

BOOKS

Who doesn't get to University . . . and Why. A Study on Accessibility to Higher Education in Canada. Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. Ottawa: The Runge Press Limited. 1970. 210pp.

A special committee of AUCC commissioned Dr. Robert M. Pike to study all aspects of accessibility to post-secondary education, including financial assistance to students and to prepare a report on the basis of such study.

Pike's monograph and the subject of this review is divided into parts: Sociological Perspectives and Student Financial Aid. Although both sections are interdependent, they will be examined separately.

In Part I, the author has referred to most of the major Canadian admissions and drop-out studies at the appropriate level to make his points convincingly without the necessity of generating new evidence. He has carefully defined his position and methodology, delimited his area of investigation, and repeatedly indicated the inadequacies of his data.

What is it then that the author has to say? First, he establishes that there are differences between provinces in school survival rates, in college/university participation, in bases of admission, and so on, just as there are variances in per capita income, provision of educational facilities, and financial aid to students and universities alike. He dashes quickly into the matter of sex differences in school survival and university participation rates and then escapes before becoming a martyr for women's lib. His point is that the variations in university participation rates imply environmental factors affecting the educational behavior of those resident in a particular area.

The first of these is school attendance rates upon which university attendance is based. The higher the retardation, withdrawal and drop-out rates, the lower the university participation rates. He concludes that as an estimate,

. . . between three quarters to four fifths of qualified high school matriculants do continue their education beyond the high school level although not necessarily immediately after concluding their studies . . . (p.26)

As he sees it, the primary problem is one of keeping the student in school until he graduates with university matriculation (for this is the group most likely to continue on to university). He notes the biased or select nature of this particular group by comparing it to the non-university attenders. They are likely to be the higher achievers and

the brightest. But equally significant in determining the likelihood of university attendance as scholastic ability and aptitude is the socio-economic status of the student's family. As this status rises so does the likelihood of attending university. This latter point is pursued à la Porter's *Vertical Mosaic*. From his data, Pike concludes that class differentials have persisted rather than diminished during the nineteen fifties and sixties notwithstanding the admissions revolution.

It is evident that the proportion of students starting grade one and continuing to graduate from high school is growing, at a higher rate than the numerical growth of the population. This is reflected, in turn, in university intakes but Pike argues that any associated changes in accessibility, particularly for students of the lower social strata, is questionable. The gap may even be widening. He does recognize that this conclusion could be distorted because of the rapid disappearance from the work force of the unskilled laborer.

Pike now turns his attention to the matters of geographical location and ethnic affiliation. The former seems to have two aspects, the proximity of university facilities, and the size of the community in which the student resides. Students are more likely to attend university if one is located near at hand. Also, students from larger communities are more likely to attend institutions of higher education. This increased likelihood relates to the degree of urbanization (modernization) of the larger center, and the very real likelihood in Canada that existing universities will be located in a large urban center in the first instance. Pike strikes at the heart of the matter when he suggests that urban-rural differences reflect real differences in the quality of educational opportunities, occupational opportunities, and a difference in life style with all the associated differences in mores, values, and beliefs. The latter are pronounced for ethnic groups in rural areas.

Pike concludes at this point that university attendance is based on two sets of factors: prescriptive, and ascriptive. The former are those such as achievement which influence university attendance directly and are recognized as such. The ascriptive factors, such as social class, community and regional differences, and ethnic affiliation, are not so readily evident and are the major theme of his monograph. He then chooses to explain why there are such differences in university attendance rates on this latter basis. His approach is two-fold; psychosociological factors, and physical or concrete factors, such as, the cost of attending university.

Under the sociological determinants of educational performance, he discusses cultural deprivation first. Without its illogical extension, he defines this as those factors in the present educational and individual's environment which serves to handicap him for life and cites the "culture of poverty", the high drop-out rates from low income family and the educational and vocational aspiration studies done in Canada as evidence. He expands upon the educational middle class phenomenon as it affects

the low class status child and the family aspirations for its children. However, he substitutes dominant ethnic group for middle class, and minority, for lower class. Finally, he questions society's right, notwithstanding its desire to improve education, to cause the alienation of any individual from his race in the process. He also concedes that unlike the United States, the ethnic perspective has not been explored fully within the Canadian context.

Turning to the physical or quantitative factors, the author looks at the following: inequalities in the provision of facilities, economic need, costs of attendance, and sources of student income. It is not this reviewer's intention to examine each of these in detail. The matter of inequalities between and within provinces is already a matter of record so it will suffice to comment, by way of agreement, that it would seem that those areas which suffer the most from such inequalities are those least likely to get help.

