Features:

The Impact of Expanding Professional Contingent Labor Force on Enrollments in MBA Programs
— Sidney R. Siegel & Rajiv R. Lajmi

Will Higher Education Make a Difference? African Americans’ Economic Expectations and College Choice
— Kassie Freeman

Accuracy of Self-Reported Test Scores
— Guadalupe Anaya

The Forum:

Commentary, International Q&A
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Features

3  The Impact of Expanding Professional Contingent Labor Force on Enrollments in MBA Programs

In this study, Sidney R. Siegel and Rajiv R. Lajmi examine how differences in how contingent employees are treated compared to their counterpart permanent employees could have a trickle-down effect on their decision to pursue the MBA degree.

7  Will Higher Education Make a Difference?

African Americans’ Economic Expectations and College Choice

Kassie Freeman studies African American high school students’ perceived economic expectations and the subsequent influence on the students’ decision to either attend or not attend college.

13  Accuracy of Self-Reported Test Scores

The validity and accuracy of self-reported Graduate Record Examination (GRE) test scores are examined by Guadalupe Anaya.

The Forum

Readers’ perspectives through Q&A, guest commentary, letters, and book reviews.

20  Commentary—Integrated Student Services: Lessons from China

24  International Q&A

26  Index for Volume 74
Editor’s Note

We are already in the midst of Advent; the Christmas season is practically upon us; and the year that will end both the twentieth century and the second millennium Anno Domini nears its beginning. Sentiments of the season are most appropriate for this issue of College & University.

First, a most welcome holiday gift: There will be no more doubled-up issues of College & University in the future. We will continue to publish quarterly.

Second, a New Year’s resolution: The Editorial Board and the Editor will redouble efforts to make College & University a journal of both scholarly and practical interest to AACRAOans. We also hope to introduce a new feature or two to further pique your interest.

And, third, Season’s Greetings: The Editorial Board wishes you a wonderful holiday season and a new year without a single Y2K headache!

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Instructions to Authors

The C&U Editorial Board welcomes manuscripts for publication in College & University, AACRAO’s scholarly research journal. AACRAO members are especially encouraged to submit articles pertaining to their own experiences with emerging issues or innovative practices within the profession.

The Board also welcomes comments on articles, timely issues in higher education, and other topics of interest to this journal’s readers in the form of letters to the editor or longer guest commentary. We especially invite AACRAO members to participate in reviewing books.

Manuscript Preparation

Manuscripts for feature articles should be no longer than 4,500 words. Manuscripts for guest commentary and book reviews should not exceed 2,000 words. Letters to the editor will ordinarily be limited to 200 words.

All submissions must be saved to an IBM-compatible disk (Microsoft Word, preferably) and include a hard-copy original printed on 8.5” x 11” white paper. Because the Board has a blind review policy, the author’s name should not appear on any text page. A cover sheet should include the title of the manuscript, author’s name, address, phone and fax number, and e-mail address.

References should be formatted in the author-date style and follow guidelines provided on page 526 of The Chicago Manual of Style, 14th edition. A list of references should appear at the end of the article. Text citations also follow the author-date format; examples may be found on page 641 of the Manual. For more information or for samples, please contact the C&U Editor.

Essential tables and charts should be included on separate pages at the end of the manuscript. All graphics should be submitted on clean, reproducible, or camera-ready paper.

All submissions are accepted for publication with the understanding that the College & University editors reserve the right to edit for clarity and style. Please do not submit articles that are under consideration for publication by another periodical.

Authors whose manuscripts are selected for publication will be asked to submit a short biographical statement and an abstract of their article, each no more than thirty-five words.

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Editorial Procedure

The editor will acknowledge receipt of manuscripts (letters will not be acknowledged) and will forward them to members of the C&U Editorial Board for review. The Board will consider the appropriateness of the article for AACRAO’s membership, the current needs of the professions, the usefulness of the information, the nature and logic of the research methodology, clarity, and the style of presentation.

This review may take as long as three months, after which the C&U editor will inform the author of the manuscript’s acceptance or rejection.
In the mid-1990s, the years following severe corporate downsizing, enrollments in graduate business programs began to rise. Today, according to the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), about 700 US institutions are granting more than 94,000 MBA degrees annually, compared to 31,000 degrees conferred by 389 schools in 1973. Estimates of the total number of students currently pursuing the degree range from 250,000 to 290,000.

Except for the nation’s top business schools, which are attended by less than 15 percent of all MBA students, the bulk of graduate business students have traditionally remained part-time. A 1996 sampling of 39 MBA programs in the mid-Atlantic region pointed to 83 percent of students being part-timers—career-minded professionals seeking to enhance their managerial skills or to find new career opportunities.

As the economy recovered and downsizing tapered off, many companies realized that they might have cut too deep. To remedy this condition, two popular strategies emerged: (1) the outsourcing of highly skilled jobs to independent contractors, and (2) the hiring of professional contract workers for temporary in-house assignments. These strategies shortly became the underpinning of an emerging breed of workers—the contingent labor force.

The Department of Labor broadly defines contingent workers as “those who do not have an explicit or implicit contract for ongoing employment.” However, unlike traditional “temporary” workers, these are highly skilled, well-educated professionals ranging from engineers, IS experts and accountants, to surgeons and research scientists. An increasing number also includes executive vice presidents, controllers, middle- and upper-level managers, and even interim CEOs and CFOs.

There are many advantages associated with outsourcing such professional jobs, including flexibility—with staffing

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This study assesses the potential impact of the growing contingent labor force on future business school enrollments. A survey of Fortune 1000 companies was conducted to determine corporate policies regarding types of benefits provided for contract workers compared to their permanently employed counterparts. Current and projected participation rates for contingency workers were developed through survey instruments and personal contacts with major suppliers of these workers. At the same time, more than 300 current MBA students were surveyed to determine the importance of tuition reimbursement on their decision to attend and continue their education. Utilizing these findings in combination with projections of labor force growth, estimates of possible declines in future graduate student enrollments are presented. Recommendations are suggested to help organizations counter this possibility of losing their supply of bright and up-to-date MBAs. Several strategies that could also help business schools counter this projected downturn in their graduate enrollments are discussed.

Dr. Sidney R. Siegel is currently Professor of Management and Organizational Behavior at Drexel University, Philadelphia. His research focus includes management-related issues in the emerging professional contingent labor force, especially with respect to new approaches that will be required of future managers; the relationship between age and performance; and other age-related issues. He is also an active OD consultant to organizations in the private and public sectors.

Mr. Rajiv R. Lajmi is currently an SAP Consultant at PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP in Philadelphia. During his Master’s degree course in the College of Business and Administration at Drexel University, Philadelphia, he worked with Dr. Sid Siegel as his graduate assistant on research projects dealing with the contingency labor force.

1 This figure is based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).
companies now able to supply highly-skilled professionals on short notice, it is possible for firms to bring human resources on board and retrench more quickly. But one frequently considered advantage is the cost savings associated with reduced fringe benefits available to these contract workers. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) reports that, in nearly all cases, contingent workers are paid less in terms of salary and benefits than their permanent counterparts.

One such benefit not available to contract workers, but traditionally provided to permanent employees, is tuition reimbursement for pursuing advanced degrees. This has significantly offset, and often totally paid for, the recognized escalating costs of part-time graduate programs. The absence of this generous benefit might influence the decision of employees to enroll or continue in such graduate programs, which typically take about 3 1/2 years, and cost between $5,000 and $25,000 annually.

It is the future trends of these part-timers that need to be examined more closely. With continued economic growth and increasing demands for specialized training of professionals in all areas, part-time enrollments should remain stable, or even continue to increase. However, this may not happen, and we may in fact begin to see a reversal with declining enrollments. A rapidly expanding contingent labor force could have an unanticipated trickle-down effect on the decision to pursue the MBA degree.

To assess the potential impact of the emerging contingent labor force on business school enrollments, a study of the following three factors was undertaken:

2. Impact of the lack of availability of tuition reimbursement on the decision to pursue or continue a graduate business program.
3. Corporate policies towards tuition remission for contract workers as compared to permanent employees.

The Study

Participation Rates of Contract Workers

Contract workers comprise the fastest growing sector of the nation’s labor force. Preliminary projections by Time and Fortune magazines in the mid-1990s pointed to as much as 50 percent of the labor force being employed as temporary workers in the near future. In October 1997, US News & World Report suggested that the labor force contained an estimated 26 million temporary workers, and the number was expected to grow. However, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) and the National Association of Temporary and Staffing Services (NATSS) reported around 2.3-2.5 million contingent workers in 1997, or only 2 percent of the total labor force. The figure in 1991 was 1.1 million.

Time and Fortune, along with US News, may have provided optimistic estimates to start with, which most likely included independent contractors and self-employed professionals. These workers are not included in BLS’s or NATSS’s data, nor within the population that is the focus of this study.

Regardless, the fact remains that between the years 1991 and 1997, the number of professional contingent workers in the labor force more than doubled—an annual growth rate of almost 13 percent. At the same time, total corporate payrolls of contract professionals have also risen, as reported by the NATSS, from less than $500 million to more than $2.5 billion. Even after adjusting for inflation, the increased dependence on contract workers is obvious.

Further clouding this numbers game is a newly emerging category of contingent professionals. Frequently referred to as permatemps, these temporary workers have relatively extended employment periods of several years, but are not treated as permanent employees, and are denied many, if not all, fringe benefits typically available to their counterpart permanent employees.

