

H. A. ALTMANN,
The University of Calgary.

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY STUDENTS OVER A ONE-YEAR PERIOD

The role or position of university personnel workers has often been given a distorted or inaccurate description by students and adults. There may be various reasons for these inaccuracies, such as the newness of a position, role confusion as related to training, or qualification.

Sonne and Goldman (1957) found that expectations and preferences of counselling clients were learned, and were related to social and cultural influence. Deutsch and Gerard (1955) and Thibault and Strickland (1956) studied the process of social influence. They found that responses and decisions were many times made in accordance with the satisfaction and positive expectations of an individual or a group.

Confronted with these variables of influence, people often experience a great deal of difficulty and anxiety in selecting a source of help. It seems plausible to assume that if a source has been contacted and little satisfaction gained, inaccurate and unjust descriptions may be given that service.

To make certain types of decisions, students often find it necessary to gain assistance from other people. Grant (1954) and King and Matteson (1959) investigated the type of assistance students expected from a counsellor and found that educational and vocational types of problems gained priority.

One purpose of this investigation was to determine what specific people university students consult when confronted with a problem. Another purpose was to determine whether students' perceptions change after a one-year period.

During the second week of the 1965-66 academic year, 150 freshmen students in the compulsory English course at The University of Calgary were asked to respond to an adaptation of the Counselling Appropriateness Check-List (Warman, 1960). Instructors administered the questionnaire and student participation was on a voluntary basis. One year later the same questionnaire was mailed to the same sample of students and 124 questionnaires were found acceptable for evaluation.

The Counselling Appropriateness Check-List contains 66 items. The three areas of the Check-List and sample items of each area are as follows:

1. *College Routine.* This factor seems to represent adjustment to the necessities and routine of establishing oneself satisfactorily in the academic setting.

- a) not knowing how to study effectively
- b) going in debt for school expenses
- c) getting back in school after dismissal

2. *Vocational Choice.* This factor seems to present concern about long-range career planning.

- a) doubting wisdom of vocational choice

Table 1
Percentages: Pre-Test Findings

Area	Faculty Dean	Parent	Physician	Friend	Counsellor	Dean of Men or Women	Instructor	Minister
V.C.	13.90	6.96	2.52	6.38	52.67	9.10	6.29	2.19
C.R.	8.78	10.28	2.11	9.17	45.11	10.56	10.50	3.50
S.	2.08	19.93	4.62	26.00	17.17	8.82	3.03	18.35

Table 2
Percentages: Pre-Test Findings

V.C.	15.08	4.82	.23	3.05	67.22	4.78	4.37	.50
C.R.	9.21	11.05	.01	4.77	53.16	6.18	15.39	.01
S.	.18	22.94	2.94	34.90	15.47	5.69	.38	16.50

Table 3
Significance of Change of Students' Pre- and Post-
Responses to the "Appropriateness
Check-List" ("z" values)

V.C.	1.13ns	10.14*	22.90*	16.70*	10.32*	16.00*	8.68*	16.90*
C.R.	.16ns	.88ns	6.00*	5.11*	5.03*	4.87*	4.89*	2.49ns
S.	3.02*	4.30*	5.09*	11.13*	1.13ns	6.96*	13.25*	8.90*

ns not significant

* $p. < .01$

- b) choosing best courses to prepare for a job
- c) want to know what I'm suited for

3. *Adjustment to Self and Others.* This factor seems to represent both interpersonal and intrapersonal adjustment.

- a) too inhibited in sex matters
- b) home life unhappy
- c) lacking self-confidence

There are eight sources of help listed on the questionnaire. The personnel included were: faculty dean, parent, physician, friend, counsellor, dean of men or women, instructor, or minister-priest.

The nature of the samples used required a test of significance of the difference between two correlated proportions (Ferguson, 1966, p. 148). Proportions were computed on the number of group choices assigned to a particular area. The actual proportion tested was arrived at by tabulating the choices assigned to specific personnel on the pre-test and then comparing them to the number of choices assigned the same personnel on the post-test. The pre- and post-test findings are listed in Table 1 and Table 2. The statistical findings are in Table 3.

FINDINGS

The statistical findings were as follows:

1. In the area of vocational choice, seven of eight areas were found to have changed at the .01 level of significance.
2. In the area of college routine, five of the eight areas were found to have changed at the .01 level of significance.
3. In the area of "self," seven of eight areas were found to have changed at the .01 level of significance.

DISCUSSION

The findings implied that first-year students are very uncertain as to the proper source of help they should contact with a specific problem, and that their views or perceptions change significantly over a one-year period. However, the source or factor related to the shift was not considered in the present investigation. In addition there was no reliability data on the Warman Check-List, and as a result changes could have been due to the instability of the instrument. Even after considering the aforementioned limitations, it still seems clear that a shift in emphasis was made during the year. A follow-up investigation is in progress involving students in an introductory guidance course. The purpose of the follow-up is to determine the direction of change as a result of discussion and role definition of the personnel listed in the Check-List.

It appears that the type of problem students present to the particular sources listed on the Counselling Appropriateness Check-List is based mainly on learned perception of that person or service. Perhaps the level of training dictates the role displayed by people in these services. Perhaps university personnel services assume that their position has been clarified somewhere along the way. It seems that a great deal more has to be done at the high-school setting to clarify student perception of available services and the

function of those services. If the sources were clarified prior to entrance, a great deal of time on the part of the students, and university personnel services, could be spared. An interesting finding was that students perceived the university counselling services as a place dealing mainly with the "college routine" and "vocational choice" types of problem. The findings supported previous research by Grant (1954) and King and Matteson (1959). The traditional form of vocational counselling is still strongly evident in many institutions.

A significant aspect of the research indicated that a "friend" is the main source contacted for discussion of personal or "self" types of problems.

Perhaps the most valid assumption is that the change was due to a first-hand exposure to a university campus in which a great deal of exploratory behavior takes place. The change at The University of Calgary may indeed be a natural phenomenon experienced by first-year students everywhere.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this investigation was to determine what specific people The University of Calgary students would consult when confronted with a specific problem. During the 1965-66 academic year, 150 first-year students responded to the Counselling Appropriateness Check-List (Warman, 1960). One year later 124 of the original sample responded again to the Check-List. The findings were as follows:

1. *Vocational Choice*. Seven of eight areas were found to have changed at the .01 level of significance.

2. *College Routine*. Five of eight areas were found to have changed at the .01 level of significance.

3. *Adjustment of Self and Others*. Seven out of eight areas were found to have changed at the .01 level of significance.

The findings also indicated that students perceived the counselling centre as a source of help mainly in the areas of vocational-choice and college-routine types of problems. A "friend" was labelled as the main source with whom to discuss personal types of difficulties.

REFERENCES

- Deutsch, M., & Gerard, H. B. A study of normative and informational social influence upon individual judgement. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 1955, **51**, 629-636.
- Ferguson, G. A. *Statistical Analysis in Psychology and Education*. (2nd ed.) New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966.
- Grant, C. W. The counsellor's role. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 1954, **33**, 74-77.
- King, P. T., & Matteson, R. W. Student perception of counselling center services. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 1959, **32**, 358-364.
- Sonne, T. R., & Goldman, L. Preferences of authoritarian and equalitarian personalities for client-centered and eclectic counselling. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1957, **4**, 129-135.
- Thibault, J. W., & Strickland, L. H. Psychological set and social conformity. *Journal of Personality*, 1956, **25**, 115-129.
- Warman, R. E. Differential perceptions of counselling role. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1960, **7**, 269-274.