

Students turn to vocational schools

by Eleanor Clift and Samuel Yette
Newsweek Feature Service

For most American students, the college degree has long been the ultimate prize in a young life—a passport to success, to be pursued with the same dogged intensity as a religious man might seek the Holy Grail.

Now the educational emphasis is changing. In a shrinking job market, educators are realizing that a college degree is not all that valuable any more. So increasingly they are guiding students of all ages toward studies that promise only one thing: to give the youth a skill with which he can earn a living.

In elementary schools, high schools and technical colleges from coast to coast, vocational education is attaining a new prominence. Young men who might once have been English majors in college—and gone begging for work—are becoming automobile mechanics. Young women who might once have studied social science—and later found that the only marketable talent they had was as housewives—are turning to crafts.

Altogether, according to the U.S. Office of Education, nearly 9 million people were enrolled in some sort of vocational training in the 1970 fiscal year, an increase of more than 10 per cent from 1969.

And every year almost \$2 billion is being channeled directly into new and existing vocational training programs.

Thanks to the efforts of men like U.S. Commissioner of Education Sidney P. Marland Jr., moreover, vocational education is no longer looked down on as declassing by academic snobs.

"There used to be a place for the unskilled person," Marland says. "As recently as 10 years ago, something like 10 per cent of our youngsters could be absorbed every year in unskilled fields. It is down now to less than 4 per cent and is decreasing rapidly.

"On the other hand, our society has gone so far as to say that the only way to virtue is through college...We must abandon the kind of cultural and academic snobbism that says the skills necessary to study law or medicine are to be prized above the skills required to be a computer technician or laboratory assistant."

Employment statistics provide eloquent evidence that a college bachelor's degree is often little more than a status symbol. In the past year, the business community has hired 26 per cent fewer college graduates, and it is generally accepted that 2 out of every 5 graduates with degrees in either liberal arts or education are unemployed or, at best, seriously underemployed.

Conversely, by most reliable estimates some 85 per cent of

all high-school graduates who undergo vocational training find work in their chosen fields.

It used to be that no youngster was expected to have any idea of what he wanted to do for a living until he reached college or at least finished high school. The new view is that a kid is literally never too young to begin making up his mind.

Several schools in Georgia's Cobb County, for instance, are trying out a three-year project called "career development," funded by the Federal government under 1968 amendments to the 1963 Vocational Education Act.

From kindergarten through the sixth grade, children are fed information about various jobs. Seventh-to-ninth-graders take field trips to visit hospitals, construction sites, cafeterias and the like.

By the time they are in the 10th grade, students are expected to have enough direction to orient their studies to whatever field they're likely to choose. Someone who thinks he might like to be a doctor, for example, will start taking advanced physics and chemistry.

"What we're trying to do," says Cobb County official Joel Smith, "is to get youngsters aware of the relevancy of subject matter to each other and to occupations. From the time they're in kindergarten,

we want to make them aware of alternatives."

Georgia also boasts one of the country's most progressive secondary-level vocational schools: the Atlanta Area Technical School, whose roster is currently jammed with 1,700 full-time students and 4,000 who study at nights.

Studies at the school range from a three-week course in cashier-checking to full, two-year technical courses in civil and mechanical engineering, printing, lithography and computer technology.

As much as possible, the studies are attuned to the real world. The students in food-service management run the cafeteria that feeds the rest of the student body. Would-be medical and dental laboratory assistants must spend at least six months in an outside lab before they graduate.

The school neither demands degrees from its enrolling students nor awards them to graduates. What they get instead is much more cherished—jobs. Anyone who has become expert in auto mechanics, diesel-fuel injection or air-conditioning is almost guaranteed work as soon as he graduates, at hourly wages that often start at \$3 and can climb quickly to \$7.

The fastest-growing element in the vocational boom is the straight substitute for college—the two-year,

post-high-school vocational school which offers a few general education courses but concentrates each student on one particular skill.

