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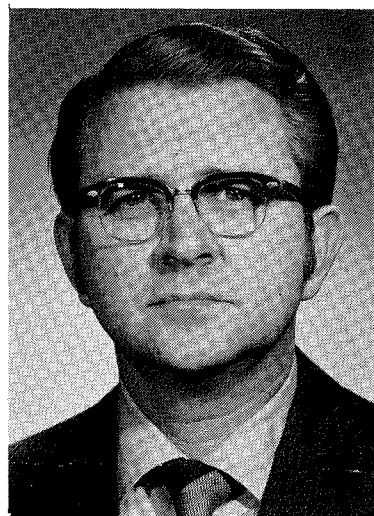
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WHY PROFESSIONALIZATION FOR FINANCIAL AID OFFICERS?

James R. Sanderson

The term "professional" has numerous meanings in modern parlance, and the way in which it is used varies widely according to the background, interests, and aspirations of the person using it. In 1711, Addison referred to the three great professions as being divinity, law, and physic.¹ At that particular time in history, physicians, druggists, and chemists still represented a mixture of both persons and skills. In a more modern (but still very strict) use of the term, it is frequently described by sociologists as including law, medicine, the ministry, and university teaching. In its broadest connotations, the term "professional" refers to almost any occupation for which formal training is required or for which the individual has a unique talent — witness the professional boxer, professional writer, or professional violinist. Use of the term can even be stretched to the point of the ridiculous, wherein sociologists have compared the characteristics of the professional thief to other professional groups and have found numerous similarities. Obviously, the main difficulty with professional criminals lies in their inability to agree on a code of ethical behavior.



James Sanderson has been the Director of Financial Aids at the University of Utah since 1959. He is presently Vice President of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, and recently served as the Chairman of the College Entrance Examination Board's Committee for Higher Education Survey, "Professional Development of Financial Aid Officers".

Members of most occupational groups give a much higher prestige ranking to themselves than do other members of their society, thus they tend to seek more deference than others will concede, they are forced to accept less money than they want, and they achieve less in most measurements of self esteem than they feel they deserve. For example, certain people were offended when the term "professional fireman" was used in England in the Fire Brigade Pension Act of 1925, arguing that specialized, intellectual training was the criterion for the use of the term.² A further example lies in the self-perception of rural postmen in America, who are independent contractors, and resent identification with urban mail carriers who are postal employees.

Albert J. Weiss, Jr. describes five major divisions of professionals in our modern industrial states as follows:³

1. The older established professions which are founded on the study of a theoretical structure of a department of learning used in the practices of the art and include religion, law, medicine, higher education, and esthetics.
2. The newer professions which have established their own fundamental studies, such as chemistry, engineering, natural and social science.
3. The semi-professions which replace the theoretical study of a field of learning by the acquisition of a precise technical skill, including such fields as nursing, pharmacy, optometry, and social work.
4. The would-be professions which are characterized by familiarity with modern practices in business or government, such as personnel directors, sales engineers, business counselors and a variety of institutional managers — which I suspect we would broaden to include financial aid officers.
5. The marginal professions which are made up of those who perform technical assignments associated with a profession, such as medical and laboratory technicians, testers, illustrators, draftsmen, interpreters, and inspectors.

The final definition of the term and agreement on such a definition is much less important, particularly for our purposes, than is an understanding of the meaning of professional development or professionalization. Ernest Greenwood argues that true differences between professionals and non-professionals can be more accurately measured in quantitative terms than they can qualitatively.⁴ He perceives all occupations as lying on a continuum between two extremes, with workers such as unskilled farm laborers on one end and physicians on the other. Greenwood feels that *all* possess some share of the ideals of professionalization, but some possess them in greater quantity than others. Here are some of the measurements of professionalization that can be quantified:

1. The degree of personal involvement.
2. Wide knowledge of a specialized technique.

3. Sense of obligation.
4. Sense of group identity.
5. A perception of significance of the occupational service to society.

Another important long-range measurement of professionalism is the capability of the group to establish a body of knowledge that is organized around abstract principles that are applicable to concrete human problems. Furthermore, the profession must not only possess such knowledge, but in large measure, bear responsibility for creating it and for its validity.

