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[59] Temple University is situated in the heart of North Philadelphia within the Model City area, a primarily and predominantly black ghetto, including a large percentage of Puerto Ricans and a small percentage of whites. Many universities throughout this city and in the country-at-large have expanded their facilities through the acquisition of land that housed the people of the community. Temple has been no exception. Necessarily, a major concern has been its relationship with its surrounding area./1/

**New Career Ladders in Social Welfare (NCLSW)**

New Career Ladders in Social Welfare is a program designed to admit to the Undergraduate Department of Social Welfare within the School of Social Administration at Temple University, a population that is decidedly different in terms of academic preparation, background, age, and life experience from the conventional college student. The program is funded under Title VII Section 707 of the Social Security Act by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and by Title IV-A through the Department of Public Welfare of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. A major emphasis in the implementation of New Career Ladders in Social Welfare has been on how members of a "differently credentialed," so called educationally and academically disadvantaged community might be admitted to Temple University in the Undergraduate Social Welfare Department. This paper will concentrate primarily on the admissions' aspects of the program. In initiating the program, there was extensive collaboration between the director of the New Career Ladders program and representatives of existing programs on Temple University's campus. An Admissions Committee was developed which included the NCLSW Program Director, the Director of Admissions of the University, the Undergraduate Chairman of the Social Welfare Department, the Director of the Special Recruitment and Admissions Program (already instituted on the campus and dealing with Black and Puerto Rican youngsters close to high school age), and the director of the Temple Opportunity Program, a major program dealing with economically disadvantaged students. This committee drew up the framework of general criteria concerning admission requirements. These consisted of a high school graduation diploma, or a GED (general equivalency diploma), residence in the state of Pennsylvania, and a demonstrated interest in the field of human services as evidenced by paid or voluntary experiences in this field.

The next step was the development of a method of recruitment, selection, and admission to the program. In the original proposal funded under HEW, the plan was to admit twenty day and twenty night students as nondegree candidates in specially designed day and night tracks of the Undergraduate Social Welfare Program. Part of the rationale for nondegree status was the hypothesis that this would reduce anxiety in terms of achievement goals of students, and it would simplify the usual complexity of advising students by assuring administrative controls within the program./2/ [59/60]

There was also the commitment that no college entrance examinations would be required. The program would deal with high school deficiencies in a way that enabled students to
receive fundamental and compensatory education and thus enable them to do college level work, since many of the usual high school college preparatory requirements were eliminated. The program would provide counseling, tutoring, and other supportive services. Students were to be rostered in a resequenced course structure beginning in social welfare courses (usually scheduled in the sophomore year) because of their connection with the human services.

There remained the essential task, once having contacted the community through the variety of media such as the local press, “flyers,” the “grapevine,” and the direct circulation of information to grass-roots organizations and agencies, of selecting from among the respondents. Initially, due to time limitations and based on the traditional casework concept of interviewing, the natural proclivity on the part of the director was to develop a basic data sheet requesting certain factual data from the respondents. This recording instrument was supplemented by face to face interview techniques used to assess the respondents’ potential for achievement within the university setting. Guidelines were developed against which to judge such data and interviews, and to achieve a beginning class of twenty-five day and twenty-five night students, who were selected and began classes in January, 1970.

Community Response
There was a large increase in community response and demand after knowledge of this unique program spread. The limited federal monies were expanded through support by the grant from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Public Welfare. This made explicit the Commonwealth's concern for the upward mobility of persons working in the field of human services and of the State Department of Public Welfare's desire to assure quality service through education. A deluge of responses brought the program staff face to face with the need to review the efficacy of procedures as well as with standardizing methods of selection without falling into the trap of having an exclusionary rather than inclusionary focus.

There was concern for special populations such as male and Puerto Rican. For example, males were recruited to help to change the image of social work from a predominantly female profession. The program reached out to recruit from areas dealing with other than the traditional individual casework concept and therefore looked for more aggressive policy oriented persons. There was an affirmative attempt toward the inclusion of those who, to this, point, generally have been rejected due to their involvement as recipients of welfare, or as manifesting other behavioral characteristics not generally acceptable in the usual social worker recruitment population. Indeed, we sought to include members of the population often viewed as clientele.

Review of Applicants
Having dealt to a large extent with the philosophical ramifications of selection of persons and recruitment from the human services job areas, it became more and more important to be able to review in a standardized fashion, through the utilization of portfolio rather than interview technique, applicants and potential selectees for the program. The need of this program to deal with large numbers of applicants and to assure as fair and expeditious a process as possible lead to the detailed research analysis that is described below. The use of other than traditional methods of admission is not a lack of admission
criteria per se, nor an open admissions policy. Selection in itself required the application of guidelines and differential.

