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THE HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE
BUREAU OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

by
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The admonition, "you don't know what you're starting," would have been uncommonly apt for Mr. Louis B. Wilson, Director of the Mayo Foundation when, in 1922, he suggested to Lotus B. Coffman, then president of the University of Minnesota, that the University hold a conference to discuss the improved selection of students who desired to enter medicine and other professions. For it was from this oblique beginning that the 37-year-old program of self-study and the Bureau of Institutional Research at the University of Minnesota stemmed. As a result of the letter from Mr. Wilson, President Coffman appointed a special Committee on Educational Guidance to consider the proposal. It did not take the committee long to discover, however, that it knew very little about students, either before, during, or as a result of, their university training, and even less about testing or educational and vocational guidance.

After nearly a year of study the committee recommended "that the president of the University appoint an educational research committee which shall promote the study and investigation of educational problems within the University. Such agency should not, for the present at least, have administrative functions, but should be for the purpose of investigation, experimentation, publicity, and cooperation among administrative agencies now existing. The immediate purpose of such a research committee would be to provide means of coordinating research now being done by

individuals in the University, of advising in regard to the direction which research should take and the methods to be employed, and in promoting the dissemination of resulting information throughout the University."

Thus the early ancestor of the Bureau of Institutional Research was an informally structured committee of faculty members and administrators who were to initiate studies, support, and coordinate educational research conducted by individuals during the succeeding quarter of a century. From the beginning, emphasis was placed upon the research and investigative role of the committee, and its function of encouragement and service to the faculty, rather than to the administration of the University.

As a result of this recommendation, President Coffman appointed a 14-member committee in 1924, which consisted of most of the college deans and certain key members of the teaching staff. Melvin E. Haggerty, Dean of the College of Education, was named as the first chairman of the newly formed University Committee on Educational Research. Dean Haggerty remained as chairman of this committee until his death in 1937 and most of the original members also served during this entire period. After Dean Haggerty's death, T. R. McConnel served as chairman of the Committee for about ten years. In 1948, the name of the unit was changed from the Committee on Education Research to the Bureau of Institutional Research. Ruth E. Eckert, who had been directing the work of the central office since 1940, was named coordinator of the Bureaus of Institutional and Educational Research (the latter a research unit of the College of Education), and an associate director was named for each bureau. Robert J. Keller, who was named associate director of the Bureau under Dr. Eckert, became the director of the Bureau of Institutional Research in 1950. Since that time the Bureau has been

headed by its own full-time director, although office facilities, equipment, clerical staff and some other personnel, have continued to be shared with the Bureau of Educational Research.

Until 1930 actual working quarters needed for research studies by the Committee were in large part provided by the chairman and members of the sub-committee appointed for each study. In many cases the facilities of the already existing Bureau of Educational Research of the College of Education were used because many of the faculty working on early projects came from the College of Education staff. As both bureaus grew in size and activity, additional quarters were provided, until this past year the two units moved into new quarters specially designed for their activities.

When the Bureau of Institutional Research was set up in 1948, the faculty committee became an advisory committee to the director of the Bureau and a standing committee of the University Senate. In contrast to the earlier years, recent members of this advisory committee have tended to be teaching faculty rather than deans, with nearly all of the areas of the University on all three campuses represented by its 14 members.

From its inception, the earlier Committee on Educational Research considered itself to be a faculty research unit rather than a group set up to do special research for the administration. As a result, research studies of immediate interest to members of the University's administration, sometimes referred to as administrative research studies, were conscientiously avoided and left to other units. However, the pressures of World War II were responsible for two large scale studies carried out by presidential request in the early 1940's, a curriculum survey and a faculty load study. As the research of the Bureau gained increased acceptance and as the size of the professional staff increased, requests for special studies

for the central administration also increased. Due to this increased demand, and because it was believed that the Bureau would be strengthened, an Administrative Research Unit was set up within the Bureau in 1956. Additional staff and budgets were made available to support these new research activities, however, in keeping with the belief that faculty control of the research activities of the Bureau should continue, and that precautions should be taken to see that the administrative research activities did not dominate the attention of the Bureau staff.