Companies in all sectors of the economy are hiring these workers, but the information technology industry is topping the list. Microsoft Corporation, one such company, is currently entangled in a major lawsuit contesting the actual employment status of its permatemps. If the status of these workers is not changed to that of permanent employees, they clearly should be included within the more formally defined contingent labor force.

The results from a recent survey of 750 companies from the annual Fortune 1000 listing further define the movement of this growing contingent labor force. This survey suggested that 93 percent of responding companies used contract workers as part of their labor force. Close to 92 percent of these companies said they would continue to use them in the future.

Student Reliance on Tuition Reimbursement by Employers

Approximately 300 students from medium-sized MBA programs in the Philadelphia area were surveyed to determine the impact of availability, and possible discontinuance of tuition reimbursement on their decision to pursue or continue a graduate business program.

Over 75 percent of the respondents were part-time students, almost all of them having permanent positions within a variety of professional fields. Close to 3 percent of the sample was contract workers. Not surprising is the fact that more than 90 percent of permanent employees indicated they were receiving either full or partial employer tuition reimbursement. None of the contract workers received any such support from their employers.

When asked to reassess the decision to pursue the advanced degree if they had not been provided tuition reimbursement, more than 70 percent claimed they would not enroll. They were also asked whether they would continue their program if tuition reimbursement benefits were terminated. Almost 70 percent claimed they would
terminate their studies. While the credits earned towards the graduate degree might influence each student’s decision, this information was not available.

Corporate Policy Towards Tuition Remission

Benefits programs in most organizations have gone through much change in the past 20 years. “Cafeteria” benefit plans, whereby employees can choose from a “menu” a specific mix of benefits that add up to a certain dollar amount, have gained tremendous popularity. Certainly, the variety of such so-called employee entitlements is broad, but the availability of tuition reimbursement for eligible permanent employees seems to be a mainstay, and is gaining popularity.

Of the 225 organizations represented by the surveyed students, ranging from small consulting firms to pharmaceutical giants, more than 90 percent provided tuition reimbursement to their eligible permanent employees. Payments ranged from complete coverage to formulas based on actual credits taken per calendar year, as well as grades achieved. Corporate support and encouragement for permanent professional employees to pursue advanced degrees is very apparent. One explanation for this may be a report by the SHRM suggesting that the demand for professionals in occupations requiring a master’s degree is expected to grow by 29 percent in the next few years.

For the growing number of contract workers, however, the situation is quite different. Less than 10 percent of respondents within the survey of Fortune 1000 companies provided any traditional benefits such as health insurance, disability packages, or retirement plans for contract workers. This finding is somewhat lower than that reported by the BLS—one in five contingent workers has employer-provided coverage for some form of health care, as compared to more than one of every two permanent employees. This discrepancy in data might be explained by the possibility that some contract workers not receiving benefits from the employer may be receiving them from the temporary agencies that place them.

As limited as this availability of fringe benefits appears to be for contract workers, more alarming is the fact that any form of tuition reimbursement appears to be non-existent. None of the Fortune companies surveyed provided this benefit to this class of workers, and almost 93 percent of the students surveyed reported that their organizations also failed to provide this benefit to contract workers.

Discussion

For many companies today, the competitive drive for new services and products has created an almost insatiable need to hire highly-trained, currently knowledgeable workers, as well as to encourage existing employees to stay abreast of new developments. To this end, company-supported MBA programs have historically acted as catalysts. This study shows that tuition reimbursement clearly is a major factor in the decision of such employees to pursue graduate programs—a majority of such students would not enroll or continue if the benefit was unavailable. For an increasing number of these existing and future professional contingent workers, this could present a dilemma. First, the total number of professional contingent workers in the labor force has grown 13 percent annually, which is expected to continue. Secondly, at the same time, the availability of tuition reimbursement for these workers has been shown to be almost non-existent.

If these trends continue, their interaction is bound to produce a decline in the enrollment of part-time MBA students. For example, considering that the number of MBA degrees conferred has grown 2 percent annually since 1991, the absence of tuition reimbursement to future contract workers could reduce this growth pattern by as much as 13 percent, as well as cause a similar drop of existing students who are transitioning from permanent employment to contract work. Based on 83 percent of the 275,000 estimated MBA enrollments in the US being part-timers, we could expect future part-time enrollments to fall by as much as 30,000 per year, not even considering the 2 percent growth rate.

It should be noted that this study does not include about 700,000 professional self-employed and independent contractors as part of the 2.3 million contract worker group. The BLS defines the former group in a separate category even though many are victims of downsizing, and who obviously are not receiving any tuition reimbursement. It is reasonable to assume that for this equally growing sector of the labor force, the decision to pursue the MBA degree will also be affected, thus further impacting future enrollment trends.

Recommendations

A 1997 survey conducted by the NATSS showed an increase in benefits provided to contingent workers compared to a similar 1994 survey. Unfortunately, tuition reimbursement was not one of them; such increases were primarily in the health and retirement areas.

It would seem advisable for temporary staffing firms as well as the eventual host employers of contract workers to reconsider the provision of tuition reimbursement. Given the “cost” to an organization of not maintaining “current” professional staff, it might be worthwhile to extend tuition reimbursement to all its professional employees, thus encouraging them to continue their education. For the growing number of staffing agencies who place these workers, offering tuition reimbursement would clearly place them in a more competitive market position. To minimize the cost for the employer, offering contract workers the option to select tuition reimbursement instead of any existing benefits is one approach. In reality, this is exactly what is available to many permanent employees through “cafeteria” benefits programs. Cost-sharing by both the employer and contract worker, and availability of relatively low- or no-interest loans for these employees are other possible options.
For business schools, some changes in marketing MBA programs may be required. The obvious elasticity of cost versus demand expressed by potential students behooves enrollment directors to rethink traditional models. Although current trends are for programs to provide satellite locations, thereby accommodating access needs for many students, it is apparent that cost may override the decision process. In the same context, employees currently receiving tuition reimbursement may have chosen MBA programs at the "top" US business schools, regardless of the cost differential, because they were not paying for it. The competition for these same students may become much keener if they no longer have this benefit in the future.

Establishing partnerships with some of the larger employers within each school's market area should also be considered. The employer, the school, and the student could contribute toward the contract worker's educational costs in varying ratios. This may seem discriminatory and a dual standard with respect to the rising cost of education. However, precedent exists whereby tuition costs vary for students as a function of year of entrance into a program, as well as year of standing in class. Similarly, the school could provide cost-reduction incentives to students on the basis of grades.

Several of these approaches are currently utilized in undergraduate programs in order to maintain a competitive position with the increasingly cost-conscious student market. The time is rapidly approaching when the same path will be necessary to deal with the growing contract labor force.

References
Will Higher Education Make a Difference? African Americans’ Economic Expectations and College Choice

Abstract
In this Spencer Post-Doctoral funded, qualitative inquiry across a range of cities, schools, and family circumstances, African American high school students were given the opportunity to voice their perceptions of the influences on African Americans’ college choice—the decision to participate or not to participate in higher education. The study concludes that African American high school students perceived that economic expectations, the connection between what they perceive to be the costs of attending higher education and what they perceive as their future earning potential, loom large in their considerations of higher education participation.

There is nothing more dreadful for academicians to consider or discuss than the notion that individuals actually think about jobs as one rationale for attending higher education. For academicians, the thought of considering a job as a reason to attend higher education violates the very idea of higher education: education for the sake of education. Once the subject of getting a job is broached, professors quickly begin to discuss how that very idea vocationalizes higher education. The irony of that logic is that there has never been a time in higher education history when the ultimate aim of completing higher education was not to better one’s self economically and socially, which, as it is today, was attached to the prestige of the job one accepted after the completion of higher education.

Academicians continue to be in denial about students’ economic expectations from higher education even when surveys such as the one completed by Boyer (1987) demonstrated that in the late 1980s an overwhelming number of college-bound high school students (90 percent) indicated that they were considering higher education as a means for getting a good job and that parents (88 percent) were equally concerned about the return on their investment, especially considering the high costs today of attending higher education institutions. Furthermore, economics of education and college choice theorists have solidly documented that economic expectations influence students’ college choice process (Anderson and Hearn 1992; Hearn 1991).

Given the linkage between economic expectations and college choice, one rationale for the fluctuation of African Americans’ participation in higher education could be their perceptions of economic expectations after higher education. That is, in those times that African Americans perceive they will receive a more favorable return on their investment in higher education, there will be an increase in the number of African Americans choosing higher education participation. For example, according to Perlman (1973), in the 1970s, when African Americans perceived that after completing higher education, they did not receive employment commensurate with their level of schooling, a question that many African Americans began to ask was: “Will college make a difference?”

The purpose of this research was to assess the effect of African Americans’ perceptions of economic expectations on their college choice process. More specifically, this research examined two primary questions: In what ways do African American high school students’ perceived economic expectations influence African Americans’ choosing college participation? What can be learned from these students’ perceptions of economic expectations that will be useful in explaining the fluctuation of African Americans’ participation in higher education? In order to...
include a representative, diverse group of African American student voices, these questions were assessed from a range of African American high school students, across different high school types, and throughout different geographic regions. A qualitative method, utilizing group interviews, was used because rarely have college choice theorists utilized qualitative methods to examine influences on students’ college choice process.

In this regard, this research can add a much needed, different dimension to economics of education and college choice theories, particularly as it relates to better understanding the influences on African Americans’ choosing higher education and, more specifically, the role that economic expectations play in African Americans’ decision to participate in higher education. It can shed light on what Ogbu (1978) defines as students’ understanding of the limitations of their employment options.

