PART II

To Help Them Achieve

An Academic Talent Research Project

1966-1968

School of General Studies
BROOKLYN COLLEGE
The City University of New York

in cooperation with
THE ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

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By Margaret Furcron

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Introduction

The Academic Talent Search Project, sponsored by Brooklyn College's School of General Studies and the Rockefeller Foundation, began with forty-two students in the Fall of 1964 and concluded its first phase in June 1966. At that time a complete report of this experimental effort to guide "disadvantaged" young people into regular college work was published under the title *To Help Them Achieve.* *

The Rockefeller Foundation generously made it possible for the students still enrolled in June 1966 to continue for another two years, and seventeen were still in attendance in Spring 1968.

The present report attempts to follow the Project through its last two years, place it in the context of other burgeoning programs for the "disadvantaged," and reexamine it by looking backward through the eyes of the College personnel involved.

For those not familiar with the earlier report, the nature and scope of the Project are reviewed here.

Despite the inevitable urge to describe the careers of individual students and to define the successes and failures of the Project in terms of the students' analysis, a deliberate decision was made not to subject them to additional interviews for the purposes of this report

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*Ellsworth Missall, **To Help Them Achieve: The Academic Talent Search Project** [New York, 1966]. Hereafter, this report will be referred to as **To Help Them Achieve – Part I**.

and not to "expose" individuals still at the College by including detailed biographical material. The students have been wholeheartedly cooperative in assisting in the evaluation of the program, but their desire to disappear quietly into the general student body has been long apparent. It was felt that their wishes should be respected.

The First Two Years

THE EXPERIMENT

In May of 1964 Brooklyn College's School of General Studies began the recruitment for the Academic Talent Search Project, an experimental program funded by the Rockefeller Foundation. It was designed to explore whether students with apparent college potential, but without the required academic standards for admission, could succeed in college despite financial and cultural deprivation in terms of middle-class values. These so-called "disadvantaged" students were to be offered all the social, academic, financial and psychological support that seemed necessary and appropriate. The Academic Talent Search Project was the first program of its kind in the City University and the achievement of its students would therefore be subject to special scrutiny. It proved to be the forerunner of programs now helping thousands of students.

THE STUDENT BODY

Students were recruited from Brooklyn high schools in poverty areas. The stated requirements were that "the applicant must be economically, culturally, and socially disadvantaged," that he must be "a resident of New York City" and "a holder of an academic diploma awarded in January or June, 1964." Finally, the applicant had to be "highly recommended by the high school principal as a student with an academic potential for college work, but whose high school achievement has been below standard (over-all average of 75% or less) because of previous disadvantaged educational background."

Seventy applications were received, but before a final selection was made the candidates were interviewed by counselors at the College. By July 1964, forty-two applicants had been selected for the program. Most of those rejected were excluded because they were found to be members of families whose incomes placed them above the acceptable level. One or two presented emotional patterns that made their admission seem inadvisable.

Thus the students were doubly screened. It is fruitless to speculate on the effect this had on the nature of the student body, but the screeners are essentially middle-class and this fact without doubt helped to shape the nature of the group.

An attempt was made at the outset of the Project to define the personalities of the students, both through counseling interviews and by testing. They were given the Manifold Interest Schedule, normally administered to entering freshman of the College, and the test produced an interesting comparison between this group and the regular student body. The Academic Talent Search Project students "tend significantly toward submissiveness and ingratiation. They also seem to be significantly less academically oriented than regular liberal arts students. It further appears that students in the Project are not likely to show adequate achievement in class environments which are not highly structured." [1]

Assuming these conclusions to be valid (and indeed experience seemed to bear them out) one might look for the reasons in the selective screening process. A "submissive" and "ingratiating" student may prove especially appealing to high school college advisors with traditional attitudes toward the student-teacher relationship. Also, the economic and social backgrounds of these students were undoubtedly a big factor in the quality of their "academic orientation." It is one thing to recognize the value of a college education and another to have the resources necessary to the successful pursuit of such an education. To the middle class, education is accepted as a part of life in a way that it has not yet become in the ghettos.

Of the forty-two students, 65% came from families earning $4,000 or less per year, and of these families 50% numbered five to ten people. Twenty-six of the homes were broken.

The racial and ethnic composition was as follows: nineteen American Negroes, four Caribbean Negroes, eight Puerto Ricans, eight white Americans of various ethnic backgrounds, one Italian, one Pole, and one Israeli.

High school averages within the group ranged from 65% to 82%. (For full matriculation, an average of 87% was a requirement in 1964.) Twenty-seven students were deficient in the academic units required by the College for the admission of baccalaureate matriculants.

All in all these students presented a picture distinctly different from that of the matriculated student body, which is largely white, middle-class, and academically well-prepared. A sociologist would classify most in the Project group as lower-class, though all expressed middle-class aspirations. Some College personnel chose to recognize and accept differences, working to change those, like academic preparation, which were quantitative. Others wanted to change all the differences so that these students might have the "advantages" of the middle class. Still others saw all the differences as inferiorities and despaired.

The Project was guided mainly by those who would consider themselves in the first group. Yet how many of the middle class can always avoid approaching students with the tacit assumption that middle class is forever best? Officers of the Project readily admitted to surprise that the students presented neither disciplinary problems nor distinguishing marks in dress or behavior. The despairing (or hostile), too, are not uncommon on the campus and contributed their share to the students' experience of college life.

SPECIAL ACADEMIC FEATURES

Because of the students' lack of academic preparation, a deliberate decision was made to provide for them, in their first year at least, special tutorials in the areas of the most obvious weakness – English and mathematics. This was not a decision lightly reached; a basic philosophy was involved – should these students be immediately expected to assume all the responsibilities of regular students in regular classes (with special help provided on an individual basis when needed) or should they be segregated for intense work in small groups? While the latter alternative raised questions of psychological suitability, it was decided upon for two basic reasons. It would allow for more intensive instruction, and it would permit the Project staff to get to know the students more intimately. Further, it would make it easier for the students to get to know each other and perhaps to develop *esprit de corps* which would provide moral support and help to alleviate the loneliness inherent in the life of the college freshman. To offset the disadvantages of "segregation" it was decided that the students should be enrolled in regular college classes as well as in tutorials and that intensive efforts should be made to encourage student participation in the social and extra-curricular life of the College.

