The Assessment of College Student Need: First Step in a Prevention Response

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This article introduces the assessment process, reviews selected assessment studies, and presents a unique procedure for identifying college student needs, leading to a prevention response.

The primary purpose of college and university counseling centers has been traditionally viewed as providing remediation for students' problems (Garni, 1980; Nejedlo, Wood, Drake, & Weissberg, 1977). Counseling programs and services were understood as being limited to the confines of the counselor's office; students were understood as being served on a one-to-one, voluntary basis when stimulated by enough dissonance to seek out the counseling center's services for help with academic, career, and personal concerns. In effect, counseling center personnel found themselves in a position of reacting to the needs of the students on campus.

More recently, counseling centers have begun to offer additional interventions aimed at the prevention of student problems (Drum & Figler, 1973; Gill & Fruehling, 1979; Nejedlo et al., 1977). Outreach programs, consultation efforts, and similar prevention-oriented interventions are now reported by 70% of all counseling centers included in the annual *Counseling Center Data Bank* (Domke, Winkelpleck, & Westefeld, 1980).

This trend toward prevention has gained impetus from at least three sources. First, there have been new intervention models introduced that emphasize prevention (Miller & Prince, 1976; Morrill & Hurst, 1971; Morrill, Oetting, & Hurst, 1974). Second, developmental theories that explain the growth and development of college students have received wide acceptance as ways to view, understand, and intentionally influence student behavior (Chickering, 1969; Heath, 1968; Miller & Prince, 1976; Perry, 1970). Finally, an increased interest in preventive programming can be found on the institutional level, where there has been an outcry for accountability and pressure for service units to demonstrate their contribution to the success and staying power of students (Mayes & McConatha, 1982).

Counseling centers today offer both remedial and preventive services. The addition of preventive services has presented several issues for agencies to confront and resolve: (a) where best to target efforts for productive results; (b) how to use limited resources and available staff time; and (c) how to clarify and communicate multiple roles to students, faculty, and administrators within the higher educational community.

These and other agency concerns are illustrated by recently published surveys. Lewing and Cowger (1982) found in a study of 106 counseling centers that over 50% of staff time was allocated for individual appointments dealing with educational, personal, and career issues. Lombardi (1974) found that 128 counseling centers devoted 25% of their current resources to prevention but would ideally increase this to 34%.

Staff time needed to offer traditional counseling services seems to be a critical area when increases in preventive programming are planned. Various user surveys have found that traditional counseling approaches take a majority of staff time, even though they are used by less than half of all enrolled students during their college years (Carney & Barak, 1976; Hummers & DeVolder, 1979). Perception studies have often found a majority of students describing counseling services as beneficial, essential, and extremely useful; yet, half of these students indicated they would not use the service (Benedict, Apsler, & Morrison, 1977; Fullerton & Potkay, 1973). Prevention-oriented programs, on the other hand, have been shown to reach several times the number of contacts usually reached through traditional methods (Drum & Figler, 1973). It seems that a small percentage of students take a large percentage of counselor time for remedial purposes. This fact mandates the necessity for accurate assessments of students' needs if the

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agency is to achieve maximum effectiveness from prevention-based programming.

The Counseling Center at Kansas State University has struggled with this issue. During the staff planning workshop prior to the beginning of the 1981 academic year, the problem of reconciling the time and energy demands for remediation activities with the center's publicly espoused prevention philosophy was addressed with vigor. The center announced that it "provided assistance and services to promote the development of productive and healthy lives" (*Counseling Center Year-End Report*, 1981, p. 1). This prevention-based philosophy was implemented through several active modes: credit courses, paraprofessional training, educational workshops, campus consultation, and self-improvement programs specifically targeted at students enrolled in specific academic colleges.

Strides in prevention programming were being made, but not to the point that center personnel were satisfied. Seminars and outreach programs were not always well-attended; even when they were well-received, their impact was difficult to measure. The center's data management system provided extensive information on traditional counseling clients but did not tap into issues concerning how students in general thought, acted, or experienced college life. An informational gap dealing with the concerns, needs, and interests of the majority of the student body existed.