**Economic Expectations and College Choice**

One of the major rationales for how or why students choose college participation is economic expectations (Anderson and Hearn 1992; Hossler, Braxton, and Coopersmith 1989; Orfield et al. 1984). These college choice theorists and economics of education theorists (for example, Becker 1975; Cohn 1979; Johns, Morphet, and Alexander 1983; Thurow 1972) have suggested that the expected costs of attendance and the future earning potential expected as a result of attending college are the two primary factors that students consider in their perception of the value of higher education, although economic status, race, and education of parents may have bearing on future earning potential.

Future earning potential has been a topic greatly underexplored as it relates to African American students’ participation in higher education. For example, Barnes (1992) completed a study on African American, twelfth-grade male stayins (those who were persisting through high school), and as it related to those students’ economic goals, she found: “It is interesting that 43.7 percent indicated they wanted to become wealthy or comfortable rather than identify an occupation.”

Economic expectations (job market opportunities) are a particularly important consideration for African American students in their choosing or not choosing higher education participation. In an ethnographic study, Ogbu (1978) describes how economic expectations might impact African American students’ interest in schooling. He argues that members of a social group that face a job ceiling recognize that they face it and that this knowledge shapes their children’s academic behavior. Mickelson (1990) divides students’ attitudes toward schooling into two categories: “abstract attitudes, embodying the Protestant ethic’s promise of schooling as a vehicle for success and upward mobility, and concrete attitudes, reflecting the diverse empirical realities that people experience with respect to returns on education from the opportunity structure.” According to her, students’ realities vary according to their perceptions and understanding of how the adults who are significant in their lives receive more equitable or less equitable wages, jobs, and promotions relative to their educational credentials. According to this notion, students are influenced by perceptions which shape their realities. Better understanding this idea can shed light on how African American students can aspire to participate in higher education but can believe that actually participating in higher education might not be economically viable. Since many African Americans generally hold jobs not commensurate with their level of schooling, even after higher education, this understandably influences students’ perceptions in their consideration of higher education.

In a study of African American valedictorians and salutatorians, Arnold (1996) found that economic realities along with other factors, such as a bounded view of the world of work, shaped the outcome of the students in her sample. She reported that family structures, like economics, play a crucial, often determining role in the lives of African American and Latino valedictorians. Economic expectations are particularly a consideration for first-generation college-goers as many African Americans were in Arnold’s sample.

When African American students assess the labor market conditions of individuals like themselves who have completed higher education, they often find individuals who are concentrated in professions below their level of schooling. As Wilson and Allen (1987) indicated, despite the higher educational attainment of the African American students in their sample, “a majority of these young adults were concentrated in either lower-level white collar jobs or blue collar jobs.” Understanding this reality, it is not surprising then that African American high school students would be especially concerned about the return on their investment in higher education.

**Design of the Study**

A qualitative inquiry method using group interviews was utilized. This approach was chosen because the voices of students are rarely heard in the debates regarding their lives. The voices of disempowered students are even more invisible (Nieto 1992). The purpose of using this approach, group interviews, allowed a greater and more diverse number of African American students a voice and provided a deeper understanding of their consideration of higher education participation. According to Nieto (1992), qualitative studies can enable us to examine “particular situations so that solutions can be hypothesized and developed.”

**Data Collection Procedures**

The data for this research were gathered through structured group interviews. A protocol was developed for the interviews based on pilot testing a survey which was administered to a sampling of students in an inner-city school and in a private school in Atlanta, Georgia. (This city was selected as a test site because of convenience of
After reviewing the responses on the survey, there were many unanswered questions, and students’ write-in responses indicated a desire to explain more about their answers. Therefore, group interviews, as Nieto (1992) outlined, were determined to be an effective means of hearing more students’ voices.

Although a formal protocol was used, the interviews and guiding questions were generally flexible and informal in order to allow students to express their issues and concerns more freely. To achieve high reliability in the questioning process, the researcher personally conducted all of the group interviews. The interviews were audiotaped and professionally transcribed. The data were read several times to confirm coding.

**Student and Site Selection**

Group interviews were conducted in each of five cities that have large African American populations (Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, DC). These cities were selected based on the previous works of Neimi (1975) and Simms (1995) that indicate that these cities have the largest cross-sections of African American populations and that they are among the metropolitan cities that have the highest African American median income and lowest poverty rates.

As a first step, school board administrators in each city were asked to recommend schools based on a request for the stated school types. In each school, the principal or headmaster selected the group participants based on outlined criteria: all African Americans, and equal number by gender, grade, and socioeconomic background (particularly in private schools). Each group was comprised of two to seven students (the ideal size of group interviews is considered to be between three to seven participants). It is often difficult to gain access to private schools to conduct research; therefore, when this study was given the support of the National Association of Independent Schools, it was decided to oversample private/independent schools to obtain as much research data as possible from this school type. Also, it was my desire to review the responses to the research questions by students from different socioeconomic levels within the African American culture. Such a cross-section of schools, particularly independent schools with African Americans attending, would be inclusive of a broader range of socioeconomic levels. While it is recognized that there is an uneven distribution of school types across cities, the diversity and the number of schools and students ensured a representative sample.

Group interviews included African American students (male and female) in tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades. These grades were the focus of this study because it is typically in these grades that students have already formed perceptions about postsecondary participation. In order to include a cross-section of school types, students in inner-city, suburban, magnet, and private schools (private and independent are used interchangeably throughout this research) in these cities were included.

A total of 70 students participated in 16 group interviews. The breakdown by school, gender, and grade is as noted in Table 1. In the inner-city school in New York and

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<td>70 31 39 38 17 15</td>
<td></td>
<td>12th 11th 10th</td>
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</table>
not be classified as groups because they exceeded the size of the groups in the study, the number of individual participants is not reported. However, while these numbers are not included in the total participant numbers in Table 1, the students’ responses were coded and are included in the analysis. In group analysis, it is acceptable to include their responses because the study was interested in patterns and themes based on the theoretical framework and the research questions (Miles and Huberman 1984).

The background of the students varied, but there were some shared traits. In most cases, across school types, the students were first-generation college-goers, so that most were from homes where the parents were not college graduates. While there were no questions about income because the interest was in their responses in the aggregate, the school distribution provided a basis for the assumption about income level. That is, the income of parents of students who attend inner-city schools is likely to be lower than that of parents of students who attend independent schools. It is important to note, however, that several African American students in private/independent schools were on scholarships.

Data Analysis

The students’ responses were their perceptions of influences on African Americans in general in the college choice process. In this way, students were not limited to their own circumstances but could more broadly include their perceptions of situations of peers, family, etc. To analyze the interviews, primary patterns and themes were evaluated based on procedures outlined in Miles and Huberman (1984). As they explain, “Pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, pattern, or explanation.” They further state that “the bedrock of inquiry is the researcher’s quest for repeatable regularities.”

The data were analyzed using what Miles and Huberman (1984) refer to as a “start list,” a deductive approach and cross-group analysis. A master list of codes was derived from the conceptual framework, the pilot test, and the research questions, using general categories. Based on the master codes, cross group analysis was used to determine commonness in themes and patterns among the responses of the different groups.

Students’ Perceptions

Students were asked what influences African Americans to pursue or not pursue higher education. Their responses indicated that they perceived economic expectations as a key influence on African Americans’ choosing or not choosing college participation (the influence of family and school were also listed and have been written about in a separate article—see Freeman 1997). Their responses exemplify perceptions that African Americans have a fear of either not having enough money to attend college or not getting a job that pays commensurate with their level of education after completing higher education. Although financial aid is one way in which students can support higher education participation, African American students’ financial needs typically exceed what they can receive from financial aid (Freeman 1989).

These students’ responses clearly supported what the literature indicates about the influence of economic expectations on college choice. That is, the African American students in this sample supported the findings of economics of education and college choice theorists (e.g., Anderson and Hearn 1992; Becker 1975; Thurow 1972), but their responses also added to the college choice literature by including: (a) these students’ perceptions of African Americans’ primary value on wealth or comfort rather than on a specific occupation as pointed out in the study that Barnes (1992) conducted and (b) their recognition of job market limitations as suggested by the works of Ogbu (1978), Mickelson (1990), and Wilson and Allen (1987).

Expected Costs and Future Earnings

For African American students, the connection between what they perceive to be the costs of attending higher education and what they perceive as their future earning potential looms large in their considerations of pursuing higher education. Students expressed the lack of money to attend college across cities and school types. One student at a suburban school in Atlanta made a statement frequently repeated by students:

“They don’t have money to go.”

A student attending a private school in Chicago captured the essence of what students perceived about future earnings:

“If you are not going to get better jobs, why go those four years for the same job.”

At an independent school in New York, a student said this:

“Well, maybe, because a lot of times when you are growing up, you might get the feeling and the outlook that, you know, it makes no sense because the jobs are not out there, and a lot of people feel that way like, ‘Why am I going through all this when I am not going to get a job, a job equivalent to what I would get if I didn’t go. So what’s the point.’ I know a lot of people feel that way.”

According to researchers such as Thurow (1972), these high school students’ perceptions are solidly grounded given that economic status, race, and education of parents impact the value of higher education. That is, African Americans, particularly first-generation college-goers, are more likely over time, especially after the first five years of college, to receive a lower return on their investment than Whites.