Theodore Caplow describes professionalization as a process with a clearly predictable sequence in the way in which occupations assume the attributes of professionalization.⁵ In his judgment, the first occurrence is the establishment of a professional association with definite membership requirements which are designed to keep out the unqualified. This is an issue of some gravity and one that in future months and years must be carefully weighed by those concerned with the professional growth of aid administrators. Some among our group have expressed a genuine fear in working toward a system which is highly credentialized, arguing that such an approach can work as a counter-current to humanism and sensitivity. Caplow argues that the second occurrence in this predictable sequence is either the change of name or establishment of a new name, which reduces identification with any previous occupational status and provides a title which can be monopolized. The third occurrence is the development and promulgation of a code of ethics, which asserts the social utility of the occupation. It might be noted parenthetically that if we subscribe to Caplow's predictable sequence we have completed steps one and two but are now directly confronted with step three in creating a code of ethical behavior. He identifies step four as being a period of prolonged political agitation, whose object is to obtain the support and the public power for the maintenance of the new occupational barriers. Concurrent with this activity is the development of training programs and facilities which are controlled directly or indirectly by the professional society, particularly with respect to final qualifications.

Professionalization is a process of gradualism, and it is no less possible for an occupational group to become professionalized within a few months, than it is for any individual to reach such status without the labor of study and the effort in building a clientele, gaining public acceptance, and establishing colleague relationship.

In many ways, the aid officer administering a small program has a better opportunity to preserve or expand his professional demeanor, since his work keeps him closely involved with students. By contrast, the administrator of a large program is less frequently involved with students, but rather finds his time consumed with administrative matters, program developments, and supervision of other employees.

Probably the most searching issue at the moment for those of us involved in the occupation (or profession) of financial aid administration is, "Why is

professional development among aid officers important?" It would be wise to ask ourselves: Where do we want to go with professional development? What are its purposes, and what are the principal incentives? Professionalism means many things, but one aspect of such efforts seems clear — they cannot be sustained alone on an interest in the social mobility of individuals in their careers. W. Lloyd Warner observed that North Americans are not class conscious, but rather they are class self-conscious and display an evident anxiety about their own social mobility.⁶ In the long run, our success in gaining professional recognition and acceptance will be measured by society at large. It can't be purchased nor can it be demanded, but rather, it must be earned.

I would like to itemize a few of the reasons that to me seem paramount in urging the professional development of aid officers:

1. It is important to both arouse and capitalize on the social conscience of financial aid officers. If you ponder for a moment our collective impact on educational opportunity nationally, it becomes evident that our judgment in distributing financial aid resources has a profound affect upon national social issues. This is a responsibility that requires professionalism. If we cannot induce a high level of confidence in society, this responsibility could easily be shifted from us.
2. The development of a strong professional organization can provide an outlet for the innate interests of good craftsmen in pursuing full and efficient use of their craft. Training and research programs in aid administration have been very limited; and the possibilities for expansion are both apparent and unlimited.
3. The development of a strong professional association seems vital as a means of establishing a "professional traditionalism" to elevate the ethical behavior of student aid officers.
4. Professional development is important as a means of increasing both our awareness and our influence in broad issues related to the financing of higher education.

Let's reflect a moment to see where we stand in terms of our professional development. Within the past two years, we have seen the creation of a national association of aid administrators with its constituents drawn from six regional associations, most of which have also been newly developed within the last two or three years. State associations operate in most states, and various other informal groups meet frequently to share concerns and discuss matters of common interest. State and regional training programs have grown, and we have continued to see an interest in the activities of the College Entrance Examination Board and the American College Testing Program in providing training for aid officers. Last year, seven grants were approved through the Education Professions Development Act for the training of financial aid officers, and numerous proposals are under consideration for summer 1971. We have witnessed a marked increase in both the activity and impact of the National Student Financial Aid Council, in influencing policy guidelines and di-

rectives from the U. S. Office of Education, as well as active and direct involvement in developing new legislation. During the past year members of the council testified on three different occasions before Senate and House subcommittees on education.

Probably the best and most current measurement of our professional posture is contained in the results of a recent College Board publication entitled "Professional Development of Financial Aid Officers," which has been widely circulated to financial aid officers.⁷ Briefly, this report confirms that annual turnover rates are now somewhat lower (among western states aid officers) than they have been in years past and that nine out of ten aid officers administering moderate to large programs spend full-time in financial aid matters. This is a marked improvement over the past 3-4 years. Furthermore, the report reveals that only one in three aid officers in western states received any specific orientation before assuming their jobs, yet three out of four regard various forms of job orientation as being important. Those responding to the questionnaire stated that they continue to place heavier reliance on workshops as a means of gaining and maintaining professional competence. The report further describes one out of three aid officers in western states as being at a relatively low level of professional development in the sense that they are involved in very few professional activities. In my judgment, we have taken several giant steps in the past three years in improving our professional posture. However, we have only made a modest beginning, and the challenges that lie before us are, in total, still rather staggering.