Four English instructors were selected and each assigned approximately ten students. No effort was made to set up a common curriculum. Each instructor developed his own, planning it so that students who satisfied all requirements could receive credit for the College's first required course in English. Those who did not make the grade were not penalized. Ample time was allowed for individual conferences. After two semesters more than half the students (twenty-three) were certified as being eligible for a full year's credit and another twelve had completed one term's work in one year.

The mathematics tutorials required significantly more complicated arrangements because of the wide variations in the students' backgrounds. Over 38% of the group had deficiencies in high school

mathematics ranging from one-half to three units. Testing revealed that some students had normal college-level ability, while others required intensive work in basic arithmetic and elementary algebra. On the basis of tests and high school records, those students who wanted to start mathematics were assigned to one of three tutorials. About half were guided into an appropriate college mathematics course and the tutorials gave help in their subject as well as in basic arithmetic. Thus the work was very largely individualized. It continued through two semesters and for a small group into the summer session. By the Fall 1965 semester, the students had achieved a total of twenty-two passing grades in mathematics. Fall 1965 produced eleven more passing grades. Forward movement was slow, but increasing numbers were able to achieve at higher mathematical levels.

The mathematics instructors were generally satisfied with the achievement of the tutorials despite the fact that some students seemed unlikely ever to meet college requirements as a result of learning blocks founded, apparently, in abysmally poor instruction in elementary and high school.

After one year the separation of the students into tutorials for part of their work was adjudged a wise decision. The students and staff seemed to benefit from this opportunity to get to know one another and the intensive work and accomplishment served as a foundation for later achievement. One student commented, "... we started as a complete group altogether and then later we were put on own own. I think that was very good. It sort of gives us independence, because after all you are frightened to death when you come into the college like that and you have to have somebody to stick it out for a while." No further tutorials or special classes were introduced after the first year. The important areas of weakness had been dealt with, and moving the students into the mainstream of college life seemed to best meet their needs and expressed wishes.

While the tutorials presented the major effort, they were by no means the only methods used to help these students academically. The services of the College's Basic Skills Center were used for reme-

dial work in writing and reading. Also, extensive use was made of student tutors, especially in languages. They were found to be extremely helpful, particularly when they worked closely with the instructors. In individual cases, faculty tutors were used with great success.

COUNSELING

At the beginning of the program, a group of faculty were selected as mentors. Some were College counselors, others regular faculty. Each was assigned four or five students with instructions to meet them frequently on an individual and informal basis to answer any questions, give any guidance that seemed necessary, and in general, to form a supportive relationship which could help ease the students' path into college life.

The very nature of a large non-residence college militated against the fullest success of this part of the Project. Informality is difficult, appointments must be made, schedules must coincide. It is likely that the students often failed to take advantage of the availability of the mentors because of a natural reticence in the face of administrative rigmarole. Some very comfortable relationships were established, however, and undoubtedly contributed to the extraordinary tenacity with which the students as a group pursued their studies.

The Project administrator served as general counselor to the students. Her constant availability – day and night – and her warm friendliness and genuine concern made it easy for the students to talk to her. Inevitably, many personal problems came into the open and could be dealt with. Eyeglasses were supplied for one student, dental work was paid for, speech defects were corrected through the College's Speech and Hearing Clinic. Advice was sought and given on courses, clothes, and social life, always with an emphasis on helping the student make his own decisions.

In addition, the services of the College placement office were available and a continuing effort was made to guide the students into suitably rewarding employment. For most, work was a necessity despite the stipends the Project afforded. Able at first to find jobs only of the busboy or dishwasher variety, the students became able, as their education and maturity progressed, to find work as teachers' aides, counselors-in-training, laboratory assistants, and the like. Thus their education assumed immediately a very tangible value.

Every effort was made from the outset to encourage the students to participate in the social and athletic life of the College. Gradually, they developed into enthusiastic participants. They formed their own club, gave parties, joined team sports. All of this helped to wear away their feeling of strangeness, and helped them to become "real" college students.

INTELLIGENCE AND ACHIEVEMENT

In an effort to accumulate data helpful in gaining more insight into the needs of these students and others like them, the group was tested frequently from the beginning of the Project. Some interesting results were obtained.

At the outset, the Wechsler Intelligence Scale showed that the group, with a mean I.Q. of 109.9, did not differ significantly in intelligence from regular Brooklyn College liberal arts students, with a mean I.Q. of 112.4. The Nelson-Denny Reading Test showed that they performed in this area at the beginning of the 12th grade level on national norms.

At the end of the two-year period, the Graduate Record Area test (Social Science, Humanities, and Natural Science) and the Sequential Test on Educational Progress (Reading, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science) were administered. Both tests showed that in areas other than Social Science, the group performed at the begin-

ning freshman level on national norms. In Social Science, on the other hand, they were approximately at the beginning sophomore level.

The average first-year college index of scholastic achievement was 1.8 (slightly below C). The average for the second year showed a significant drop (to 1.2) as the students progressed into more higher-level courses and chose to register for self-selected programs without special faculty and without tutorials. However, an examination of individual records shows that ten students, or almost 25% of the original group, earned an average of thirty-two credits with a record of C or higher. Another eight earned an average of thirty-six credits with average grades so close to C that one or two B grades would have raised their average to C and given them satisfactory records in the context of routine College policies.

In comparing these students to others in the School of General Studies who are admitted without the regularly required academic preparation, one striking feature emerges. *They stayed in college.* They did not drop out, despite the problems that their "differences" from regular students necessarily created, and despite financial and family difficulties that could have destroyed their will. At the outset of the Project a 20% retention was predicted. Yet at the end of two years, thirty-one students remained with the program – a retention of 74%. Another six who might have remained were drafted, leaving a probable retention of 88%. Of the five who dropped, one married and left New York City. The other four felt a need for full-time employment and did not believe they could satisfactorily combine this with the difficult school program.

