

*The influence of such elements as faculty and staff attitudes and student and campus characteristics affect the philosophical basis and the design and development of summer programs.*

## *Affective Development as a Foundation for College Adjustment*

*William Collins*

An important role of the summer preparatory program is to provide general academic assistance to students through tutorials, basic skills courses, or developmental programs. Yet, the students who enroll in summer programs often need encouragement, advice, and information, in addition to academic assistance. Their successful adjustment to the institution may depend as much on their affective reactions as on their academic preparation. Thus, the actual role of the summer program may be twofold: (1) providing academic assistance and (2) enhancing affective development as a means of nurturing academic persistence. Developmental summer programs are in a unique position to focus on both areas.

Developmental summer programs provide an opportunity for students to improve basic skills in content areas such as math or English and to develop sound study habits. Offered in the summer preceding the freshman year, such programs are designed to make students better prepared academically for the challenges of full-time college enrollment. Although adequate academic preparation is a necessity, it is

not sufficient for college success. Such factors as motivation or time management are well recognized for their influence on achievement. What is less recognized, but no less important, is the student's affective adjustment to the institution—that is, students' feelings about being at a particular institution, or their feelings about the institution's sensitivity to their unique circumstances. This is particularly important to the nontraditional, disadvantaged, or underprepared student who is likely to be a participant in summer programs. Other questions that may affect the adjustment of summer program students include: How receptive is the faculty to nontraditional students? Do students feel alienated because they are in a special program? Have students had adequate opportunity to examine their interests in particular fields or majors? Are students proud of their affiliation with the program and the institution? Do students consider their college experience to be worthwhile and enjoyable? Developmental summer programs can provide opportunities that address these nonacademic questions while simultaneously aiding affective adjustment.

### **Personal and Interpersonal Development**

The brevity of most summer programs limits the amount of academic development that can take place. That is, although summer programs can bridge gaps and help students to be better prepared than they otherwise would be, such programs are not likely to eradicate completely twelve years of poor preparation for college. Yet, through participation in a summer program, students can make giant strides in their personal and interpersonal development that can have a positive impact on overall college adjustment. At Cornell University, a series of personal growth workshops are offered in the summer program. The workshops may focus on such matters as money management, sexuality and contraception, or alcohol and drug abuse. These workshops are designed to emphasize the responsibility that accompanies the new independence most students experience during college. In less formal ways, students are encouraged throughout the summer to develop their assertiveness in interpersonal relations and academic settings. Based on our observations over the years, successful students assert themselves and do not shy away from the challenges that confront them. Particularly at a competitive institution, students must be able to state their ideas, identify their interests, and not be unduly swayed by the ideas and interests of others. Students must not be awestruck by their professors or intimidated by more privileged peers. Cornell's summer program students are encouraged to raise their hands in class and to

visit with professors during office hours. The program also sponsors opportunities for students to interact with faculty and administrators in a relaxed atmosphere. Each week a faculty member or administrator is invited to eat dinner with students in the dormitory and to lead a discussion on a topic of interest afterwards. The topic may be related to an academic discipline or to a university policy. In any case, students get an opportunity to interact on a personal level with key members of the university community. Such activities emphasize to students that, in addition to academic obligations, the personal and interpersonal sides of college life are important factors in overall adjustment.

### **Interest and Reality Testing**

Students who attend a summer program often need to examine their interest in particular fields of study. For example, a student may plan to be a doctor or an engineer, based on what other students have done or general impressions about the field. But the student may not have a thorough understanding of the program of study for that discipline or may not be familiar with the work routine of a particular career choice. The academic requirements of a specific major usually become clear to students over the course of the summer, as their current course work is shown to relate to future course work. The work routine in a particular discipline is less obvious, but can be addressed through field trips and guest lectures by professionals in the field. For example, engineering students might visit a manufacturing or processing plant to observe the kind of work engineers do. Or, a professional engineer might be invited to campus to lecture to interested students on career options, work conditions, or other items of concern to students. Similarly, pre-med students might spend an afternoon touring a medical center or hear a guest lecture by a physician or medical student. These activities serve to remind summer program students of the relevance of their studies and also provide role models with whom students can identify. Occasionally, as a result of the interest testing available through the summer experience, students will decide to revise their plans regarding a major and choose to pursue a different career or academic path. This should not be viewed as an unfortunate loss; on the contrary, such revisions are actually part of the growth process that can set students in the direction most appropriate for their interests and skills.

