori truth that the Academic Counselor should be primarily a liberal arts teacher and scholar. I shared this view until about a year ago, perhaps out of the too-prevalent humanists' notion that only they can handle intelligently any problem related to education. Yet it has been increasingly clear to me that the art and science of normal teaching and learning is all that can, or should, be expected of professors who follow their calling. Over ninety percent of the problems that come into the Academic Counselor's office are not problems of normal teaching or learning. Many requests are for routine information, and here we must refine our techniques for mass-communicating whatever can be so communicated without significant loss. Most other requests, either specifically stated or else dumbly implied, are for help in resolving

problems of money, poor study habits, scattered or weak motivation, low intelligence, or personal conflicts, some of them deep-seated. Apart from whatever they can offer by way of general intelligence and good-will, few English or philosophy teachers, either by temperament or training, are ideally suited to give whatever help can be given in such cases. A certain kind of psychologist or sociologist, or more likely a responsible person responsibly trained in the clinical, guidance, and counseling branches of educational psychology is the one who should be Academic Counselor (though perhaps the word "Academic" would go). Much of his advice could be given in group sessions. Much more than is given now could be given individually.

That we need people specifically trained in, and professionally committed to, counseling should need no argument. The University at Bloomington has many such counselors. For better or worse, it is no longer possible to pretend that the problems that confront students at every educational level are specific academic problems. It is easy for an academician who has reasonable assurance and stability himself to be impatient with, even to scoff at, those who can't handle their own difficulties. But to the extent that better, less obstructed performance in the classroom is desirable, we need all the help we can get from people whose professional choice is to work with those who are misplaced, misguided, unrealistic, or otherwise uncertain and confused as to why they have come to college or as to how they are to get what they hope to get.

The kind of counselor I have described should not be responsible for ultimate definition and enforcement of the academic requirements of the Center. More specifically, he should not be the officer responsible for final decisions in matters of probation, suspension, or readmission. He should not have any supervisory relation to the faculty. It is perhaps undesirable that he should be the student affairs officer or admissions advisor, though such capacities might most readily combine with his main function as counselor. But I may be getting into job definitions here, and that is matter for other hands. My conviction and assertion at this time is that we need someone in our Center operation who is a counselor in the strict sense of that term. Eventually the larger Centers may need two or three such officers.

My second recommendation is that giving help in the purely academic aspects of program making, giving information about the characteristics of and prospects in the various careers and professions that Indiana University prepares for, and offering appropriate suggestions as to how to perform better in their specific courses--all these responsibilities should be in the domain of the faculty. This may sound like a formidable list of extra-professional duties, but it really amounts to little more than preparing for and keeping regular office hours and substituting some regular semester time for the present hours spent in too-often perfunctory and uninformed counseling at registration. The exact details of pre-enrollment counseling would have to be worked out, and no doubt the situation is complicated by the Centers' having so many part-time students and part-time faculty. But the principle behind this suggestion is, I think, valid and represents no more than what is sound practice at many colleges.

My third recommendation is that counseling become more efficient through certain changes in general administrative procedures. One thing that is constantly forced on our attention in the counseling offices is that there is a marked relationship between fiscal irresponsibility and academic ineptitude. To the extent that a student cannot foresee and plan to meet his financial responsibilities, often to the same extent he cannot intelligently plan and pursue his academic program. The recent move to shorten the time when refunds

will be granted and to reduce the amounts refunded in case of withdrawal is a step in the right direction. And as soon as possible the deferred payment plan should be abolished, or at the least be much more sparingly used and rigorously enforced. It is very difficult to explain to deferred-payment students that if they withdraw they are still responsible for paying the appropriate amount of fees. Many, of course, when they see that they cannot pay their remaining fees simply stop coming to class, with resultant failing grades. Then later we have the problem of explaining why they received those grades. To say more on this point is to labor what has long been obvious.

Why, then, do such practices persist?

In large degree, they reflect an educational philosophy that increasingly plagues American education, and has sometimes veritably cursed extension education. That philosophy, if it should so be dignified, is bound up in a neither clearly-defined nor ultimately-defensible notion of "service." The irony is that those best qualified have often abdicated the authority for making academic decisions to those who presumably come to school to gain greater ability to make those decisions intelligently. Thus, "service" comes more and more to mean that public institutions in particular run the danger of being over-responsive to the extra-intellectual "needs" or even whims of those least equipped to benefit from university-level instruction.

Fortunately, the entire University is doing many things to make the student more responsible, and to improve his chances for achieving academic success commensurate with his abilities and preparation. The present and forthcoming entrance requirements, the closer cooperation with the high schools, the seeking out, providing for, and recognizing of superior students, the improving facilities for the faculty--all these make one properly hopeful. In the Division, we should soon see the day when our students truly have the total academic benefits that students at Bloomington enjoy. The remaining problem in the Centers then will be the ensuring that all students, young and sometimes-arbitrarily-classified adult alike, become aware that attending Indiana University cannot be an impulsive, incidental, or secondary concern. Unless we set a high humanistic value on what we offer, we can hardly expect our students to do so. There is good reason why adult and off-campus education has often been suspect. There is no reason why it should continue to be so.

Lester M. Wolfson  
Academic Counselor  
and  
Associate Professor of English

Indiana University  
Gary, Indiana  
April, 1962