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The Socio-Economic Background

Of the 1951-1952 Freshmen*
At Savannah State College

By Elson K. Williams**

This study is an investigation of the pre-college background of the 1951-1952 freshman students at Savannah State College. It involved an analysis of their social, economic, cultural and intellectual experiences. The purpose of the investigation is: (1) to furnish educational data which may be needed for effective teaching, counseling and adjusting the curricula to the needs, ability and interests of the students; (2) to supply data which may be helpful for administrators and teachers who are engaged on all levels of the educational ladder; and (3) to discover relationships between the pre-college experiences of the freshmen at this Institution and those of the students of similar institutions.

This investigation is predicated on the following assumptions: (1) that college curricula should be closely articulated with the pre-college experiences of students; (2) that an inquiry of the socio-economic experiences of students is essential to functional revision of college curricula; and (3) that an understanding of the background of college students is basic to effective college teaching.

Several studies² have been made pertaining to the pre-college experiences of the freshman population in institutions of higher learning for Negroes. However, the investigator has not been able to ascertain that an inquiry of this nature has been completed which accounted for Negro students at this In-

*This study was made of 186 freshman students who were enrolled in Freshman Orientation during the fall quarter of 1951-1952.

**The investigator wishes to express his deep appreciation to Dr. W. K. Payne, President of Savannah State College and the members of the Research Committee of Savannah State College for their cooperation and assistance.

¹R. W. Davenport, "A Background Study of a Negro College Freshman Population." *The Journal of Negro Education*, VIII, No. 2 (April, 1939), pp. 186-197.

²Some of the most significant investigations include: Charles H. Thompson, "The Socio-Economic Status of Negro College Students." *The Journal of Negro Education*, II, No. 4 (January, 1933), pp. 26-37; Thomas E. Posey, "The Socio-Economic Background of Freshmen at West Virginia State College." *The Journal of Negro Education*, II, No. 4 (October, 1933), pp. 466-476; R. K. Davenport, "A Background Study of a Negro College Freshman Population." *The Journal of Negro Education*, VIII, No. 2 (April, 1939), pp. 186-197; and Ambrose Caliver, *A Background Study of Negro College Students*. U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., Bulletin No. 8, (1933).

stitution or any of the institutions of higher learning for Negroes in this State.

Questionnaires were administered to 186 students of the class who were enrolled in Freshman Orientation. All of the questionnaires were executed and returned. An analysis was made of the results of Cooperative English Tests, the Cooperative General Achievement Test and the A.C.E. Psychological Examination for College Students. In addition, the writer made a careful study of the literature on the background of freshman students in Negro institutions of higher learning.

This presentation of the findings is purposefully organized into four major parts. The first part is primarily concerned with description of the factors that are pertinent to the personal status of the freshman group. The second aspect entails an examination of the pre-college experiences of freshman students with respect to their religious, educational, family and community status. The third part of the findings is concerned with the economic conditions of the group under investigation. In this respect, an analysis is made of parental occupations, family income (an indication), home ownership and other economic facets that are related to the pre-college standards of living of the students. The fourth part of this presentation includes a summary and conclusion of the findings.

Personal Status

Place of birth—An analysis of the data given in 186 questionnaires reveals some pertinent information concerning the population of the freshman group. Accordingly, 184 freshmen of the 186 that were studied were born in the deep South; two were born in the North; while none was born in the upper South. Of the 184 freshmen that were born in the South—168 were born in Georgia, six in Florida, five in South Carolina, four in Alabama and one in Mississippi. Of the two students whose places of birth were in the North—one was born in New York; while the other was born in Michigan.

Sex and age—With reference to the sex of the freshman students, the females outnumber the males approximately two to one. Specifically, the data indicate that sixty-four or 34 per cent of the students are male; while 120 or 64 per cent are female. Two of the students that replied did not indicate their sex. The findings further show a significant difference between the ages of the two sexes. In this matter the range of ages for the male is from sixteen to forty—while the range of the ages of the female students is from fourteen to twenty-seven. The

median age for the male students is 19.75 and for the female student 18.7. The approximate difference in the median ages of the boys and girls is twelve months. The ages of the students investigated seem to be lower than the ages of Negro freshmen that were studied approximately twenty years ago. In a study that was made twenty years ago, Caliver remarks: "The mean ages of men and women are respectively 20.21 and 19.34, the difference being slightly more than 11 months. The group of students studied seems to be sufficiently representative to warrant the conclusion that the typical Negro student entering college is about 20 years of age . . ."³ The median ages of the freshman group under inquiry closely parallel those (median age for men was 19.75 and for women 18.572) of the freshmen at West Virginia State College as recorded in a study made by Posey in 1933.⁴

Residence—Data from the questionnaires clearly indicate that the population of this group comes from dispersed areas throughout the State. The students under investigation come from approximately one-third of the 159 counties of the state. Significantly .39 per cent of the group reside in Chatham County, the home county of this Institution. Sixty-three of the 186 students reside in cities with a population of 20,000 or more. Forty-nine of this group reside in Savannah. The remainder reside in small town communities and dispersed homesteads.

