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A
TWO YEAR EXPERIENCE
WITH NEW CAREERS:
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

BY
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The two-year experience with New Careers, funded by the Department of Labor, has come to a close in Minneapolis. A careful evaluation of this experience leads us to some observations and conclusions. In the experience of the staff of the Minneapolis New Careers Program, there were four major areas that presented particular challenges to the administration of the program: the work/study model, the response of the University of Minnesota, the administrative arrangements for the operation of the program, and the relationships of the agencies to the program and its students. In each of these areas, there were experiments, with successes and failures. Many of the successes have been documented elsewhere, and are reflected in the results of a follow-up study recently released. * The failures, and the issues that were freshly uncovered because of the New Careers experience, are the subject of this report. **

The Work/Study Model

The intent of the work/study model is to break down the somewhat arbitrary barriers that define where education takes place. In contrast to the more traditional view that education takes place in the classroom prior to the practice that takes place on the job, the work/study model assumes that both the University and the job setting are sources of learning in the human services, and that the learning that takes place on the job deserves accreditation at the University.

Further, the work/study model is intended to offer a way of pursuing an educational objective while at the same time providing an income with which to support the student and his family.

From the New Careers experience, it can be said that the work/study model is one of the most realistic ways to enable members of this group (low-income and minority persons) to gain credentials that will give them access to upward mobility. It might also be seen as a valuable model for use in re-training groups of people whose jobs have become technologically obsolete. For example, what might be called the "professional blue-collar worker" -- the man who has done a highly skilled job for a long period of time -- might be able to use the work/study model to be trained to do another job when his original trade was automated or outdated. By the same token, very highly skilled white collar workers whose jobs have disappeared because of changes in national priorities or government subsidies -- such as certain classes of aerospace workers -- might be able to use the same training model.

However, the work/study model, to be effective either in training or in re-training, must have certain flexibilities built into it. Otherwise, the student does not benefit any more from the study-related job than he would from any other job he might hold on a part-time basis.

* Margaret A. Thompson, The Minneapolis New Careers Program: A Follow-up Study. Available in mimeo from the Office of Career Development, University of Minnesota.

** For those who need background information on the program, see Appendix A.

Released Time and Scheduling of Courses

One of the essential elements for a work/study program is a firm commitment by the employing agency to provide released time for the enrollee to attend school. This includes time for study and for transportation to and from school, and can rarely be less than half time (20 hours per week). Insofar as possible, this time should be given in such a way that it can be used by the enrollee to take the courses he finds most useful to him.

Often, however, the nature of the task on the job or of the agency structure does not permit this. In planning coursework for this constituency, two serious issues must be taken into account. First, coursework relating directly to the competencies the individual needs on the job must be designed and made available. These courses may not have general appeal to the student body at large, and may be offered in "sheltered" sessions for program enrollees only. Second, there is the problem of scheduling coursework in such a way that persons with jobs and families can still avail themselves of the courses that are particularly important and appropriate for them.

These two issues cause a dilemma for the program planner in a work/study program. On the one hand, he wants to bring the low-income student to the main campus, where he can genuinely participate in the University community and take regular coursework along with a variety of other students. This involves much more than just a new environment: such resources as the library and supportive services, as well as the benefits to conventional students of sharing experiences with the low-income student, have undisputed value. On the other hand, the requirements of job and family make it useful and practical to schedule classes in the community itself (rather than on the main campus), at hours more convenient to the students involved. However, this has the drawback that it often forces the students into what might be called "segregated education." Although they may at first feel more comfortable in familiar settings and surrounded by familiar people, ultimately it seems valuable that they have access to all the resources, both human and material, that the University has to offer. The job of the administrator of these programs must be to try to balance these two demands -- for a full educational experience and a flexible curriculum and schedule -- in such a way that the students benefit from the best combination.

In the area of flexible coursework and scheduling, some particular strategies can be suggested. First, appropriate coursework should be developed in extension divisions or night school departments, so that enrollees can work during the day without detriment to their education. In some cases, higher educational institutions must consider rescheduling classes so that a range of coursework is available in late afternoons (from 4 to 6, for example) to permit easier access for working persons who are working on degrees at various levels. In addition, some day and night school classes can be decentralized to neighborhoods in such a way as to make them more accessible to the enrollees. The additional benefit of this to people in the neighborhood other than program enrollees is obvious; many cannot take the time and expense of commuting to the University campus for a class, but when it is offered close to home, they find it valuable.