It was decided to establish as a major goal for the 1981–1982 academic year a needs assessment project that would seek to identify and explain the needs of students attending our institution. The process of this effort included a search for formal and informal ways to gather data, a series of pilot attempts to try out assessment techniques (some successful, some resulting in dead ends), a comparative review of literature about students nationally and at other institutions, and a reflection of how our data about students could lead to more effective prevention efforts. This article is a report of our efforts up to the present time.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Definitions and Purposes

Assessment is generally accepted as an early stage for a problem-solving, intervention-directed activity (Brown, 1981; Corazzini, 1981; Gill & Fruehling, 1979; Kuh, 1982; Miller & Prince, 1976; Wilson & Yager, 1981). Assessment data are gathered to be analyzed and interpreted for explaining and forming hypotheses for the planning of program interventions (Lenning, 1980). The process has been described as "the glue" that holds any developmentally based program together (Miller, 1982).

The assessment process follows five steps: specifying of goals and objectives, design of an assessment system, selection of measures and data-gathering methods, collection of the data, and the system's interpretation and use (Lenning, 1980). Kuh (1982) enumerated five major uses for needs assessment when applied to groups:

1. monitoring stockholder perceptions for relating to constituents on relevant issues;
2. choosing and justifying selection of program offerings;
3. obtaining an estimation of the acceptability of program alternatives on the campus;
4. providing for participatory policy making; and
5. measuring for change and improvement of groups or individual participants in intervention programs.

Scriven and Roth (1978) pointed out that accurate assessment will identify student needs and increase the likelihood of improving their behaviors.

Criticisms

In spite of the general acceptance that needs assessment is important for program planning, there is considerable criticism about what has been practiced under the rubric *assessment*. Many of the tools and techniques used to assess the level of students' development and their needs are at best gross instruments rather than specific measures (Brown, 1981). Instruments designed to measure individual characteristics can be misinterpreted when viewed as group norms. In other cases, instruments designed for the purpose of developmental needs assessment are so complex to administer and score that data gathering becomes prohibitively cumbersome (Hanson, 1982).

Further criticism suggests that assessment is too focused and narrowly conceived. Assessed variables are often confounded by interaction with other context factors. If the complex relationship of needs to environment is not understood, results have little use for application (Heath, 1980). Because the group or individual being assessed often cannot accurately identify needs in the manner requested, the resulting validity of those data is questionable (Wilson & Yager, 1981). In addition, researchers may ask questions to affirm their own program needs rather than to accurately identify the needs of the students (Warner, 1975).

The needs assessment process taken at any one point in time may give the appearance that development is static for a population (Kuh, 1982). Acceptance of the assumptions implicit in developmental and systems theories would indicate that we are likely capturing a still picture of what is really a continuous scene. By the time we view the picture, it is history; the results and potential use of the data are negated.

Other criticisms surrounding the assessment process include the failure on the part of many researchers to identify the implications of the results. Also, when implications are delineated, they may not be implemented due to other institutional priorities (Hanson, 1982).

Suggestions for Improvement

Several suggestions have been made to minimize some of the difficulties identified above and to improve the success of needs assessments. Heath (1980) suggested that the measurement process should seek dimensions that quantify amounts and degree. He also asserted that measurement of healthy growth should consider the complexity of interactions and the holistic relationships of a system. Kuh (1982) cited several guiding principles for conducting needs assessment, including:

1. The process is continuous, capable of viewing change and requiring adaptations along the way.
2. Assessment is a series of steps that guide planning as a responsive process.
3. Assessment is open to public scrutiny, with values of the vested persons acknowledged and recognized publicly.
4. Assessment is viewed from many perspectives through multifaceted data.

Miller and Prince (1976) suggested that the results of assessment should be made known in an accurate, descriptive manner that respects the choices and values of those assessed. It becomes the responsibility of the assessor to inform and educate all interested parties of the results and describe how these results may be used.

