

How a Group of College Freshmen Regard their High School Background

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Much has been written by educators in recent years relative to the quality of education being provided in high schools. Particular emphasis has been placed by these writers on the kinds of programs high schools are providing for students who eventually enroll in institutions of higher learning.

Studies of this kind have been of great value in focusing attention on some of the current high school curricula and practices. Little has been written, however, on how college freshmen themselves look upon their high school background, once they have had a taste of college work. It is the purpose of this paper to reveal how a group of freshmen at Southwestern State College regard, in retrospect, the preparation they had received in high school.

Questionnaires were given to 232 freshmen enrolled in Freshman Orientation classes at Southwestern State College. This group did not include short business course students or pre-engineers but was composed nevertheless of a substantial sample of all other entering freshmen at Southwestern. The freshmen included in this study had been enrolled in college eight weeks. They came from high schools located in all parts of the State of Oklahoma, but principally from the west-central and southwestern part of the state. Their high schools ranged in enrollment from as few as 30 students to as many as 1500. Seventy-four per cent came from high schools of less than 300 enrollment.¹ Questions used in the questionnaire and responses of the freshmen follow.

Question A. What are Some of the Practices or Policies of Your High School or Any of Your High School Teachers That You Now Find Particularly Helpful to You in Your College Work?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
1. Expected me to learn what was taught	43	19
2. Provided me with a good background in English	37	16
3. Helped me to understand what college would be like	30	13
4. Required me to write themes and/or term papers	26	11
5. One or more teachers used college teaching methods	19	8
6. Stressed importance of a good math, science, and English background	18	8
7. Required me to take notes and taught me how to do so	15	6
8. One or more teachers took an interest in me and helped me	14	5
9. Taught me how to study and stressed improvement of reading	8	3
10. Stressed importance of assuming responsibility	6	3
11. Others	18	8

¹ Of interest is the fact that in the State of Oklahoma, 83.7 per cent of the high schools had a student enrollment of less than 200. Oklahoma Public Expenditures Council, "Cheating Our Children: Report on the Organization of Oklahoma High School Districts," Oklahoma City, Sept., 1956, p. 3.

The general tone of responses to this item was that high school teachers who had been strict in their requirements and insistent on high quality work were now deeply appreciated. Students who had had teachers of that kind found that they were better able to cope with certain college courses. Comments as the following were numerous:

"I had to get my lesson in and had to earn the grade I got." "I had an English teacher who helped me very much because she saw to it that we had our lessons. She wouldn't get our lessons for us. She expected you to have them prepared before class. Our other teachers didn't." "The best course in high school which helped me most was algebra. The teacher explained the math thoroughly and made us get our work in or flunk." "I had a very rough English teacher in high school. She gave very hard and numerous assignments." ". . . . My chemistry teacher didn't 'baby' us along as some do."

Question B. What are Some of the Things You Did in High School That You Now Feel Not Only Do Not Help You but Even Hamper You In Your College Work?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
1. Developed habits of loafing and of indifference toward studies	82	36
2. Didn't take enough of the "solids" (math, science, etc.)	36	16
3. Missed too many classes because of athletics and other activities	35	15
4. Teachers didn't care whether or not we really studied	20	9
5. Relied on others to do my work for me	10	4
6. Didn't develop certain skills (e. g. vocabulary, spelling, grammar, study methods)	9	4
7. Certain essential courses not offered	7	3
8. Didn't read enough	5	2
9. No response	27	11

A large number of respondents conveyed the idea that they had in one way or another wasted much of their time in high school. Some typical comments follow: "If you played sports, you didn't have to do much else. We got out of school lots of time to clear the football field or even to have the games in the afternoon. That didn't help any after coming to college." "We had our grades more or less given to us. We didn't have to go to class, if we had any kind of excuse."

Question C. Do You Think Your High School Could Have Done Certain Things That It Did Not Do That Would Have Helped You in College? Responses to this item were: Yes—182; No—46; No response—2. Those indicating Yes, made statements that have been classified as follows:

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
1. Should have offered classes that weren't so easy	39	18
2. Should have offered more (or better) courses in science	36	16
3. Should have offered more (or better) courses in math	27	12
4. Should have <i>required</i> students to take more of the "solids"	25	11

5. Should have offered a bigger variety of courses	24	11
6. Should have taught students how to study and have required us to take notes	17	7
7. Should have developed skills in grammar, theme-writing, use of library	17	7
8. Could have helped students prepare for college through better guidance	14	6
9. Should have helped students develop sense of responsibility toward college work	10	4

Question E. At What Point Did You Decide *Definitely* To Go To College?

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per Cent</i>
1. Before or during the 9th grade	96	33
2. During 10th or 11th grade	33	14
3. During the 12th grade	46	20
4. After graduating from high school	74	32
5. No response	3	1

The fact that so large a proportion of the respondents who eventually came to Southwestern had not definitely decided on going to college until they were seniors or had been graduated from high school points up the frequent absence of long-range planning among them and explains the inappropriateness for college of some of the courses they had completed in high school.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A questionnaire was given to 232 college freshmen at Southwestern State College to determine how they regarded their high school background now that they had experienced college work.

In general, these freshmen indicated the belief that they, themselves, and their high school staff could have done more to insure better preparation for college. Results showed that high school teachers who were more rigorous in their requirements were now greatly appreciated by their former students no matter how previously regarded. Responses further suggested that the relationship between high school and college courses was much more fully acknowledged by students after enrolling in college than was appreciated by them while in high school.

A large number of respondents indicated the belief that failure to develop certain skills and habits of study while in high school constituted a decided handicap to them in their college work. Failure of high schools to offer certain college preparatory courses or the inclination of students to steer away from such courses, when offered, in favor of shop and other vocational courses was also believed by many respondents to have kept them from attaining adequate preparation for college work.

The fact that over 50 per cent of the respondents indicated that they had not decided definitely on going to college until they had reached their senior year in high school or had been graduated from high school suggests a serious lack of long-range educational planning by students in many Oklahoma high schools. Responses to this and other items suggested strongly the need for an organized advisory program in a large number of the high schools.