The African American students in this sample perceived that it was important to demonstrate to African American high school students that people like themselves had been successful in the job market after completing higher education. In response to the question on what could be done to help students have a different perception of economic outcomes, a student at an independent school in New York indicated:
“Oh yeah, just show people who are in colleges that, I mean who have been to college, Black people preferably, who have jobs that make a lot of money, like maybe engineers and architects.”

Researchers such as Arnold (1996) have indicated the need to present African Americans who have achieved academically and who will serve as role models. The fact of the matter, according to Wilson and Allen (1987), is that there are many African Americans concentrated in lower-level jobs even after completing higher education.

Recognition of Job Market Ceiling Faced by Group Members
In keeping with what Ogbu (1978) suggested about students recognizing the job market ceiling faced by individuals of their same cultural group, these students clearly voiced their perceptions of the job market ceiling as an impediment to more African Americans’ choosing higher education participation. For example, in an independent school in Chicago, a student responded:

“People are unaware that there are opportunities out there after college. People just kind of see it as—you get out of college and then what do you do.”

Another student attending school in New York added:

“Why should I go through four years or an extra four years of college to be a doctor or something like that for me to not get that job because of the color of my skin.”

Not only that, students perceived, as Mickelson (1990) indicated, how individuals like themselves receive more equitable or less equitable job treatment relative to their educational credentials. A student attending a magnet school in Washington, DC, had this to say:

“Oh, course, we have to be two times better than a Caucasian person and plus be more, in case of being a male, you have to be three times better than the Caucasian person; you understand, as a female, we got to be four times as great, because they will test you to see if you know what you know. They say ‘Well, you can’t do this job.’ They say they think your aptitude is bad. So, it’s difficult. It’s very difficult.”

The combination of African American students’ perceptions of job market limitations plus more or less equitable job treatment creates an insurmountable barrier in the minds of students considering whether or not to invest in higher education. At the same time, however, African American students are concerned about wealth and/or comfort.

Desire for Wealth or Comfort Rather Than for a Specific Occupation
While African American students admittedly are influenced about college choice by job market expectations, in keeping with what Barnes (1992) indicated in her study, African American students’ economic goals are focused more on wealth or comfort than on a particular occupation. A student attending an inner-city school in New York, indicating why some African Americans choose higher education participation, stated:

“A better job. You want to increase your living standards and your position in society. You don’t want to be just a high school graduate.”

Another student attending a private school in New York added this in reflection about choosing higher education participation when she was younger:

“Wait, I want to go to college. And I was like ‘ah, money.’ So I thought, I will go to college and make money.”

It has been this desire for wealth or comfort that has, perhaps, often caused researchers and educators to believe that African Americans are not serious about the college choice process. For example, it has been acknowledged that when socioeconomic background has been held constant African Americans tend to have higher stated aspirations to participate in higher education than other groups (St. John 1991). Yet, they do not act on their aspirations as often as Whites. It could mean that their focus on wealth or comfort influences their stated aspirations to participate in higher education. However, they may be hesitant to act on their aspirations given that, at the same time, they perceive that others like themselves face job market limitations—there will be no way for them to achieve wealth or comfort.

In summary, African American students perceive that economic expectations play a significant role in African Americans choosing higher education participation; they generally voiced more interest in making money and bettering their position in society than in a particular occupation; they perceived concerns about the expected costs and the future earning potential; and they recognized job market limitations.

Implication of Findings
These findings suggest that African American students are very much aware of the job market experiences that African Americans face. These perceptions obviously have an impact on their choosing to invest or not to invest in higher education.

Certainly, college choice theorists need to conduct much more research relating to African Americans economic expectations. These students’ responses clearly indicate that when African Americans are making decisions about whether or not to choose higher education participation, an important consideration is, “Will it make a difference?” When they look to other African Americans who have gone through the process, they often find individuals who are, according to Wilson and Allen (1987), concentrated in lower-level jobs. The perception of these limitations on economic opportunity could explain the fluctuations in the number of African American high school students who choose participation in higher education. Obviously, when students recognize limitations, they are much less likely to choose to invest in higher education when they cannot clearly see the returns. The question
then becomes how to motivate and stimulate African American students’ desire to participate in higher education when they perceive job market ceilings.

High schools and colleges/universities could do more to help students understand the process of entering the job market after completing higher education, to encourage them to select a satisfying occupation, and to explore expectations after entering the market. Higher education recruitment offices could do a much better job of helping potential college-goers, especially first-generation college-goers, to understand the linkages between higher education participation and transition to the labor market. It is clear that while college choice theorists have primarily focused on socioeconomic background, economic expectations is an area that requires more attention, from both research and practice aspects. Whether or not educators acknowledge it, when students consider choosing higher education participation, especially students who perceive labor market limitations, they will continue to ask, “Will college make a difference?”

References
Demonstrating that student outcomes are associated with educational programs requires the use of measures or indicators of student development, growth, change or learning. Thus, the National Education Goals Panel has made a case for the use of “short-term...measures of progress” as proxies for more direct measures of educational outcomes (Ewell and Jones 1993). Institutional assessment studies often use college grades, self-reports of change or development, and standardized test scores. College grades and self-reports are used ostensibly because educational and institutional researchers find them easier to obtain. Surveys such as the Student Information Form (Cooperative Institutional Research Program 1985) and the College Student Experiences questionnaire (Pace 1983) are designed to provide a variety of student-reported indicators of educational outcomes and factual information. The surveys include self-reports of growth or development, behavioral and psychological measures, and items of demographic information, academic and career achievement, and finances. While standardized tests could be used as indicators of cognitive development (Anaya 1992; Anaya 1999), obtaining the data can generally involve substantial expenses and administrative efforts. Obtaining student-reported test scores, along with other factual information through surveys, may be a viable alternative for institutional research and college impact studies.

Baird (1976) reviewed the research conducted between 1937 and 1975 on the accuracy of self-reports of factual data. Educational research during this period had examined the accuracy and validity of self-reports of participation in extracurricular activities, awards received, courses taken, and course grades received. This early research reveals a remarkable degree of consistency in the validity and accuracy rates for a variety of factual academic data reported by students. The correlations between self-reported grades and school-reported grades ranged from .74 to .96. Smaller correlations were observed for lower achieving students, specific academic areas (as opposed to overall grade point averages), and for men. The percent of students reporting high school grades in “exact agreement with their school’s” reports ranged from 71 percent to 92 percent. The lower accuracy rates were found amongst the lower achieving students and those who applied to more selective institutions. The accuracy rates of self-reports of grades and courses taken in high school were consistently higher than those for co-curricular data. The accuracy rates and the validity for self-reports appear to be affected by several factors. First, the variation in correlations and accuracy rates in the studies reviewed by Baird (1976) reflected differences in definitions. That is, for example, accuracy can be defined as ‘exact agreement’ with the actual grade, or as falling within a specific range from the actual grade. The validity and accuracy rates are possibly underestimated given that school reports contain errors, thus “self reported grades can be as useful as school-reported grades” (Baird 1976). Second, some variation is also associated with certain groups of students and for some types of institutions. Higher accuracy rates have been reported for academic data reported by women and by students at selective institutions (Baird 1976).

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The validity and accuracy rates of self-reported Graduate Record Examination (GRE) standardized test scores are examined using a national sample of 1,408 college students. The data yielded high correlations between actual and student-reported scores, and high accuracy rates for different groups of students (e.g., gender, race, and family income) and for students at different types of institutions. Approximately 88 percent of the student-reported scores are within forty points of the actual score. Differences in accuracy rates are associated with prior student performance on standardized tests and with the selectivity of their undergraduate college. Guidelines for the use of student-reported scores are offered. The author concludes that student-reported test scores are as useful as actual scores.
Recent educational research has examined the accuracy of student self-reports of high school courses taken and grades received (Sawyer, Laing, and Houston 1989), of the time spent studying outside of class (Reed, Puchalski, Denham, and Michael 1984), and of the types and amount of college financial aid awards (Trusheim 1994). The results of these studies contribute to the early evidence that despite the fact that accuracy rates vary somewhat, self-reports of factual and behavioral information are reasonably accurate. An overview of these studies serves to illustrate the validity and accuracy rates for different types of educational information, for different groups of students, and for students at different types of institutions.

Sawyer, Laing, and Houston (1989) examined the accuracy of student-reported data on an expanded version of the ACT questionnaire. Students were asked to report their grades for individual courses taken from the 9th through the 12th grade. The authors reported the correlations between the official high school reports and the student reports of the courses taken and the grades received. The correlation for the courses taken and for the grades received was .87 and .80, respectively. The correlation between the student-reported grades and actual grades (transcripts) ranged from .53 (e.g., music and drama) to .89 (e.g., English, math, science, and psychology) with the median correlation being .80. The data also showed that accuracy rates varied for different courses. Accuracy of student-reported grades was stringently defined: no difference between the student-reported grade and the actual grade. In this study 71 percent of the students accurately reported individual course grades. The authors reported that all students tended to overstate their grades, but that women and students with higher ACT Composite test scores were more likely to provide accurate reports. These results are consistent with the research reviewed by Baird (1976). It is possible that students in the Sawyer, Laing, and Houston (1989) study may have more accurately recalled and reported grades for science, English, psychology and math because these were perceived to be more important for college admission and because the survey was administered along with a college admissions exam. In sum, the accuracy of self-reports of educational data varied as a function of the nature of the information itself as well as a function of the characteristics of the participants.

