

The Very Poor Student and What He Can Get from One or Two Years of College

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The identification of the very poor student is a continuing process throughout his school career by teachers, peer groups, siblings, perhaps his parents, and more recently, counselors. This student may have been identified in this role so often and so long that he has been stereotyped. Most of us are aware of the many problems this student has faced during his relatively short life time, but what about the major problem he faces when a decision must be made concerning college entrance or joining the nation's work force? The high school graduate immediately faces a society that expects him to enter college regardless of abilities or goals in life.

The parents of a very poor student in particular are aware of their own shortcomings and want their son or daughter to achieve a higher standard of living than they have, so pressure exerted for college entrance comes from all sides. These same parents know about some of the advantages of being a college graduate, but many have little or no concept of what is required to become a college graduate. Most of them do not even understand the problems of attending college. It is apparent that most parents of below average students do not realize the value of a total education because they accepted much less than desirable achievement during the grade and high school phases of their child's education.

The very poor student usually has less than a desirable attitude toward school, teachers, and his fellow students. He comes to college because others say he should, but doesn't have the resources to achieve a reasonable degree of success. This student, because of his past scholastic records, American College Testing Program, or college entrance examinations, is not only restricted as to which college or university he may enter, but he may have to enter as a special student or on condition or probation.

The fastest growing segment of higher education is the community or "Junior" college. The open door policy of most community colleges results in a heterogeneous range of abilities for entering students. The community college then finds itself in the position of having a higher proportion of the very poor students than normally would be found in a four-year institution.

There is an indication that a majority of below average students come from families that subsist on

a below average income. Another consideration is that the number of children in this family will normally exceed that of an average family at the higher end of the economic scale. Larger families with a below average income find it very difficult to send their children to a distant university and may also experience considerable difficulty in meeting the expenses of a local college or university. State supported community colleges have relieved this financial burden in many areas: thus many below average students are enrolling in college because it is now within their means.

Merely recognizing the problems does not tell us what the very poor student can get from one to two years of college. It gives us an indication of some of the reasons why this student may not attend college or why he is not likely to succeed in a regular college curriculum.

The vocational-technical curriculums offered by the many new community colleges and some four-year colleges and universities are quite valuable for the academically poor student, especially if the reason for low achievement is other than low mental ability. It should be recognized at this point that the good students will usually get the best jobs in any vocational or academic field of study. For a number of reasons, usually known only to the student, he or she may be branded as very poor in one area and at the same time excel in another area. Most colleges and universities have written in their catalogue the purposes of the college and objectives of a general education. The purposes and objectives are valid for all students as long as the administration and faculty believe in them and apply the criteria contained therein to all students regardless of their abilities. It would then be expected that the very poor student who is enrolled in the same institution of higher education as other students would be subjected to these goals and would have the following opportunities:

1. Enroll in suitable vocational-technical or semi-professional programs, thus fitting him or her for gainful employment.
2. Attend a core of general education courses and activities that will broaden and deepen the students' cultural heritage and enhance an awareness of his responsibility as a citizen of his community, state, nation and world.
3. Learn to be an active and intelligent citizen in dealing with the interrelated social, economic and political problems.
4. To be advised, counseled, and guided by professional counselors and by the total faculty and

administration in order to achieve maximum potential in our society.

5. Attain a degree of emotional and social adjustment through the enjoyment of a wide range of social relationships and the experience of working cooperatively with others.

6. Develop an understanding about the meaning and value of life.

7. Learn to think through problems, to collect, evaluate and weigh evidence in order to arrive at reasonable solutions to problems.

8. To maintain health and share the responsibility for protecting the health of others.

9. To improve abilities to communicate through writing and speaking.

Even though the student has opportunities for improvement in any or all of the expressed objectives, several influencing factors that should be recognized at this point would be:

1. The attitude and prior preparation of the "very poor" student will usually not allow achievement to the same extent that the good student achieves.

2. The objectives of general and vocational-technical education cannot be achieved through college courses alone.

3. The objectives of general and vocational-technical education must be earned by the student and not be automatically granted by the professor.

4. Attitudes and habits of a student have been formed over a number of years and will not be readily changed by mere exposure to the college curriculum.

5. The "salvage" of marginal students, though an expressed function of the community college, may be accomplished by any segment of our educational system.

It is quite apparent that each marginal student will not receive the same inspirations or benefits from the one or two years of college. Evidence would lead one to believe that college experiences are quite valuable for all students: however, it is nearly impossible to measure these values. At present it appears that we will have to rely on the opinion of former students to evaluate the benefits received from the one or two years of college. If nothing else, this points out advantages of a continuing follow-up of all students in order to have an idea of what is being accomplished for students regardless of their attainment. Our present standards of measuring success are not irreproachable. The final grade or final degree does not always complete the picture. A very poor student may actually acquire more of the desirable characteristics adopted as objectives by a college or university and thus will show a greater achievement relative to that shown by an excellent student even though attending college for only one or two years.

Perhaps it would be well for us to ask ourselves What have I done to help all students attain their maximum potential even though they may attend college only one or two years?