In the matter of financial need, in terms of simple survival it is to be expected that the children of low income families would not continue on to university. Not only are there the costs of attendance and the loss of income during this period, but even prior to such considerations, pressures may be exerted to have the child augment the family income long before he leaves home permanently. Invariably such pressure leads to the school drop-out. The Ontario studies have shown that when such children continue, they do so in vocational programs which aim at short term release into the labor force. It cannot be denied that financial reasons have not been often given by students as the reason for leaving, yet the author feels strongly about this point to the extent of recommending that study grants be made available on the basis of individual need after the age of compulsory attendance. Such action would be, he argues, an incentive to children from low-income homes.

While financial reasons for not attending are not frequently reported for high school students, such is not the case for university. It may be that the direct costs of attendance are too high in comparison to the non-evident costs of high school attendance, even though fees pay only about a fifth of the operational costs of the universities. Yet, the direct costs are even higher if the student must leave home to attend. Pike's statistics suggest that by means of summer employment, students meet about 25-30% of such costs. Loans, scholarships, etc., account for a like proportion while parents and friends provide the remainder. It is easy to understand under these conditions why any upset in this balance creates major problems to the potential student. For this reason, Pike pursues this matter of accessibility and economic need prior to his examination of existing scholarships and student financial assistance in Part II. Money, he notes, in isolation is not decisive as to whether a student attends or not. In combination with ambivalence about attending in the first instance, or deeply embedded mores about incurring debt or even seeking aid, it does become important. Finally, there is the obvious

matter of being aware of available assistance. Such awareness depends in part on guidance counsellors possessing considerable specialized knowledge about student loan availability. Such counsellors are not likely to be found in smaller schools or in the low income urban districts.

The most insightful section in Part I is his discussion of the "Factor of Education Itself". Here he examines the underlying philosophy of higher education prevailing in our country and its evolution to the present day. In contrast to European elitism, he notes the trend to the American democratic tradition of barring no one from an education. He uses Turner's concepts of sponsored mobility and contest mobility rather than the above two terms. It is clear that Canada has chosen to follow the American pattern and in so doing, considerable effort has had to be made to expand our universities to meet the demand for places, i.e., the admission revolution. But the effects are not just at this level. He notes that the elitist philosophy must be supported by an elitist-oriented secondary and public school system. In Canada, the emergence of the comprehensive high school as the characteristic secondary school speaks against this development. His discussion leads to what might be called Pike's Law, namely, that the longer a student is held in school before eligibility to enter university, the more likely the students who graduate with matriculation will represent only a small proportion of the initial intake. Liberalization of university admission requirements has not been without problems not the least of which has been that of transfer from one high school program to another — or more specifically to the matriculation stream. Unfortunately, the author does not choose to pursue this point although ample evidence has long existed in the United States (e.g., the Eight Year Study of the late 1930's) of the untenability of the matriculation stream to predict success exclusively than any other program.

The author writes in a pleasing first person style, with meaningful footnoting, and an eye for a well-turned phrase. Example: "However, as will soon become apparent, these students (post-secondary other than university) are the Canadian social scientist's Cinderella sorely neglected, but well worth looking at." p. 35.) This quotation is by way of introducing three criticisms of the monograph — all of which are perhaps unjustified or unfair to the author in part, since he himself recognizes them. The first is this matter of post-secondary education, and the community college concept, in particular. There can be little doubt that this particular development will have a profound effect on the nation's socio-economic structure. We cannot predict at this point what this effect may be because such institutions are only now coming into existence in sufficient numbers to have a significant impact. For the closing part of this century, community colleges may well be the great educational experiment which will answer some of the questions Pike raises.

The second and third criticisms are closely related. Nowhere does the author suggest the existence of a manpower policy at any level appropriate to the nation. Such policies are implied in the discussion of Student Financial Aid but at no point is there evidence of the existence of one or the need for national manpower student policies. Such development policies seem to exist in the various provincial university commissions, such as, those in Ontario and Alberta, and seem to be reflecting government policy but within a limited context. If such overall policies do exist, their consistency should be also examined. Such a basis is necessary for its social and work force (economy) implications as well as the funding of all post-secondary education. Nevertheless, this funding may well reflect indirectly the priorities assigned and the willingness to bring education at all levels to the local community. To rephrase it, the social philosophy, the capacity to support, and the need for post-secondary education in any political area may be such that the university admission philosophy is made elitist with the full consent of the population. This could occur in the absence of other post-secondary institutions, for example, where the pressures in university admission are high and limited numbers of university graduates would be in high demand within the national economy. After all, it is only since World War II that the public has made full use of its universities, and it has only been since the funding of universities has been placed on a per-student-attending basis that the universities have themselves been prepared to modify (or liberalize) their admission policies for survival. The political realities of university attendance, then, seem to have been over-looked in Pike's monograph yet these must be viewed within context. To sum up, then, Pike has not examined the existence of manpower policies and second, the willingness of a given area to fund higher education in relation to political and perceived social demands.

