

THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT PERSONNEL ADMINISTRATOR IN INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH *

by

K. Patricia Cross

At one point in the preparation of my portion of today's program, I had a long introduction analyzing the problems of research in SPA—why there wasn't more of it, why it wasn't better, and why it didn't seem to make an impact on the practice of SPA. I scrapped that introduction when I recalled my own years as Dean of Students when I occasionally longed to jump on the bandwagon of brilliant critics and analysts and forsake my own rather prosaic role as the plodding administrator trying to find the answers.

Although you have been gallant enough to *leave the way open for me* ~~offer me the opportunity~~ to analyze, *rather than to propose solutions* I've been conditioned to the slow search for answers; and I have been engaged, over the past three years, in attempting to work on *a partial answer to* ~~some way to dispell~~ what I think is the major reason for the lack of good institutional research on the part of college administrators. It doesn't take too much acumen for anyone who has ever served in college administration to recognize that the "bad guy" responsible for the lack of significant institutional self-study and research is the hectic pace of most college administrators. If, following good administrative principles, we could delegate the time-consuming chores of designing instruments and tabulating and analyzing data, we could take some giant steps forward in personnel research, and I think the time for this progress is now.

Within recent years, research centers have blossomed throughout the country. The U.S. Office of Education *foundations, and other national agencies have* ~~has~~ allotted millions to Research and Development *in higher education.*

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I'd like to focus this afternoon on one type of research that can and, I think, is done by college administrators. This emphasis is interpreted as disparaging in any way the efforts of those of you who are pursuing interesting hypotheses or the valuable contributions that individual members or NASPA as an organization are making to the advancement of knowledge in the field. But I would like to very briefly attempt to illustrate one model for administering a local program of research with a minimum of time spent in gathering

~~Centers attached to Universities and to national research agencies.~~ These ^{centers} agencies have a raft of highly trained people whose job is research. They never talk with a national fraternity officer; they have no concern with parietal rules—except to study them as a phenomena of change—they can close off their offices to the telephone and to the student with an emergency. *They ought to be able to assist greatly in providing research help which has as its goal the improvement of higher education.* ~~Unless the college has a highly unique problem, the administrator can't begin to construct a better questionnaire in his spare time.~~

Or let's take the question of data analysis. Nationally and regionally, there are data-hungry computers that can outdo the most eager of part-time graduate assistants in efficient data tabulation. Lest you start to settle back, freed from that nagging feeling that you should be doing research, let me assure you that it is my intention to convince you that indeed you should be doing research—but research of a particular kind and in a specific role.

This brings me—not without some effort on my part to steer it in this direction—to the title of this seminar. I believe that the proper role of the SPA in research lies, not so much in ^{basic} research investigation, as in research administration and educational application. The dean ^{interest is} ~~is concerned~~, not primarily ^{concerned with} ~~with the~~ statistical significance ~~of research~~, but rather with ^{the} educational significance. *of research.*

Specifically, I am advocating student personnel leadership in the applied research which provides the information for decisions about local campus programs. If there is anything we really have discovered in all our research in higher education, it is that colleges and the students attending these colleges are remarkably diverse. What is needed by college administration is information about particular ^{specific} ~~particular~~ ^{namely, their own} campus. And while research specialists can design the instruments and analyze the data, the responsibility for interpretation and educational application cannot be delegated.

~~I would like to be very specific this afternoon in attempting to illustrate how a program of research can be administered with a minimum of time spent in~~

gathering, processing, and analyzing data, ^{leaving} ~~and~~ a maximum of time ⁵³⁴ ~~devoted to~~ interpretation and application. The data which I will present is an actual case study of one of the colleges participating in the Institutional Research Program for Higher Education. The Institutional Research Program (IRPHE) is a non-profit research program launched last year by Educational Testing Service to help colleges and universities study their students and their campus environments. In its first year, IRPHE has served over 150 colleges, surveying some 42,000 students in a great variety of locally-conducted self-study programs.

The institutional research program has three major purposes: 1) to identify (or design where necessary) useful research instruments; 2) to provide efficient data processing for the tabulation of great quantities of data; 3) to provide professional research consulting services through workshops, publications, speaking, ~~guide books~~, campus visits, etc.