In every program, these issues must be adjusted to the particular needs of the students involved, and to the offerings of the University. The major task of the program staff is to be sensitive to these needs and resources, and to develop flexible alternatives that give as many students as possible the education they seek.

Continuing Financial Support for Education

One of the main goals of a work/study program is to enable the individual who completes the program to have free movement in terms of his profession and to free him from the insecurity of dead-end and/or obsolete kinds of work. This goal can only be reached if the person is enabled to gain the requisite credentials in his chosen area. Several levels of credentialing can be seen as possible goals for the student: the 45-credit certificate; the Associate in Arts degree (A.A.); the Bachelor of Arts degree (B.A.); and graduate degrees. The process of defining the goal, from our experience, ought to involve both the student and his employer (or his prospective employer). The goal should be planned in the light of both the student's career goals and the agency's personnel needs.

In a work/study program that enables a person to begin his education but not to complete it, the success of the program over the long run depends on the availability of scholarship monies to students to continue their education. The length of time these funds should be made available can only be determined in the context of the individual's goals and the agency's needs.

Although various sources of this support could be suggested, at the present time, it appears that the main responsibility for initiating demonstration programs falls on the federal government. But a continuation of education support beyond the life of these programs falls largely on the state legislatures in states where these programs are underway, since the programs are usually statewide in scope and often use educational institutions largely funded from state funds.

Coordination of Work and Study Portions

Another element necessary to make the work/study model work successfully and be a real contribution to the individual's is some form of coordination of the work and study portions of the programs. Several models have been tried to solve this problem. First, seminars were held, in which it was hoped that enrollees and supervisors would be able to discuss their problems and work toward solutions of them. These were only marginally successful, largely because neither supervisors nor enrollees could afford the time away from work to participate fully in them. In a later experiment, participants were reimbursed for their participation, and the result was considerably more satisfactory. From our experience, the success of the seminars is also greater when there is a fairly well-structured agenda and a clearly outlined set of issues for discussion. The program staff must take the responsibility in this area.

Another strategy that was tried in New Careers was holding seminars for enrollees, organized around the particular skills their jobs required. This model also was a very limited success, since the enrollees needed a wide diversity of skills and had a wide variety of levels of competence, both of which made it very difficult to teach everyone what he wanted to know in the context of a single class.

The most successful model to integrate the work and study portions of the program was one involving a three-way quasi-contract between the educational institution, the agency, and the enrollee. This agreement sets up a project which the enrollee can carry out at the agency and for which he can receive academic credit. Several criteria are taken into account in setting up the projects: there must be specific skills the enrollee can be expected to learn by doing the project; the responsibility for supervision must be clearly outlined and divided between the university staff member and the agency supervisor; the project must be clearly related to the course of study in which the enrollee is engaged; there must be a clear timetable which can be followed in carrying out the project; and there must be a definite expectation as to the kind of product expected from the project. The projects must be designed in such a way that they have a clear value to the agency; this is important not only from the agency's point of view, but is an important contribution to the enrollee's feeling that he is making a valuable contribution. Specifically, these projects might include data collection, surveying, analysis of case records, student observation, and preparation of teaching units (for teacher aides).

One of the critical problems for these work/study programs is that supervisor and program administration see the job setting in two very different ways: the program staff is likely to see it as a learning experience, while the agency personnel are likely to see it as a way to get a job done. The implication of this is that supervisors must be trained in the use of paraprofessional personnel, with the major emphasis on learning to teach the enrollee the skills he needs on the job. In this process, there must be some tangible rewards for the supervisors -- credits in the merit system or stipends, for example. In a work/study program, supervision forms the vital link between the work experience and the University experience, and should be the focus of a considerable amount of planning.

Consortium of Educational Opportunities

Finally, it is clear that an element of the work/study model should be a consortium of educational opportunities that can be made available to students. In any of these programs, one of the "facts of life" is that there is a wide variety of educational levels, of academic aspirations, and of areas of interest. It is only the most remarkable educational institution that can meet the needs of all the students in the most suitable way. In building a program, it is suggested that various institutions of higher education be involved to meet the diversity of needs and interests of the enrollees: some with a remedial program; some with experimental programs; and some with conventional academic programs. Creating such a consortium, if it is to benefit the students, requires a clear assessment of what the students want and need in terms of

educational experiences, and of which institutions have programs which will meet the variety of needs. In addition, the program planner should recommend the supportive services necessary to meet the needs of the students for such services, which will be elaborated in the next section.