Pike has not misled the reader as to what he intended to do. His has been a sociological consideration of the problem in the most part. On admittedly limited research evidence, and without generating any new evidence, he has forcibly been able to magnify those points already suspected to many workers in this field.

If this reviewer is enthusiastic about Part I of the monograph. Part II — Student Financial Aid — is pure gold. It is billed as "a general review of publically financed and administered programs which are designed to provide financial assistance to Canadian undergraduate students" (p. 129). For those, like this reviewer, who have been on the fringes of such matters and have struggled to gain some rational grasp of the area, the author provides a needed sense of structure. Regrettably, as Pike notes, the area is in a constant state of flux as governments yearly vary the amounts, terms and conditions of direct financial assistance in line with economic necessity and political expediency. He also comments repeatedly on the extreme difficulty in collecting data (p. 154, 159). Nonetheless, his historical review, assembly of amounts budgeted

and expended, and other descriptive sections which defy meaningful review, are vital parts of the picture.

Rather than attempt to review this section in the conventional sense, this reviewer would like to comment on the following, keeping in mind the position of the author elaborated in such detail in Part I of the monograph. For example, in Chapter XII he begins by commenting that Canada, apart from the Canada Student Loans Plan, does not have “. . . a rational, comprehensive nation-wide system, plan or policy in the public student aid field” (p. 137). He goes on to elaborate on how many provincial loan plans which imitate existing plans in other provinces but modified enough to meet local conditions, serve only to confuse and to vary significantly the terms for award from area to area. For example, only in Quebec and Alberta, at the time of writing, were loans available to all post-secondary students on the same basis as to those who were just university bound. Obviously, as the community college movement gains momentum, this will have to change dramatically. He notes that while all plans and schemes have an underlying general philosophy of equalitarianism, i.e., no able student is prevented by financial need from completing his education, the practical application of such a philosophy is yet another thing. How are awards to be given? On the basis of merit (scholarship), or some need equivalence formula, or to all who apply being in full time attendance at university, or registration in a specified program of study, or only at certain phases of the student's program, or what have you? Clearly, the case can be made for equalization programs if there are adequate regulations to guide the program. However, such regulations must have a factual basis which can only come from research data and routine collection of loan information, both of which are sadly lacking. In view of the public's general reluctance to bare their financial conditions to what they believe is public scrutiny, most politically sensitive governments opt-out or elect compromise regulations or plans based on not so politically-sensitive criteria, e.g., merit, or to all comers. As the author notes with some bitterness, many of the aid plans fail because the truly needy student will have dropped out long before high school graduation. By the same token, the limits placed on the amount of aid in many provinces creates glaring discrepancies from province to province and from area to area.

In light of the discussion in Part I, it should come as no surprise that some provinces do not use all of their federal loan allocation while others use more. In most instances, this relates back to the high school holding rates and the underlying causes of these, since the basic loan allotment to each province is made on the number of resident adults in the 18-24 age group. Other provinces with high holding rates exceed their allotments and require supplements. Interesting variations exist in both the number of grants made and the average amount of each from province to province. In many ways, this reflects the political aspect of student aid.

In closing this section, this reviewer must again comment on a point made earlier in Part I. The matter of knowing about student financial assistance and how best to apply for it, is an area of considerable specialization. Unfortunately, many high school counsellors do not seem to be the slightest bit interested in this area which is to the detriment of their students. Part II, although limited in its treatment by the lack of data, cannot help but clear muddy waters and challenge the interested reader to delve further, either in terms of content of existing programs or as an area worthy of research.

Perhaps the best way to close this review would be to quote directly from the author's plea for the exploration of new concepts in university programs:

. . . I would like to pose the final question, and this is; 'access to what?' Canada is offering a university education to more and more of her young people. Many of these young people hold great expectations as to the kind of education that the universities will offer, but many subsequently see their expectations dashed in the face of large classes, over-worked professors, and the impersonality of the giant campus. Perhaps these disillusioned students have been led to expect too much. Perhaps in the process of adjusting to the challenge of mass higher education, the universities can no longer be expected to provide the intellectual stimulation . . . I hope that this is not the case. I hope that if confronted in ten year's time with the question 'access to what?', we will still be able to reply 'access to a stimulating and challenging environment for learning' (p.125).

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