The Second Two Years

The Second Two Years

WHAT NEXT?

In the latter half of the experimental period (1964 – 1966) the executive officer of the Project reported as follows:

> The opportunity to work with these students has opened up a variety of insights some of which have demolished certain earlier preconceptions. In the first instance, the phenomenal motivation, drive, and "stick-to-itiveness" has become apparent in the fact that eighteen months after the beginning of the Project forty of the original forty-two students are still enrolled. This kind of statistic would be extremely difficult to duplicate in the experience of any American college. At the outset of this Project many would have guessed that even a 20% retention would have been a noteworthy achievement.
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> The Project envisioned an $8.00 weekly stipend as adequate to free the student from economic irritations. The payment of lunch money and carfare, it was supposed, would come close to relieving the student of those immediate \material needs that would obstruct a free application to intellectual pursuits. Like the previous assumption, this one has been demonstrated to be very wide of the mark. Twenty hours, thirty hours – even full-time employment, have been necessary to keep these students on campus. The intensive use of personal initiative and college facilities to find employment for these students has been very much more important than was foreseen prior to September, 1964.
>
> Furthermore, the notion that almost any kind of employment that might be acceptable to the average upward-mobile middle class student would also be psychologically supportive as well as materially valuable in this Project had to be modified. A disadvantaged student knows from his cultural background that one does not need a college education to be a dishwasher. He needs a more immediate material and psychological demonstration that education is worthwhile.

These students have not displayed social patterns or attributes that so consumed their energies or so exhausted the time of the college staff that academic purposes were frustrated. Quite the contrary, their regard for the other fellow and particularly their own families has been a source of continuous favorable comment by college associates. From persons who were fearful, anxious, and withdrawn they have become confident, articulate and outgoing. The development of a relaxed social grace has likewise been an item of comment by those who recall their social gatherings over the last year and a half.

These students have indicated changing career plans during this Project that show an increasing awareness of themselves, a realistic grappling with the social pressures that they will continue to meet, and a broadening realization of what they can expect of themselves as college graduates.

The academic performance has been satisfactory, and, for a limited number, outstanding. When one interprets this achievement in the context of the intellectual challenges that characterize the standards of Brooklyn College, it deserves attention. When one adds to this the recognition that these students carried also an uncommonly heavy burden in the removal of formal high school conditions and inadequate preparation – even where formal high school conditions were not evident in the record – their readiness to keep going has sometimes been hard to believe.

With these factors in mind, it was decided to continue the Project for another two years, in accordance with the following proposal:

It is a regard for what happens to these students after June, 1966, that stimulates a request for assistance to conclude their experience in a fashion that helps them, somewhere in the mid-stream of an educational program, to reach the other shore.

With the assistance of the Rockefeller Foundation it would be possible to phase out this Project in a manner that reflects a concern for the economic, psychological, and academic circumstances of each of these students. It is suggested that for a two year period those who may warrant it be given financial assistance to continue in a normal evening program.

Special and group tutorial, health and medical and psychological counseling services and the weekly stipend would be discontinued. Basically each

acceptable student would enjoy no more or less than the services enjoyed by all students except for minimal specialized guidance.

In response to this proposal, the Rockefeller Foundation provided a supplementary grant to continue the Project for another two years, until 1968.

DID THEY ACHIEVE?

Since academic achievement as measured by grades is a standard indicator of college success, it is necessary to take a careful and critical look at the records of the students in the second two years of the Project. Testing in 1966 indicated that the group as a whole, after two years of college, had caught up to freshman level, and even higher in social science. Did they then progress from that level?

Twenty-seven students of the original forty-two began the fall term of 1966. They had amassed a grand total of 1564 credits, an average of fifty-eight for each. Twenty-two students had no further entrance conditions to remove. One had become fully matriculated on the basis of grades earned. What happened then? How did this group proceed in the next two years?

THOSE WHO LEFT

First of all, 40% (eleven students) dropped out of school, 14% more than had dropped out in the first two years. At first glance, this larger dropout rate in the second period seems surprising. One would expect the initial discouragements to wreak the heaviest toll. A closer look proves interesting. Three of the eleven dropouts went into the armed forces. Two moved out of town and both applied to colleges near their new homes. Another was accepted as a dance major at the Juilliard School of Music . Six of the dropouts, then, were not ordinary dropouts at all, and so the percentage changes from 40% to 18%.

The remaining five show striking examples of strong will to continue, finally defeated. There is value in examining some more closely. To the extent that they had potential for higher education, these students represent the most serious failures of the program.

One has worked since the age of twelve to help support his mother and four younger siblings. He has "always wanted college." In the program, he was "diligent," "eager," showed "drive," made "fantastic progress." He was drafted but received a hardship discharge after a short time and returned to college. After only one term back, he dropped out. His overall record (thirty and one-half credits) was so close to C that he could be readmitted to the College at any time without special permission. He may come back some day. The will and the ability are both there. The Academic Talent Search Project made possible for him, at least for a time, the hope of fulfilling a life-long dream – to become a lawyer. As he put it in a letter to the Project's director before he left for the army:

> . . . . I would like to thank all the wonderful people who have given me this chance of a life-time. I know that the help I have received will help me throughout my college career. . . . I am the most appreciative person in the world. . . . I am sure that there are millions of students who, like myself, will profit by this great opportunity.

Another dropout returned to school after being out for one term but could not manage to stay on. He had a poor record (below D). We see a pattern of someone searching for himself. "He has a good mind." "No reason why he cannot complete work for a college degree but motivation should be watched and stimulated." Despite an occasional B on his record we find instructors reporting failing grades and "seen in student center when he should be in Basic Skills," "Erratic," "Attendance poor," "Latenesses." On the face of it, the Project did not help this boy. And yet his I.Q. is 121. What would have helped him? We do not have the answers, but we must continue to ask questions.

