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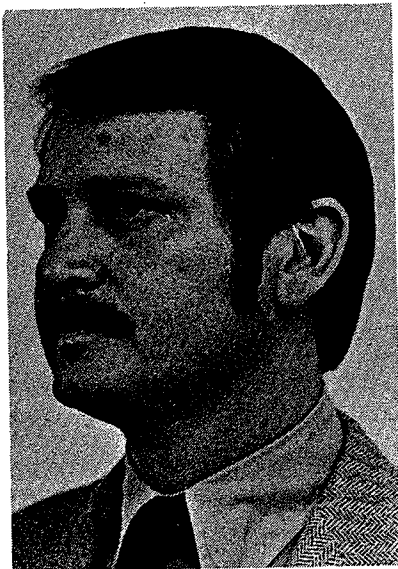
THE SELF-SUPPORTING STUDENT: TRENDS AND IMPLICATIONS

Marvin R. Hensley

Introduction

Administrative problems associated with self-supporting aid applicants have existed for some time. Additionally, there has been some indication within the past few years that proportions of self-supporting students have been rising in most institutions of higher education. The increased proportions occur in part because some students declare financial independence from their parents simply because they are students. The declaration has been for some, a personal preference rather than an economic necessity even though the student may meet Federal requirements for self-supporting status. The Federal requirements defining a self-supporting student are those established in September, 1971:

1. The student has been claimed or will be claimed as an exemption for Federal income tax purposes by either parent or any other person (except spouse) for the calendar year in which aid is received and the prior calendar year, or
2. The student has received or will receive financial assistance of more than \$600, including room and board, of any kind from one or both parents or from persons acting in *loco parentis* in the calendar year in which aid is received and the prior calendar year.



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There is a belief that the tendency has resulted in existing administrative problems becoming more severe. Additionally, a new problem is appearing: institutions must finance a greater portion of the cost of education for self-supporting students. The increased individual financing decreases the number of students who can be funded within an institution's financial aid resources.

The implications of increased proportions of self-supporting students extends to all institutions of higher education. Recognizing the need for definition and understanding of administrative problems associated with the self-supporting student, the College Scholarship Service Western Region Subcommittee on Needs Analysis sponsored the study which is the subject of this paper. The study and this paper were prepared for a preliminary investigation into several areas of the self-supporting student category.

The study attempted to determine whether proportions of self-supporting students were rising in institutions of higher education of the Western Region. An attempt was made to obtain some qualitative measure of the problems and of the rate of increase in proportions of self-supporting students. The study investigated the extent of problems associated with the self-supporting student on the distribution of financial aid resources within institutions in the Western Region. Some common methods for administration of the self-supporting student category with respect to dependent students were also investigated. It was assumed implicitly that, problems notwithstanding, no self-supporting student with demonstrated need would be denied assistance through the self-supporting category.

Methodology

The principal tool of the study was a questionnaire jointly developed in the Fall of 1972 by the Financial Aid Director at the University of California, Davis, and the CSS Sub-committee on Needs Analysis. The questionnaire was divided into three sections relating to the self-supporting student: partial demographic information; filing requirements; and policy toward the aid recipient. Four types of institutions were identified under the questionnaire: public universities and colleges; private universities and colleges; public community colleges; and private community colleges. These are basic funding categories for institutions, and enough differences exist between them to justify the separation. Later in the study, private and public community colleges were combined because of a low level of response to the questionnaire by private community colleges. Consideration of private community colleges as a separate and equally weighted classification would have biased the results and led to possible misinterpretation.

College listings were obtained through the College Scholarship Service, and CSS undertook the initial mailing of the questionnaire in January, 1973. Questionnaires were returned by the participating institutions directly to the Financial Aid Office of the University of California, Davis. After thirty days, that office sent a second copy of the questionnaire to nonresponding institutions on the College Scholarship Service listing. Institutions not responding by March, 1972, were sent an additional letter by the Financial Aid

Office of the University of California, Davis, requesting the information. All usable questionnaires received by April 30, 1973, were included in the tabulations. Funding for computer tabulation was provided by the College Scholarship Service; the Financial Aid Office of Stanford University provided computer service and technical assistance.