Trusheim’s (1994) two-part study examined the accuracy of self-reports of students already admitted to college, recently matriculated freshmen. The self-reports included information on the types and amount of financial aid awarded to students. Data for a national sample were drawn from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Accuracy rates were examined for two types of information, type of aid and amount of aid. First, Trusheim calculated agreement rates between student and institutional reports of whether or not aid was received. The agreement rates were 90.5 percent, 90.8 percent, 92.6 percent, and 93.0 percent for students at private universities, private colleges, public colleges, and public universities, respectively. He calculated the correlation between student and institutional reports of whether or not aid was awarded. The correlations for each type of institution ranged from .63 to .81 (for three types of aid received: federal loans, work study, and state aid). Next, Trusheim examined the accuracy levels for the student-reports on the amount of financial aid received for three types of awards. The correlations were lower between the mean financial aid amount reported by students and that reported by the institutions (for three types of financial aid and four types of institutions), ranging from .76 to .27. Part two, a single institution study, replicated some of the analysis using student reports obtained from the Student Information Form (SIF) and financial aid data from the institution (Trusheim 1994). The correlations between student reported survey data and institutional data were comparable to those obtained with the national sample (.67, .62, and .63 for Pell Grants, work study, and federal loans, respectively). The data from Trusheim’s study suggest that self-reports of whether financial aid was awarded, and the type of aid, are good estimates of institutional reports regardless of institutional type. Yet, the range of agreement rates between self-reports and institutional reports of financial aid amounts varied considerably. It is likely that students find it easier to remember the type and sources of financial aid they have been awarded. Keeping track of numerous educational fees and expenses along with varying amounts of financial aid awards may be more difficult for the typical college freshman. Of particular interest for purposes of this study, are the data reported by Trusheim (1994) on the accuracy of self-reported SAT scores. The data from the single-institution replication study yielded correlations between self-reported test scores and the institution’s records of the scores of .93 and .94 for the SAT Verbal and SAT Math scores, respectively. Briefly stated, students provided very good reports of test scores and of types of financial aid awards, but fair to poor estimates of the amount of financial aid awards. The correlations between student-reported and institutional records of standardized tests provide recent evidence of the accuracy of self-reported test scores.

In summary, student-reported factual data appear to be fairly accurate representations of data maintained by educational institutions and agencies. Slight variations in the level of accuracy and rate of accurate responses are associated with the definition of accuracy, the nature of the information (course grades, financial aid), characteristics of the participant, and characteristics of the educational institution. Baird’s (1976) review indicates that self-reported grades yield correlations ranging from .74 to .96. Criteria requiring an ‘exact agreement’ with transcript grades resulted in accuracy rates ranging from 43 percent to 78 percent. However given a ±.1 and ±.3 margin, the accuracy rate increases to 78 percent and 92 percent, respectively. Furthermore, the nature of the information being gathered affects the correlations obtained. For example, self-reports...
of course grades are more accurate for courses typically required for college admission and less accurate for ‘elective’ courses (Baird 1976; Sawyer, Laing, and Houston 1989). Trusheim (1994) found more accurate self-reports of the type of financial aid awarded versus the amount of aid awarded. Higher accuracy rates have been found for women and high achieving students (Baird 1976; Sawyer, Laing, and Houston 1989). The data on the accuracy of self-reports for different types of educational institutions appear to vary (Baird 1976; Trusheim 1994), but a pattern is not evident. The research suggests that the degree of accuracy and the accuracy rates of self-reports of factual data may vary as a function of students’ characteristics (e.g., gender, ability level), nature of the data being reported (e.g., courses taken, financial aid awarded), and perhaps the type of educational institution. Hence, this study will analyze data on self-reports of standardized test scores to determine if similar patterns obtain. The accuracy of self-reported standardized test scores and the rate of accuracy for different groups of students and for students at different types of institutions are examined. While the socioeconomic level and the race of participants are characteristics frequently incorporated in educational impact studies, the research on the accuracy of self-reports has not included these variables. The current study includes these additional characteristics in the analysis.

Method

This is a longitudinal, multi-institutional study examining the accuracy of student-reported GRE scores. Correlations, means, and distributions of self-reported scores are calculated for different groups of students and for students at different types of institutions.

Sample and Instruments

The sample for this study consists of first-time, full-time freshmen that completed the 1985 SIF, the 1989 Follow-up Survey (FUS), and reported GRE Verbal and Quantitative scores on the FUS. The 1985 sample is representative of first-time full-time freshmen entering college in the fall. Students completed the SIF at the beginning of the freshman year and the Follow-up Survey (FUS) was administered to them four years later. Self-reports on the FUS of their GRE scores further delimited the sample. The sample for this study is comprised of 1,408 college students who took the GRE within four years after entering college. The mean and standard deviation for the GRE scores are 574 and 103 for the Verbal test and 642 and 116 for the Quantitative test. The Educational Testing Service (1987) reported a standard deviation of 118 for the Verbal test and 132 for the Quantitative test. The sample for this study includes 844 (59.9 percent) women, 39 (2.8 percent) African American students, and 65 (4.6 percent) Asian American students. The Higher Education Research Institute's 1989 follow-up was supplemented by funds for national studies on general education (EXXON Education Foundation) and for the development of science talent (National Science Foundation). The EXXON Education Foundation and the National Science Foundation provided funds to conduct follow-ups of all students in the 1985 sample at 150 institutions. The Higher Education Research Institute uses these surveys to generate profiles of college freshman, to trace changes from year to year in the characteristics of college freshman, and to conduct college impact studies. The SIF and FUS surveys have been used in national and institutional student outcome studies. They include over three hundred items covering a wide range of information: student demographics, academic achievement, educational expectations, life goals, self-ratings of skills, academic and co-curricular activities, teaching/learning activities, and perceptions of the college environment. In the 1989 FUS students were asked to report their GRE test scores. If these self-reports are accurate, researchers might choose to use them as indicators of learning or cognitive development.

Results and Discussion

The correlation and accuracy rates reported in this study are within the ranges found in the literature on self-reports of factual educational data. The correlations for the self-reported Verbal and Quantitative scores with the actual scores are .94 (Table 1). These correlations are comparable to those reported in studies of self-reports of grades, awards, and courses taken. More importantly, they are of
the same magnitude as those reported in the single-institution study conducted by Trusheim (1994). As you may recall, correlations of .98 and .94 between student reports and institutional records of the SAT Verbal and SAT Math (respectively) were observed by Trusheim (1994). The correlations in the current study for different groups of students and types of institutions provide a bit more detail. Thus, a closer examination of the data shows significant negative correlations for female (male = 1, female = 2) and African American students reflecting the lower test scores obtained by these students. The negative correlations for public universities and four-year colleges, as well as sectarian colleges indicate that students attending these institutions have slightly lower scores than those attending private universities and non-sectarian colleges. Finally, Table 1 also includes correlations with level of accuracy of student-reported scores. The accuracy level is the absolute value of the student-reported score minus the actual score. Because lower differences reflect higher accuracy levels, significant positive correlations with the accuracy level reflect greater inaccuracy in self-reports. Thus, negative correlations indicate higher accuracy rates. For example, the negative correlations between accuracy level and the two achievement measures (SAT scores and college GPA) indicate higher accuracy rates for high achievers. While these data provide evidence that student-reported scores are fairly accurate representations of the actual scores, the distributions for inflated and deflated student-reported scores can provide a much more detailed picture than the correlations.

As discussed above, accuracy of self-reported data could be defined as an 'exact' report of the actual data. More commonly it is defined as falling within a selected range from the actual data. Naturally the degree of specificity in the definition will affect the proportion of participants 'accurately' reporting the data. The characteristics of the scale and relevant statistics can be used to determine and select specifications. In this study, the means for the self-reported Verbal and Quantitative scores are 586 and 648 respectively (standard deviation = 101 and 111); for the actual scores the means are 574 and 642 (standard deviation = 103 and 116). The mean paired differences (self-reported score minus actual score) for the Verbal and Quantitative scores are 11.10 and 7.18. The t-statistics for the paired differences of the Verbal and Quantitative scores are 11.65 and 6.24 respectively (df = 1407, 1397; p < .001). In other words, on average, students are most likely to overstate their scores by 7-11 points which may perhaps be a matter of rounding up to the nearest 'tens' place in a three digit figure. Table 2 shows the accuracy rates for three definitions of accurate, overstated, and understated scores. Table 2 indicates that approximately 87 percent of the students accurately reported their GRE Verbal and Quantitative scores (within plus/minus 40 points). Regardless of the criterion level, the proportions of students accurately reporting their test scores are comparable for the Verbal and Quantitative scores. Approximately 80 percent of the student-reported scores are within twenty points of the actual score. The proportion increases to approximately 87 percent and 92 percent for scores within forty points and sixty points, respectively, of the actual scores. For this study student-reported scores within forty points, plus or minus, of the actual score are considered accurate in the examination of the accuracy rates for different groups of students and for students at different types of institutions.