Another student attended for seven terms and one summer session. For a wide variety of stated reasons, he dropped out before the end of five different terms. What kept him coming? We have only one clue. In Fall 1966, he suddenly surfaced to get an A in Mechanical Drawing. Perhaps his hope of being a civil engineer was briefly kindled with enough warmth to keep him registering another few terms, even though he would not again complete a course.

One is tempted to try to find some things common to those students who, after more than two years of intensive effort, finally gave up. The closest examination of their records reveals little. As would be expected, their academic achievement was decidedly below that of the group which continued. Of 535 credits taken in the last two years, only 329 were earned – a ratio of .61. Their averages ranged from C to almost F. Four failed to remove entrance conditions. Yet in native intelligence as measured by the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (range from 93 to 135), they included some of the best in the program. Cultural background seems not to have been a factor; they represent all the varieties within the total group.

One common element emerges to stir the imagination, but it may or may not be significant: each dropout came from a home that was broken, either by death, divorce, separation, or a permanently incapacitating illness.

THOSE WHO CONTINUED

The sixteen students who continued present a somewhat brighter scholastic picture. Averages ranged from B to D minus (scholastic indices of 3.0 to .93). Twenty-five per cent (four students) had averages above C. Twelve per cent (two students) had averages below D. The overall mean and median were C minus. (At Brooklyn College anything below a 2.0 index (straight C average) is unsatisfactory.) This group, which enrolled for 735.5 credits in the second two years of the Project, earned 646. Thus the earned-attempted ratio was .88.

Significantly, all but one of the sixteen had removed all entrance conditions. Four students attended the summer session of 1968, accumulating twenty-seven credits and receiving grades ranging from D (six credits) through A (five credits).

By 1968, the number of students who were able to matriculate on the basis of grades in accordance with normal college regulations increased from one to four, and at the end of the 1968 summer session the Project had its first graduate, Miss R., with a 3.0 (straight B) index and a major in Russian. She now has the background for the work she aspired to in 1964 when she entered the College – the teaching of Russian in high school. Three others will be eligible to graduate within the 1968-1969 academic year. According to experienced counselors who have carefully evaluated the records of all the students, the prognosis is good that at least six more, despite currently below-C records, will eventually be able to graduate if they can manage financially to continue attending without taking on too heavy an employment load in addition. Thus, almost ten per cent (four students) of the original group have fulfilled the goals of the Project – baccalaureate matriculation and satisfactory progress towards graduation. For almost 25% (ten students) eventual graduation can be predicted with some confidence.

Can any factors be found to explain why this last group of sixteen continued, and with some success? A few facts do seem significant. Though the group had no more native intelligence as measured by the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale than those who had dropped earlier with poorer records, they did present a picture of relative stability in personality and in family background, with feet fairly securely placed on the upward-mobility ladder. For example, only four of the sixteen homes were broken – two of these by death. Most of the students seem to have expected to go to college and were encouraged in this direction by both parents. (At least one student suffered from too much parental pushing.) Before entering Brooklyn, many had applied to and been accepted at other colleges, an indication that they were on the move out of the

ghettos. Also, we see by the fact that several could attend full time that they had a modicum of financial security.

We can look at the academic results of the Project in two ways. We may say that nine out of ten of the original group may very possibly not graduate and that three out of four almost certainly will not graduate. On the other hand, using the same statistics, we may say that one out of ten will almost certainly graduate and that one out of four may very possibly graduate. It is probable that the point of view one chooses depends on how one saw the Project from the beginning.

Questions

A clear-eyed and unsentimental look at the academic achievement statistics calls up some profound questions.

Was the Project a failure?

Will it, and others like it, degrade academic standards?

Why, with selectivity, ample funds and every special service that men of good will could devise, did the students not do better?

It should be stated unequivocally that many people at the College believe the Project to have been a failure. Comments range from "Any sensible person could have predicted the large number of failures. These kids will never make it in college," to "It was a good idea but this wasn't the place to try it." But others, including especially those who knew the students well, remain convinced that all efforts and expenses were well spent. Said one professor, "I don't give a damn what the records look like; I see what college meant to these people. Their lives have been changed." A sensitive and experienced counselor said, "No one can measure the tremendous impact college has had on this group. Even some of those who dropped out will be heard from again. They might even come back to college themselves after years. And their children may come simply because this program has broken the lockstep." An administrative officer who worked closely with the students said, "College has had an enormously creative influence on these kids. If exposure to the liberal arts isn't expected to have this kind of influence we might as well close the College." A teacher commented on a very practical aspect of the students' experience, "Even the ones who don't finish have gotten a taste of education and enough know-how and sophistication

to command much better jobs than they ever hoped for before." The director of the Project noted in a report made after interviewing a number of the students, "A project that arouses the confidence of the student and stimulates his efforts can have social consequences for his family, friends, and neighbors that may be as important as the education of the student himself. 'If I can do it, so can you.'"

The extraordinary retention rate despite all obstacles is testimony to the students' sense of achievement in the program but, say the critics, are we being realistic or even kind in allowing them to be exposed yet again to what seems inevitable failure in the light of traditional methods of evaluating scholastic achievement? It is a serious thought. In our eagerness to help, are we adding to the psychological damage these students have supported most of their lives? Consider two individual cases. "Miss T.," reports her history professor, "received on the first exam a grade of 5; on the second a grade of 57, both based on a scale of 100. This shows a considerable improvement all the same, and I suggest that she stick with the course in the hope that her improvement will continue to the point where she may pass the course with a grade of D, and then continue on in History 2.1 where, this kind of improvement suggests, she may earn by her effort considerably higher grades." Was this professor simply trying hard to find something nice to say? It seems unlikely since he, a well-known scholar, was recommending to the administration that the student be allowed to remain in his class despite her failures to that point. And again, "Mr. T. came to me for tutoring after having failed his first exam. I found him to be both able and industrious; his mind was a very good one, crippled and impeded by a black Alabama education, but his insights were clear, his sense of proportion balanced and his sense of history what instructors more often look for than find. He scored in the 70's in his second exam and held it through the final to earn a C for the course. Severe illnesses at home upset him in the next semester and so he only earned a D in History 2.1. It was definitely *not* an adequate index of his ability."

