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# **Academic Achievement and the Selection of Friends**

by

Charles I. Brown\*

The central aim of this investigation was to determine if academic achievement bears any relation to the choice of friends among a select number of high ability students enrolled at Bennett College. This longitudinal study, initiated in 1959 and concluded in 1963, sought to examine certain aspects of the Bennett College year(s) of ten students who were admitted to the Social Science Individual Tutorial Program (SSITP) during their freshman year. In order to admit a more proper evaluation of the above stated principal intent, the Bennett College year(s) of the social friends and roommates of the ten Tutorial Students (TS) were similarly examined. The declared social friends and roommates of the ten TS during the years embraced by this study numbered 40 thereby making a total of 50 S's included in this investigation.

## **BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION OF SSIPT**

The general purpose of the individual tutorial was to allow students of certain specified abilities the opportunity to do advanced work and to provide the social science staff a means of working more effectively and diligently toward producing individuals more alive to social concerns, more skilled in analysis, more comprehensive in judgment and more cognizant of their responsibility to the social order. Specifically, the ten students selected for the pilot SSITP by the Social Science Committee met with the following requirements:

1. Rank in the upper 10% of the class according to the results of the freshman test battery. (The following listing of the tests that comprised the complete battery maintains the order in which the tests were administered: Iowa Silent Reading; Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking; SCAT; STEP; Kuder Preference; and the California Test of Personality.)
2. Rank in the upper 10% of the class in social studies aptitudes and communication skills as derived from the results of the Iowa Silent Reading Test, Revised Form AM-BM. (This study makes use of the ISRT scores as the principal comparative factor in its attempt to assay the relationship, if any, between academic achievement and the selection of social friends among the S's studied.)
3. A high school transcript denoting an overall academic average of "B" or grades in the Social Science areas that would seem to indicate success in the tutorial program.
4. A high degree of self-motivation and interest. (The most notable attempt at objectifying this impressionistic factor was

the careful study and weighing of the several items mentioned above by the selectmen of the Social Science Core in lieu of face-value acceptance of possible halo-effect statements made by the candidates during their separate personal interviews.)

Some other important provisions and reservations included in the design of the SSITP that met with the satisfaction of both the preceptors were (1) voluntary participation in the program; (2) voluntary withdrawal from the program, without prejudice, if the student felt that her needs were not being met, or if the tutorial method proved too arduous an undertaking; (3) release of the student from the individual-teaching program by the tutor, if the TS's work did not satisfy the standards of the SSITP; (4) optional class attendance. On the other hand it was mandatory that the student fulfill the following requirements: (1) take mid-semester and semester examinations under the same circumstances as the other students; (2) attend special forums, lectures, seminars, and other programs designated by the Core; (3) to keep up with regular classroom work and to complete several major projects with the guidance and assistance of her instructor.

## METHOD AND PROCEDURE

**Hypothesis:** A more lucid and succinct reiteration of the hypothesis which bears the brunt of the testing of this study is that students exhibiting characteristics of excellence in academic achievement, specifically in the communicative skills, choose friends of the same general quality and/or characteristics.

**Subjects:** The total number of S's included in this investigation is 50. Ten of the S's are Social Science Individual Tutorial Program students who in turn identified or designated 40 other S's as being their closest social friends ( $N = 28$ ) and/or roommates ( $N = 12$ ).

**Materials:** The materials utilized in the gathering of data for this study were an interview sheet and the cumulative folders of the S's. The interviews restricted to the 10 SSITP'ers were of a highly structured and personal nature, i.e., during the interviewing sessions previously prepared questions were asked and the elicited responses were recorded by the investigators. The TS were queried with regard to membership in honor societies, their study habits, particularly as to whether they studied alone or with others, and the names of friends (excluding males) by whom they were most often accompanied or with whom they engaged in social activities. The last question of the series required the interviewee to identify her roommate(s).

