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Selective Service and College Enrollment

The Selective Service procedures now going into effect have the great advantage over recent practices in that they shorten a man's period of vulnerability to 1 year and, for many men, reduce or eliminate uncertainty over their chances of being drafted. Thus men of draft age will be able to plan ahead with greater confidence than has been possible in recent years.

The prolonged uncertainty and vulnerability in recent years have had the paradoxical effect of keeping some men in college and of keeping others out—both for the same reason: the desire to avoid military service.

It may be useful to consider possible effects of the new procedures on college and university enrollment. In 1967, 25 percent of the engineering graduates entered graduate work immediately. The percentage dropped to 18 in 1968 and to 16 in 1969. The Engineers Joint Council attributes this decline to the decision of many young engineers to enter industry in the hope that their local boards would defer them because of the work they were doing. Under the new system, a college graduate will have completed his military service, will have passed his year of vulnerability, or will be able to estimate his chance of being drafted within the year. Most students who want to go to graduate school will now be able to do so with little likelihood of being called for induction.

The same Selective Service practices have kept other men in college. Any undergraduate can be deferred as long as he continues to make normal progress toward a bachelor's degree. Although deferments for graduate work were abolished in 1968, many graduate students have been permitted to postpone induction to the end of the school year or until receipt of a degree. Thus colleges and universities have been used as draft shelters by young men who did not particularly want to be in college but who wanted even less to be in the Army.

This year, many men low on the order of call and, after this year, men who have graduated from the prime age group without being called will not need draft shelters. If it turns out that a substantial number of such men leave college, or do not enter, enrollment will increase more slowly in the next few years than has been expected on the basis of population trends, which indicate a slower increase in the 1970's than in the 1960's.

A substantial reduction in the use of college as a draft shelter would have the secondary effect of lessening the number of new appointments necessary to maintain adequate faculty size, and that number, as with enrollment, will in any event be smaller in the 1970's than in the 1960's.

Less rapid increase in faculty size, cutbacks of research funds, and some industrial curtailment are already reducing the rate of increase of demand in the scientific fields. The current situation seems to be that shortages will continue in engineering and the health fields but that shortages of scientists for teaching and research posts are now easing.

The uncertainty of some of these speculations is itself worthy of note. The greater assurance with which individuals can plan ahead is an advantage to the young men involved, but uncertainty as to how they will respond makes it necessary to guess what the secondary effects will be. A country that collects great masses of data on all manner of things must still do a good deal of guessing about the educational facilities that will be needed in the future and the ways in which even such important changes as the current one in Selective Service influence educational and occupational planning.—DAEL WOLFLE