Given the criticisms surrounding the assessment process and the improvements articulated by authorities in the area, the following criteria were determined as important for guiding the decision-making process as it applied to this assessment project:

1. Predetermined goals and purpose would guide the needs assessment process.
2. Multiple means for measuring and observing students from a variety of perspectives would be used where possible.
3. Student needs should emanate from the minds of students rather than from the questions and agendas of the researchers.
4. Information about the context and relationships of students interacting with their environment as a system would be preferred over processes that attempt to isolate single factors.
5. Results should be understood as tentative and evolving rather than as fixed and final; every attempt should be made to note trends and the fluid state of the individual and his or her milieu.
6. Primary emphasis would be on translating results to implications and interventions.
7. We would be open to hear our own results, to evaluate our present program and recognize the need for change, to communicate our weaknesses as well as our strengths, and to allow this information to be clear and open knowledge to the academic community.

The Assessment Question: What is the Nature of the College Student?

An important first step in generating an understanding of local student needs is to have a sense of the trends and influences of the larger society. Large-scale surveys have been conducted by the Carnegie Commission and Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education (Levine, 1980) and the Cooperative Educational Research Program co-sponsored by the American Council on Education and the University of California at Los Angeles (Astin, 1976, 1978, 1982). DeCoster and Mable (1981) coordinated a project to better understand the student and college life through content analysis of taped discussion groups held on 22 campuses across the nation. Stodt (1982) summarized the implication of the "psychological" characteristics of college students in the 1980s.

These studies paint a picture of today's student as self-centered, materialistic, pragmatic, vocationally oriented, politically middle-of-the-road, and highly competitive for the grade as a ticket for success. Students were seen as friendly and sexually permissive; yet, they still felt a sense of alienation, loneliness, and apathy. Student social activism was minimal, cynicism about society was high, and optimism concerning individual success ran high.

A CASE EXAMPLE

It was decided that questions concerning student needs on campus could be explored by undertaking a three-stage process: (a) discovering what was already known concerning these students, (b) collecting further data about the students' needs and motivations, and (c) formulating implications for prevention programs to meet these identified needs.

What is Known

Two compilations of data on the campus provided important perspectives concerning the character and needs of students. Phelan and Lynch (1982) provided summary data on enrollment trends, academic records, and ACT profiles for students during the past 10 years. From these studies, it was noted that students fell below the national mean on certainty of academic major and choice of a future career. New students overestimated their prospective GPA, as indicated by their subsequent performance. Students in 1982 saw a greater need for support services in academic assistance, vocational choice, and personal counseling than students a decade earlier.

The second document was a Delphi survey used to gather the opinion of student affairs staff concerning the needs of students on campus in the next 10 years (Student Personnel Service's Futures Task Force, 1982). This document was helpful in checking the congruence between what students were saying about themselves and what practitioners believed to be important.

Probing the Unknown: A TAT Study of Today's Student

In the fall of 1982, the needs assessment team was ready to initiate an inquiry to better understand the motivations, concerns, and anticipations of students on campus. The intent was to discover the subtle, less openly discussed needs of students, as well as the more apparent nature of student character.

Two methods of collecting data—the paper-and-pencil questionnaire and the structured interview—were rejected as being too vulnerable to a social expectancy response. Students are adept at responding to these types of data-gathering procedures in ways that they believe the "teacher desires." A method of inquiry was needed that could avoid this problem.

It was decided that a projective device analogous to the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) would be most appropriate for this study. Theoretically, the projective device provided data of particular interest concerning the nature of student's personality. Motivation theory seeks to answer why a person engages in certain activities and what energizes or directs one toward specific goals. McClelland (1971) experimentally derived three operational constructs of human motivation: the need to achieve, the need for power, and the need for affiliation. He concluded that the most unique, sensitive, reliable, and valid measure of these motivational dispositions was the use of the TAT.

