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Too Slow

We have been waiting for some time for the U.S. Office of Education to publish a report on the number of bachelor's and higher degrees conferred in 1959-60. A summary table appeared a year ago, but the full report that would continue the annual series that began with 1947-48 has not yet appeared. This is too slow. Summary figures for 1960-61 are not yet available. This also is too slow.

In contrast, major reports from the vastly larger national census for 1960 have been available for some time, and estimates based on samples are available continuously and promptly on unemployment rates, cost of living, and other economic indexes.

For future historical use, it will make little difference whether such reports appeared promptly or tardily. But prompt publication is of great importance to students of educational and manpower trends and to university and government officers concerned with educational planning.

The users of educational statistics realize that compilation on a national basis requires time. The colleges and universities must know who actually received degrees before they can report the figures to the Office of Education. Unfortunately, their initial reports sometimes include errors, so the Office of Education, which takes pride in 100-percent coverage and in having its own report accurate, must verify many details through further correspondence before tabulation and reporting can be completed. But even so, the process is too slow.

While we wait for two-year-old figures on the number of degrees granted—information which is not available from other sources—the full report of a study of higher education salaries for 1961-62 has already been published. If salary data for 1961-62 can be published in September of 1962, why is it necessary to wait so long for degree data? A coordinated, rapid, and efficient system of compiling and publishing statistics on higher education would aid the Office of Education, other government agencies, the colleges and universities themselves, and the national educational organizations. Cooperation among these agencies and institutions will be necessary to achieve such a system, and, because the Office of Education should be centrally involved, support from Congress and the Bureau of the Budget will also be required.

Faster and more accurate reporting by the colleges (and that would be expected if the reports appeared more promptly), such new equipment as may be needed to process the data more efficiently, and a tight printing schedule could readily solve the delay problem, if the Commissioner of Education and the Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare are sincerely interested in solving it.

But speed is not the only problem. Some critics ask why we need three separate annual studies of academic salaries, by the Office of Education, the National Education Association, and the American Association of University Professors. Such questions, and the serious delays, indicate the desirability of a thorough analysis of available and needed statistics on higher education. The agency that takes the initiative in studying this problem and sticking with it until a workable solution is agreed upon will have rendered a valuable service to higher education. The solution is not technically difficult. There seems to be no adequate reason to delay any longer in working out the operating details.—D.W.