This program related to the selection of students not only to the university itself but to a specific school and program within the university, therefore the criteria developed dealt with those areas considered important for the field of social welfare as it exists today and with some projection as to what the field might need and require in the years to come. Criteria were based on the changing nature of the field of social work and its involvement in the community, and on the fact that Temple University is situated in an area where residents must exhibit innovation, aggression, compassion, and the ability to negotiate the system. These areas are important in determining how students might in fact apply such negotiation skills within the university system. The traditional marking systems and quintiles of secondary education were not as important since the population ranged in age anywhere from eighteen to the latter fifties with a median age of around thirty-three. It is therefore of interest to note the following development of admissions changes utilized in this program and its applicability to other programs, given the use of competent personnel in assessing data.

**Program Admissions Mechanism**

A critical factor in a program such as NCLSW, which purports to help the economically and the educationally disadvantaged who might otherwise not attend college, is the admissions' mechanism of the program. It had been decided that the program would not require any admissions' test scores, such as those of the SAT, as a condition for entrance. It can be supposed that the requirement of standardized tests for admissions represents the high valuation of certain [60/61] intellective abilities that arc generally called Spearman's "g" factor.

It was not possible to establish any empirical or statistical basis for a judgment about a desirable admissions' mechanism, as the set of behaviors exhibited by a successful student in the NCLSW program was not specified. However, on the basis of more general considerations, such as the tasks typically set in the social work profession, it seemed plausible that the behavior measured by the standardized tests was not the most relevant behavior for program selection. Thus, the irrelevance of the almost ubiquitous demand for standardized testing in American society and academia was recognized.

The decision to omit such testing was not equivalent to, or even suggestive of, an abandoning of all admissions' criteria./3/ It is well known that there has been a continual effort in the literature to find viable alternatives to instrumentality, such as standardized testing, which are less than appropriate to the institution's selection requirements (as was the case with the NCLSW project), and which perhaps introduce serious ethnic and cultural biases into an institution's admissions process.

Alternatives to testing have been examined. As early as 1936 Henry Chauncey undertook a study at Harvard University where he found that a panel of raters made selections of students for admissions which were as "good" as those selections that were based on test results./4/ Given evidence such as this, program personnel decided to introduce an alternative to standardized testing. In line with by now well-established tendencies in the
social work profession, the NCLSW program moved in the direction of interviews and interview ratings as the basis of selection.

The program began operating with the interview as the basic data-gathering process for the admissions' mechanism, while the interview rating comprised the basic criterion of acceptance. Subsequent to the screening of the first semester class, however, it was felt that interviewing was a very costly approach to selection (in terms of staff time if no other), and variations of interviewing (such as a preliminary screening of applicants) were considered in an attempt to reduce these costs. It was suggested that the consideration of alternatives was properly a research task.

**Interviewing as an Admissions Mechanism**

It became clear that there were minor variations about a common set of practices that comprised the interview. In an attempt to document what the common activities were, and what the variations were, a sequential series of group interviews were undertaken of those NCLSW staff members who themselves interviewed prospective students. At each interview, a flowchart was presented to the staff, and questions were raised by staff (about the content of the flowcharts, to be answered by the researcher) and also by the researcher (about lacuna and variation in the flowcharts, to be answered by the staff). For example, prior to the interview, and even prior to an interview appointment, a collection of data had to be completed by the applicant and submitted to the project. The organizational response to this material was ascertained by a sequential series of group interviews of staff members, with the final product of these interviews indicated in the flowchart. By means of the combination of sequential interviews and group interviews, different approaches were uncovered and rationalized.

Either one of the variants in procedure was clearly superior to the other, and convincingly so to all the staff, or else there was a decision point where the individual interviewer had to choose one of several variants in procedure, to address a particular problem. In the first case, the convincingly superior variant was obtained in the documentation. In the second case, the hitherto implicit decision point was made explicit, and at least the role of decision-maker, if not the decision criterion, was identified in the documentation.
In the first flowchart, the necessary components of a completed admissions' package were:

| 1. A high school transcript and either a high school diploma or a G.E.D. test certificate. |
| 2. Both a completed Temple University admissions form and a NCLSW Program admissions form. |

A comment or two on each of these requirements is in order. The transcript meets a Temple University requirement. The various admissions' forms, and well chosen references, permit the interviewer insights into the quantity and quality of the applicants' work experience.

By a similar sequential series of group interviews of project staff, the activities that comprise the program staff's preparation for the interview, as well as the actual criteria considered in the interview, were ascertained. It might be noted that all of the NCLSW staff members who engaged in interviewing applicants were trained social workers, each with an MSW degree; hence standardization of the interview was presumed as a result of the common professional education.

**Interview Criteria**

In the second flowchart the interview process that was actually being employed by the staff members is indicated. The interviewer took necessary notes and wrote up the results using the following criteria to judge the potential of success of the applicant. The interviewer thus highlighted the applicant's particular strengths and weaknesses.

