

Library Enriches Precollege Experiences for Students

Experience is described using a task force of forty-one precollege students as library assistants under the auspices of the United States Office of Economic Opportunity. The students accomplished assignments usually given to college student assistants and in return clearly gained insight into library functions, activities, and services.

THE PRE-COLLEGE CENTER at Fisk University is one of six such centers in the United States. It was organized in 1964 by Educational Services, Incorporated, a leader in the development of excellent instructional materials in schools and colleges.

A major purpose of the program is to assist students from low income families, to increase the likelihood of their success in college. Open to all eligible high school seniors in Metropolitan Nashville, the program requires that students show evidence of the desire to improve themselves, have curiosity of an intellectual nature, and manifest the ability to pursue successfully a college career.

All funds for the program are supplied by the United States Office of Economic Opportunity with the expectation that experience in such programs will give capable students increased opportunities to work toward and attain their major goals in life.

Student participants are exposed to thought-provoking English and mathematics activities. The ultimate goal of such activities is to stimulate more constructive thinking, better speaking, improved reading, and greater insight into mathematical and English processes.

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The Pre-College Center faculty is composed of excellent teachers from local high schools and unusually capable students of Fisk University. Emphasis is placed upon securing faculty members who have: (a) excellent abilities in various subject matter areas; (b) skills in working with students democratically; (c) the ability to use the inductive teaching method; (d) ideas for developing exciting learning experiences; (e) the ability to stimulate provocative discussions and to involve all students in the learning process.¹

The program was initiated in March 1964. Classes during the school year were usually held on Saturday mornings. During an eight-week summer session students lived on campus and attended classes daily. In addition, they attended concerts, plays, and exhibits, and took a variety of field trips.

At the end of the 1965 summer term, these students were permitted and encouraged to participate in a four-week training program which provided them actual work experiences for which they received remuneration. Eighty-four students were employed in offices on campus, with the library requesting that forty-one be assigned as library aides. It was felt that through these services

¹ Fisk University, "The Pre-College Center," Nashville, Tennessee, n.d.

the library could focus on solving some of its problems that required immediate attention, while at the same time providing desirable library orientation for those students who probably were not familiar with library practices. Moreover, it was hoped that the experience would stimulate the young people to do wider reading for pleasure and classroom assignments and learn to work independently in solving problems requiring use of the library.

As soon as the training program was announced, the library assessed its needs and determined which could be met through the use of people who might or might not have had experience in library work. Under job identification the following were cited:

1. typing book pockets and cards, order cards, and book requisitions;
2. opening and checking in new books;
3. reading shelves;
4. mending, repairing, and marking books;
5. cleaning furniture and polishing brass;
6. dusting, sweeping, and vacuuming;
7. alphabetizing and filing catalog cards;
8. assisting with inventory;
9. cleaning library carrels where materials were stored and disposing of waste materials.

After a two-day training period students were assigned to duties according to their capabilities as indicated in the evaluation of the results of their brief training. They were subsequently assigned to adult supervisors who would be responsible for assigning their specific jobs.

Very early in the work program it was evident that the majority of the students needed constant supervision in order to perform their various assignments. For the most part they were capable of satisfactory performance on their specific jobs, or they were shifted to more suitable jobs; however, they tended

to be lax and sometimes failed to complete assignments without prodding. The students were agreeable and quite cheerful, and with proper stimulation they would complete jobs as assigned. Moreover, they seemed to enjoy carrying out most of the assignments. It was apparent that the problems that the students presented were problems that probably are characteristic of teenage groups. Three of the students who were especially good workers were retained and are now working as library assistants while studying at Fisk.

In addition to the contributions that these students made to the library, it was evident that there was mutual gain as result of such a program. Many of them displayed an active interest in reading and checked out library materials for home use. Others were interested in the books and materials that the library was discarding and asked if they might have these materials for personal use.

The majority of the students were originally unfamiliar with the kinds of materials that are provided in a library, as well as the organization of such materials for use. Their work at Fisk doubtless gave them a greater familiarity with the types of library resources and library organization than they would normally receive. As a result, it is hoped that they will have a greater and more lasting appreciation of libraries and will subsequently make greater use of them.

It can be concluded that Fisk University library and the library aides in the precollege training program have received mutual benefits. If these students have developed an increased interest in reading and in using the library, and if they have become sufficiently familiar with the organization of library materials to work independently in carrying out their assignments, they will ultimately receive the greater benefit as a result of the program.