The second major source combed for data was the complete cumulative folders, active or inactive, of all 50 S's, not only for corroborative evidences, but more importantly to secure the *Iowa Silent Reading Tests* scores, psychographs, grade point averages, and other relevant information which they contained.

The data compiled through the use of these materials were then

submitted to artful treatment and analysis in the light of the hypothesis. The resultant findings are summarized in the succeeding section.

## FINDINGS

The student participants of the SSITP were initially interviewed in 1959 and again in 1963. An encapsulated version of these widely spaced visitations is shown best in Table 1 along with comparative entries (items 2, 3, 5) for the social friends and roommates of the Tutorial Students.

Table 1, item 2 offers an interesting contrast as well as a finding that runs counter to most studies in that the graduating TS is two months older than her counterpart, having lost an initial advantage of one month's youthfulness. This rather unusual circumstance is doubtless due to the proportionate inequality in the number of college dropouts in both groups—a 10 and 45 per cent loss respectively.

As freshmen 4 TS indicated their permanent residence as being geographically north of the Mason-Dixon line while 6 claimed southern origin. By their senior year one TS was lost to the group via the dropout route, another had moved her permanent address to the north, making the north-south distribution 5 and 4. Of the 40 S's in the original group of friends and roommates only 22 were graduated with their class, 5 of this number were northerners, 15 were southerners, and 2 were students from abroad.

Six of the ten freshman TS had been or were members of high school honor societies. The inclusion of one other student who had not been an honor society student in high school increased to seven the number of college honor society inductees. The foregoing offers a vivid contrast to the 18 of 40 social friends and roommates who had been similarly honored while in high school, but of this number only 3 maintained academic averages sufficient to qualify for a college honor society. This more or less select group of three was joined by a fourth student who had not been a high school honoree.

Items 9, 10, and 11 are self explanatory to the extent that only one further word of elaboration should prove sufficient for each. As freshman all of the TS laid claim to studying alone by reasons of preference and habitual practice. As seniors, two defected from the nine remaining TS in favor of co-operative study, with seven still preferring to go-it-alone. Again, as seniors the number of social friends and roommates of the TS had dwindled to a lasting 15 and 9 from respective highs of 29 and 12 recorded their freshman year.

**Table 1.—Interview Results for TS and Some Comparative Data**

	<i>Tutorial Students Friends and Roommates</i>			
	Fresh. (N-10)	Senior (N-9)	Fresh. (N-40)	Senior (N-22)
2. Age	17.7	20.9	17.8	20.7
3. Permanent Address				
North	4	5	10	5
South	6	4	28	15
Foreign			2	2
5. Honor Society Member				
High School	6	5	18	3
College		7		4
9. Study Habits				
Alone	10	7		
With others		2		
10. Social Friends	28	15		
11. Roommates	12	9		

The second tabular offering is more comparative in content and attempts to highlight some of the more significant aspects of the communicative abilities of the S's as measured by the Iowa Silent Reading Test—Revised Forms AM-BM, CM-DM.

#### **Tutorial Students:**

1. The initial ISRT scores (Form AM-BM) of the 10 TS who accepted the challenging study provisions of the SSITP ranged from 187 to 171. These scores may be otherwise interpreted as ranging from the 64%ile to the 38%ile, or a reading level grade equivalent of 13+ to 12.1. The respective average median scores for the several TS are 181, the 50%ile, and a reading level equivalent of grade 13.
3. At the expiration of a semester or a year's study in the Bennett College Reading Development Center the terminal ISRT scores (Form CM-DM) ranged from 201 to 188. The grade percentile range for these scores varied from the upper 1 per cent to the 67%ile, while the reading level grade equivalent was 13+ in all instances. The concluding median scores for this group in order are 196, the 88%ile, and a reading level grade equivalent of 13+.
3. The mean academic average of the TS at the conclusion of the freshman year on a three point scale was 2.43. The variance in academic averages ranged from a high of 2.86 to a low of 2.14 for a differential of .72. The mean academic average of these same students, with but one exception—a dropout, at the termination of their undergraduate years was 2.22. The senior year dispersion of academic averages ranged from 3.00 to 1.71 for a grade point differential of 1.29.

