

TEN DAYS IN MAY
(A SECOND ATTEMPT AT ACCOUNTABILITY)

by

Fred M. Amram

March, 1976

Acknowledgements: The author wishes to give credit to Nathaniel Alexander who supervised the tabulation of the data and did much of the counting himself. Alex, too, should be credited with the preparation of the tables.

Very special thanks to Peggy Dreckman for sheperding an impatient author through draft revisions and for doing much of the re-writing herself.

RESEARCH CENTER REPORTS
THE GENERAL COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Introduction

In the summer of 1969, several small anti-poverty programs joined together to form the Consolidated HELP (Higher Education for Low-Income Persons) Center. The purpose of the consolidation was to facilitate delivery of supportive services to low-income, minority and educationally disadvantaged University of Minnesota students. Over the years, new programs have replaced many of the original student service systems at the HELP Center. Despite these periodic changes, existing programs have successfully cooperated in sharing space, staff and budget to provide eligible students¹ with a single on-going system of services, including financial assistance, vocational guidance, academic and personal counseling, tutoring, legal assistance, employment counseling, and welfare advocacy.

This report is intended to provide the educational community with an updated account of the staff time involved in delivering services to HELP Center students.

The HELP Center's first attempt at accountability² took place in 1974. All members of the HELP Center staff except tutors were asked to record their activities on a contact chart for a period of five days. They were asked to identify who they saw, the reason for the contact and how the contact was made. The results of that study showed that the format of the contact chart needed some revisions. Nevertheless, several clear pieces of information were produced. Some of the more interesting were that:

- (1) The nine full-time counselors averaged 13.7 contacts per day.
- (2) Of 1,082 total contacts, 634 were student contacts during the five-day period and that 546 different students were seen.
- (3) Part-time student assistants were much utilized by students.
- (4) One of the counselors was seeing far fewer students than each of the others, thus pointing out a need for reassignment of tasks.
- (5) Some students saw more than one staff person per week.

What follows is a second attempt at accountability.

¹In the spring of 1975, HELP Center services reached 973 students. Approximately sixty percent of these students were Black, Native American or Chicano and over fifty percent of the students were female single-parents. (Appendix I provides a breakdown of the categories of students served.)

²Who's Watching the Store? (An Attempt at Accountability) by Amram and McComb, April, 1975.

Method

To document the allocation of staff time, each staff member with the exception of secretaries and tutors was asked to count all work-related contacts made during ten work days in May, 1975. Secretaries were asked to report only those work-related contacts which placed them in a helping situation. Tutors were not asked to participate in this study.³

Staff members recorded their contacts on a revised version of the contact chart used in the first staff-time study. A copy of the revised chart is presented in Appendix II. The revised chart enabled staff members to quickly note much more specific information about their contacts than had been possible in the first study. For example, the new chart made it possible to ascertain whether a contact was with a student, a prospective student or others such as University personnel, welfare agencies or personnel from other schools. The old chart simply provided for pre-intake and intake contacts. The new form also allowed staff members to identify the topic or topics of the contact ie: financial, personal, academic, etc. and the setting in which the contact took place (in person, by telephone, etc.) Finally the chart allowed staff members to indicate the length of the contact in half-hour intervals.

At the end of the ten-day study, charts were collected from each staff member, reported contacts were counted and where it seemed appropriate, averages of the data were calculated. No statistical analysis was performed on the data.

For reporting purposes HELP Center personnel were divided in five general categories:

- Group 1 Administrative staff
- Group 2 Clerical staff
- Group 3 Specialized Counselors
- Group 4 General Counselors
- Group 5 Part-time Peer Counselors

Individuals within groups were identified by alphabetical code (see Appendix III).

Results

Appendix III presents an overview of the data collected during the ten-day study. What follows here is an effort to draw from the tables some of the results which were of particular interest to the author.

³A separate report on the activities of HELP Center tutors is in progress and will be published in the near future.

- Group 4, General counselors are the heart of the HELP staff and the major focus of this study. They also constitute the largest number of individuals (9) of the 15 full-time HELP staff members. General counselors averaged 13.2 contacts per day, 8.7 of which were with students. Comments on the grids indicate that non-student contacts were mainly about students and also included a fairly large number of college meetings.
- While the full-time counselors averaged 13.2 contacts per day the number of contacts by individual counselors varied widely. Counselor I averaged 17.9 contacts per day compared to Counselor M who averaged 6.3. Interestingly, Counselor M also reported the second highest percentage of contacts lasting longer than one-half hour (33.3 percent) compared to a counselor average of 18.7 percent. The second lowest number of daily contacts (6.6) was reported by Counselor O who was highest in contacts lasting over one-half hour (45.5 percent). Examination of Table III indicates that those counselors who report a high number of contacts do not necessarily have short contacts.