The TAT is a method for "revealing the dominant sentiments, emotions, drives, or complexes of an individual personality" (Murray, 1943, p. 1). It uses a series of pictures, usually ambiguous human situations, about which the participant is asked to make up creative spontaneous stories. The instrument is well known and has "sufficiently commended itself, from the point of view of psychological theory and practice, to become one of the most widely used of the projective techniques" (Freeman, 1955, p. 545). Coehlo, Solomon, Wolff, Steinberg, and Hamberg (1969) adapted the TAT approach to a series of photographs depicting college situations and were able to predict with some accuracy students who would dropout 3 years later. Mullen and Abeles (1967) used a similar adaptation of the TAT to predict dropout behaviors in therapy with college students.

For this study, a TAT-type set of stimulus pictures was developed to elicit responses around such areas as self-esteem, peer relations, direction in life, achievement, and family relations. There were 10 photographs of various scenes, including a woman gazing at a daisy, a man pondering which road to take, two women in a lab, a student and a woman in an office. In order to have participants identify with the hero, male participants were shown five of these photographs with male students; females were shown the remaining five photographs with female students. A sixth photograph was a blank sheet of white paper and was administered as a completely ambiguous stimulus to all participants. Each participant was individually administered the six pictures by trained interviewers who followed standard TAT instructions (Murray, 1943). Administration time averaged 30 minutes per subject, with all responses audiotaped.

A stratified random sample was drawn from students enrolled during 1982–1983. Stratification was made to draw equal representation by gender and academic level (less than or greater than 60 semester hours). An issue in primary prevention is

targeting certain populations within the general student population for specific programming efforts, based on the belief that the student body is not homogeneous. Stratification on gender and academic level would help discover whether these groups did or did not possess different psychological needs and characteristics, thereby indicating the need for programming aimed at specific groups.

Initially, 120 students were randomly drawn from the registrar's file of students currently enrolled, distributed equally by gender and academic level. This number afforded a sufficient supply of participants to account for attrition due to inaccessibility, refusal to participate, or no-shows at the time of administration. The total of 65 participants (54% of those invited to participate) in the final sample achieved the objective of obtaining a minimum of 15 subjects per cell (i.e., male/female by upper-class/lower-class status).

The content of the tapes was analyzed through a two-step procedure. First, all audiotapes were evaluated by two raters who summarized tape content into a written description of the themes and the identified needs/press imagery. The written summaries, made blind to demographic identification, were then independently analyzed by four judges using the need for achievement (N Ach), need for power (N Pow), and need for affiliation (N Aff) scoring profiles contained in McClelland (1958).

Need for achievement is defined as competition with a standard of excellence, unique accomplishment, or long-term involvement with a task. *Need for power* is defined as the expressed desire to influence someone and undertake activity to maintain or gain control. *Need for affiliation* is defined as a desire to establish, maintain, or restore a positive affective relationship.

Scoring of need themes used the presence or absence of need imagery method ($+1$, 0, -1) suggested by Terhune (1969). Three subcategories—specific aspects of need/press imagery—were also scored in the same manner: activity of a problem-solving nature (PSA), anticipation of a favorable outcome (FO), and positive impact of environmental press (EP). A further analysis of content categorized specific descriptions of student needs into major themes through a process-seeking agreement between two judges.

RESULTS
The data were analyzed to determine interrater reliability for the six scales: N Ach, N Pow, N Aff, PSA, FO, and EP. Coefficient alpha was used to compute reliability. All 65 profiles generated in the study were used in the calculation, as judges rated all participants. Alpha values ranging from .82 to .90 were attained for five of the six scales. N Pow was the lowest scale, with a reliability of .64.

Table 1 summarizes the percentages of responses for the six rated scales by gender, class level, and total for all 65 participants. A comparison of the observed-versus-expected frequency of observations in each of the three scoring categories was made between males and females and between students enrolled in less than 60 hours and students enrolled in more than 60 hours.