### **Social Friends and Roommates:**

1. An examination of Table 2 discloses that at the beginning of their freshman year the social friends and roommates of the 10 TS had an average median score of 166 on the ISRT (Form AM-BM) and a range from high to low of 192 to 142; a 20%ile mean with a range that extended downward from the 79%ile to the 1%ile; and a mean reading level grade equivalent of 10.9 that encompassed reading grade equivalences from 13+ to 6.5.
2. Upon the expiration of their Reading Center study the median scored by the obverse group on the ISRT (Form CM-DM) was 184 with a range of 41 points separating the high score of 202 from the lowest score of 161. The 58%ile mean is drawn from an attenuated scale of percentile rankings ranging from the upper 1 per cent down to the 6%ile; although the mean reading grade equivalent for this group is 13+ it is marred by a range that includes grade equivalences from 13+ to 8.2.
3. The mean academic average of the comparative group at the completion of the 1958 freshman year is 1.54. This mean grade point average is derived from a set of academic averages whose extremes range from 2.38 to .43, the grade point differential being 1.95. By the time of their graduation the mean academic average of the social friends and roommates had experienced a dramatic rise to 2.10—18 members having been lost to the original group via the dropout route. The range of academic averages for this latter group being 2.95 to 1.42 for a grade point differential of 1.53.

Brown, C. I.