A lifetime of educational deprivation cannot be made up easily despite help and support. No one can say how many years are needed. The important thing is that progress does occur, and though in the end the grade may be D or F, this progress may even have been dramatic. To those used to taking the grade symbol as the measure of success or failure the issue is clear – there has been a failure. But perhaps these students, whose position in society often forces them to see and feel beneath the surface of things, recognize the progress more than the failure. In any case, many have stayed. As one put it with a striking intensity, "I have to go on." Perhaps there is a sense that it is better to fail as a college student than to succeed as a dishwasher: "A man's reach must exceed his grasp." As an English professor in a similar program at the City College of the University put it, "I do not know what percentage of my students will emerge with degrees from college. I no longer particularly care. 'You've got to understand,' a student said to me just before the term ended, 'when I came to this school, I figured that if I could get one year – just one year – of Whitey's college, I would be changed. And you know, I am. Man, they made me hungry. And it's not the money any more. I want it all. Even to be a poet. Man, I want that too.' "[2]

We cannot, then, measure failure in a simple way. It may be wrapped around success. But, granting benefits for some or even all of these students, are we possibly risking too much in the lowering of standards? Is this fair to the other students, to the College? There is, of course, no way to answer this question, now or in the near future. A decline in academic excellence is a distinct threat. Some view it as a sword of Damocles, others as a certainty. One of the most encouraging indications that it will not come to pass at Brooklyn College is the firm conviction of President Harold C. Syrett that it *need* not. In a letter to the faculty in September 1968 in which he outlined plans for greatly enlarging the numbers of students admitted under discretionary admission procedures he stated:

> I am well aware that some members of the faculty believe that any changes in Brooklyn College's traditional mission will destroy the College's

> traditional excellence. I doubt that I can change the beliefs of such faculty members, but I must say that I disagree with them. I am convinced that in the future outstanding public colleges will be multi-purpose institutions with many objectives. I am also convinced that it is possible to change the college's admission policies without lowering standards; that we can tailor some courses and programs to meet the needs of the community without watering down our curriculum; and that we can expand our adult education programs without any detriment to the usual full-time day population.
>
> I am not suggesting that the task before us is an easy or simple one, but I am contending that the job must be done and that it can be done. Further, I am convinced that the difficulties in reconciling the real and imagined differences between quality and mass higher education constitute the most rewarding and exciting challenge confronting today's colleges and universities. Our students, it appears, have already recognized this problem. On the one hand they demand that we take in more students – particularly from minority groups – while on the other hand they insist that we eliminate the factory-like mass production aspects of higher education. The students are right. We should do both.

But suppose we grant that the Project cannot be called a failure (and in many respect it is indeed a success) and suppose we accept the challenge to continue providing excellence in education for all. A nagging question still remains: why didn't all the students do better academically? Of course there is no single answer, yet it would seem valuable, at a time when programs like this one are burgeoning in all parts of the country, to examine the answers given by members of the faculty, the student body, the administration, and other observers of the Project – both critics and supporters.

SOME ANSWERS--?

It is natural to look first at the structure of the Project for built-in problems – some errors in judgment which set up additional difficulties for the students, thereby implicitly encouraging failure. Yet even under close scrutiny the Project appears extraordinarily well-conceived and well-administered. In analyzing its workings from

its inception to its end, one is struck time and again by the thoroughness with which every resource of the College was used to meet the needs of these students, not just as a group but as individuals – each with his unique requirements. No available stone, as it were, was ever left unturned for anyone.

Despite some suggestions for changes for "next time" made by the staff in *To Help Them Achieve* – Part 1, only two substantive criticisms of importance emerge from the body of evaluation of the design and administration of the Project. First, insufficient advance recognition was given to the tremendous financial burdens under which these students labored and the difficulties many of them had in finding time and place for study. Most of them had to work, and for long hours. Had it been possible to relieve them of some of this necessity the lighter burden might have produced a different academic picture. Further, as the director commented in a 1968 evaluation of the Project, "If compensation is not planned to cover housing then some other resources should be available to provide some students with appropriate accommodations. Perhaps thirty percent of the ATSP students would have met their educational responsibilities more successfully had it been possible to move them into other quarters."

The second criticism of the Project's design is really a question. Did the admission screening, conducted essentially by middle-class personnel (high school and college counselors) function to select students who were less effective academically than others might have been? As indicated in Chapter 1, there are some suggestions that it did. As described in *To Help Them Achieve* – Part 1, a long-term testing program at Brooklyn College has examined the personality types of Brooklyn College students. The Project group differed significantly from the regular College group in that they showed less self-confidence, less intellectual turbulence and drive, less ability to intellectualize their feelings and, in addition, the tendency toward submissiveness and ingratiation already mentioned. Is it possible that some of these qualities, or their absence, may have been "screened

in" to the group? The frequency with which the adjectives "respectful," "courteous" and "appealing" appear in the high school recommendations raises some questions. And of course the students' cultural and family backgrounds have shaped them. Drs. Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey close their very informative book about the personality of the American Negro, *The Mark of Oppression*, with the following: "The psychosocial expressions of the Negro personality that we have described [many of which are recognizable in terms of ATSP personality profiles and faculty comments] are the *integrated* end products of the process of oppression. Can these be changed by *education* of the Negro? The answer is, no. They can never be eradicated without removing the forces that create and perpetuate them. Obviously, Negro self-esteem cannot be retrieved, nor Negro self-hatred destroyed, as long as the status is quo." [3]

Whether through screening, then, or simply through the fact of the group's cultural backgrounds, some conflicts inherent in the situation must have been reflected in the students' academic records. The group was mainly lower-class, many of them in close contact with the ghetto streets. Though they all aspired to the middle class, a transformation is not easy and may perhaps be even less so in an environment which, it must be said, sometimes seems complacently middle-class and which, through all its representatives, exerted an inexorable pressure on these students. We read that they changed their eating habits, their dress, their hair-dos, their habits of leisure, work, and study. We know that they were forced to change their lifetime language patterns. We learn that an instructor feels about one that "she should have speech therapy to rid herself of her slight West Indies accent." Often realizing little or nothing of what they were doing, College personnel put heavy demands on the group, setting goals which, though the students aspired to them, nevertheless meant deep changes which must at times have been resented. Did some rebel? Turn off? Drop out? Probably. Certainly the psychological, sociological and autobiographical literature about the "disadvantaged" [4] abounds in examples of the adolescent unable to live up to his promise because of this very conflict between himself and

the pressures of his environment and his aspirations.