Social Background

Religious Status—Church membership and affiliation are vital indexes to the religious heritage of a group. It seems pertinent to point out that 97 per cent of the group included in this inquiry hold membership in organized religious bodies; while approximately 2 per cent are not affiliated with any church. Membership of students and parents in prevailing denominations is as follows:*

<i>Denomination</i>	<i>Student</i>	<i>Father</i>	<i>Mother</i>
Baptist	118	110	107
Methodist	41	38	47
Catholic	10	4	3
Others	11	7	11

³Caliver, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

⁴Posey, *op. cit.*, p. 467.

*The data above are not to be construed to indicate that a difference may be ascertained between the religious affiliation of parents and students inasmuch as the number of no replies relating to parents on this item exceeded the number of no replies for students.

With reference to the attendance of religious services by the freshmen prior to their coming to this Institution, the replies from the questionnaires reveal that 84.9 per cent attended church services regularly and 60.8 per cent attended Sunday School regularly. Furthermore, the replies indicate that 94.1 per cent of the students attended church service voluntarily and 80.1 per cent attended Sunday School voluntarily.

Educational Background—The educational status of the parents of students is particularly significant in determining the cultural and intellectual experiences of pre-college students. In the inquiry into the formal training of the parents of the freshman group, the results of the returns point out that (1) 24.2 per cent of the fathers and 24.8 per cent of the mothers had completed high school; and (2) 1.5 per cent of the fathers and 3.18 per cent of the mothers had earned a bachelor's degree as their highest level of attainment.

The results of a series of tests administered to the Freshman Class during the period of orientation show that the students under investigation compare unfavorably with the students on a national scale with respect to intelligence and achievement. The average scores on all the tests fell in the lowest group* of scores on the 1950 National College Freshman Testing Program.

*Average** Score of Freshman at Savannah State College⁵*

Psychological Examination	English Test	Social Studies
Total Raw Score	Total Score	Scaled Score
39.4	34.6	36.5
Natural Science		Mathematics
Scaled Score		Scaled Score
47.9		44.7

In connection with the informal training of the freshmen, the findings reveal that 39.2 per cent of the students had family libraries in their homes, a majority of the students read newspapers daily; and a majority of the students read magazines weekly. The newspapers which were read with the greater frequency include: *The Savannah Morning News* (daily) *Pittsburgh Courier* (weekly), and the *Savannah Evening Press* (daily); while the magazines which were read with the greatest

*These tests included: (1) A.C.E. Psychological Examination for College Students 1948 Edition (2) Cooperative English Test, Form Y-High School Level (3) cooperative General Achievement Test, Form Z.

**Scores on the 1950 National College Freshman Testing Program are grouped in this descending order: Superior, above average, average, below average, poor.

⁵ 1951 National College Testing Program: *Confidential Report of Test Results to Savannah State College.*

frequency include: *Life, Ebony, Time, Our World, Look and Readers' Digest.*

The results of the findings also point out that 10.5 per cent of the freshman group had travelled outside of the United States (including veterans); and 71 per cent travelled outside of their home state; moreover, the greatest amount of traveling experiences to large cities, (one or more times) indicate that sixty-two students had visited New York City, twenty-two had visited Philadelphia, sixty-two had visited Atlanta, eleven had visited Chicago and four had visited Detroit.

It is pertinent to point out that college population is influenced also by the various cultural centers that are shared and are made available to all the people of the community. The physical accessibility to these cultural media is vital in the growth of educational experiences of pre-college students. Accordingly, the results of the study show the number of students who have access to various types of cultural or educational centers: (1) church, 167 students; (2) elementary school, 154 (3) junior high school, 63; (4) high school, 144; (5) college, 63; (6) community centers, 91; (7) museum, 26; and (8) theaters, 132.