**Table 2.—Iowa Silent Reading Tests Scores and Academic Averages of Tutorial Students, Social Friends, Roommates**

STUDENTS	IOWA SILENT READING TESTS SCORES						ACAD. AV.	
	Mdn. Scor		Gde. P'tile		Gde. Equiva.		Fresh.	Senior
	AM-BM	CM-DM	AM-BM	CM-DM	AM-BM	CM-DM		
<b>TS-A</b>	184	201	57	U.1%	13+	13+	2.47	2.43
sf1	166	199	20	93	10.9	13+	1.61	1.85
sf2	160	172	12	30	9.6	12.4	1.66	1.42
sf3	154	190	7	75	8.5	13	1.86	1.45
Rm1	157	161	9	13	9.0	9.8	.57	DR
RM2*	160	172	12	30	9.6	12.7	1.66	1.42
<b>TS-B</b>	171	197	28	88	12.1	13+	2.30	DR
sf1	150	173	4	34	7.9	12.6	.43	NG
sf2*	166	199	20	93	10.9	13+	1.61	1.85
sf3	171	183	28	54	12.1	13+	1.12	DR
Rm1*	160	172	12	30	9.6	12.4	1.66	1.42
<b>TS-C</b>	187	201	64	U.1%	13+	13+	2.31	2.65
sf1	174	190	34	75	12.7	13+	1.61	1.80
sf2	185	199	59	93	13+	13+	2.38	2.21
sf3*	154	190	7	75	8.5	13+	1.86	1.45
Rm1	140	175	1	37	6.5	12.8	.80	DR
Rm2	177	191	42	76	12.8	13+	2.31	2.09
<b>TS-D</b>	174	196	34	88	12.7	13+	2.14	2.11
sf1*	150	173	4	34	7.9	12.6	.43	NG
sf2	164	191	17	76	10.4	13+	2.13	2.24
sf3	173	202	32	U.1%	12.7	13+	2.02	2.00
sf4	188	196	67	88	13+	13+	2.31	DR
Rm1	163	177	16	42	10.2	12.9	1.35	DR
Rm2	191	NR	79	NR	13+	NR	2.29	2.95
<b>TS-E</b>	181	188	50	67	13	13+	2.18	1.89
sf1	162	181	14	50	10.0	13+	1.05	DR
sf2	170	193	26	82	11.8	13+	1.92	2.17
sf3	153	173	6	32	8.3	12.5	.63	DR
sf4	165	189	19	70	10.6	13+	2.06	2.15
sf5	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	2.12
Rm1*	170	193	26	82	11.8	13+	1.92	2.17
Rm2	192	NR	79	NR	13%	NR	2.38	2.95
<b>TS-F</b>	181	196	50	88	13	13+	2.32	1.79
sf1	165	173	19	32	10.6	12.7	.61	DR
sf2	153	183	6	54	8.3	13+	1.60	2.30
sf3*	153	173	6	32	8.3	12.5	.63	DR
Rm1*	153	173	6	32	8.3	12.5	.63	DR
RM2	150	NR	4	NR	7.9	NR	1.11	NG
<b>TS-G</b>	181	196	64	82	13+	13+	2.84	1.71
sf1	163	174	16	34	10.2	12.7	.67	DR
sf2	178	191	45	76	12.9	13+	1.91	DR
sf3	164	177	17	42	10.4	12.9	1.08	DR
Rm1	142	152	1	6	6.8	8.2	.44	DR
<b>TS-H</b>	185	199	59	93	13+	13+	2.38	2.21
sf1	178	NR	45	NR	NR	NR	2.30	2.42
sf2	163	181	16	50	10.2	13+	1.92	DR
sf3	166	181	20	50	10.9	13+	1.97	DR
Rm1*	163	181	16	50	10.2	13+	1.92	DR
Rm2*	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	2.12
<b>TS-I</b>	187	196	64	88	13+	13+	2.52	2.79
sf1	163	196	16	88	10.2	13+	1.76	1.85
sf2	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR	1.93	DR
sf3	181	193	50	82	13+	13+	1.11	DR
sf4*	185	199	59	93	13+	13+	2.38	2.21
Rm1*	181	193	50	82	13+	13+	1.11	DR
Rm2*	164	194	17	84	10.4	13+	1.04	NG
Rm3	158	173	10	34	9.2	12.6	1.75	2.14
<b>TS-J</b>	173	197	32	89	12.7	13+	2.86	3.00
sf1	170	184	26	58	11.8	13+	1.66	2.08
sf2	169	196	24	88	11.6	13+	1.36	1.83
sf3	174	189	34	70	12.7	13+	1.40	1.76
sf4	164	NR	17	NR	10.4	NR	2.29	2.50
sf5*	166	181	20	50	10.9	13+	1.97	DR
Rm1*	170	184	26	58	11.8	13+	1.66	2.08
Rm2*	165	189	19	70	10.6	13+	2.06	2.15
Rm3*	166	181	20	50	10.9	13	1.97	DR
<b>TS</b>	181	196	50	88	13	13+	2.43	2.22
sf & Rm	166	184	20	58	10.9	13+	1.54	2.10

TS—Tutorial Student  
 sf—Social Friend  
 Rm—Roommate  
 Dr.—Dropout

NR—No record  
 NG—Non-Graduating Student  
 \*—Duplicate entry

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

When the data presented in the above tables and comments are joined in the light of the hypothesis governing this study, there seems to be ample evidence to indicate that the 1958-1963 group of Tutorial Students selected their social friends, wittingly or unwittingly, on the basis of consideration far more primary and mundane than excellence in academic achievement.

The hypothesis, it may be recalled, sought to examine the premise that students exhibiting characteristics of excellence in academic achievement choose as intimate friends those persons possessing the same general qualities. In advancing the thought that the proposed hypothesis was not valid for these several S's, support for this conclusion may be found in the disparate mean scores for Iowa Silent Reading Tests not only between the two major groups, but principally the even more widely disparate mean scores and academic averages between individuals. (See Table 2 for further illustrations akin to the measured communicative abilities and academic averages of TS-A and her sf2.)

