A Composite Student Support Program (SSP) at Brown

Report to the Dean of The College, for 1977-78

1. Introductory

The composite Student Support Program (SSP) which replaced the Transitional Summer Program last fall has had a number of notable successes in its first year of operation, and one or two problems as well. It has initiated several new ways of "supporting" undergraduate education, and coordinated several older programs that were well established but functioning in isolation. All minority students at Brown (and, in a different frame of reference, all non-minority students) have had access to help, enrichment, and supplementary educational services through one or another of its ten branches. During the year 1977-78 SSP staged or facilitated thousands of human contacts that would not otherwise have taken place, conferences, meetings, consultations, tutorials, retreats. SSP has also supplied an administrative and budgetary structure within which support programs can be developed and minority interests directly addressed; that is in itself worth attention in a university that has not made long-range plans along these lines.

Problems: SSP has obligations both to the minority community and to the University as a whole; sometimes these obligations conflict. The money allocated to TSP was committed to minority students and designated for the benefit of the Third World student community; sharing these funds with non-minority students in effect undermines the University's commitment to the Third World community. On the other hand, segregated educational facilities are both illegal and incompatible with Brown's educational values: the University benefits from sharing in Third World culture - indeed, would hardly qualify as a major institution of higher education if it restricted itself to conventional students, to traditional western topics and interests - and the Third World community benefits from its membership in the larger university community. Funds reserved for TSP/SSP must be channeled into minority affairs, but bridges between majority and minority communities, including those sponsored by SSP, must be maintained in top working order.

It is our impression that this year's Student Support Program has not met some important needs that were met for some students by the Transitional Summer Program. In meetings with students we have been told that TSP helped to acclimatize students to the strange new atmosphere they met at Brown, and that the influence of TSP spread to friends who had not participated. There was general agreement that the Third World Transition Week was a great help to many students, but five days cannot do what six weeks did. A revived TSP, however, would absorb almost all the money now allocated to the ten branches of SSP.

An additional problem for SSP in its first year has been publicity: Brown students resist communication, throw away anything in their mailbox that isn't obviously a love letter or a
check, and stay away from non-essential meetings. The student body and the faculty should be better informed about SSP than they have been so far.

In sections (2) and (3) below, operations of the ten components of SSP for 1977-78 are informally described and evaluated. For convenience, these ten have been divided into academic and non-academic programs, with the understanding that at Brown such divisions are artificial. SSP's support services are more briefly listed and identified in a pamphlet on Academic Assistance Programs at Brown, which will be available in the Office of the Dean of The College.

2. Academic Support Programs

SSP started five new academic support programs and contributed to one older one, the Tutorial service offered through the Deanery. The following Table gives rough estimates for the number of students reached in some useful way by each program (column 1), the number of students whose education was significantly enhanced by this program (column 2), and the number of Third World students who participated in each program (column 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Number Helped</th>
<th>Number Supported</th>
<th>Number Third World Students Supported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading and Study Skills</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Tutorial</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chem 3T</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math 9: extra section</td>
<td>15?</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engin 3: extra section</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutorial for course work</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>140?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tutorial program is most heavily patronized by sophomores and juniors; the other five are used mostly by freshmen.

The non-credit course in Reading and Study Skills met 24 times each semester, mainly in Churchill House. Different formats were tried at different times in the year: lectures to audiences of 150 or more; tests and exercises for 20-30; individualized work with controlled reader and tachistoscope; one-on-one discussion of general study problems associated with particular courses. The freshmen who most obviously needed professional help with reading were foreign students, who were referred after a certain number of sessions to Mr. Ryan and the Language Lab. Since Brown students are mostly too bright to have needed study skills in high school, they learn a lot from studying learning.
Between September and May, thirty students paid 3 or more visits to Michael Cervas for one-on-one help with writing. Several of these had been referred by the English 1 staff, in response to an appeal by Mr. Cervas early in October. The average number of visits, each 1½ hours long, was 4, but one student paid 17, two 12, three 9, and two 8. To quote Mr. Carvas: "every student who came to see me improved his or her writing ability in one way or another. For some, the improvement was painfully slow, for others quite dramatic." Writing tutorial reached upperclass people as well as freshmen, Californians, athletes, foreign students, and RUE as well as minorities. Nine superlative evaluation forms were submitted, anonymously, in May, and are available for inspection in Dean McIntosh's office.

Extra evening classes were held from September to January in Engin 3, to answer questions and explain ideas that may have had to be skipped or slighted in lecture. Attendance varied, but as many as 75 students came to one or another session, most of them more than once. 8 of the 75 were minority freshmen. Professor Rice reports that the grade distribution for Engin 3 in 1977 was no different from 1976. However, he and Mr. Ruina, who conducted the extra sections, both feel that the number of students who came and came back to these extra sections, plus the nature of the questions asked and topics covered, demonstrate that they fill a genuine need. Such extra sections are planned as part of the regular structure of Engin 3 next fall.