Only 21% of the total sample showed N Ach, with 31% displaying doubtful or routine N Ach and nearly half the sample (48%) showing no N Ach. The overall percentage of students with achievement imagery would seem low; however, there are no established norms for students in general to determine whether this is an unusual finding. N Aff, on the other hand, was present in 45% of the sample, indicating a stronger need for affiliation. The chi-square analysis showed significance in both N Ach and N Aff by gender comparison. Women showed less need imagery for N Ach than men and more short-term or routine accomplishment. Women were much higher on affiliation than men, with significance reaching the .001

level. Of the sampled women, 65% were rated for N Aff, while 58% of the men were rated with no N Aff. Significance was approached ($p < .10$) but not met for N Pow, with women showing greater N Pow than men.

There were no significant differences on any of the subscales on the variables indicated. Significance was approached ($p < .10$) for environmental press, with upper-division students more likely to view the environment in either positive or negative terms, while most undergraduates viewed the environment in a mixed or neutral way. An interesting observation was the large percentage of the entire sample who expected a favorable or mixed outcome (FO) to their situation, with only 22% expecting negative consequences.

To better understand the specifics of the major themes brought out in the student stories, a content analysis was made collapsing these themes into seven categories. The descriptions and frequencies of these categories are given in Table 2.

Although these results are not surprising, they do highlight problem areas that students encounter. Developmental issues—autonomy and relationship—account for over 50% of the concerns students presented. Developing purpose in life accounted for another 25% of the issues facing students. The need to handle the stress brought on by the psychological and environmental press constituted 18% of the student needs expressed.

DISCUSSION
The results from this study were compared to several other sources of local and national information about students to deduce observations concerning their needs. Each of the following observations contain recommendations for interventions. Several have been implemented for initiating a prevention response.

Observation One
A significant number of the students expressed worry, anxiety, or stress as a major theme in their lives. They expressed a need to get away from the pressures they experienced. The range of outlets for stress included relaxing, exercising, being alone, or "letting go and getting drunk." The Delphi survey (Student Personnel Service's Futures Task Force, 1982) conducted by the student affairs staff was also attuned to these needs, which suggested the promotion of good health and stress management as the highest priorities of the future. As a recommendation, the Division of Student Affairs initiated for the coming year an interdepartmental task force to begin a program called Vita, meaning *life*, to promote and communicate wellness and health enhancement activities for students.

Observation Two
The "Titanic Ethic," a description coined by Levine (1980) to describe students who see doom in the world around them but still feel they will somehow be survivors for the good life, was apparent in this study. Expectations for a favorable outcome (FO) exceeded the strength of student motivation to achieve (N Ach) or the presence of activity to solve problems (PSA) (see Table 1). This result was maintained in spite of a perception of the environment that was more negative or neutral than positive. Another example of this phenomenon was the students' tendency to overestimate their actual first-year GPA by a considerable amount (Phelan & Lynch, 1982). Student projective stories revealed the frequent use of phrases depicting uncertainty, unpreparedness, and despair; yet, these same stories would still result in a happy ending—"everything would turn out all right."

Selective blindness may be a difficult illness to prevent when the fantasy vision may seem more pleasant than reality. As a recommendation, to shock students into an awareness of reality now may be more beneficial than the rude awakening of