Oklahoma State Tech in Okmulgee offers its 2,500 full-time students 41 separate courses in 10 broad fields, from carpentry to commercial art to bootmaking. Young Bill Mahood, from Santa Barbara, Calif., is learning how to make custom boots. And where only a few years ago social pressures might have made him feel like a lowly tradesman, he now talks like a budding tycoon.

"There are 400 million feet in the nation," he says, "and the average person has seven pairs of shoes. The horse population is growing. As more and more horses are used for leisure, there will be a greater need for riding gear. The opportunities are unlimited."

Vocational schools differ from regular schools in more than just their study programs. The on-campus attitude is more serious, more dedicated and more optimistic.

"The kids who come here know what they're here for," says one Oklahoma Tech official. "They're not here to party or fool around. They know themselves and they believe—as they should—that vocational technical education is not something less than academic education. It's just something else."

Short Stuff

Today's Chemistry Department Seminar will be at 3:30 p.m. in Rm. 104 Hamilton Hall. Professor Naba Gupta will describe his present research on "Protein Synthesis in Animal Cells."

The Dental Admission Testing Program for admission to College of Dentistry will be administered on Oct. 15. Chalk samples for practicing the manual dexterity portion are available in Rm. 102, College of Dentistry. Further information is available from Dan Greer, ext. 3161.

extensions 2003, 2006, or 2007.

The ASUN Senate has three vacancies: Home Ec. Bus Ad. and Arts and Sciences. Applications may be obtained in the ASUN office Rm 334, Nebraska Union for interviews at the Senate meeting on Oct. 13.

Four University committees have openings for grad students. They are Library, Grading, Teaching Council and Calendar and Exams. Applications may be obtained

from the ASUN office, Rm. 334, Nebraska Union.

The Organization of Arab Students will have a monthly meeting Sunday Oct. 3 at 4 p.m. in the Nebraska Union.

The University Gay Action Group will sponsor a picnic this Sunday at 4 p.m. in Pioneers Park. For rides, meet at UMHE at 3:30 p.m. Bring one dollar or your own food.

The ASUN Human Rights Committee will meet Sunday at 9 p.m. in the Nebraska Union.

Anyone interested in going to London for second semester sociology courses should meet in Oldfather, Rm. 707 Saturday morning at 9:30 a.m.

To arms, to arms. . . Red Coats are coming

The "Red Coats" is an organization unknown to many UNL students but one with a well-known purpose. The organization, now in its second year, is part of the Nebraska Builders organization and operates mainly in public relations.

"Red Coats are informed, interested students working with public relations," said Cindy Vondrak, Red Coats chairman. Vondrak said the organization wants "to show the community that students are interested in good programs like Red Coats, because the public tends to see only the bad conduct side of students.

The organization was developed by Peter Wirtz, coordinator of student activities, James Kendrick, Builders' faculty advisor, and Rog Bonnesen, Builders president.

The founders had encountered public relations

groups, such as "presidents greeters," on other campuses and felt a similar program would be worthwhile for UNL.

Forty UNL students participate in the two areas offered by Red Coats.

One area deals with offering service as student guides, hosts, and hostesses for office and departmental guests of UNL's administration. This includes a guide service for large groups and dignitaries visiting the University.

The other area of Red Coats involves University public relations with the out-state Nebraska community.

Members also hope to inform persons outside the University by making tape recordings of students' opinions on pertinent campus issues for release to radio stations.

A program pertaining to this aspect of Red Coats is now in the formation stage. The group is planning, within the next three weeks, to develop a weekly half-hour for radio. This program would include information and discussion on topics such as UNL's new International House, or the independent-greeks split.

Red Coats exercised their ability in public relations during last year's Montgomery lectures when each member was assigned a guest. The Red Coat's duties as host or hostess included giving the guest a brief tour of the campus and volunteering information concerning UNL happenings.

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Lincoln Walk for Development Presents a Charity Concert for the Hungry

BUMPY ACTION & INSIGHT-SAT. NIGHT

In The Nebr. Union Ballroom
Begins At 8:30 — Adm. \$1.50