The University's Response to Enrollees

In most work/study programs, enrollees are likely to have some characteristics which distinguish them from the kinds of students the educational institution is used to dealing with. First, the students are likely to be older than the usual university students; their income is likely to be lower; they are more likely to come from minority backgrounds, and they are likely to have more family responsibilities. All of these things affect their ability to use the educational program a university offers. Second, they are likely to have more academic deficiencies, and more serious ones, than the other students. And third, because of inner city backgrounds of most of the participants in these programs, participants may be uncertain -- or even skeptical -- of the value the university can have for them. They may perceive it as a relatively stuffy establishment which does not really understand the problems of people who are like themselves. In light of all of these factors, universities have a responsibility to be as free and creative in their programmatic responses as possible.

The special kinds of needs these students have, and the responses they require from the educational institution, have been gradually perceived by both the staff of the program and the University of Minnesota staff involved. As their needs have become more and more clear, the University has made a series of responses to them in nearly every area: administrative structure, remedial services, supportive services, curriculum offerings and teaching methods.* The recommendations in this section include continuation of many of the most successful of these efforts, and, where experience has shown a need for further change, suggestions for way in which educational institutions might further respond to this constituency. The recommendations fall into two general categories: curriculum development and supportive services.

Curriculum Development

Several areas of curriculum development, from the Minneapolis New Careers experience, seem to require particular attention in a successful work/study program. First, the teaching of academic skills must be woven together with the kinds of skills that are required for the job in which the enrollee has his work experience. Of course, this includes the giving of academic credit for work experience.

* For further discussions of the University of Minnesota's responses to the needs of this special student group, see Knop and Thompson "New Careerists in Higher Education", in mimeo from the Office of Career Development, University of Minnesota

Second, the University must pay particular attention to the techniques of teaching that can be used most successfully with this somewhat atypical student group.

In particular, the curriculum must deal with the learning style of these students, which demands more active oral participation in the classroom setting and requires the instructor to relate the immediate and extensive personal experiences of these students to the abstract academic concepts he is trying to teach them. The students need to be enabled to see the broader cultural implications of the situations they have lived through, and this requires a special kind of teaching. Their parochial view needs to be "metropolitanized".

The quality of teaching has special significance for work/study programs. Students in these programs come with a richness of life experiences that far outstrips that of the traditional young student. To interrelate their expensive "street knowledge" and "mother wit" with the conceptual world of academe requires sophisticated and secure faculty members.

Much more extensive research and experimentation is needed in such areas as the teaching of remedial reading and writing skills, relating teaching methods to the interests and experiences of low-income students, and adapting course offerings to the schedules and interests of these students. It has been established that conventional methods of teaching leave these students, for the most part, bored and frustrated; but much more documented experimentation is needed as to what alternatives are successful. One of the experiments that has been tried at the University of Minnesota, and one which has had success with some students, is the "packaged courses" that were designed and offered by the General College of the University. In these, a student could take several courses whose subject matter was closely related at the same time gathering a group of skills in one quarter that would otherwise be more diffused by the passage of time and change of instructors. In addition, these courses could be altered somewhat in structure and/or content to fit the particular needs of the students. An example of this was a "package" course created by combining Man and his Work and Contemporary Books and Periodicals. This course was described by the instructor as follows:

The purpose of the package course was to integrate the concepts of the work situation of New Careerists with the socio-historical context of work in American literature. Thus, there was a conscious attempt to relate the particular orientation of New Careerists with a universalistic perspective...By providing the students with these materials, it was hoped that they could begin to analyze and criticize the predominant concepts behind the work situation and the themes and myths behind contemporary books and periodicals.

Third, enrollees of these programs are likely to need a set of courses that are both career-related and offered in a sequence over several quarters or semesters. Especially in the case of those with reading and/or writing problems, this arrangement of courses in sequence can be used to allow students systematically to improve their basic skills, and instructors to build on the progress they make. When there is no sequence, students often find themselves lost in courses they are not prepared for and baffled by some of the assignments they are asked to prepare.