TABLE 1

Response Ratings of Students' Picture-Stories

Categories		Males (n=31)	Females (n=34)	Less than 60 class hrs. (n=33)	More than 60 class hrs. (n=32)	Total (n=65)
N Achievement (N Ach)	N Ach imagery present	32%	12%	27%	16%	21%
	N Ach imagery doubtful	16	44	24	38	31
	N Ach imagery not present	52	44	48	47	48
		$\chi^2 = 7.48$*		$\chi^2 = 1.93$		
N Affiliation (N Aff)	N Aff imagery present	23%	65%	42%	47%	45%
	N Aff imagery doubtful	19	24	21	22	21
	N Aff imagery not present	58	12	36	31	34
		$\chi^2 = 16.86$**		$\chi^2 = .25$		
N Power (N Pow)	N Pow imagery present	19%	38%	21%	38%	29%
	N Pow imagery doubtful	23	32	24	31	28
	N Pow imagery not present	58	29	55	31	43
		$\chi^2 = 5.62$		$\chi^2 = 3.77$		
Problem-Solving Activity (PSA)	PSA overt	32%	26%	30%	28%	29%
	PSA lacks direction	35	44	33	47	28
	PSA not present	32	29	36	25	43
		$\chi^2 = .62$		$\chi^2 = 1.45$		
Favorableness of Outcome (FO)	FO imagery positive	32%	38%	36%	34%	35%
	FO imagery mixed	45	41	45	40	43
	FO imagery negative	23	21	18	25	22
		$\chi^2 = .26$		$\chi^2 = .45$		
Environment Press (EP)	EP imagery positive	16%	21%	12%	25%	18%
	EP imagery mixed	58	59	73	44	58
	EP imagery negative	26	21	15	31	23
		$\chi^2 = .36$		$\chi^2 = 5.63$		

*Significant at the .05 level.
**Significant at the .001 level.

tomorrow. So far, the best suggestion is to conduct "future shock" and "future cope" workshops that confront students with situations and problems that will need to be resolved. Perhaps, orientation programs should strive to show more of the realities of college life rather than the present-day programs of welcoming, testing, registering, and saying "I'll see you in the fall."

Observation Three
Of the students sampled, 76% viewed the environment as negative or neutral, using such phrases as "a hassle," "a runaround," "teachers are unfair," or "a landscape full of obsta-

cles" to describe their milieus. As a recommendation, institutions may be personalized in several ways, including both physical and human variables. Academic advisement, for example, can be improved for students and rewarded for faculty.

The Counseling Center at Kansas State University has initiated a peer-operated resource and information center. This information center, entitled U-LearN, answers telephone and drop-in inquiries about where various needs may be met on the campus and in the community. Any question not immediately answerable will be researched by the student staff. It also serves as a distribution center for self-help materials in such areas as career exploration, sexuality, wellness, study

TABLE 2

Frequency of Major Need Themes of College Students

(N = 65)

Need Theme Category Descriptions	f	% of N
Low Self-Esteem (depressed, concerned, lack confidence)	23	35%
Autonomy Issues (dependency, separation from family, being on one's own)	22	34%
Lacking Purpose (unsure, questioning values, bored, shallow, nondirection)	20	31%
Relationship Issues (loneliness, isolation, conflict with others, lack social skills)	15	23%
Stress and Health (pressure, anxiety, withdrawal, seeking outlets)	13	20%
Nonsupportive Environment (obstacles, hassles, feel unappreciated)	11	17%
Career Concerns (questioning employability, uncertain about decisions, confused)	9	14%

Note. These are story themes identified as concerns of unresolved problems found to be major themes in the students' picture stories. These themes were mutually identified by two judges.

skills, and it encourages students to seek out assistance for preventive purposes.

Observation Four

Affiliation—the need for relationships, support, and contact that is warm and accepting—is the most important need according to this study. The need in women is far greater, or at least more openly expressed, than in men. Many anecdotes in the stories referred to loneliness, isolation, a yearning for companionship and the duress of a relationship in conflict. The Student Personnel Service's Futures Task Force (1982) also listed the development of social human relations skills, in which friendships could be fostered and emotional support provided for students in the 1980s. Students seem to suffer from many social contacts that seem shallow or unfulfilling. What has often been perceived as a socially precocious generation may more likely be a generation reflecting a veneer of social skills that have been adopted from media portrayal but have only been superficially experienced. The increase in student interest in the Greek system and affiliation with close-knit religious organizations may be reflections of these trends.

The greatest impact for developing relationship skills will more likely come through peer contact. As a recommendation, a prevention emphasis could be developed through the training of residence hall assistants who can do both formal and informal intervention in the living area. Another program sponsored by the Counseling Center with considerable success involves peer counselors who offer programs on issues of dating, relating, and sexuality. The professional efforts are directed toward training, supervising, and consulting with the peers who deliver the service.