It is with mixed feelings that I report that although IRPHE provides mostly information about the out-of-class activities of students, the academic administrators have been somewhat ahead of student personnel administrators in the use of IRPHE. I say "mixed feelings" because while I am happy to see academic administrators take an interest in the impact of the total college experience on the student, it seems to me that student personnel administrators are losing valuable leadership in their area of special concern by not being the office with the information.

I'd like to look now at the type of information furnished by two instruments of particular interest to student personnel administrators. The instruments are the CSQ (College Student Questionnaires) and CUES (College and University Environment Scales).

The data used for this case study this afternoon are from a small, highly selective, private, co-educational, four-year liberal arts college. I selected

this college primarily because we had fairly complete data on it and also because it was not too atypical in any way.

Let me talk first about its study of its overall environment as its students perceived it. Many of you are familiar with the College and University Environment Scales, developed by Robert Pace of UCLA. Very briefly CUES consists of 150 questions about the college. In about 20 minutes, the student can mark whether he thinks each statement is true or false for his college. If two-thirds of the students agree on the statement, then it is assumed that this is a perceived characteristic of the college. Note that it is the college that is being measured with CUES---not the student.

We can look at CUES data in two ways---the profile of the college on the five scales, or the item by item response of students.

Chart #1 represents the scale scores for two administrations of CUES. The shaded line shows the responses of entering freshmen as they expect the college to be; the solid line represents the college as it actually is when seen by the same students after they have had a year of experience on the campus. It is immediately apparent here that Forreal College did not live up to the students expectations on any of the five scales. While few colleges are as stimulating and exciting as students dream they will be, the patterns of expectations and reality show considerable variation from college to college. Students expect this college to be a friendly place, focused on group activities as indicated by their 99th percentile rating on the expectations for the community scale. And the college catalogue does emphasize this feature of the college; the first paragraph states that "Forreal is an independent, coeducational, and residential liberal arts college. Enrollment is limited because of the conviction that smallness in a college has the special virtues of a closely-knit student body and cordial relations between faculty and student."

In all of the data presented this afternoon, you will be aware of this emphasis at the college, and, as a matter of fact, they do pretty well at accomplishing their goal. Upon a year's acquaintance with the college, students ^{still} rate it at the 87th percentile on the community scale.

Students also have high expectations for scholarship at Forreal College; and although it doesn't come up to expectations, it still ranks in the upper half of representative colleges. The Guide to American College rates Forreal as very selective in admissions and notes that 51% of the freshmen are from the top quarter of their high school class, *thus it is not surprising that students have high expectations for a climate of scholarships.*

In chart #2, I have selected some CUES items. Let's look again at Scales II and V on Community and Scholarship. Items 37 and 44 illustrate part of the reason for the drop in the community scale score, but to have 88% of your students say that the college helped everyone get acquainted would indeed be quite a tribute to orientation and to the feeling of friendliness on the campus. The items on the scholarship scale show some disillusion with the academic program of the college, but it is quite apparent that students continue to work for grades at Forreal College.

Perhaps this gives you an idea of how an instrument such as CUES might give the personnel administrator objective information about the reactions of the students to the college program.

The research procedure was simple. The administrator selected and ordered the instrument, arranged 20 minutes in September and in March for its administration, shipped the answer sheets to ETS, and received back the complete tabulations which you see abstracted here. The real work comes where it should for the administrator-educator-- in the interpretation and application of the research results to improve the total educational program at his college.

whereas CUES attempts to give a picture of the climate of the college, the C-S-Q- (CSQ), which was just introduced this year, is designed to describe the student - his background, plans, attitudes, & reactions to his college experience.

The C-S-Q-s come in 2 forms - CSQ-1 is for entering students and CSQ-2 is for enrolled undergraduates. The two questionnaires have some overlapping sections & scales so that longitudinal studies of change are possible. The CSQ is a very flexible instrument & provides an omnibus description of the student & his reactions. It takes an hour to administer, and like CUES is scored, tabulated, & reported by ETS.