Supportive Services

Particularly in a university as large as the University of Minnesota, the enrollees of work/study programs may feel lost and ignored in the mass of students who attend the University. In the course of admission, registration, book-buying, and other such routinized University processes, the student comes into contact with a variety of people who may by their actions either make the student feel comfortable in the academic setting or confirm his suspicions that the University is really indifferent to his needs and irrelevant to to his life style, and in his perceptions a "racist institution". Most of the early encounters the student has with the University "system" are encounters with secretaries, clerks, and receptionists; because of this, this level of university personnel has a special responsibility to understand and to direct efforts to the insecurity and bafflement of the student. If he gets a patient and understanding reception from these people, who personify the university to him, other problems he has to confront do not seem so overwhelming. Completely aside from the types of services the university offers, the way they are offered can determine their usefulness to the enrollees.

Aside from this general consideration, several areas can be pinpointed as ones in which enrollees of these programs have needs for unique supportive services.

a. Financial Counseling

Many work/study students in programs similar to New Careers come from a background plagued with financial insecurity; many others have never learned how to manage the money they have. Thus, financial crises in enrollees' lives are persistent and recurring events. To some extent, these difficulties can be eased by providing financial counseling for enrollees to enable them to learn how to allot the money they have. To be effective, this counseling must be sensitive to the situation and priorities of the individual involved, and financial plans must be worked out with his and his spouse's participation and approval. Debt counseling, however, has limited uses. Another useful service a university can provide is a short-term emergency loan fund which enrollees can use when emergencies leave them penniless, as they frequently do.

However, the essential problem of many of these students is not that they don't have enough money, but that they have never had enough money. They come to these programs with indebtedness so oppressive and so inescapable that they are often unable to succeed in a work/study program --either because

they must moonlight to supplement their income, or because they endure so much anxiety trying to discover a way out of their problems that they cannot work or study. It is not clear what kind of supportive service could adequately deal with this problem. The daring experiment of simply paying off a person's bills to give him a "fresh start" has yet to be tried. But perhaps in the long run, this may be the only effective solution; and in the long run, a cost-benefit analysis may reveal that it is also the most productive approach.

b. Family-Oriented Services

One of the ways in which program enrollees are different from other students is that they have families with a wide age range of dependents. Students with families have needs for supportive services -- particularly in the mental health and health areas -- that are organized around the needs of all members of the family, not just those of the program enrollee. In many cases, failure to deal with the family as a whole actually results in a waste of resources, since it only deals with one part of a very complex problem and hence cannot solve it.

The fact that these students have families, and thus that their problems call for treatment for non-students, is compounded by other problems which commonly occur in the lives of low-income people. These include: the interrelatedness of a number of problems the enrollee may have; the tendency for low-income persons to have more crises -- emotional, financial, and personal -- than other university students because of the intensity of their academic experience; the special problems enrollees encounter because of their minority group status; the problems that arise with adolescent children; the effects of program participation on marital relationships; and the changes that occur in families which are experiencing fairly rapid upward mobility. Whatever supportive services are offered by a university need to be organized around the needs of the family unit of which the enrollee is a part, as well as around the other factors which make him different from most other students.

c. Transportation

Being involved in a work/study program involves substantial expenditures for transportation and parking at the educational institution and at the work site. Program planners should include funds for transportation in their budget. This need not, however, be a responsibility of the educational institution.

d. Day Care

Many low-income students, and particularly women, can participate in work/study programs only if there is day care for their children. Again, money for this service to enrollees should be seen as a vital part of a program budget.

e. Academic Counseling and Research

As has already been mentioned, the special constituency of these programs presents special needs in the areas of remedial studies and academic counseling. However, little information is available about documented successes in providing these services for low-income people. Two areas in particular need extensive and careful research. First, there are few, if any, relevant ways to assess the skills of incoming enrollees in this constituency. Conventional predictive instruments, such as scores on standardized tests, do not reflect the life experience of these people. Often, their high school experience was some time ago, long before standardized tests became a standard fixture in getting an education. They are often frightened and intimidated by the form of the test itself, which only compounds the effects of their unfamiliarity with the multiple-choice questions, the machine-scored answer sheet, and the timed examination. High school records, another conventional way of measuring students' ability to succeed in college work, are also irrelevant in this constituency. Many of these students never finished high school, and their records are erratic. Some achieved their diploma through GED programs and their records are not easily compared to those of other students. And for many, the high school experience took place so long ago that it cannot be used as an accurate assessment of the individual's capabilities at a much more mature stage of his life.

