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Shortchanging the Disadvantaged Student

Some universities are providing remedial courses for young people who, through no fault of their own, have received a substandard secondary school preparation. Such remedial courses have proven to be of great value in preparing these students for survival in the mainstream of American higher education. In addition, many universities recognize that most students from the inner city have had experiences different from those of traditional students, and sensitive faculty members often try to make those experiences educationally meaningful in the classroom. Universities deserve to be strongly supported in both of these efforts.

A few of these universities, with the best of intentions, push their activities on behalf of disadvantaged students still further and, in doing so, modify the fundamental nature of the university. For example, some institutions give graduation credit for the completion of remedial courses, arguing that the student has done the work in college (and so should receive college credit) and further, argued that he is unlikely to work seriously on his remedial courses if they do not carry credit toward graduation.

Let us suppose a disadvantaged student in a particular university is awarded 20 graduation credits for completing a series of remedial courses. He would then need but 100 additional credits to satisfy graduation requirements, while a typical student in the same university would need 120 college credits. Is it fair to the disadvantaged student to award him a degree for the completion of 100 credits of postsecondary study while the adequately prepared student earns the same degree after accumulating the educational benefits of 120 credits of study? Does it benefit the disadvantaged student to award him a degree for 17 percent less college-level study than the better prepared student has had?

Some universities feel that the community encounters of students from the inner city are so meaningful that these students should receive college credit for their experiences. The rationale is that those particular experiences, which traditional students have not had, add a learning dimension of such significance that it deserves to be recognized with college credit. But traditional students have also had an array of experiences, albeit different from those of students from the inner city. Should not they be awarded college credit for their special experiences?

I suggest that universities do a disservice to disadvantaged students when they award them graduation credits on a basis different from that used for other college students. This kind of "generosity" is yet another form of discrimination against disadvantaged youths, for discrimination it is when those students are deprived of a full college education through receiving credits that are not available to other students.

Institutions that attempt to make it easy for disadvantaged students through such manipulations are actually restricting the intellectual growth and maturity of those students. And that is what I refer to as the shortchanging of the disadvantaged student.—ARNOLD B. GROBMAN, *Office of the Dean, Rutgers College, New Brunswick, New Jersey 08903*