Chart #3 represents some selected items from CSQ-1 and CSQ-2. CSQ-1 was administered to entering freshmen before they had registered for classes. CSQ-2 was administered to the same students in the Spring after they had completed a year of study on the campus. Most of the items shown here appear on both Part 1 and Part 2. Those having to do with college experience, of course, appear only in Part 2.

Item No. 45 reads as follows on the questionnaires: In which of the following areas do you hope to receive (or in the case of Part 2, have you received) your greatest personal satisfaction at this college during the year? The original statement offered nine choices, only three of which are reported here. At Forreal College, considerably more students expected to find their greatest satisfaction in self-discovery and self-insight than is true for the national norms (15%), and this expectation was pretty well fulfilled.

Alternatives 1 and 7 of this same item show some reinforcement for the CUES data. While 32% of the students expected their greatest satisfaction to be found in coursework in general, only 9% found it there. On the other hand, Forreal College does apparently promote considerable satisfaction in the friendships established by students. The satisfaction of close friendships was not really an expectation for greatest satisfaction of many students, but it was a reality for a sizeable group.

If one looks at the flavor of the responses on this page in general, there seems to be a consistent element of what I shall "academic disenchantment." On item 56, we observe that 43% of the students are disappointed with their ^{courses}~~campus~~; and 62% are dissatisfied with their grades. Although students in general seem to feel that grades under-represent their ability, one would like to know, I should think, why almost 70% of the students at Forreal College feel under-graded. Is it simply because many students who made As in high school are making Cs in the new

competition? Or are there conditions in the classrooms[^] that contribute? Item 85 is quite interesting. The norms show just the reverse of the picture at Forreal. Students in general seem to attach somewhat less importance to grades as they proceed through college, but here the CUES data is again supported as students at Forreal College feel the necessity for good grades. This may again be the idealism of entering freshmen at this college who hope for a truly intellectual experience, as the catalogue describes it, only to find themselves faced with the reality of grades. The next three items also support the dissillusionment hypothesis by indicating that competition is not as great as expected and that the number who are now planning graduate study has dropped slightly from 34% to 27%. From item 30, we observe that the women show a tendency to choose the role of housewife over career woman. Whereas the entering freshmen split evenly over preferences for housewife versus career, the end-of-year freshmen women show greater preference for housewife and less for career. ~~This, too, may reflect some disillusion with the intellectual life.~~

There are two other items on the next page that I should like to call to your attention. Item 137 asked how frequently the student had attended religious services in the past year. Almost 1/2 of the students had attended religious services at least once a week while at home, whereas only 17% attended weekly services at college. What this reflects, we probably can't tell from here. The next question No. 138 would seem to indicate that there had been no great questioning of religious faith on the part of the students. It may be that there is a lack of opportunity in the small town where Forreal College is located.

Item 34 has some very real and perhaps immediate implications for the Dean of Students office. Students obviously have found the college ^{more} ~~more~~ expensive than they had anticipated. Perhaps if this research project netted no more direct action than some changes in the college catalogue, it would be considered worthwhile.

While we haven't time here to go into any detail on the use of the CSQ, let me just mention some of the other features of this instrument that are especially relevant to student personnel research.

One of the features I find most exciting, but can't seem to get administrators to use very well, is the provision for analyzing subgroups on the campus. For example, one might wish to study differences in dormitory residents versus fraternity members versus students living off-campus. This can easily be done, and the college would receive a parallel print-out of Ns and percentages for each of these groups on each of the 200 items of CSQ as well as the CSQ scales which are described on page 4 of your handout. The satisfaction scales, SF, SA, SS, SM are also of special interest to the personnel worker.

CSQ also provides a write-your-own-items section, where the college can present items of local interest and receive back from ETS the complete tabulation of student responses to these items. One might wish to know, for example, how many students would like to live in the new dorm next year or what student reactions were to the orientation program.

The possibilities for data collection are limitless with the variety of new instruments and data processing services now available. I've used CSQ and CUES simply as illustrations and because I had data for them, but it seems to me that one of the really important services NASPA or some other professional organization might perform is to collect information about useful research instruments and where they are available and distribute such information ^{to} ~~for~~ the membership.

I do hope that developments such as these will help the personnel dean to take his place as full partner in the planning of the total educational program for his campus.