1. *Necessary Conditions* (If the applicant lacked these qualities, he was to be rejected.)
   
   a. Intelligence and verbal ability.
   b. Personal insight, maturity, and emotional stability.
   c. Interest in social welfare.
   d. Will school become an advantaging or advantageous factor?

2. *Important Conditions* (If the applicant lacked these qualities, serious doubts existed as to his acceptability.)
   
   a. Ability to relate to interviewer.
   b. Ability to handle affairs and plan future.
   c. Social awareness and social conscience.

3. *Desirable Characteristics*
   
   a. Aggressiveness.
   b. Warmth and outgoing personalities.
4. Experience (In addition to the information on job, and life experience given by the application form, there was a need for further qualitative data on the applicant's experience. The interviewer commented on his perception of the nature and quality of the applicant's experience.)

On the basis of these criteria, the interviewer stated: "recommend for admission" or "do not recommend for admission."

As we mentioned above, it had become increasingly clear that this procedure was too time-consuming and therefore not feasible as an admissions' process, and therefore had precipitated the gathering of data from the staff on the nature of the existing admissions' mechanism. It was also clear, however that there were institutional problems to be anticipated in a modification of the admissions' process.

The acceptability of interviewing is deeply based in the professional belief system of the social worker. As Edwards has pointed out, with special reference to the social work profession: "For the practitioner in any profession, the fascination of practice lies in the unique case, in the ways in which the one client differs from all others." Edwards has also noted that this focus leads to the use of the interview. "The social work skill which has been developed more than any other is that of using interpersonal relationships through the medium of interviews."

In response to the obvious impracticality of comprehensive interviewing of all applicants, the staff actively began to seek supplements rather than replacements to interviewing as an admissions mechanism.

Thus the program staff came to consider as a supplement to interviewing the critical reading of the applicant's admission package. Once the application package was completed, the folder was read by two social workers on the NCLSW staff. Initially it was felt that the criterion measure for the activity of critical reading would be "interview" or "don't interview," which, if related to the later interview, would establish a recommendation of "accept" or "reject," that would permit screening of applicants for interviewing, a limited number of whom could then be interviewed. Thus we see the first incremental step. The staff wasn't asked to accept the testing of an alternative to interviewing, but a supplement to interviewing.

Independent Review of Applications
Each application was independently reviewed by two readers and a judgment of "interview" or "don't interview" was made. The subjectivity inherent in the reading approach was presumed to be reduced by the independent readings. Each reader was given a form in which he was requested to read the materials and answer the questions that follow. Thus it is possible to summarize the factors to be considered.

1. Application Package
   a. Application complete?
   b. Documents missing?
(1) Program application.
(2) Temple University application form.
(3) Three letters of reference.
(4) High school diploma and/or G.E.D. test results.
(5) High school transcript.

2. Application Form
   a. Applicant's written comments show interest and motivation for the program?
   b. Applicant's experience in the human services field satisfactory? [62/63]

3. References
   a. Applicant work in the field of human services?
   b. Performance satisfactory?
   c. Personality satisfactory?

4. Academic Record(s)
   a. Applicant need the New Career ladders in Social Welfare Program, or could he be admitted to another program in the university?
   b. Will you refer applicant elsewhere?
   c. Should the applicant be interviewed?

When the same applicants were processed by both admissions mechanisms, interviewing on the one hand and reading on the other could be compared as alternatives. There were two possible outcomes in the case of the critical reading in terms of the dimensions listed above. Either both readers concurred in their independent judgment that the applicant should be interviewed, or else at least one reader felt that the applicant shouldn't be interviewed. In the case of interviewing, there were also two possible outcomes: the applicant should be accepted or rejected.

The two alternatives were independent. The interview followed the completion of all the readings, however, the interviewers didn't know the outcomes of these readings. On the basis of this comparison, the efficacy of the two alternatives was determined. As mentioned, we hoped that the critical reading would simply provide a screening mechanism that would reduce the total number of applicants to be interviewed. In order to enhance the control of this experimental comparison, the sample was deliberately restricted in anticipation of the use of the Fisher Exact Probability Test. The fourteen applicants randomly chosen for the test were presumably representative, and it was then possible to ascertain if any association existed between the two alternatives.

The data was tabulated in a 2 by 2 table, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Accept</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The two alternatives were tested on 13 applicants, since one applicant screened by the critical reading of his admissions' folder was later unavailable for interviewing.

The results tabulated above illustrated a strong tendency for both readers' judgment to "interview" to be associated with the judgment of the interviewer to "accept." Similarly the judgment by at least one reader "don't interview" appeared to be associated with the judgment "reject."/8/

**Results of "Critical Reading"**

For the majority of NCLSW staff members, critical reading of folders by a panel of judges or raters had simply never been considered as an admissions' mechanism or as a supplement to interviewing. When the first test was undertaken to assess the adequacy of alternate admissions' mechanisms, their first response to critical reading was that it might provide a useful supplement to interviewing, but no more. The results of the first comparison were somewhat surprising to the staff.