Observation Five

Evidence of students' planning toward future careers and life goals was less present through the story images than professional educators would typically describe. Activity for planning was more often described in short-term responses to immediate needs. For example, concern was expressed over meeting next week's deadline or being able to declare a major in time to register for next semester's classes. When asked whether they are concerned about careers, about one-third of all students will say they need help with these plans; the rest will indicate they are headed toward a specific goal. The statistics indicate that the average number of changes of major on campus is close to three per student over a 4-year college career. Students do use a multitude of career resources on campus but usually in response to the immediate pressure for choosing a major, preparing a term paper, or preparing for graduation and finding a job or continuing school.

At least one-third, and perhaps as many as half, of all students are moved by fate and happenstance more than by a plan of intentional purpose toward a career. One senior woman expressed this in her story; it suggested that "next year I will need to find some answers...as they will no longer be in the back of the book." Student affairs staff identified not only the need for careful planning, but also suggested that students will have to plan to be adaptable in redesigning their skills and training for a rapidly changing work world.

As a recommendation, a prevention program should close the gap between meeting the hand-to-mouth existence of short-term survival that many students go through and assisting in the ongoing preparation that is now necessary to be able to compete in the world of work. The Counseling Center has changed its program response in the last year from volunteer seminars to more intrusive interventions such as presentations in regular classes in an attempt to raise student awareness. A second response has been to increase the availability of multimedia, computer-based guidance and other drop-in access to career information through the resource center.

Observation Six

Alienation seemed to be present to a considerable extent on the campus. This was evidenced by statements that indicated a lack of purpose, uncertainty of direction, and questioning of meaning. Many referred to parents' or other authorities' values without being able to identify their own values orientation. One student yearned for a way that he could be "self-motivated." Another student wrestled with the dilemma of whether it would be okay to cheat, if that meant he would get a better grade. There was a sense that students did not know where to go or who to talk to concerning the resolution of values, purpose, and identity questions. The result on this campus seemed consistent with the discussion of DeCoster and Mable (1981) and Levine (1980), which emphasized an educational system that would confront and enable students to form a system of values and purpose.

The Student Personnel Service's Futures Task Force survey (1982) was also consistent by recommending a way to help students identify what is important to them and to be able to live in a manner consistent with these beliefs. It seems that this is a basic assumption of a liberal education that has somehow become lost in the classroom as well as in other areas of the campus. As a recommendation, a forum on developing purpose, values, and direction should come from all levels of the campus community and be emulated in the behavior of faculty, administrators, and students. Students need adult mentors to serve as models, and there is a question as to how many mentors are now available on campus for students. Perhaps, an intervention needs to be directed toward a workshop for faculty on mentoring and role models. This could be accomplished specifically through faculty development programs and the training of curriculum advisors.

SUMMARY

Conducting a needs assessment is much like the familiar Sufi story "Blind Ones and the Elephant" (Shah, 1967).

> A populace of blind people were anxious to hear of the strange and mighty elephant that was brought to their city by a royal entourage. They wanted to understand the truth about the nature and form of what they knew little about. One man felt an ear and described it as "large, rough, wide, and broad like a rug." Another felt the trunk and harkened with the real truth, "It is like a straight and hollow pipe, awful, and destructive." A third felt the leg and described it as "firm like a pillar." (p. 25)

Understanding the nature of the college student is likely to be more difficult and complex than describing an elephant and can potentially yield equally confusing results. The successful undertaking of a needs assessment requires important decisions concerning what to assess, how to assess, and where and when to target one's efforts. The research of student needs must also have an awareness that the nature of "this elephant" is dynamic, as it continually changes due to its own maturation and its interaction with the environment. Therefore, the rigor and thoroughness necessary for gathering data must be matched with flexibility and creativity to understand these interactions and determine useful applications from what is known. The advantage of these efforts lies in the realization that reliable needs assessment data can provide an essential first step in planning and implementing effective primary prevention strategies.

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