The initial mailing consisted of 457 questionnaires. Of 304 replies received, 24 were eliminated because of insufficient information. The final study size was 276, or slightly over 60% of the initial mailing. Response was fairly balanced between two-year and four-year schools. There was also reasonable balance between public and private four-year schools' response.

The proportion of self-supporting students out of total number of student aid recipients enrolled in an institution was the common variable throughout the study. Enrollment size of an institution was investigated as a possible influence on proportions of self-supporting students for each institutional classification. That is, institutional size with respect to enrollment may be a determinant of proportions of self-supporting students. Unfortunately, response separated by enrollment levels was too small to obtain any significant information on that point.

The Increase In Proportions Of Self-Supporting Students

The first area of investigation concerned the question of whether proportions of self-supporting students were increasing or not. If the proportions were increasing, a measure was obtained to represent the institutions' perception of the rate of increase. Additionally, institutions were requested to indicate the degree of administrative problems they experience with self-supporting students as opposed to dependent students. Finally institutions were asked to estimate the proportions of self-supporting students out of total number of aid recipients within their school. As is well known, very few institutions of higher education possess accurate figures for proportions of self-supporting students.

Questionnaire responses clearly indicated that, as initially hypothesized, there has been a recognizable increase in proportions of self-supporting students for the majority of institutions polled. Based on average qualitative characterizations of responding institutions, the perceived rate of increase tends toward dramatic. Additionally, a majority of polled institutions indicated that administrative problems were more severe than the average qualitative rankings provided by schools within their institutional classification.

Based on schools within the Western Region, it appears that a category of aid recipients which presents more serious problems than average is increasing rapidly in the majority of cases. Once this observation is made, it is instructive to investigate the size of the category that the self-supporting student represents.

Average proportions of self-supporting students were obtained for each institutional classification. The averages themselves are not dramatic. They range from 36.9% for public colleges and universities to 20.3% for private colleges and universities. Community colleges and public and private col-

leges and universities taken as one classification have average proportions of self-supporting students between those figures. However, the shapes of the distributions of proportions of self-supporting students for each institutional classification is more interesting when combined with responses to the administrative problem inquiry.

Sixty-three and eight tenths percent of public colleges and universities have higher than average proportions of self-supporting students and more than 63% of the institutions view the problem as more serious than the average measure for those schools. The distribution of proportions of self-supporting students for private colleges and universities shows that only 40.3% of those schools view the administrative problems as more severe than the average response. As might be expected, public colleges and universities indicate more schools with above average proportions of self-supporting students than with below average proportions; results for severity of administrative problem follow similar lines. But, when private colleges and universities are considered, the average perception of administrative problem is not as low as the average proportion of self-supporting students. In fact, the distribution of proportions of self-supporting students is clustered in opposite directions for public and private schools (see tables 1 and 2). The results indicate two phenomena: There is not a one-to-one relationship between proportions of self-supporting students and severity of administrative problem and, administrative problems appear before very large proportions of self-supporting students are experienced.

The second phenomena above is reinforced when non-response to this section is analyzed. The non-response to the question relating to institutions' perception of the rate of increase is high: up to 30%. Non-response to the question concerning severity of problems associated with self-supporting students is low; less than 5% on the average. That seems to indicate institutions' awareness of problems before they are aware that a rapid increase in self-supporting students is underway.

Identifying Efficient Techniques For Self-Supporting Student Administration

Institutions were asked to respond in several areas of filing and policy requirements as related to the self-supporting student category. They were questioned about types of proof required to obtain self-supporting status and about policy variants toward the self-supporting student.