What must be done to begin moving financial aid officers more closely to the status of recognized professionals? Harold Wilenski suggests that the following steps must occur in the process of professionalization. Dr. Wilenski argues that these processes are going on simultaneously and that they cannot be strictly ordered as to which must occur before the other, but each must be accomplished to some degree for an occupation to emerge as a profession.⁸

1. It is necessary that the individuals involved spend their full time and energy in performing their task.
2. There must be an established university training program.
3. It is necessary that a national professional association develop.
4. There must be a re-definition of the core task so as to give what he describes as "the dirty work" over to subordinates.
5. A common consequence of such changes is conflict between old timers and the new men who seek to upgrade the occupation.
6. Competition must begin between the new occupation and those which can be regarded as neighboring occupations.
7. An established code of ethics must be developed.

Clearly then, the forces that must be in operation in the process of professionalization include development of a common concern, standardized prac-

tices and codes of ethical behavior which demonstrate a truly professional interest in the occupation. Ultimately, it must be our goal to establish both responsibility and honor in the practice of aid administration and to work toward distinguishing between those who have the qualifications and those who are inadequately prepared. We must begin to internalize a professional image, building skills, building self-confidence, developing a greater degree of autonomy and perceptiveness, and finally finding answers to the question, "Who am I on my campus?" If ultimate public acceptance and recognition is an important measurement of professionalization (and to deny it would be serious error), we must make a conscious effort to make our presence felt. Members of popularly familiar occupations have the advantage of knowing that tradition has clearly established their status, but the financial aid officer finds few who can understand his concern with difficult need analysis cases or follow his alphabetical conversation on the variety of programs which he administers.

In conclusion, I would like to outline what to me appear to be the most significant steps to be taken within the immediate future.

1. We must increase and improve our efforts to provide immediate training for newly appointed aid officers, and it would appear that the primary responsibility for this task must be assumed by state or regional associations.
2. We must work toward the development of an acceptable code of ethical standards for the profession. This alone sounds to be a relatively simple task, but it's a matter of singular importance in insuring that the national community of aid officers weigh the significance of altruism and accept the fact that the best interests and welfare of the students they serve are fundamental in completing their day to day tasks.
3. We must intensify our efforts to provide both training and opportunities for professional growth for aid officers administering smaller programs. In the College Board study it was revealed that this group of aid administrators (those having fewer than 300 applicants annually) most frequently reported having primary responsibility for financial aid policy on their campuses. And yet, paradoxically, these individuals receive the least institutional support and encouragement for professional development, either in terms of released time or financial support.
4. We must work toward the development of both more and improved academic programs to provide formal training and self-study or extension-type training for aid officers.
5. We must develop a set of specific guidelines for use by regional accrediting agencies in reviewing the status of financial aid programs of institutions seeking accreditation or re-accreditation.
6. We must support the growth and development of our national association and work toward the creation of a national secretariat to represent the profession, including our interests in federally supported programs, sponsoring and coordinating research, and publishing professional literature.

The task isn't an easy one, nor is it one that can be accomplished within the brief span of months or even a few years, because it is, as stated earlier, a process of gradualism, and there will always be horizons for us to surpass. We should be both encouraged by the beginnings that we have made and challenged by the tasks that lie before us. For although it's a major effort, it's one that deserves our support.

FOOTNOTES

1. Howard M. Vollmer and Donald L. Mills (ed.), *Professionalization*, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1966), p. 3.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 4
3. *Ibid.*, p. 74
4. *Ibid.*, p. 9
5. Theodore Caplow, *The Sociology of Work* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1954), pp. 139-140.
6. Vollmer, p. 65
7. Warren W. Willingham, *Professional Development of Financial Aid Officers*, Higher Education Surveys Report No. 2 (Palo Alto, Calif.: College Entrance Examination Board, 1970).
8. Amitai Etzioni (ed.), *The Semi-Professions and their Organization*, (New York: The Free Press - Division of McMillan Co., 1969), p. 274