However, at the extremes there does seem to be some relationship.

- The 9 General counselors report "academic and registration" problems as the most frequent reason (501) for contact--far ahead of any other reason. Second and third most frequently reported contact involved "personal" and "financial" problems. The relatively large number of "other" listings (299) raised questions about the clarity or adequacy of the categories--or the willingness of counselors to take the time to fill in the chart carefully.
- Office visits (537) and phone calls (426) were the most frequent types of contact.
- Clerical personnel were asked to identify only those contacts where they provided "real" assistance to students. Appendix III shows that the two secretaries did not have many such helping contacts during the 10 day test period (13 and 28).
- Attorney E at the time of the test period was new and becoming acquainted with the job. Attorney F was working one-fourth time and was preparing to leave the HELP Center. It is noteworthy that the quarter-time Attorney F had almost as many contacts (36) as full-time Attorney E (41). Observation since this study shows that Attorney E now has familiarized himself with the job and has a heavier caseload.

- The Director and Administrative Assistant reported a relatively high number of total contacts (173 and 127 respectively) and a relatively low proportion of contacts lasting more than one-half hour (6.9 percent and 9.4 percent respectively). It is not surprising that the administrative staff was found to have a preponderance of non-student contacts. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that 32 percent of the Administrative Assistant's contacts were with students.
- The two part-time peer counselors reported a daily average of 4.2 and 3.4 contacts. It is remarkable that during the 10-day period Peer Counselor R reported not a single non-student contact, while some 77 percent of the contacts of Peer Counselor S were with non-students. These results may indicate that during the study period R had very limited contact with a supervisor. It also raises questions about the sorts of tasks S performed which caused her to have so few student contacts.
- During the ten-day period, staff made a total of 1,089 student contacts. Appendix IV identifies the student contacts by program. Not surprisingly, Title IV and M.L.K., the largest two programs, constituted the greatest number of student contacts.
- Of the 1,089 student contacts made by staff members, 775 could be clearly identified by student name and program. It was possible to determine that these 775 student contacts included 603 different students. Obviously some students were seen more than once. If one assumes that the 314 student contacts which could not be clearly named approximated the same ratio of different students to total student contacts ($603 \div 775 = 77.8$ percent) one calculates that the additional 314 student contacts constitute an additional 244 different students. Such a calculation shows that some 847 ($603 + 244$) different students were seen during the two-week test period.

Conclusions Revised:

Some of the results of this study call for no judgments or interpretations. They are simply reported in the previous section. Other reported results have lead the author to draw some conclusions or have raised some questions.

- Apparently "low volume" counselors have relatively long contacts with students. This fact may reflect personal counseling style. It may reflect an attraction that such counselors have for students who like or need long sessions. The Center director will make further explorations to determine whether or not modification in counseling style may be necessary to generate greater "efficiency."
- Some of the forms were filled out inadequately or incompletely, perhaps reflecting an unwillingness to cooperate fully with this type of study. In future accountability efforts, staff must be required to be more exact in reporting contacts.
- The surprising results concerning contacts of peer counselors raised some questions (see previous section). Subsequent exploration revealed inadequate supervision--a situation which is being remedied.
- A very large number of different students enrolled in the HELP Center were seen at least once by at least one HELP staff member during the ten-day test period. This fact is impressive because enrollees are not required to come to the Center. Furthermore, this fact takes no account of additional students contacts with HELP tutors. Apparently students do use the available services.
- Finally, the data have proved helpful not only as an accountability tool but also as an aid to supervision. During the 1976-77 year, staff will be required to participate in contact studies for the first five working days of every month. The purpose of this on-going evaluation will be to provide (a) additional documentation of service, (b) additional insight into special student needs, and (c) improved techniques for examining counselor services.

