

# two new ways



Two professors, Bill Sheppard in psychology and John Wish in marketing, insurance and transportation, are doing some creative things in teaching within the present educational structure.

They are not, by any means, the only faculty members who are using relatively unorthodox methods. But they are significant in the contrast that can be drawn between their respective approaches.

Sheppard's course in introductory psychology is highly structured although it does permit the student to set his own rate of progress. His is a regular course in learning and thinking, PSY 211, taught with irregular methods.

It has 200 students in a lecture hall. It's

## Sheppard

This first innovative approach takes the large lecture class and, without changing its size or its location or increasing the amount of student or instructor hours required, transforms it into an interactive situation. In the course of a term each student spends a total of six hours speaking about the subject material to a classmate and six hours listening to another individual.

The program focuses on a text developed by C.B. Ferster of Georgetown University. The specifically defined objective of the course is complete fluency in the principles of operant behavior presented in the text. The student is evaluated on total mastery of defined blocks of material rather than on conventional partial mastery of the course content.

The text is laid out in small units of material. The student first studies a single unit and is then interviewed by a TA or another student who has completed the same particular unit. The interview lasts about ten minutes. In this time the student, with the text before him as a guide, challenges or simply explains the material covered in the unit. If his presentation satisfies the interviewer, he is checked off and proceeds to the next unit. If not, he restudies the unit and is interviewed again with no penalty.

In this manner the student sets his own pace. He is required only to be interviewed and give interviews. An objective final will be given only for experimental comparison with a separate control group.

The process of studying and interview-

ing takes place in the normal three, one-hour classes per week. At the end of the term the student is graded on the amount of material covered.

The principle is that the student will achieve and maintain a high competence in the material he covers and is, as a result, evaluated on the amount of material mastered rather than for the level of mastery of a given amount of material. The student is immediately reinforced by his interviewer's approval if he is correct or immediately corrected without penalty if he is wrong. This is the value of the interactive method.

According to Sheppard, much research in methods of instruction has limited value because "it has been dealing primarily with methods we already use. It compares, for example, a lecture with a discussion . . .

"We're not using much imagination in coming up with new ideas."

He feels that, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of any method of teaching, it must be asked: "Has the course changed the student's behavior in any measurable way? In the last analysis it's only those changes in behavior that are relevant."

This course is one of the first of its kind and it is experimental. It is one concrete effort to make the large class which "we seem to be stuck with" more amenable to the process of learning.



## Wish

Wish's course last year, like Sheppard's, was an experiment in innovative education, but there the similarity ends. The objectives here were 1) to sensitize White, middle-class, suburban students to the problems of the inner city, 2) to experiment with field work as a teaching technique and 3) to try to do "something" positive in the inner city.

The theme of this unstructured approach is "learning by doing and by exposure." During Winter term the class began its preparation for field work since the students had no previous experience in survey research. At this time contact was made with the Model Cities program and other community action agencies in Portland to ascertain what they wanted done.

The original goal for the course was the production of a survey research report on consumer goods prices in low-income areas of Portland. The final project outcome was quite different.

The students worked for various agencies collecting census and demographic data and surveying opinions of residents regarding their community.

The actual field work occurred during Spring term. A few members of the class received 15 units of credit for working full-

time in Portland. Others taking three to five units spent shorter periods of time in Portland. Now one girl is working for East-CAP Housing Corporation after graduating at the end of Spring term.

Residents of the area worked with the students to do the actual field work and the students acted as technical advisors in training residents and supervising and directing the survey. All of the funds for the project came from the involved agencies to pay resident workers and purchase supplies and computer time.

Starting from scratch and thrown almost directly into field work, class members were sensitized to inner city problems and did accomplish something positive. The survey was completed, several residents who were unemployed are now employed and students learned survey research by conducting it. Wish is planning a similar course for this year.

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