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<td>Quantitative</td>
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<td>.4754** -.0730** -.1329**</td>
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* p < .05, ** p < .01

Note: The accuracy level of the student reported score is the absolute value of the student-reported score minus the actual score. Lower scores designate higher accuracy levels.
Early research on self-reports consistently found higher accuracy rates for women and high ability students (Baird 1976). In this study a higher proportion of women also more accurately report their GRE scores (Table 3). However, the difference in accuracy rates is statistically significant only for the quantitative scores; that is, a larger proportion of men (10.4 percent) than women (5.4 percent) inflates the Quantitative score. The data in the current study on the accuracy rates for ability or achievement levels of students is also consistent with prior research. There appears to be a pattern of increasingly higher accuracy rates for student-reported Verbal and Quantitative scores for students with higher SAT Verbal scores (Table 3). In fact, this is one of two instances in which there are statistically significant differences in the accuracy rates for both Verbal and Quantitative scores. Although prior research has not examined the accuracy rates for students in different racial and income groups, the GRE data analyzed here indicate that differences are not operating for different racial groups. There are statistically significant differences in accuracy rates of the Quantitative scores associated with family income level. A higher proportion of students in the top (9.4 percent) and bottom (10.3 percent) of the family income quartiles overstated the Quantitative score. In summary, the Quantitative scores statistics indicate that men, students from families in the top and bottom income categories, and those students who scored below 500 on the SAT Verbal test are more likely to overstate their scores. Variations in the accuracy rates of student-reported scores are associated with student characteristics; are variations also linked with institutional characteristics?

Variations in the accuracy rates for students at different types of colleges might be associated with the self-selection processes of individuals and institutional selection criteria. Differences in the accuracy of student-reports of GRE scores are due to a higher proportion (93 percent) of accurately reported scores by students at the most selective institutions. In fact, this is the second instance in which there are statistically significant differences in accuracy rates for both Verbal and Quantitative scores. Smaller proportions of students at the least selective institutions (average combined SAT scores at or below 1264) accurately report Verbal (between 84.3 percent to 86.6 percent), and Quantitative (between 80.7 percent and 90.8 percent) scores. This contrasts with the proportions of students at the most selective institutions that accurately report the Verbal (93.8 percent) and Quantitative (93.2 percent) scores.

The results of this study are consistent with prior research and provide additional empirical evidence on the accuracy rates of self-reported test scores. First, the correlations between actual scores and student-reported scores, the accuracy rates, and the differences in accuracy rates for students of different ability groups are consistent with the literature on self-reported factual educational data. For instance, the range for the rates of accurately reported scores for women and men, and for students in different age and income groups is 80 percent to 93 percent for three criterion levels (Table 2). The data yielded a positive association between the accuracy rates of self-reported data and student achievement level. These data are consistent with the results reported by Baird (1976); Sawyer, Laing, and Houston (1989); and by Trusheim (1994). Women in this study did have a statistically significant higher accuracy rate than men only for the Quantitative scores. This is in contrast to the research reviewed by Baird (1976) and that conducted by Sawyer, Laing, and Houston, (1989) which consistently reported higher accuracy rates of academic data for women. Second, data not previously reported in the literature were examined; the current study explored the accuracy rates for students from different income and racial groups. Statistically significant differences in accuracy rates by income group were observed but not by racial group; however, further research should be conducted to determine the reliability of these observations. In summary, the statistically significant differences in proportions of over-reported Quantitative scores range from a low of 9.4 percent, 10.3 percent and 10.4 percent (highest family income group, lowest family income group, and men, respectively) to a high of 14.2 percent and 16.0 percent (least selective colleges, students with SAT Verbal scores below 500). Given that the correlations and accuracy rates in this study are similar to those reported in the literature on educational self-reports and that few statistically significant differences in accuracy rates are present, one could conclude that student-reported test scores are as useful as actual scores.

| Table 2: Percent of students overstating, accurately reporting, and understating GRE Verbal and Quantitative test scores for three criterion. |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| **Accuracy Criterion** | **GRE Verbal** | **GRE Quantitative** |
| Overstated by | | |
| 61 or more points | 6.5 | 6.4 |
| 41 or more points | 11.2 | 8.4 |
| 21 or more points | 17.2 | 12.6 |
| Within plus/minus of actual score | | |
| 60 points | 93.0 | 91.4 |
| 40 points | 87.4 | 87.8 |
| 20 points | 79.6 | 81.0 |
| Understated by | | |
| 61 or more points | 0.5 | 2.1 |
| 41 or more points | 1.3 | 4.5 |
| 21 or more points | 3.2 | 7.7 |

*Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 percent because of rounding.*
Recommendations

Student-reported scores can be used in lieu of agency reported scores with the knowledge that student and institutional characteristics can provide clues to levels of accuracy for self-reports. Three general guidelines are warranted for researchers and administrators to estimate the accuracy of student-reported GRE scores.

First, the selectivity data of the institution, rather than its institutional classification, has the highest correlation between actual and self-reported scores, and a clear pattern for the distribution of accuracy rates.

Second, achievement or ability level as measured by prior test performance can be a good indicator of accuracy rates. Unfortunately, if SAT scores (or other standardized achievement test scores) are not available, the undergraduate GPA would not serve as a useful substitute measure of achievement or ability level. Note the lower correlation between grades and GRE scores. Trusheim’s study (1994) yielded strong correlations between student-reported scores and college records of the scores. Hence, student-reported SAT scores could serve as an indicator of ability level in estimating the accuracy rates of self-reported GRE scores.

Third, a clear pattern emerged in the data: significant differences among students were most often observed in the Quantitative score data. As such, the student-reported GRE Verbal scores would most often more accurately reflect actual scores.

Briefly, the data in this study suggest that variations in accuracy of self-reports may be associated with family income. To the degree that minorities are over-represented in lower SES groups, it is also important that researchers further examine the accuracy rates by income and racial groups. The small number of African American (39), American Indian (11), and Latina/o (14) students in the sample limits the analysis for racial groups and future research should include larger numbers of students in these.
racial groups. Overall, the data from this study have provided evidence that self-reports of standardized test scores are very good estimates of the actual scores for most students (approximately 88 percent). The use of self-reports of GRE scores can offer a tremendous advantage for institutional research, program evaluation, and for research on educational outcomes. Nevertheless, it is advisable that analysis accounts for (1) the selectivity of the institutions or educational programs of interest, (2) prior test performance of the student, and (3) other student and institutional characteristics that might impact the outcome under investigation.

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Integrated Student Services: Lessons from China

In May 1998, I left for China, to travel for four weeks. Three days before I left I interviewed for a new position at Boston College—Director of Student Services. Student Services brings together the service, processing, and technical units of the Office of the University Registrar; the Office of Financial Aid; the Office of Student Accounts, Loans, and Collections; and auxiliary services including ID, parking, meal plans, and orientation support (see accompanying chart).

Leaving for four weeks in the midst of a job search might be viewed by some as a foolhardy move but my mortgage was paid, my TIAA-CREF statement was more than adequate, and my Shanghai contacts were about to increase. Besides, I had it on good authority that I was the only applicant for the job.

I spent my first week in Beijing seeing the sights: Great Wall, Forbidden City, Tianamen Square, Summer Palace, and the Temple of Heaven. I next saw the terra cotta warriors in Xian, which alone were worth the trip, and then I began a three-day trip along the Yangtze River through the Three Gorges including a visit to the Three Gorges Dam site.

Normally the construction of a dam is not something I would be drawn to, but when I saw the scenery, the dam itself, and read The River at the Center of the World by Simon Winchester, an account of his trip along the Yangtze, I was hooked. The scope of the project is massive and the economic, sociological, and environmental issues surrounding it have drawn attention on a global scale.

About a week after I left the cruise and moved on to enjoy the scenery of Guilin, I began to reflect on similarities between the Three Gorges Dam Project and our own student services initiative. What could the Three Gorges Dam possibly have in common with the integration of student services at Boston College? Read on.

**Project Scope**
The Three Gorges Dam is a 610 foot dam, measuring 6,864 feet from one side to the other. Over time and in stages the water will rise to 573 feet and create a 600-square mile lake stretching back 372 miles. Thirteen cities will be inundated along with 140 normal-sized towns. The dam, built across the Yangtze, will be the largest dam in the world.

Project Delta is a university-wide effort at Boston College to improve service, reduce costs, and enhance productivity by delivering prompt personal service and information in a do-it-yourself manner.

The following describes the anticipated advantages and acknowledges concerns about the respective projects.

**Control Flooding**
Catastrophic floods have occurred along the Yangtze an average of every 50 years. In 1931, 140,000 people drowned and 12 million had to leave ruined homes. The construction of the dam will contain the flowing water, tame the river, create a lake, and eliminate flooding.

Student service offices are flooded with students and telephone calls in patterns that are more predictable than the weather. No lives are lost, but before the opening of the school year the tension builds, stress levels rise, and students and employees prepare for the onslaught.

Consolidating staff from the aforementioned offices and increasing the number of self-enabled Web-based services for students spreads the work and helps to even out the peaks and valleys.

**Improve Navigation**
The river is a challenge for shipmasters because of its whirlpools, floods, boils, and shoals. The lake created by the dam will make the river more navigable and increase the size of vessels that can navigate the river.

Students and parents armed with telephone numbers for various offices in the University must determine where to pose their questions. It may not be clear if a question about the certification of a student loan should be directed to financial aid or student accounts and loans. The
caller chooses an office, possibly one where someone has been helpful in the past, then holds on a telephone queue only to discover that they will be transferred to a different office and another telephone queue. The integration of services creates one central point of contact for students and families.

Deliver Electricity Services
The energy stored in the dam-impounded lake will generate enough electrical power to light 200 million Chinese homes.

Though not a utility company, Boston College seeks to improve its service to students and parents by centralizing and automating its services. Now in addition to registering for courses, changing addresses, and viewing account and financial aid information, students may add money to their meal plan, request a refund, and complete entrance counseling for Stafford loans. Faculty can display photo class lists and electronically generate an e-mail or voice mail to students in their classes or to their advisees.