APPENDIX I

DISTRIBUTION BY COLLEGE
 CONSOLIDATED H.E.L.P. CENTER

SPRING QUARTER, 1975

SEPTEMBER 9, 1975

PROGRAM	GC	CLA	EDUC	AFHE	UC	HEALTH SCIENCE	IT	BUS	CER	TOTALS
Martin Luther King	288									288
Other H.E.L.P. *includes Ext.	25	17	1	2	1	3		2	164	215
Title IV	102	100	2	12	8	10	2		5	241
G.O.P.	4	12	9		2	1			6	34
B.I.A.	110	42	3	3	1	7				166
H.C.P.	4	3						1		8
Davies	4	13	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	21
TOTALS	537	187	16	18	12	22	22	3	176	973

*P.T., O.T., Nursing, Mort. Scie., Dental Hygiene, CBS, Vet. Med., etc.

APPENDIX III
(Revised)

	TYPE OF CONTACT													REASON				HOW CONTACT MADE				AVERAGE PER DAY	# OF CONTACTS > 1/2 HOUR	% OF CONTACTS > 1/2 HOUR
	TOTAL # OF CONTACTS	PROSPECTIVE STUDENT	STUDENT	NON-STUDENT	STUDENT UNK, UNLISTED	FINANCIAL	PERSONAL	ACADEMIC REGISTRATION	ADMIN-ISTRATIVE	LEGAL	WELFARE	OTHER	OFFICE	PHONE	FIELD	OTHER								
<u>STAFF MEMBER</u>																								
<u>Group I (Admin)</u>																								
Director A	173	4	10	156	3	9	7	7	124	4	14	32	91	60	15	7	17.3	12	6.9					
Admin (Asst) B	127	1	33	86	7	9	0	14	48	2	38	27	60	38	8	21	12.7	12	9.4					
<u>Group II (Clerical)</u>																								
Secretary C	13	0	0	2	11	2	0	4	1	0	0	6	1	12	0	0	1.3	1	7.7					
Secretary D	28	1	12	8	7	5	14	14	1	1	2	4	25	3	0	0	2.8	4	14.3					
<u>Group III (Legal) / (Misc.)</u>																								
Attorney E	41	0	17	23	1	0	0	0	6	35	0	0	8	25	4	4	4.1	6	14.6					
Attorney (Part time) F	36	4	3	29	0	1	0	0	1	26	7	1	16	9	1	10	3.6	12	33.3					
Employment Counselor G	75	5	35	30	5	0	0	1	2	0	0	72	39	28	2	6	7.5	14	18.7					
Welfare Advocate (Part time) H	168	6	79	74	9	3	27	11	3	21	129	21	64	39	19	46	16.8	20	11.9					
<u>Group IV (General Counselor)</u>																								
I	179	8	110	58	3	0	7	103	10	0	0	59	73	40	37	29	17.9	25	14.0					
J	111	14	66	25	6	19	2	30	5	0	0	55	53	34	2	22	11.1	14	12.6					
K	167	43	64	53	7	14	0	99	20	0	12	28	84	67	13	3	16.7	28	16.8					
L	117	6	56	22	33	8	5	76	19	1	0	17	60	41	6	10	11.7	22	18.8					
M	63	17	10	32	4	18	8	6	46	0	0	3	21	24	14	4	6.3	21	33.3					
N	151	7	58	85	1	11	87	19	32	11	2	87	59	80	12	0	15.1	32	21.2					
O	66	16	48	1	1	31	19	31	3	3	23	11	34	18	1	13	6.6	30	45.5					
P	176	10	101	61	4	6	45	63	0	0	29	33	89	46	20	21	17.6	39	22.2					
Q	156	7	4	63	82	62	14	74	16	0	4	6	64	78	3	11	15.6	11	7.1					
Totals for 9 full time counselors	1,186	128	517	400	141	169	187	501	151	15	70	299	537	428	108	113		222	18.7					
<u>Group V (Part time)</u>																								
R	42	5	37	0	0	0	1	18	1	0	1	21	27	4	7	4	4.2	8	19.0					
S	34	2	5	26	1	1	1	3	0	0	0	29	12	16	6	0	3.4	7	20.6					
TOTALS	1,923	156	748	834	185	199	237	573	338	104	261	512	880	662	170	211		318	16.5					

APPENDIX IV

Number of Student Contacts by Program

<u>Program</u>	<u>Number of Contacts</u>
Title IV	291
M.L.K.	263
B.I.A.	99
Davies	17
C.O.P.	13
Other HELP (CEE/TAP)	<u>92</u>
Subtotal	775
Program unlisted, unknown, or unassigned	<u>314</u>
Total student Contacts	1,089
Calculated number of different students seen	847