

EDUCATIONAL CENTER GROWING—BUT DIFFERENTLY



Harvey Rice, a student in business administration and urban studies, has been appointed assistant director of the Portland State University Educational Center.

A 1955 graduate of Benson High School, Rice has studied computer programming, accounting, business management and urban problems at Electronic Computer Programming Institute, Pacific Academy of Accountancy, Portland Community College and Portland State University.

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(Editor's Note: The Portland State University Educational Center was established in 1968 in a one-time furniture store at 2611 N.E. Union Avenue. Director Harold Williams has seen the student body of the "Storefront Campus," as it is sometimes called, grow from 15 to nearly 600. We asked Williams to report on the progress of the Center, which is run by three paid staff members and a host of volunteer instructors, both students and faculty members from the main PSU campus. His report follows.)

We didn't start in the normal way most institutions do, by building a building and then have some people of all kinds come and be told, "We'll redeem your souls." We did it a little differently.

We went out into the community and asked people their ideas. We went to the barber shop, the pool halls, the churches — you name it — and we got them involved with the Center. The people gave us the ideas and we just simply executed them.

The purpose of the Center was to establish something relative to both the University and the

community and to become something with which the community could identify. Our hope was that the University would be looked upon as something more than an island to itself within the total community.

We have jumped from 15 students to 550-plus, and when I say plus I mean we are pretty close to 600 now. I believe the main reason we've grown so fast is that the people can relate to something now and they don't have to worry about feeling ashamed or embarrassed because of their educational deficiencies. They can relate to themselves; they can relate to people in the community; they can relate to the professors and the people who tutor them; they can relate to the students; they can relate to a whole part of themselves that they didn't know existed within them.

The only problem I can see now is that not enough people outside the community really know that we exist. Beyond that, I don't think there are any great problems at all, unless there is a certain thing called "professional jealousy" on the part of the old established pros who don't particularly want to accept new approaches to education which are working here.



Harold Williams, Director of Portland State Educational Center.

The advantage of more people knowing about the Center would be that people could find out the way for them to cut the myth, cut their fears about college and find people in another part of their city who are totally blind to them. This would be a great advantage; it would also show the whole legislative community and the whole state system that there is a need for this type of educational structure which is more advantageous to the people than a lot of things going on in the established structure now.

A lot of people in the city think that we set up just for the minority; to make it more blunt, just for the Blacks. The program wasn't set up just for Blacks; it wasn't set up just for that community mislabeled as "Albina"; it was set up for the whole city of Portland.

The Center is a total of people, an organization of a people's program. It's a good opportunity to learn that no matter what race you're in, that if you don't take a bath you stink. The programs have really offered us a lot of beautiful opportunities in race relations to let people become aware of one another, of one another's qualities, of one another's backgrounds, of their likes and of their dislikes of one another. The Educational Center has helped tear down a lot of myths about race relations that were infecting our city, our state, our country and the world in general. It's an opportunity for people to be free without hangups, and just be themselves for a few hours and to obtain something else in the process.

The Center happens to be located in the mid-town of Portland, but anybody and everybody is welcome to come in and be a part of the program and to be accepted into it. There are no restrictions on what economic bracket a student is in, or what background he has, or what his social status is. All of these things are irrelevant. People can sense this just by coming into the Center to see for themselves that people are people.

Eighty-five per cent of our people happen to be white. The simple fact that the public needs to understand is that the Center is not a "Black program," but a "people program." The majority of the people who come to the Center come from outlying areas like Gresham, Beaverton, Tigard and from all over the southeast and southwest parts of the city. They do not only come from the north and northeast areas.

From the educational standpoint, we offer courses in psychology, sociology, English and mathematics. We also offer courses which will help high school drop-outs pass exams to obtain

general equivalency diplomas. We try to offer anything that people can use quickly, subjects which are to the point for them and with which they can identify in their jobs and everyday living. Our program is geared to the people, not to computers. To be geared to their needs and what they want out of it — I guess this is the basic purpose of the Center.

We have exactly three paid staff members — myself, an assistant and a secretary. Other staff consists of the beautiful volunteer instructors from the main campus and a lot of outstanding young students who give their time to people at the Educational Center. Some of the students here have an overload in studies, some don't have jobs and need them, but they are still here giving their time to the Educational Center. They are people concerned about the whole community, concerned about their university. They are students not necessarily interested in blockading the Park Blocks. They are giving their time to this university and they are not given any credit for it.

They make it possible for us to offer day and night classes, credit courses and non-credit courses. We have approximately seven credit courses and nine non-credit courses going on now — in math, English, psychology, sociology — the whole background. We have art courses which are non-credit; we have various educational courses just for general information if the student plans later to take a college credit course.

Our classes start in the morning at 9:30 and run until 10 at night. People can walk in off the street any time and sign up for classes with but one stipulation: They can't come in near the end of a quarter and register for a college-credit course. If they want to enroll in non-credit courses, or want tutoring help or just to attend informal sessions, they can come in anytime of the year, anytime of the day we are open. There is no fear of registration at the Center.

We would like to expand the curriculum offerings at the Center, but that depends on the commitment of the requisite department heads within the university. We would like to offer as many courses as there is a demand for. There are a great number of courses we don't offer, like history, political science and some stages of urban studies. We haven't got them because we haven't got a commitment from the department heads.

We need more courses in business administration. People are asking that we give courses of this type. But we are limited in the things we can offer to the young because of the department heads and their commitment to us. The University could be more direct, in a sense, to what it really wants of the Educational Center.

We need more direction from the total campus, not just from the people who are in our corner, but from those who are not so familiar with what we are doing at the Center. We can see ourselves growing this coming year to an enrollment of perhaps 1,500. We have a most definite need for more facilities, more space, more equipment, a few more paid staff members, more commitment from the main campus, more commitment from department heads and more commitment from the people in general. In this way we can prove that we have something very relevant to the total educational structure.

The volunteers now are spending an average of 15 hours a week at the Center. That's like a college professor on the main campus who would work at least 15 hours or so over and beyond the normal work load. He doesn't get any pay for it. The only recognition or reward I can give to the volunteers is a simple thanks. This sounds like very little. It is very little. But that's all we can give now. I wish we had some type of reward to show our real appreciation for what they have done for us.

The people who come to the Center range in age from 16 to 60. Some of them have jobs and are just bettering their skills for their jobs. Some need a math background for example, so they can apply for certain jobs which now are out of their reach. A lot of people who have come to the Center have since ventured on to college. They mastered certain awarenesses in themselves while attending classes at the Center; they became aware of what's going on in college and the experience in the Center helped them to break down some of their fears of going on to college.

Because our instructors are volunteers, we can give a non-credit course for just one dollar. A three-hour credit course costs six dollars. A student may take only one three-hour credit course per quarter at that rate. The course allows people to take the three hours they might need to graduate, to get a job, or, perhaps, a promotion.

Many people with ability have been blocked financially from the University. Now, the Educational Center allows them to attend a few classes, find themselves, and, if nothing else, learn something constructive for their everyday life. People can relate to the Center — and with each other in their own economic bracket.

We haven't ventured into vocational skills, because that's a totally different area. We stick with the liberal arts. Training for the industrial area is not our purpose. We are based for people who want to decide for themselves where they want to go. We just try to expose them to a different area in their lives and they take it from there.

The over-all philosophy of the Center is simple. It is to give without remembering, to receive without forgetting. And that, simply, is it.