Two techniques of evaluation were used as each was deemed appropriate. First, the average proportion of self-supporting students enrolled in institutions applying a policy or filing variant was compared to average proportions for the corresponding institutional classification. Second, within an institutional classification, average proportions of self-supporting students enrolled in institutions applying a policy or filing variant were compared to average proportions for institutions not applying that variant. Recalling the assumption from the introduction to this paper, it is additionally assumed that, with respect to policy variants, lower proportions of self-supporting students imply more efficient and effective measures for dealing with self-supporting student administration problems. The new assumption is rea-

sonable based on demographic information obtained through the survey relating administrative problems to large proportions of self-supporting students.

Under the criterion above, it is more effective to require parental financial statements and affidavits of non-support than not to make that requirement to verify a student's independence. Under the same criterion, it is not effective to require students to submit their own income tax form as proof of independence. Many younger persons obtain dependent benefits and still file income tax returns based on their own employment. Requiring a student to submit his income tax form as proof of self-sufficiency may not screen out those individuals. Table 3 indicates the response within the area of policy and requirements.

Institutions which have a policy of expecting different amounts of self-assistance from independent and dependent students have relatively lower proportions of self-supporting students than institutions which do not have different expectations. Also, application of different budget categories for independent and dependent students is associated with lower proportions of self-supporting students than when the same budget categories are used. However, due to the preliminary nature of the study, explicit differences in the areas above were not investigated.

As might be expected, higher proportions of self-supporting students appear when it is easier to file as self-supporting than as a dependent student. When no parental statements are required attesting to financial independence, there are higher proportions of self-supporting students than when parental financial statements or affidavits of non-support are required. Neither of these statements is particularly surprising.

Institutions which deny self-supporting status based on high parental income even when valid non-support affidavits are filed have relatively lower proportions of self-supporting students than institutions which do not follow that policy. Unfortunately, the important relationships between the policy and total package philosophy were not explored in the study. The policy seems to be an excellent direction for more investigation because of the linkages to other policy and filing variants.

Conclusion

This paper is a summary of a more comprehensive report associated with the study of the self-supporting student. The study did not attempt to define specific policy recommendations. A more modest goal of directing future research into an existing problem, which is becoming more severe, was achieved. Based on the efficiency criteria above, efficient requirements and policy were identified and separated from those which are inefficient. A problem which has been noticed by many financial aid offices has been identified and its magnitude has been assessed. The problems of administration of self-supporting students can only increase if their proportions continue to increase; there is every indication that will happen. Based on future investigations of the self-supporting student, recommendations for minimizing administrative problems for most institutions of higher education will be forthcoming.

TABLE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF SELF-SUPPORTING STUDENTS
PUBLIC COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