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Current Organization

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Student Services Director</th>
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<td><strong>Student General Services</strong></td>
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Technology
Landslides and earthquakes could put the dam at risk. In 1975 sixty small dams and two huge dams collapsed after torrential rains due to substandard construction or poor design, and it is estimated that hundreds of thousands of people may have drowned. Does the country have the practical skills to build a dam of this size? Can the Chinese do it?

Boston College has over the years taken pride in its administrative systems. The systems are highly integrated; the campus network (known as Agora) brings a voice, video, and data connection to each resident student, and student access systems (known as U-View and U-Dial) including kiosks, interactive voice response, and transactional systems have changed the way students conduct business with the University. To our embarrassment, however, we continue to produce a transcript constructed of sticky labels, and each transcript must be retrieved and copied when a request for a transcript is received. The past year has seen a halt to our former pattern of incremental change as the University prepares for the Year 2000 and rebuilds its technical infrastructure. Can the University continue to deploy the technology needed to support the student services unit?

Movement of People
At least 1.2 million Chinese people who currently live along the river will be moved either to higher ground or to a completely different location.

The staff of the Registrar’s Office and Financial Aid Office occupied the same floor of a building. All other staff moved to this building in October 1998. In the summer of 1999, the space was reconstructed. All staff moved several times over the course of the year.

Endangered Species
Yangtze dolphin, Yangtze alligator, the finless porpoise, and the Chinese sturgeon, who use the whole of the lower and middle Yangtze for their spawning are all nearly extinct and are unlikely to survive.

The new model eliminates the position of the University Registrar, the Director of Student Loans and Accounts, the Director of Financial Aid, and the Director of Enrollment Systems. These were replaced with a Director of Student Services and a Director of Financial Strategies. The work has been captured and mapped to new positions. Will anything fall through the cracks? Will the level of administrative oversight be as thorough? Will other institutions begin to eliminate similar positions?

Work
Among those who will be displaced, some will move higher into the hills where the weather is cooler and instead of growing citrus fruit, sweet potatoes, lettuce, and corn will be the best crops. Those who move up will have to grow different crops.

Most positions have undergone change. Service associates handle general questions concerning academic, financial, and auxiliary services. Support specialists compile financial aid applications, send bills for third party payments, enter grades, and perform an array of other tasks. Most staff have been involved in learning new roles and teaching other staff members about their former roles.
Costs

There are fears that the project has diverted funds from maintaining the surrounding embankments and dikes and will destabilize the river and its surrounding geography.

Can we reduce staff and maintain customer service? Can we assign staff to project work and expect them to continue to perform their current role? Are we compromising the infrastructure to support the project? Will the project reap sufficient long-term benefits?

Business Process Redesign and Project Implementation

Prior to the implementation of the new Student Services structure, the project team identified all processes performed in student services offices, listed the skills and activities of employees, established job roles, identified the learning and development required for each job role, and prepared an organization chart. The organization chart was approved by the Project Delta Executive Committee and in the spring of 1998, the two leadership positions were posted within the student services organization: Director of Student Services and Director of Financial Strategies. Simultaneously staff cross-training began. The directors were appointed in the summer, then the three team leaders positions were posted within the existing offices.

As Director of Student Services I met with staff individually and in small groups to discuss interest in the jobs that would be available. As a result of the discussions it became clear that staff were self-organizing into roles and that competition for jobs would be minimal. For example, some staff members preferred processing while others felt they were born to provide service. Most of these self-assessments were on target.

By late summer the team leaders were hired and some staff whose roles had not changed or had not changed very much were mapped into positions. There was one last round of postings for new roles or roles that had changed enough to merit a search, again to internal applicants only. These included the general service specialists, publications/training support, a processing team leader, and team leaders in financial services to serve returning students and graduate/law students.

In the fall of 1998, additional space became available in the building occupied by the Registrar and Financial Aid staff and staff from Student Accounts, Loans, and Credit and Collections moved in. At this point, in mid-October, staff assumed their new roles in general service and processing.

Successes and Challenges

Technology

At the end of summer 1998, several new Web-enabled services were introduced including entrance counseling for loans, adding value to a meal plan with an electronic debit to the student's account, simulation of a degree audit, and request for a refund. This reduced both in-person traffic and processes that employees previously had to perform for students. An electronic Certification of Enrollment has recently been added.

Centralization of Services

The centralization of services is an advantage for students who previously had to walk ten minutes from the central part of the campus where the Registrar and Financial Aid Offices were located to reach the Office of Student Accounts. Recent surveys have shown that students value the convenience of centralization and consolidation of service.

Centralization of Processing

The ability to dedicate our combined resources at peak times to financial aid application processing, grade processing, faculty course evaluations, and other labor-intensive processes has been successful in smoothing out the peaks and valleys. Staff throughout the organization are always busy and rarely get the opportunity to catch their breath.

Organization Formation

Staff were anxious about many things during the formation of the organization: work roles, training, space, neighbors, and supervisors. The information was conveyed as it became known but hiring and space decisions continued through the week prior to the move, which made for an unsettling three months. Cultural differences also existed among the offices. These were identified and guidelines were established for a range of issues including released time for courses, flexible schedules, compensatory time, and dress codes.

University Support

Support for the Student Services organization involved several offices including Information Technology, Human Resources, and other process owners. All are hard-working, well-meaning people but they have a lot to do each day and our needs were among the many deserving of their attention. The result was that hiring did not take place on schedule because job descriptions had to be finalized, salary ranges determined, and individual salaries established. Web-enabled services, though welcome, were a fraction of the system developments requested.
**Communication**

After my appointment as director, I offered to meet with all staff individually. This took place along with meetings of the entire group, small group meetings, e-mail updates, and a listserv. Communication must be ongoing and it must be recognized that the same message may have to be repeated several times. Staff have continued to stress the importance of communication and have requested periodic open forums. Gatherings for celebrations and farewells are also scheduled frequently.

**Telephone Service**

All general telephone calls not directed to an individual are answered in general service, which also handles walk-in traffic. Staff training has been a challenge because the range of questions is daunting, staff training and retraining are ongoing, and there is no foolproof way to retrieve Web-based information and other online documents containing policy, procedures, and informational updates. The telephone volume has also been a significant challenge. Processing support staff are added to the telephone queue at peak times of the year but this interferes with their ability to complete their own work. With telephone call volume reaching 15,000 calls in some months and callers waiting in the queue for an average of one to two minutes, we continue to look for ways to improve our performance.

**Staff Retention and Morale**

In anticipation of the consolidation, the staff was reduced by approximately 10 percent based on attrition. The current organization includes 65 staff members. Over 20 percent of the staff in place one year ago has resigned. Some of the resignations were due to standard attrition, which at Boston College is approximately 8 percent each year; others were related to the reorganization and new roles. We are fortunate to have experienced and talented staff who remained in the organization and energetic new staff who have joined us. Rewards have been put in place including achievement awards for breakthrough contributions; recognition awards for project work, service on committees, and extraordinary efforts; and a monthly service award, which is chosen at random based on nominations from staff.

**Scope of Responsibilities**

Staff in service and processing support who previously did both in one of the functional units are experiencing a loss of the depth of the knowledge they once had and an expansion of the breadth of knowledge required in their new roles. Throughout the organization it will be critical for us to ensure that we preserve the depth of knowledge needed to maintain standards and ensure compliance.

**Space**

The space occupied by the staff in October 1998 had not been redesigned to suit the new functions and proximities. The space was reconstructed in summer 1999 to provide a more open and welcoming look for students and families, a more equitable distribution of space among all employees, demountable partitions for flexibility of private office space, and common systems furniture for all staff.

**Branding**

Students continue to ask, “Is this the Registrar’s Office?” We explain that it is now Student Services encompassing academic, financial, and auxiliary services. To change the culture and put forward the new brand (Office of Student Services), a museum-style banner was hung outside the building identifying the office and the functions, the name of the office was etched into the door, and newsletters and other materials were sent to students.

**Conclusion**

The student services initiative is still in its infancy. Training continues, staff are moving into the reconstructed space, and plans are in place for the school year. Performance metrics such as the average wait in the telephone queue, the number of abandoned telephone calls, the number of calls answered within one minute, the amount of time it takes to produce a transcript, and student satisfaction surveys will be monitored to measure success.

Before the author Winchester left on his trip a colleague advised him, “When you travel on the Yangtze, don’t condemn, only wonder.” Winchester himself adds that judgments about China should not be made lightly. Boston College is in the early stages of forming a new organization and identifying new ways of doing business. The advice about China holds true for our own project: wonder, and withhold judgment.

Websites of interest:
http://www.bc.edu/studentservices
http://www.bc.edu/delta

Agora demo:
http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/tvp/nav/Sept98/sld01.htm

**References**

Q. A graduate of a postsecondary institution in Europe has applied for admission to one of our graduate programs. The curriculum she completed there required four years of enrollment, but one of the years involved full-time practical training at a company, not academic courses. A letter from the institution states that her diploma is the equivalent of a bachelor's degree in the United States. Can we admit this student to a graduate program?

A. First, consider several basic statements:

- In the United States, practical training is given no academic value, with two notable exceptions: clinical training in health fields, and practice teaching.
- In the United States, a bachelor’s degree represents completion of a unified program of study that requires four years or five years of full-time enrollment at a tertiary (university-level) institution. We have no bachelor’s degree programs shorter in length than four years or longer than five years.
- In the United States, most universities and colleges require a bachelor’s degree as one of the qualifications for admission to a master’s degree or doctoral degree program.