Then too, there was the related conflict between the culture of the streets and the culture of the College. One student, interviewed in 1968 because of his below-C record described very clearly the position in which he found himself and which had taken a tremendous toll of his energies over four years. "I'm lower-class," he said, "and this College is middle-class. I don't belong in either place now. My friends from the street have dropped me, and I've never become part of things here. But I'll go on. I have to." The English professor in City College's pre-baccalaureate program states in the article already mentioned " . . . most of my students . . .felt this conflict between their aspirations and their backgrounds. 'I want to play the numbers as well as have the knowledge you have,' said one . . . . It is a desire I believe I can understand, if for no other reason than that I can still remember how desperately I wanted to retain the shrill Jewish life of Jerome Avenue *and* Keats' sonnets."

One other facet of the conflict inherent in the movement from the old culture to the new is described by Drs. William Grier and Price M. Cobbs in *Black Rage*. "Black people," they say, "feel bound to the concept of equality. It is a belief which allows them to live . . . . But the belief in equality produces conflict when the black child is introduced to intellectual striving, competition, and the evaluation of his innate abilities . . . . To say that one is smarter is to say that one's brothers are dumber, and that is a difficult thing for a black student . . . . Those with great intellectual gifts develop the technique of denying or minimizing them." [5] Thus the student is not true to himself and sets up still further conflict in separating himself from the American Dream of success. Could this theory explain something of the seemingly inexplicable failure of students with high I.Q.'s and every apparent reason for high achievement?

Many of the College staff felt that the kinds of conflicts described here, and others, all essentially unavoidable in the nature of things, made some of the students more or less permanently alien-

ated from the College and the staff which was so ready to help. Of an outstanding student who is now close to graduation a teacher said, "Of course the special support helped her, but essentially she made her own way, alone." An administrator states that the system of distributing the stipends at the Project office gave an opportunity for a few minutes of friendly chatting between students and staff and a few words of encouragement, if needed. Undoubtedly this was true for most, but one student said, "This business of picking up the money is very embarrassing for some kids. One goes into the office and does not know what to say or do. I think it should be mailed or something." One student from a later special program (SEEK – described in Chapter 4) put his feelings this way, "My counselor is my friend. But . . . he's trying too hard. He cannot get into my skin. There are problems for me that nobody in the Establishment can really understand. He'd better stop trying . . . I don't want to be part of my counselor's world. And he can't be part of mine." This was a more outspoken student than most in the Academic Talent Search Project, but perhaps he was expressing something of what they would have expressed if they had not been so "respectful," "courteous" and "appealing."

Could a feeling of being discriminated against have been a factor in some students' failures? Again, perhaps. There were scarcely any incidents of overt discrimination and some of these were more felt than real. Indeed a number of students commented that they had never before received such routinely courteous treatment from school personnel (a sad commentary on the public schools). But, in going over teachers' reports, one gets a very strong sense that some teachers were much more understanding of and sensitive to these students than others, and that the students, perhaps in response, showed different faces to different teachers. For example, we read, "Fine attitude; conscientious. Doing B work at present." Another instructor describes the same student, "Poor attitude – extremely uncooperative. Grade of D." And in a different case, "This student impresses me as a dead mackerel." From another instructor, "He has so much anger boiling inside him I don't know how he can keep it in

day after day." Take still a third example, this time of a teacher who admitted learning from these students:

> My first group... did no do well....To begin with, I realize now, as I did not then, that they were all scared – badly. I remember that three of them huddled together in the rear of the room as near the door as possible. They said little; I know they were seriously bewildered by the complexities of our source book [for the required history course]; and I can see now that I didn't know how to reach them. I issued a general invitation to all students with 036 curriculum numbers [the distinctive code number for this group] to come in and see me early in the term; even then I knew enough not to say, "Will all ATSP students please come in, as you may be having difficulties?" But they may have taken it that way. One learns as one grows older, and today I think that I could find a way to see them and (perhaps) begin to explore their difficulties.
>
> I remember sometime during that term being invited to a party given for the ATSP students and their friends; Miss J. and Mr. J, I recall, were different people; obviously they were having a ball. The ease was there, the stiffness, that deadly stiffness which is so paralyzing, was gone for the moment, and this boy and girl were glowing.
>
> In another term, Mr. D. was a pleasure. Out of a different ghetto, he was fun to watch as he bit into the material we studied, and discovered that there was something there beside the Dead Sea fruit he obviously expected. He too was shy, and while he didn't repel further contact outside of class, he squirmed at the idea of it, and was obviously troubled by thoughts of its general impropriety. Once when I suggested that he might come to see us, he said that he "couldn't *go to see* a teacher." I remember wondering amused, what his concept of a teacher out-of-hours could possibly be: Olympian? monstrous?

Many teachers, like this one, grew in sensitivity as the program progressed and admitted the value to them personally of having taught this group. Others, less interested perhaps, or simply not as effective as teachers, continued to feel that they could never reach the students and that the students did not want to be reached.

In fact, lack of teaching expertise, especially in English, was blamed by one English teacher for many student failures. Indeed, a

thorough examination of relevant methodology in English teaching would seem to be an important requirement for further programs of this kind. Almost all the students were seriously handicapped in the written language area and remained so even after striking improvement in the tutorials. One teacher remarked, "She is working and she is intelligent, but intensive, massive work in English remains for her the *sine qua non* of academic achievement."

