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Future Administrators

Under a grant from the Ford Foundation, the American Council on Education is in the second year of a 5-year program of providing internships in academic administration to selected faculty members who would like to sample the administrative life. Next fall "fifty persons judged to have high potential for successful careers in academic administration in colleges and universities will be selected for administrative internships in fifty host institutions."

Traditionally, it has not been quite respectable to aspire openly to a position in college or university administration. The assistant professor who is good in his field usually thinks of a professorship in a major university as the top rung on his ladder. Later on, some change their minds; many a scholar who knows that his best work is behind him or that he will never quite achieve as much in his own field as he once hoped has successfully traded the known satisfactions of a largely self-directed life of teaching and research for the frustrations and uncertainties and also the rewards and larger scope of an administrative position. Some have combined eminence in their own fields with high talents as educational philosophers and leaders.

Unfortunately, there are not enough such men and women to provide all of the presidents, provosts, deans, directors, and other administrators needed by the wide range of institutions involved in education beyond the high school level—community and junior colleges, liberal arts and teacher-training and other specialized colleges, great universities and lesser ones—and to direct the variety of new responsibilities that have been assumed or accepted by the universities—sponsored research, international cooperation, and public service duties.

Some of these posts will be filled by persons who defy the academic mores by frankly aspiring to administrative careers, for it seems—although not altogether happily—that a new breed will grow in number, the men who hope and prepare for administrative posts as devotedly as the lieutenant who hopes to become a general, the businessman who wants to become company president, or the school teacher who aspires to a superintendency. These persons are likely to be considered academic climbers and looked on with suspicion by many of their colleagues, but they exist.

For some of them and also for some who follow the more traditional route, a year spent in close association with an established administrator may provide a valuable opportunity for self-appraisal in a new role and an opportunity to be tried out, with no permanent commitment on either side. It may well be that none of the interns in this program will become Harpers, or Elliotts, or Conants. But a number of men in their 30's and 40's will learn some of the problems, the temptations, the frustrations, and the constructive opportunities to be found in administrative responsibility. Some will be repelled or will demonstrate their ineptness. Others will find satisfaction and will impress their preceptors as good candidates for future administrative appointments.

This program is worth watching, not only in terms of its own objectives but also, if it works well, as a possible model for selecting and training some of the growing number of science administrators who are needed on campuses, in industry, and in government. Here too there is a problem of finding the men and women who can contribute most effectively, and with personal satisfaction, by transferring from the laboratory to the administrative office.—DAEL WOLFLE