As further grist for the conclusion accepted by the investigators of this problem, the idea was proffered above that purely mundane reasons—only a few of which will be mentioned—played a much larger role than was first suspected in the selection of social friends by the TS. It was disclosed that through the operation of juxtaposition or “rubbing elbows” in all of its manifestations, barring a real or imagined intolerable physical presence, intimate friendships are formed. Other earthy planes upon which accordant friendships may be created are mutual social interest and/or disinterests, reflected glory, heroine worship, and a searching for power on the one hand and subservience on the other.

The investigators are of a mind that college life would lose much of its savor for the adolescent of recondite learning abilities but of few distinguishing social graces if, for instance, these persons did not align themselves with or reflect in the glory of a “Chatty Hattie.” The obverse of the cited illustration is equally true.

Also germane to this point is the fallacy, unfortunately perpetuated to an unwelcomed extent even in academic circles, that “egg-head tendencies” are inevitably accompanied by some odd or queer behavior—whereas the truth of the matter as suggested by the informants interviewed is that students of intellectual acuity are subject to the same pressures of intra and inter-personal relationships as the individual or student of less intellectual acumen. Or put another way, even though the TS measured up to every expectation in completing the cycle of the pilot SSITP from raw eager intelligence to finished products more skilled and knowledgeable in the diagnosis and repair of the world's concerns, it is indeed heartening to report that the 10 Bennett College TS early showed their mettle in coping with their own social needs by remaining on the human-side throughout the entire experiment.

A third general conclusion or implication emanating from the

data of this study and its 50 S's is that the TS, social friends, and roommates grew toward one another—the accounting factor probably being the pull of central tendency expressing itself in the large number of dropouts and non-graduating students (N-28) leaving the better equipped (?) among the friend and roommate group to lessen the academic chasm that loomed exceedingly large during the freshman year to a respectable 2.10 versus 2.22 academic average for the TS group by the senior year. This phenomenon may be contributed in part to the upward pull of central tendency. The downward pull of central tendency may be significantly seen in the fact that at the completion of their freshman year no TS has an academic average of less than 2.14, whereas during the senior year 3 of 9 SSITP'ers compiled an academic average of less than 2.00.

On this same point—pertaining to the groups trending toward each other—it is also interesting to report that a sort of in-group development took place over the four year period to the extent that when a student for whatever reason dropped out of college the missing member was seldom, if ever, replaced by a surrogate.

### SUMMARY

Ten students who assisted in the successful launching of the Social Science Individual Tutorial Program at Bennett College in 1959 formed the nucleus of 50 S's comparatively studied in an attempt to discern the validity of the hypothesis that students of excellent academic prowess and potential select as their most companionable social friends other students who demonstrate qualities that are much the same.

The principal methodologies and sources of data from which the content of this narrative report are drawn were: (1) interviewing sessions; (2) an analysis of the S's Iowa Silent Reading Tests scores made during their freshman year at Bennett; and (3) an analysis of the S's freshman and senior year academic averages.

Apart from some minor considerations or qualifications in the main the hypothesis as originally proposed could not be counted as significantly proven and was therefore rejected for the following reasons: (1) the occurrence of overlapping ISRT scores and academic average among the two groups, i.e., the social friends of the TS were chosen from the several levels of *measured* communicative abilities—the *sine qua non* of successful endeavor in the Social Sciences of *academia*; (2) when belated recognition was given to the primacy of prosaic reasons that go into the making of extremely partisan friendships. It was discovered that in choosing friends juxtaposition, mutual interests and the conscious or unconscious striving to satisfy social and personal needs considerably outweighed academic ability. Conversely, similar circumstances are likewise operative when the TS is being selected as a social friend by another student of either co-equal or less intellectual competence for the abstract; (3) that it was principally at the completion of their year that the members of the survival-group showed a remarkable resemblance

toward each other. Plausibilities lending at least in part to this notation are: (a) the attrition of academic chaff, the penurious, and the discontented; (b) the seeming reluctance of the TS to include a wholly new or different individual into an ever tightening circle of social friends. On the rare occasions when social friends were replaced, the mantle of social friend was bestowed upon an already acquainted with roommate.

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