Teaching expertise (or lack of it) is perhaps at the root of one last criticism to explain academic failures which has been leveled at the Project, or rather at Brooklyn College's curriculum – lack of "relevance." One hears this repeatedly today, all over the country, and yet one cannot entirely escape the feeling that with better teaching much of the clamor would be stilled. Can Alexander Pope ever seem "relevant" to New York's urban youth? Perhaps he can when they find themselves agreeing with him that "the proper study of mankind is man." Can the Roman Empire ever seem relevant to a boy from Harlem's streets? Might it not seem so if he learned that it was built on a slave economy and fell partly because it could not assimilate its subject populations? What *is* "relevancy" anyway?

Any or all of these theories may account for some or all of the academic failures and dropouts in the program. But many have deep, far-removed causes about which the College can do little except through the long-term contributions of its graduates to improving our schools and our society. Whatever the reasons for, and whatever the College attitudes toward, academic failures in the face of reasonable standards, the fact remains that to get an education, or even to get through college, one must have certain positive attitudes towards oneself and towards intellectual discipline. Many of the students did not show these attitudes, but in these changing times more and more of the previously "disadvantaged" seem likely to be able to develop

them. As one critic of the Project said, "Did you actually believe that in two or four years you could make middle-class Brooklyn College undergraduates of these kids who have had to fight the Establishment all their lives? Did you expect them to shape up to suit you just because you gave them a chance to? Be thankful for what you've done—made possible fantastic changes in the lives of forty-two people, and their friends, and their relatives. If you keep them coming you'll find more and more will have what real achievement takes."

"Keep Them Coming"

From the early days of the Project it was clear to those who knew the students and who were committed to the idea of baccalaureate education for the "disadvantaged" that crucial to the Project's success in the long run would be the numbers of these students accepted. A steady flow into specially designed programs would, first, be an open statement to the community that Brooklyn College intended to fulfill its obligations as a public service institution. Said Brooklyn College's President in his previously quoted letter to the faculty, "Many of the conditions in Brooklyn, and their resulting tensions, are, needless to say, the result of inequality of opportunity, including educational opportunity. The challenge to Brooklyn College, consequently, increases in urgency almost by the day. I believe that the college's only viable course of action is to accept the challenge voluntarily and wholeheartedly." In other words, implementation of the Project's philosophy was seen as a benefit to the College as an institution in the urban community.

Of more personal importance was the need, felt and expressed by staff and students, to have more minority group members on campus so that their presence would create a hospitable situation which would encourage larger numbers of such students to undertake higher education. Often it was heard that, "I would never have taken that course if I'd known I would be the only Negro in it." And, "In all the years I've taught here, these are the first Puerto Rican students I've had in a class." A student wrote (see Appendix A), "Whenever there is a person anywhere in a strange land, he needs someone or something to identify with. He needs to know people like him, who know what he knows, experience what he experiences; he needs a friend. Once the A.T.S.P. students overcame their insecurities–

whether they knew it or not—they began to help others similar to them struggling for an education. They gave these students somebody to identify with." This same student gave the Project credit for creating an atmosphere at the College that in a change from the past, was a welcoming one, at least for some minority groups:

> Negro and Puerto Rican students are registering more and more along with the other groups. People have always been saying that a change is going to come and it has. I am sure that many other students are noticing the change on campus, but are unaware of the cause—the Academic Talent Search Project. Forty-two students came in, two dropped out. Nobody knows how many have been aided unofficially.

Indeed, the color of the campus has changed very much since 1964, and who can tell what effect this program has had on a tide that certainly could not have been stemmed, but which was in fact very slow to rise? In 1964, the Academic Talent Search Project was (after James Meredith entered the University of Mississippi, after the publication of *The Other America*, after the march on Washington, and after the declaration of the war on poverty) the first program in any branch of the City University of New York to direct itself toward the baccalaureate education of those whose culture, education and finances had largely proscribed higher education. Not, of course, that these students would ever have been turned away from any of the University's colleges. If they met admission requirements, they were accepted as matriculants; if they did not, and could pay, they were accepted as non-matriculants. Few surmounted the hurdles of removing the entrance conditions, improving English, "adjusting," etc. In fact, those that did, staying on in college even to graduation, were so few and so outstanding in ability that every counselor can remember them out of hundreds of student clients. They were able, as most of us are not, to go it alone.

The Project marked the beginning of a change and was unquestionably an instrument of change. In the spring of 1965, the director of the Project made a number of specific suggestions to the Dean of the School of General Studies and the President aimed at bringing

increasingly large numbers of "disadvantaged" students to the Brooklyn College campus. (See Appendix B.) It is difficult, of course, to follow the progress of the seed planted in 1964-65 by these forty-two students and their dedicated faculty. Very good growth weather in 1965-66 and later must be conceded. The situation was indeed one of those where nothing is so irresistible as an idea whose time has come. Now, in the fall of 1968, Brooklyn College has close to 700 students who have been admitted under discretionary admission procedures. In Fall 1969 the figure is expected to be over 1000, with the students divided among several programs.

THE SEEK PROGRAM

First to come after the Academic Talent Search Project was SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge). This program is financed jointly by the City and the State and all the senior colleges in the University participate, each with some administrative and curricular variations. Starting at Brooklyn College in 1966 with some eighty students, the program took over without significant change the structure of the Academic Talent Search Project and, to a large extent, its personnel. As the terms progressed, a number of changes were made to suit the quite different student body. Special sections in speech and drama, and in the social sciences were introduced, for example, for the far more heterogeneous SEEK group. Also, in an effort to absorb these outspoken students as rapidly as possible into the mainstream of college life, the program was removed in 1968 from the School of General Studies (where most of the College's experimental programs have begun and where great flexibility in programming is possible) to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The number of SEEK students now enrolled is approximately 420. The College has no authority for their selection. They are recommended to a central office by schools and social agencies or may be self-referred. They must have a high school diploma or the equivalent and live in a Federally-designated poverty area. A total number of over 2700 are assigned to the various colleges in the University where space is available.