About 10 students participated regularly in the extra section of Math 9. The class was run informally, with discussion of why a given rule did or did not apply to a given problem. Two thirds of the class were RUE students, who needed to learn or re-learn trigonometry and algebra. Some of the class were subject to what is now commonly referred to as "math anxiety": for these, a small informal ungraded class was suitable, as a format within which they might most easily experience success in mathematics.

About 45 students who had trouble with Chem 3 were invited to enroll in a self-paced, tutorial section run by Professor Lee Clapp and Mrs. Edelgard Morse. These two in effect made themselves available to answer questions at almost any time, and worked through the Chem 3 syllabus with individuals or small groups at a pace adapted to students' capacity. 19 students got enough of a boost from this extra help to take the regular final exam, and 17 of these passed. 13 students who extended Chem 3 into Semester II passed the course; in effect, 30 students who would almost certainly have failed Chem 3 were enabled to learn its material and get credit for it.

Under the Brown Tutorial Program, any student may apply for help with a particular course and be assigned a student or graduate student as tutor, for $7 per semester no matter how many tutorial sessions take place. Some Departments appoint a faculty member to screen potential tutors and monitor tutorial needs. This year the number of requests for tutorial rose 50% to 428, making it much the largest academic assistance program at Brown (unless we count the faculty itself).
3. Non-academic Support Programs

The Minority Peer Counselors (34 in number, competitively selected and carefully trained) help hold SSP together: by getting to know minority freshmen and introducing them to SSP, by making referrals to SSP services, by taking part in events at the Third World Center, by acting as staff for the Third World Transition Week, and by reporting to an Assistant Dean who is on the Steering Committee and who runs Tutorial. MPC's in 1977-78 were for the first time under SSP given their own budget, distributed equitably among the freshmen dorms, listed with Resident Counselors among counseling resources, consulted by the Residential Council and Student Life Committee, and represented on the Board of Counselors. Renewed attention this year was given to the problem of MPC's for all three major ethnic minorities, Latinos and Asian-Americans as well as Blacks. MPC's continue to attempt to clarify their goals and functions, so that they may be sure they are doing their job.

All minority students in the Class of 1981 were invited to the Third World Transition Week (TWTW, September 6-10), a pre-orientation series of meetings, tours, meals, lectures, and recreation designated to help new students find their feet faster than they otherwise might at Brown. About 60 (out of about 120) minority freshmen attended; they seem to have enjoyed it and profited from it immensely (their evaluations are on file in UH 213). The goals of TWTW also include a fostering of solidarity and community spirit among minority students, early access to deans and other administrators, awareness of predictable crises, of academic opportunities and pitfalls and of the history of Brown's attitudes to Third World issues.

Until last year all funds for the Third World Center (TWC) in the basement of Churchill House were pieced together from allotments by the UCS to student groups such as the Third World Coalition, Latin American Student Association, Organization of United African Peoples, Saturday Enrichment, the Asian-American Students' Association, MPC's and others. SSP gave the TWC a budget (which will be increased next year, when the Reading Course and the Writing Tutorial are run out of Churchill House), a half-time Director, and several fractions of several secretaries; it supported physical renovation of the Center and sanctioned pretty elaborate programming, including efforts to reach out to concerned faculty, staff, and members of the minority communities of Providence. A full roster of last year's activities at TWC would take up too much space (see minutes of the June 23rd meeting of the Steering Committee), but the following list is suggestive: membership drive, newsletter, occasional papers, Thursday speakers, Tafreeja (ethnic suppers), black men's rap group, black women's rap groups, Minority Parents' Reception on Parents' Weekend, Third World Weekend, Third World Film series. Money is a problem here, since almost any amount could be absorbed: the physical resources of the Center are not always adequate to its tasks.

Finally, special Faculty Advisors for minority freshmen were selected from lists of faculty members compiled by Third-World student groups such as MPC's, LASO, AASA, OUAP. They signed up to spend more
time with fewer advisees; they volunteered to meet their two or three charges during TWTW and see them frequently, outside office and classroom, hoping to get to know them informally and extra-academically and to offer moral support as well as academic advice. 96% of the freshmen surveyed in late October felt positive about their special SSP advisors and wanted to keep them, not switch; the usual percentage for positive feelings like this is about 60%.

4. **Operations and Issues**

The day-to-day operations of SSP are superintended by a Steering Committee that meets every week in the Third World Center. Membership: the Director of TWC, the Assistant Dean in charge of Tutorial and MPC, the Dean of Freshmen, at least three students, interested parties.

A standing committee of the Faculty on SSP meets every two weeks, to provide guidance and discuss policies and planning. Membership: five faculty members, five students.

Live issues this year include: publicity, community outreach and education; what it means to be a "Third World" student at Brown; budget allotments to TWC versus TWTW and academic support programs; evaluation, for purposes of planning.

Respectfully submitted,

Carey McIntosh
Calvin Hicks

with contributions from
Ricardo Anzaldúa,
John Robinson, and
Frank Levin.

CM:ts
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