It was observed that the amount of time required per reading and recording responses by a reader was five to ten minutes; an interview usually takes a minimum of one-half hour, not counting necessary write-up time. The staff time-ratio of the two alternatives was thus in the neighborhood of three-to-one. Hence folder reading was cheaper in terms of staff time, and apparently resulted in the same selection of applicants that interviewing did.

In August, 1970, a decision was made to replicate the earlier experiment, primarily to ascertain if folder reading permitted a direct judgment of "accept" and "reject." At this time the value of interviewing as an admissions' mechanism again appeared to be questionable, due to the impending necessity of selecting the Spring 1971 class of NCLSW students and the associated cost considerations. By August, 1970, the possibility that folder reading might provide a replacement rather than a supplement to interviewing was apparent to all the NCLSW project staff. Thus a second incremental step to the staff's accepting the testing of an alternative to interviewing was reached, and by now some of the professional and institutional concerns had been lessened as a result of the success of the first comparison.

**Second Attempt**

Twenty applicants were again randomly selected and their folders were read as described above. The applicants were interviewed in precisely the same fashion as indicated earlier. The cases were grouped into one category where both readers recommended that the student be accepted and another for those cases when the readers couldn't agree or else both [63/64] recommended the student not be accepted. These cases fell into a "reject" category on the folder reading variable. Thus rather than considering the critical reading process as a screening mechanism for interviewing, it is viewed as a full-fledged and distinct alternative. The data was again tabulated in a 2 by 2 table as follows:/9/
On the basis of the scores on the ETS Cooperative Tests (English), a standard Temple University examination for placement in freshman English (subsequent to and independent of admissions), which the majority of NCLSW students take, it is also possible to make an independent judgment of the equality of the two groups, hence a comparison of the equivalence of the two admissions' mechanisms, with respect to their performance on the ETS test. In Figure I, the mean score, test date, and number of students taking the test is given for the Spring 1970 class (plus the mean score of a retest given this group for administrative reasons). These students were selected by interviewing as an admissions' mechanism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Class of Spring 1970</th>
<th>Class of Spring 1971</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Test Date</td>
<td>12/69</td>
<td>4/70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure I**

These mean scores can be compared to the mean score of the Spring 1971 class, which was selected by folder reading alone. The equivalence of the means is patent. Hence we have additional evidence that the two admissions mechanisms make essentially the same selection. This last evidence is to be viewed as merely corroborative of the experimental evidence, which can stand on its own in the comparative assessment of the admissions' mechanisms.

On the basis of the experimental comparisons reported here - which met the requirements of rigorous experimental inquiry to the fullest extent possible - a decision was reached to abandon interviewing as an admissions' mechanism in favor of the critical reading of the application folders. Thus, for the Spring 1971 term, all the students who were accepted were processed by the critical reading alternative of the admissions' process. Thus we see, that institutional change was realized. Moreover, we have provided sufficient documentation of the nature of the mechanisms under study to permit further replications of the research reported here.

**Comments**

This paper has addressed the admissions' mechanism of New Career Ladders in Social Welfare. The high correlation between the direct interviewing selection techniques and
the review by two independent readers of required didactic materials has aided program staff in a more efficacious method of reviewing large numbers of applicants.

The criteria for selection, which differ from the usual college requirements of standardized testing, have been established to assure that these procedures do not act as an exclusionary device. Since the program has a built in support system that provides counseling, tutoring, and other fundamental aides aimed at assuring student success, individual and group contacts are initiated and maintained with each student from the point that he is recommended for acceptance into the university's New Career Ladders in Social Welfare Program./10/ [64//]

References


2. Later this was changed to Degree Candidacy. The process leading to these changes is discussed in another document.


4. Cited in P. E. Meehl, Clinical vs. Statistical Prediction, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1954), pp.112-113,

5. Each flow chart represented part of a three-point procedure for admissions.


7. Ibid.

8. Cf. D. L. Thomas and J. C. Stanley "Effectiveness of High School Grades," Journal of Educational Measurement, Vol. 6 (1969), pp. 203-215. By the Fisher Exact Probability Test, with Tocher's modification, it was determined that this distribution would be exceeded at a level of significance of P < 0.05. The phi coefficient for the data of the first test was calculated as 0.54. It might be remarked that this correlation coefficient is of comparable magnitude to other coefficients reported in research on undergraduate admissions mechanisms.

9. Again, the test of significance was the Fisher Exact Probability Test, with Tocher's modification. The probability that the two distributions differed was P < 0.05, hence of the same magnitude as in the earlier experiment. The phi-coefficient was 0.47, again of acceptable magnitude.