Then consider several observations:

- In many countries in Europe, one half year to one full year of practical training is a key component of programs offered by non-university tertiary institutions.
- In most countries in Europe, there is no general education component in an academic program. Students enroll directly into courses in their major field. Many European educators do not consider U.S. general education courses to represent actual tertiary-level study. They consider general education courses to represent remedial high school work that is required because U.S. universities have concluded that U.S. high schools do not adequately prepare students for university study. Those European educators do not accept the U.S. perspective, that is, that we require every university graduate to have studied at the university level every broad field of human knowledge (humanities, languages, mathematics, natural sciences, and social sciences), no matter what a student’s major field might be.
- In most countries in Europe, the first degree awarded by a university requires a written thesis. Most European educators do not consider a U.S. or British first university degree to be the equivalent of theirs because in the United States and Britain a written thesis is considered to be just one method of teaching, not an essential method of teaching.

The results of these differences is predictable:

- Most European educators consider their secondary school leaving certificate to represent completion of the equivalent of two years of university study in the United States. A few are willing to compromise on one year.
- Most European educators consider completion of two or three years of tertiary study in their country to be the equivalent of completion of a bachelor’s degree program in the United States. In fact, many European countries have now introduced a formal degree (called bachelor in various language variations) at the end of two or three years of tertiary study, which they equate to a British or U.S. bachelor’s degree.
- Most European educators expect U.S. universities to admit their students to graduate programs upon completion of two or three years of tertiary study in Europe, whether or not a formal degree was awarded at that point.

U.S. educators have four choices:

- Make their own determinations concerning the U.S. equivalent of foreign educational qualifications.
- Accept determinations made by educators in the country in which an applicant was educated.
- Waive the bachelor’s degree requirement when a foreign-educated applicant has not completed at least four years of study in a unified program at the tertiary level, if they would waive the same requirement for a U.S.-educated applicant.
- Arbitrarily or capriciously wander from one choice to another.

As an autonomous institution, your university can admit to its graduate programs anyone it wants to admit. However, admissions decisions tend to be cited as precedents. Therefore it is prudent to have clearly articulated policies, and clearly articulated circumstances under which those policies will be waived.
Q. An applicant has submitted a grade report from a foreign educational institution. I cannot find the institution in any publication that lists the universities in that country. The institution stated in a letter that it has a relationship with a university in the United States and with the Open University in England. Should I grant credit for the courses listed on the grade report?

A. No educational institution can transfer its official degree-granting recognition to another educational institution. A credit course is one that can be credited toward the academic requirements of a degree program at the institution that taught the course. If the institution that taught a course is not an officially recognized degree-granting institution, then the course is de facto non-credit.

In the United States, accreditation by one of six regional accrediting associations is the process whereby an educational institution acquires formal recognition as a degree-granting institution whose courses and degrees merit reciprocal acceptance by other educational institutions. Other countries have a similar process, usually administered by a governmental agency.

If a tertiary (university-level) educational institution is not mentioned in standard reference books, one can consult the Ministry of Education in that country, or the U.S. embassy or consulate, or advisors in the office of a U.S.-sponsored educational organization in that country, such as AMIDEAST, the Fulbright Commission, or the Institute of International Education.

If you can’t find any reliable evidence that an educational institution is officially recognized as degree-granting in the country in which it operates, then it would be appropriate for you to apply to its grade reports the policies you apply to grade reports (transcripts) issued by educational institutions in the United States that do not have regional accreditation.

Other educational institutions in the United States might have decided to grant credit for courses taught by a foreign educational institution that is not an officially recognized degree-granting institution in the country in which it operates. Their policies do not set any precedent for your institution.
The following is an index of the articles, commentaries, book reviews, and letters to the editor that appeared in Volume 74 of College & University, Summer/Fall 1998, Winter 1999, and Spring 1999. The entries are separately indexed alphabetically by title, author(s) and subject; and the issue in which the entry appeared and its page number are also given in each listing.

Title Index

A is for Admission: The Insider’s Guide to Getting into the Ivy League and Other Top Colleges (book review), Summer/Fall 1998, 29.
Converting from Quarter to Early-Start Semester: Observations Through a Rear-View Mirror, Summer/Fall 1998, 29-24.
Correlations Between Chiropractic National Board (Part I) Scores and Basic Science Course Grades and Related Data, Winter 1999, 16-20.
Educational Consortia—A Longitudinal Study, Spring 1999, 30-36.
Educational System of Italy (book review), Summer/Fall 1998, 30-31.
Enforcing Academic Policies and Alleviating Student Bad Debt, Summer/Fall 1998, 16-19.
Index for Volume 73, Summer/Fall 1998, 34-37.
Managing Student Employees in a Recruitment Setting, Summer/Fall 1998, 6-10.
Pakistan Educational Credentials (letter to the Editor), Spring 1999.
Pakistan Educational Credentials—Rebuttal (letter to the Editor), Spring 1999.
Pluralizing Professional Scholarship: Graduate Students and the Art of Writing for Publication, Summer/Fall 1998, 2-5.
(The) Recent Rise of Abbreviated Degrees: Are They Comparable to the University Degree?, (Commentary), Summer/Fall 1998, 25-27.
(The) Shape of the River (book review), Spring 1999, 49-50.
Student Records Management (book review), Summer/Fall 1998, 28.
Students of Color and Doctoral Programs: Factors Influencing the Application Decision in Higher Education Administration, Spring 1999, 2-7.
(A) Study of Canadian and American Admissions Equity at Brigham Young University, Spring 1999, 25-29.
Why We Can’t Break Out of the Box (commentary), Spring 1999, 44-45.

Author Index

Bennett, D. Tyson and Homer “Bucky” Wesley, Enforcing Academic Policies and Alleviating Student Bad Debt, Summer/Fall 1998, 16-19.
Blackburn, James, (The) Shape of the River (book review), Spring 1999, 49-50.
Blackburn-Smith, Jefferson and Laura Lembo, Managing Student Employees in a Recruitment Setting, Summer/Fall 1998, 6-10.
Canterbury, Richard M. (See Fitz Gibbon, Heather M.)
Cook, William A., (The) Recent Rise of Abbreviated Degrees: Are They Comparable to the University Degree? (commentary), Summer/Fall 1998, 25-27.
Dalrymple, Margaret, C&U’s New Cover Design (letter to the Editor), Winter 1999, 33.
Frey, James S. Pakistan Educational Credentials—Rebuttal (letter to the Editor), Spring 1999.
Frost, Jacqueline, Student Records Management (book review), Summer/Fall 1998, 28.
Hammerman, James K. (See Philip M. Sadler)
Harris, Chad S., Web-Enabled Systems for Student Access, Winter 1999, 2-12.
Hayre, Harb S. Pakistan Educational Credentials (letter to the Editor), Spring 1999.
Herring, Tom (See Harris, Chad S.)
Hopkins, Roberta, Educational System of Italy (book review), Summer/Fall 1998, 30-31.
Hoyt, Jeff E., Level of Math Preparation in High School and Its Impact on Remedial Placement at an Urban State College, Spring 1999, 37-43.
James, David, Why We Can’t Break Out of the Box (commentary), Spring 1999, 44-45.
Keim, Marybelle C., Educational Consortia—A Longitudinal Study, Spring 1999, 30-36.
Lembo, Laura (See Blackburn-Smith, Jefferson)
Littche, Larry (See Fitz Gibbon, Heather M.)
Pooch, Michael C., Students of Color and Doctoral Programs: Factors Influencing the Application Decision in Higher Education Administration, Spring 1999, 2-7.
Quann, C. James, Converting from Quarter to Early-Start Semester: Observations Through a Rear-View Mirror, Summer/Fall 1998, 20-24.
Rippenberger, Susan J., Pluralizing Professional Scholarship: Graduate Students and the Art of Writing for Publication, Summer/Fall 1998, 2-5.
Shute, R. Wayne (See Jeffrey M. Tanner)
Sultson, Mohammad, Lonabocker’s article vis-a-vis Indonesia (letter to the Editor), Summer/Fall 1998.
Wesley, Homer “Bucky” (See Bennett, D. Tyson)

Subject Index

Abbreviated Degrees
Cook, William A., (The) Recent Rise of Abbreviated Degrees: Are They Comparable to the University Degree? (commentary), Summer/Fall 1998, 25-27.

Admissions/Applications
Pooch, Michael C., Students of Color and Other Colleges: Factors Influencing the Application Decision in Higher Education Administration, Spring 1999, 2-7.

Chiropractic

College & University
Dalympyle, Margaret, C&U’s New Cover Design (letter to the Editor), Winter 1999, 33.
Johnson, Thomas L. W., C&U’s New Cover Design (letter to the Editor), Winter 1999, 33.

 Consortia
Keim, Marybell C., Educational Consortia—A Longitudinal Study, Spring 1999, 30-36.

Counseling

Credentia Evaluation
Frey, James S., Pakistan Educational Credentials — Rebuttal (letter to the Editor), Spring 1999.
Hayre, Harb S., Pakistan Educational Credentials (letter to the Editor), Spring 1999.

Debt, Student
Bennett, D. Tyson and Homer “Bucky” Wesley, Enforcing Academic Policies and Alleviating Student Bad Debt, Summer/Fall 1998, 16-19.

Disabled

Financial Aid

Higher Education
Blackburn, James, The Shape of the River (book review), Spring 1999, 49-50.
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