A study of the institutional research focus at the University of Minnesota during the past 35 years is revealing. As might be expected from the origins of the Committee on Education Research, research emphasis during the first 15 years of the Committee was on studies of student personnel, student selection, testing, admissions, and retention. This is not to say that some studies of class size, methods of instruction, curriculum, and faculty characteristics, among others, were not also conducted, but the primary focus was upon the students. During the 1940's studies of students and testing practices continued but increased attention was given to problems of curriculum and instruction. With the increasing development of the Student Counseling Bureau at Minnesota, which has assumed continuous responsibility for research in that area, the Bureau's research emphasis on curriculum and instruction and on studies of faculty and staffing has increased.

Because the historical development of the Bureau has been reported in the introductory chapter of the volume A University Looks at Its Program, I have covered only the highlights of the development and staffing of the Bureau since its inception in 1924. Rather than repeat the material reported in that chapter, I would like to discuss the current operation

of the Bureau, its place in the administrative organization of the University, and its relationship to faculty and administration.

The role of the Bureau of Institutional Research at the University of Minnesota is stated in the Faculty Handbook distributed to all new staff members as follows: "The Bureau of Institutional Research is a special research unit maintained by the University for the study of its own educational and administrative problems. It is a fact-finding organization with no responsibility for modifying university instruction or administration. It seeks only to discover through scientific inquiries the answers to problems that arise in the educational work of a great university

" . . . The Bureau offers consultative aid to individuals and staff groups pursuing the study of special problems, provides the proper facilities for many kinds of educational investigation, and conducts experimental research on approved projects.

"(It) is a research-service unit maintained especially for the faculty of the University of Minnesota. Faculty members are cordially invited to use it."

As the organization chart (Figure 1) indicates, the Bureau is an independent, all-University unit directly responsible to the academic vice-president. It consists of two units, a general educational research unit and an administrative research unit, coordinated by the Director and an office supervisor.

From a beginning where projects were conceived, developed, and conducted by a committee of faculty members working with special appropriations and with part-time clerical and student help, institutional research at the University of Minnesota has grown into a formalized Bureau with a

full and part-time staff of 16 persons. The staff is comprised of five full-time professional staff members (in addition to the director), seven part-time positions for graduate student workers, an office supervisor, and two secretaries.

In the early days of the Committee on Educational Research, faculty members would propose research studies to the Committee and if the Committee found the proposal to be of substantial worth, it would recommend an appropriation to cover the necessary expenses of conducting the study and to cover, in some instances, the cost of relieving the teacher of part of his teaching load in order to conduct the research. In those days, special appropriations had to be obtained from the president's office to cover such expenses, but after 1938, when the committee received its first listing in the University printed budget, project allocations were made without special request. As the size of the University has increased, however, a smaller proportion of the Bureau's studies has been conducted with individual faculty members, and a larger proportion in cooperation with faculty committees or as a Bureau initiated project. Today research proposals may come from individual faculty members, faculty committees of the various colleges, the University Senate, standing senate committees, deans or department heads, the president or other members of his central administration, or from the Director and members of the Bureau staff.

One of the important functions served by the Bureau is that of providing opportunity for graduate students to receive valuable experience in educational research while completing their graduate studies. For qualified individuals it is possible to begin with a half-time research assistantship and move up to a half-time or even a full-time research

fellowship with the Bureau. Some feel that the provision of such experience for persons who are going into college and university work is, in itself, justification for the institutional research unit at Minnesota. Graduate students who fill these part-time positions are usually students majoring in educational psychology, psychology, sociology, or statistics. Occasionally graduate students from journalism or school administration are hired. The list of prominent individuals who served an apprenticeship in this research unit can be quoted with pride. Included are such persons as: Alvin Eurich, vice-president of the Ford Foundation; Henry Harmon, President of Drake University; G. Lester Anderson, Vice-Chancellor for Educational Affairs, University of Buffalo; C. Robert Pace, Chairman of the Department of Psychology at Syracuse University; John Dobbin, Director of the Cooperative Test Division of the Educational Testing Service; Marcia Edwards, Associate Dean of the College of Education at Minnesota; and Marjorie Moore, a Division Head for the Vocational Rehabilitation Office of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, among many others.