Family Status—The investigator maintains that the important aspects of family life are directly associated with the teacher-learning situation as well as the interest, ability and needs of students. With respect to the marital status of the students, evidence from the findings reveals that 89.9 per cent of the students are single; 9.7 per cent are married; none is divorced; 71 per cent have no children and 8.4 per cent have from one to three children each. As to the marital status of the parents, the findings* show that 69.9 per cent of the parents are living together; 5.3 per cent are divorced; 6.8 per cent are separated, but not divorced. Further data relative to the family status show that: (1) 75.7 per cent of both parents are living; 2.6 per cent of both parents are dead; 8.4 only father is living and 11.1 per cent only mother is living; (2) 60.3 per cent of students live with both parents, 12.7 per cent live with mother only, 2.6 per cent live with father only, 13.7 per cent live with guardian, 5.8 per cent live with their spouse, and 1.06 per cent did not reply to that item; and (3) 58.8 of the students live in the same household with one to two brothers and/or sisters, 14.8 per cent live in the household with one to two brothers and sisters, 5.8 per cent live in the household

*Nine per cent did not reply.

with their stepfather and/or stepmother, and 13.7 per cent live in the household with their grandparents. Furthermore, it is pertinent to point out the size of the family relative to the number of brothers and sisters. The findings show that forty-one students have one brother or sister; nine have three brothers and/or sisters; forty-one have four; forty-nine have more than four; while eight students failed to give any information on this question.

Economic Status

Status of Employment—In this study, no efforts were made to measure specifically family income. However, attempts were made to determine the number of people that was employed in the family inasmuch as the number of persons working in the family is one of the significant indexes to family welfare. In this respect, the results of the inquiry show the number of persons employed in the families (exclusive of the students reporting) are: (1) Each of fifty-nine families has one employee (2) each of sixty families has two employees (3) each of twenty-nine families has three employees and (4) each of seventeen families has more than three employees.

The type of employment of parents is significant in helping to determine the economic status of students. The data furnished below throw some light on the income of the parents of freshmen under investigation.

*Occupation of Parents**

Occupation	No. of Fathers	No. of Mothers	No. of Guardians
Beautician	..	1	..
Butler	1	..	..
Brickmason	..	..	..
Carpenter	10	..	..
Chauffeur	4	..	..
Domestic Worker	..	17	7
Housewife	..	86	..
Landscaper	4	..	..
Minister	6	..	..
Mortician	2	..	..
Nurse	..	3	1
Secretary	..	1	..
Teacher	..	14	3
Skilled laborer	45	..	7

* One father was unemployed.

Unskilled laborer	36	..	1
Farmer	28	..	..
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	136	122	13

Approximately, half the freshman group is working while attending college. Of the number that is working, almost 25 per cent of that group indicate that the money earned does not help to defray their educational expenses; 23.3 per cent reveal that the money earned helps to pay their expenses in part; 4.7 per cent pay their expenses in full from their current earnings.

Ownership—The data furnish significant results relative to ownership of homes, farms and automobiles. The types of conveniences that are found show to an appreciable degree

Type of article	Per cent who own	Per cent who rent
Home ⁷	63.0	19.6
Farm*	19.6	3.7
Automobile	48.7	..

the standards of living of the freshman group. The findings reveal also the number of students who have conveniences in their homes.

<i>No. of Students</i>	<i>Conveniences</i>
67	Gas
168	Electricity
105	Bath tubs
113	Toilets
181	Radios
6	Pianos

Furthermore, 13.2 per cent of the students reveal that they live in brick houses; 2.6 per cent live in stone houses; and 75.7 per cent live in frame houses.

Summary, Conclusions, and Implications

1. The findings are primarily the results of data obtained from 186 questionnaires that were executed by the freshman group.
2. One hundred and sixty-eight students of the 186 that were investigated are natives of Georgia. Approximately one-

⁷Only 156 students replied.

*Only 23.8 per cent of the freshman group indicated that their parents or guardian lived on farms.

third of the group is from Chatham County; while one-fourth is from Savannah.

3. The female students outnumber the male almost two to one. The median ages (19.75 for males and 18.7 for females) compare favorably with those of Negro students in general as revealed in a previous investigation.
4. Religious experiences seem to have formed a significant part in the total pre-college experience.
5. The educational experience of the group is qualitatively and quantitatively below that of freshmen as revealed in the national testing program. A large number of students come from environments that are seriously lacking of a desirable cultural setting.
6. Approximately 90 per cent of the students are single. A majority of the group live with both parents.
7. Most of the students come from homes that afford low incomes. The standard of living of the group is not conducive to the most effective teaching-learning situation.
8. More emphasis should be placed on experiences that make for cultural enrichment of the students' personality in order to compensate for the pre-college deficiency of the students. Cultural experiences of intra-class and extra-class nature should be more intensively and extensively provided.
9. The Institution should make every effort to include college experiences that will be articulated with the pre-college experiences of the students.
10. More emphasis should be placed on remediation. The Reading Clinic should be expanded for the purpose of providing a more effective program of remediation for all students who need this type of service.
11. A comprehensive testing program for the entire college should be instituted.
12. There is a need for more individualized instruction.