SEEK students at Brooklyn College have shown some interesting differences from those in the Academic Talent Search Project. These may be the result of the larger numbers involved, of the less rigorous screening through Establishment channels, of the greatly widened intellectual range, or mainly a reaction to the tenor of the times. In any case, the students are more militant, more conscious of black and white, less content to be absorbed into the middle class pattern, less "grateful," more articulate, more eager to effect social and educational changes with or without the encouragement of the Establishment.

> "The SEEK Program is not doing me a favor; I'm part of society and society must do some things for me."
>
> "We're let into this door to conform. We're here because society needs us here. Society wants us to go back and get others to conform."
>
> "Education is primarily of pragmatic value to the SEEK student in that he likes the money it can make. He would do well to rid himself of any romantic attitudes about education."

These remarks, made by SEEK students at a faculty-student-administration symposium held over a year after the program's inception may send chills down some spines. The original Academic Talent Search Project students did not talk like this. Yet many faculty complained that they were remote, inarticulate, uninvolved. We may propose that their presence on campus in a special program helped make it possible for those who came after to become involved, articulate, intensely aware of themselves and their role in society.

THE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM

Another program, now comprising 200 freshman with 200 more to follow in Fall 1969, is indigenous to Brooklyn College and in its particulars is unique. It was created through the strong recommendation of the President's Committee on Educational Opportunity that

more students from poverty areas be admitted to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences by discretionary admissions procedures. Even stronger pressure, including a sit-in in the Registrar's office, came from the largely white student body, who demanded immediate admission of 1000 students from poverty areas. There was a great deal of sentiment for the proposal on the part of the faculty and administration (though much opposition too). It was voted to admit 200 students each year on an experimental basis for two years. The figure 1000 was deemed unrealistic in terms of available facilities.

The Educational Opportunities Program differs from many other programs of similar intent in that it requires specific academic preparation and does not depend on the recommendation of teachers or counselors for selection. Students must have the same academic units as other matriculants and must have a high school average of at least 75% or a score of at least 450 on either the mathematics or verbal subtests of the Scholastic Aptitude Test. Before admission, the students receive five weeks of intensive preparation for college in a workshop in reading, writing and study skills and a thorough orientation to the College from faculty and upper classmen. (It is interesting to note that one of the most experienced English teachers in the Academic Talent Search Project recommended just this kind of pre-admission orientation period.)

The students attend as fully matriculated students in the day session. They limit their programs to twelve credits in the first term and are given the option of electing to receive pass or fail ratings rather than letter grades. Otherwise, they receive no special academic treatment. Indeed, part of the program's philosophy is that the students must face the stiff competition at the College or leave. They have developed an extraordinary *esprit de corps*, and a system of mutual aid came almost at once into being. This, plus volunteer faculty mentors and student tutors are the primary supportive measures used by the very effective director of the program, an educational psychologist who is counselor as well as administrator.

OTHER PROGRAMS

Still other programs exist in the City University for "disadvantaged" youth and adults.

The College Discovery and Development Program started at the same time as the Academic Talent Search Project. Working with the high schools, the staff attempts to discover and foster talent from the 9th grade on. The program differs from the ATSP in that it aims primarily to place students in the *junior* colleges in specially-paced programs. Currently, it has about 1600 students in college and many more are receiving help in the high schools.

Individual colleges in the University have their own programs. City College has had its Pre-Baccalaureate program; Queens College has its Adult Continuing Education Program; the Urban Centers cater to the needs of the dropout or general diploma graduate with education for employment and guidance services designed to develop maximum potential.

Other projects are just beginning. The One-Hundred Scholars Program will offer senior college admission to the top 100 graduates of each academic high school. Approximately75% of the students are expected to be black or Puerto Rican. In the words of the University's Chancellor, "It is our belief that for students who have spent their academic careers in the debilitating climate of many of the inner city high schools, achievement in relationship to their peers is a more equitable admissions criterion than comparing their achievements with that of students from academically superior schools."

One further proposal, with far-reaching consequences, is that the University take over the operation of selected high schools—those in the poverty areas. If approval from City and State can be gained for this plan, Brooklyn College with its important role in teacher education will have a crucial part to play.

From the start in 1964 with the Academic Talent Search Project's forty-two students at Brooklyn College, the number enrolled by the City University in special programs for the "disadvantaged" has increased to approximately 4700. While the economy of New York City assures that most of the students are Negro and Puerto Rican, poverty areas also yield a fair sprinkling of Irish, Jews, Italians and Orientals. Ethnic surveys had never been made in the University until recently. In fact, there have been only two such and they differentiate only the categories of Negro, Puerto Rican and "other." The second, in 1968, showed 20,981 Negro and Puerto Rican students, an increase of more than 5000 over the previous year. The senior colleges are now enrolling 10.4% Negro and Puerto Rican students. While actual figures for earlier years are not available, long-time members of the University staff recognize that the current figures represent so drastic a change as to constitute a kind of social revolution.

One is reminded of the time in 1946 and 1947, after the passage of the New York State law prohibiting discrimination in hiring, when Negroes appeared from "nowhere" to become salesclerks, secretaries, banktellers, accountants and fill a wide range of other jobs for which they had been mysteriously unfit until a law was passed. Where had they been before? And where had these students been before they had the chance to participate in the intellectual life of their city?

It is too early really to judge the value of these programs. As of now, it is possible to see in them whatever one is predisposed to see. Success? Failure? Ruination? Palliative? Radical social reform? It will be years before a reasoned judgment can be made. Only one thing is certain: the impact on the social, intellectual, economic and political fabric of the City will be enormous.

The Academic Talent Search Project, its students, staff, and sponsors have contributed more than a mite to the changes now moving in the City. And to Brooklyn, the Project made a difference

—in many ways, but particularly in opening up possibilities and in showing the students and the community that even in 1964 the College gave a damn.

Postscript