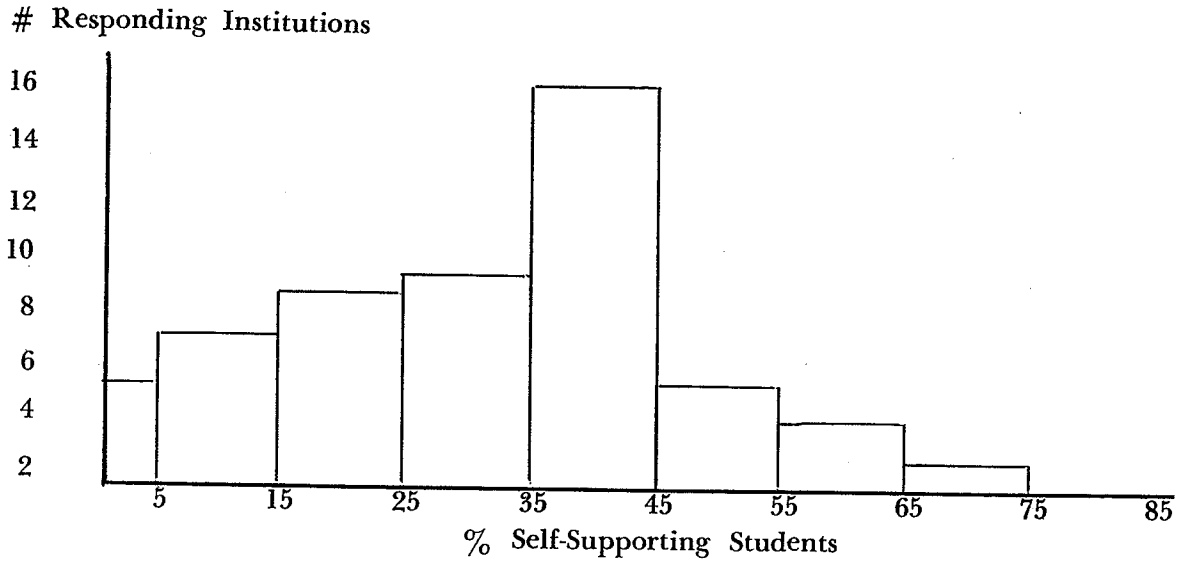


TABLE 2
DISTRIBUTION OF SELF-SUPPORTING STUDENTS
PRIVATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

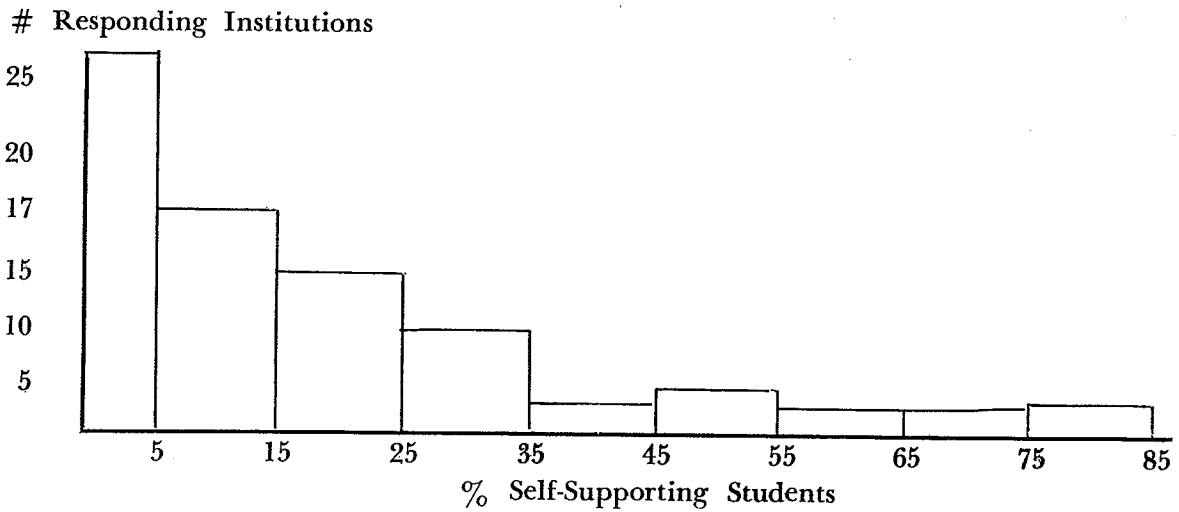


TABLE 3
EFFECTS OF STUDENT INCOME TAX REQUIREMENT
IN COMBINATION WITH OTHER TYPES OF PROOF OF INDEPENDENCE

	Public Colleges & Universities	Private Colleges & Universities	Pub. & Priv. Col. & Univ.	Comm. Colleges
Average % Self-Supporting Student Requirement	33.7%	18.9%	25.7%	31.5%
Affidavit & PFS	25.9%	15.5%	18.9%	25.4%
Tax & PFS	41.7%	55.0%	45.0%	40.0%
Tax & Affidavit	37.0%	* 5.0%	31.7%	45.8%
Tax & PFS & Affidavit	51.7%	22.1%	31.0%	46.8%

* Only one responding

Appendix

Many returned questionnaires were incomplete. Almost all questions had some non-response, although the non-response was not uniform. That is, the non-response in each category or question did not necessarily come from the same institution. To compensate for non-response, each question's response was treated as a "distinct" sample for that question. Therefore, even though different averages of self-supporting students may appear for different questions, inferences drawn against those averages are valid for the population of respondents to that question.

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