Summer program students also may need to assess themselves—to do some reality testing regarding their own abilities and the level of competition at their chosen institution. Habits that have produced success before are likely to be repeated. Unfortunately, many of the habits

that met with success in high school are apt to be inappropriate and, therefore, unsuccessful in college. Rote memorization, cramming, or evidence of effort may have been rewarded in high school, but are unlikely to be rewarded in college. Thus, many summer program students may enter college thinking that their old habits will serve them when the reality is that a whole new set of habits is in order.

As Yates and Collins (1979) have pointed out, students have a tendency to overestimate their abilities while underestimating the level of competition at a particular institution. Such unrealistic expectations can lead to academic disaster. Summer programs should provide the opportunity for students to realistically appraise their abilities, relative to the prevailing level of competition. The academic program should be rigorous enough for students to consider it a real challenge. Weaknesses in the student's preparation for college should be pointed out and a program designed to strengthen the student's skill. This can be a painful process for the student as he is brought to realize that his skills are not as strong as he had thought and that old habits may require major revisions. But the student's long-term success may depend on just such painful revisions. In fact, it may be a greater disservice to allow summer program students to begin their college careers with a false sense of security because they were not made to acknowledge clearly their academic weaknesses. Faulty expectations about one's own abilities can lead to inadequate preparation for the real challenges that confront students in the academic setting. Furthermore, unless the student acknowledges weaknesses, there will be no incentive to change behavior. When the old habits prove unsuccessful, the student may withdraw from full participation in campus life, creating still other obstacles to adjustment. By testing their career and academic interests and by testing the reality of their academic strengths and weaknesses, summer program students can develop a better sense of the challenges they will face and the skills needed to meet those challenges.

### **Identification with the Institution**

Summer program students also have the opportunity for an early positive identification with the institution. In part, the routine recognition of buildings, services, and personnel shapes this identification. But more significant is the student's experience as a legitimate part of the university community, as one who contributes to the diversity of talents and experiences that constitute the institution, and also as a representative of the institution.

The Cornell summer program allows for the expression of the wealth of talent among student participants through a talent show, college quiz bowl, and an Olympics day. These events can be entertain-

ing, informative, or just plain fun. They provide structured avenues through which students can release energy, which has a tendency to build up while students are in class on hot summer days. Activities also provide an opportunity for students to cheer each other and provide a mechanism for recognizing talents other than those of the formal classroom setting. But, perhaps more than anything else, such events serve to develop a sense of comradeship and positive identification with people, programs, and the institution.

Such activities can also involve students from other summer programs at nearby colleges, serving to illustrate that summer study is a common experience and not something peculiar to a given institution or something forced upon students because they are different from their peers. A well-planned set of extracurricular activities can help summer program participants feel good about the new environment they are about to enter while they locate a comfortable niche for themselves within it.

### **Conclusion**

Summer programs have academic development as their major goal. But students' affective development can be equally important to successful adjustment. Academic skills are essential, but students must also feel good about the institution and their place within it. Students must recognize their strengths and weaknesses and be willing to revise behavior, as appropriate. On the personal level, students must acknowledge their responsibilities and assert themselves intelligently to meet them. Persistence through graduation, especially for students who attend a summer program, can depend as much on students' affective responses as on their academic preparation. The successful summer program will give due consideration to the affective domain as it relates to overall student adjustment.

### **References**

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*William Collins is director of the Learning Skills Center at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. He is currently engaged in research on prediction of achievement by underprepared students.*