From our experiences, success for these students is related to a number of motivational factors for which there are no reliable measure -- determination, "coping skills" and support from members of the family, for example. At present, these can only be measured in a somewhat intuitive and non-empirical way.

There is a need, in sum, for the development of measures which predict success in college for students who do not fit the pattern of the conventional student group. Particularly as more students from the low-income community are joined by larger groups of returning G.I.'s and by an increasing number of students who do not go directly from high school to college, it seems imperative that research in this area begin to take place.

The second area in which more research is needed is in the evaluation of methods of dealing with the academic problems of low-income students on the college campus. In many cases, it is obvious that some enrollees need a transitional period in which they can improve their study, reading, and writing skills before they enter the competitive situation of the regular University coursework. Basic elements of such a program, from our experience, should be: communication skills; coursework stressing abstract thinking and organizational ability; and basic math skills. But beyond these specific skill areas, attention should be given to the building of the student's confidence in himself, as well as the diagnosis of his academic problems.

The problem for researchers and creative educators in this area is to discover ways in which this process of diagnosis and remediation can take place with some success. At this time, it is difficult to decide exactly which individuals need which kinds of help, and even more difficult to know how to give them the kind of help which will be of use to them in University coursework.

Summary

In short, most of the responses the University can make to the special "dis-advantaged" constituency enrolled in a work/study program involve the very characteristics that make them unlike other University students. In addition, special responses are needed because of the nature of a work/study program and the stresses it involves. The University of Minnesota has been quick to respond in many of these areas, and has in many ways been flexible even in altering its own response when it became obvious it was not working as well as had been expected. This is perhaps the most important response an educational institution can make to the advent of low-income students: that it be flexible and willing to change in response to student needs, even when it involves self-evaluation and self-criticism.

Administration of the Program

Another area in which recommendations can be made on the basis of the Minneapolis New Careers experience is the area of program administration. As anyone involved in a New Careers program can attest, the very design of the program involves an almost overwhelming complexity. The guidelines and administrative rules of the Federal funding sources must constantly be observed; the local agencies which provide job sites must be coordinated and communicated with; the institution of higher education must be taken into account in planning; and the student group brings a range of problems which are largely unknown to those who have dealt with more traditional students.

The problem of coordinating all these variables, while at the same time responding creatively to unpredictable circumstances and the need for long-range planning, requires a skilled and flexible staff. To complicate their jobs by adding unnecessary layers of administrative structure can make it impossible for them to function effectively. For every subcontract that is made to administer a New Careers program, there is an unnecessary duplication of administrative effort. This leads to areas of conflict and misunderstanding which can seriously damage a program. From the Minneapolis New Careers experience, a simplified, unified staff which is located in one place seems by far the best model for administration of a work/study program for low-income students.

Agency Commitments

The Minneapolis New Careers program demanded and received an extraordinary commitment on the part of its enrollees and the University of Minnesota to make the program successful in achieving its goals. However, the failure on the part of the agencies to provide permanent jobs with built-in career ladders for the enrollees was disappointing. With the exception of the Minneapolis Public Schools, and a few small agencies such as Family and Children's Service, most agencies failed to provide career ladders for advancement.

There were several apparent reasons for this failure of commitment. First, many agencies failed to develop a line item in their budgets for the New Careers

portion of their staffing on a permanent basis. It was the intent of the timing plan which was part of the program to distribute the burden of salary payments so that agencies could make provisions for future funding. Very few agencies, however, used this device.

Second, many agencies did not perceive the paraprofessional as having much usefulness to their functions, and were reluctant to take on the job of restructuring that would have been necessary for enrollees to be most valuable in their roles as "bridge" personnel. And, since the paraprofessionals were not seen as uniquely valuable to the operation of the agency, their jobs were not seen as worth funding on a permanent basis.

Third, the use of paraprofessionals requires a pool of very skilled supervisors at the agency. These people, to be successful at utilizing the enrollees, had to envision the roles they would fill and then respond creatively in training the enrollee to play those roles. This supervisory talent, for various reasons, was very sparse in the agencies to which New Careerists were assigned. This problem only made the usefulness of enrollees seem even less deserving of permanent funding; but in fact, it was lack of response in the agencies that was at fault in many cases.