As the Bureau is now constituted, its scope of institutional research is essentially unlimited. However, because certain kinds of institutional research have traditionally been conducted by other university departments, the Administrative Research Unit has purposely avoided any encroachment upon activities which other units might consider to be their special domain. The Bureau frequently cooperates with these other units, however, in making analyses of costs, budget allocation, faculty load, enrollments, or student characteristics. As a result, institutional research at Minnesota is not completely centralized in one unit.

The Bureau also provides leadership in certain studies involving all institutions of higher education in the state of Minnesota and in research in higher education for the state legislature. One example of the first service is the annual enrollment forecast and attendance report made by the Bureau. Another example is the proposed state-wide cost and statistical study designed by the Bureau, to be conducted in cooperation with the Association of Minnesota Colleges. The volume Higher Education in Minnesota reports a series of research studies conducted by the Bureau for a legislative Commission on Higher Education, and represents service to the state which is typical.

The sampling of projects described in the volume A University Looks at Its Program gives a clear indication of the kinds of studies which the Bureau conducts, except for the recently instituted administrative research studies. A classification of the major projects conducted by the Bureau during the past 18 years, by type of study, is included among your materials, although this table does not include many of the individual studies conducted by staff members for which the Bureau provided advisory service. This table shows the limited number of controlled experiments and the heavy emphasis upon survey-type studies. We are striving to achieve a better balance, both between experimental and descriptive studies and between applied and theoretical research.

The costs of research studies are covered almost entirely from the Bureau's budget. In certain instances cross-charges are arranged to cover unusual printing or mailing costs, or other out-of-the-pocket expenses, but aside from these, all costs of services of the professional staff of the Bureau, clerical assistance, and costs of writing and producing reports are borne by the Bureau's budget.

Because the order of priority has been on the problems of the University first, on higher education in Minnesota second, and on higher education in the nation third, invitations from governmental or other outside agencies to seek contracts for special research studies have been consistently declined and the Bureau has actively sought such a grant only once in the past twelve years. The policy has been to avoid any outside contract commitments unless they fit especially well into the current research interests of the Bureau.

Projects currently underway or in the design stage include the following: (1) an evaluation of the School of Architecture program by all registered architects in Minnesota; (2) evaluation of the effects of the use of dental assistants upon the attitudes and productivity of dental students; (3) a study of faculty attraction and retention; (4) a class size experiment in accounting; (5) honor students' perceptions of college teaching as a career; (6) differential attitudes and interests of college and university faculty members; (7) comparative analyses of faculty activities; (8) a developmental analysis of budget allocations during the past 20-25 years; and (9) a pilot study to determine how college teachers set their levels of expectation concerning the work and achievement of their students, and how these levels differ. Attempts are continually being made to broaden the scope of activity, both in types of study and in the areas of the University involved.

The involvement of the faculty in the development of the institutional research program at Minnesota has resulted in an atmosphere of understanding cooperation with the Bureau's research requests -- both general and administrative -- which is not easy to come by. Too often, in my estimation, if any institutional research is done, it is done by and for a member of the

administration, and the faculty resents such research, not because they think it is unnecessary, but because they do not feel that they are a part of such research, except as it is imposed upon them. In my estimation, a sound institutional research program best serves an institution if at least as much service is provided to the faculty as is provided to the administration, and if faculty participation is ensured in the research program. In this way the administration's benefits are both direct and indirect.