In light of these contributing factors, some recommendations can be made in regard to agency commitments. First, if public service agencies are to be asked for a long-term commitment to employ paraprofessionals, then their slim financial resources must be bolstered to enable them to meet their added financial obligations. Two possible sources of funding seem most likely to fulfill this need. First, there is a need for continuing Federal subsidies to public service agencies which provide jobs of this type. In this light, a Public Service Careers Program seems a welcome innovation, if it can provide a subsidy for job creation. Its upgrading emphasis, which permits regular staff to take training for upward mobility, reducing the resentment felt for the New Careerist because of his special opportunity, is certainly on the right track.

Second, it can be suggested that one of the priorities of United Fund or Community Chest organizations could be giving financial support to the development of paraprofessional positions in the agencies that are funded by these organizations.

Third, experiments are needed in the area of supervision. At this point, there is little evidence as to what makes an effective supervisor or how supervisors themselves can be trained to work with paraprofessionals in the human services. Documented research studies in this area are necessary. One such experiment has been suggested above; many others can be devised and evaluated. Particular attention can be focused on the effects on supervision of 1) professionalization; 2) the nature of the enrollee's tasks; 3) the type and structure of the agency; 4) the approach of the supervisor toward supervision; and 5) the role of persons outside the agency in providing partial or total supervision.

Finally, professional schools in education, health, law and social work must develop coursework that enabled their graduate students, who will be the new professionals to work within a team which will include the paraprofessional.

Summary

In sum, many recommendations for future programs can be made on the basis of the Minneapolis New Careers program. First, the nature of the work/study model which New Careers employs dictates flexibility on the part of employing agencies, the educational institution, and the staff of the program. Second, the unique needs of a low-income population such as the one New Careers involved require somewhat different curriculum development and supportive services than those offered for the conventional University student. Third, administrative complexities of a program such as New Careers must be kept at a minimum if the creative, responsive staff it needs is to be able to function. And finally, several remedial steps -- and other experimental ones-- need to be taken to enable agencies to make the fulfill a long-term commitment to employing paraprofessionals.

APPENDIX A:

INTRODUCTION TO THE MINNEAPOLIS NEW CAREERS PROGRAM

Beginning in the summer of 1967, the Minneapolis New Careers Program was funded by the Department of Labor, drawing its legislative authority and financial muscle from the 1966 "Scheuer Amendment" to the Economic Opportunity Act. The program has been administered by the Community Action Program of Hennepin County Mobilization of Economic Resources (MOER) Board.

The New Careers concept involves three somewhat independent goals or purposes. First, there is the goal of helping low income people enter the job market in an area of high demand and great social need, namely human service occupations. Secondly, the New Careers concept aims at improving services themselves by allowing the low income aide or worker to help the middle class professional relate to a variety of "minority" groups: e.g., the poor, the non-white, the alienated. Third, the concept implies the development of new careers - the creation of socially useful jobs at entry-level with appropriate education and training allowing for advancement on the career ladder within the agency, or between agencies.

While these three major goals may appear somewhat unrelated, they are actually fused together by a pervasive goal: the restructuring of staffing patterns in human service agencies and institutions with accompanying changes in higher educational institutions, in order to achieve a relevant response to the unique education needs of those advancing in New Careers.

Frank Riessman and Arthur Pearl in their 1965 publication, New Careers for the Poor, provided the theoretical framework for the New Careers movement. Within this framework wide latitude was permitted in the design of experimental programs which implement the Riessman and Pearl objectives. In Minneapolis, the experimental model had two features that clearly distinguished it from other developing programs throughout the country: one is that from the first, the Minneapolis program was firmly anchored in an institution of higher learning, the University of Minnesota, where an experimental education component is being tested with the cooperation of the General College and the General Extension Division. The second distinguishing feature arises from the fact that the Minneapolis Public Schools had 115 of the 207 allotted job slots. This gave the program a strong slant on education as the new career field of emphasis. Diverse career opportunities in recreation, employment, corrections, care of the mentally retarded and mentally ill, however, were also significant in the Minneapolis program.

For the enrollee, the purpose of the program was to provide jobs with built-in career ladders, and academic credentials that would enable them to utilize these advancement possibilities. At the beginning of the program, enrollees were placed in human service agencies in entry-level positions. They were also enrolled in an educational component - for most, the University of Minnesota.

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