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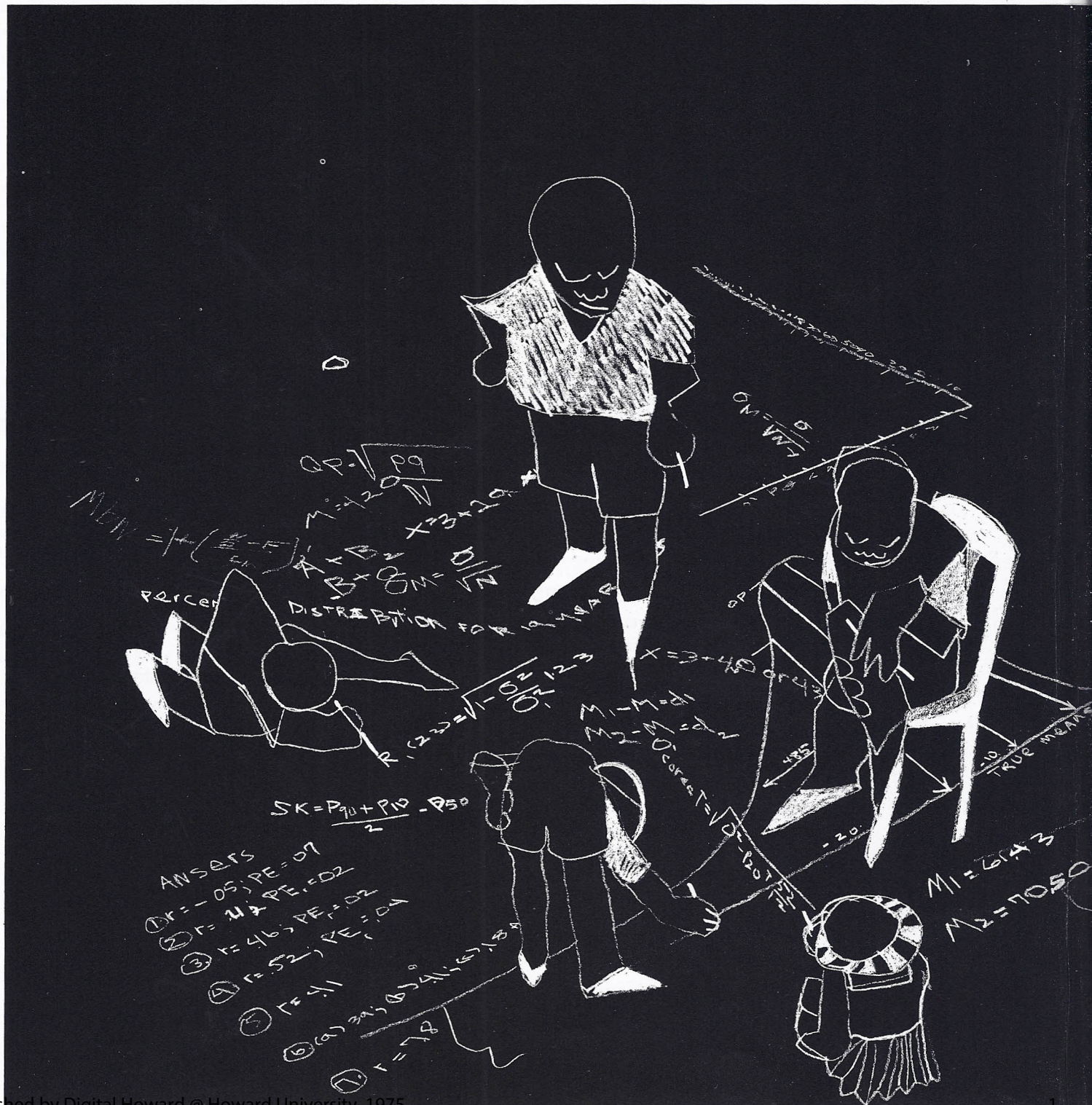
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Research At Black Colleges

By Lawrence E. Gary

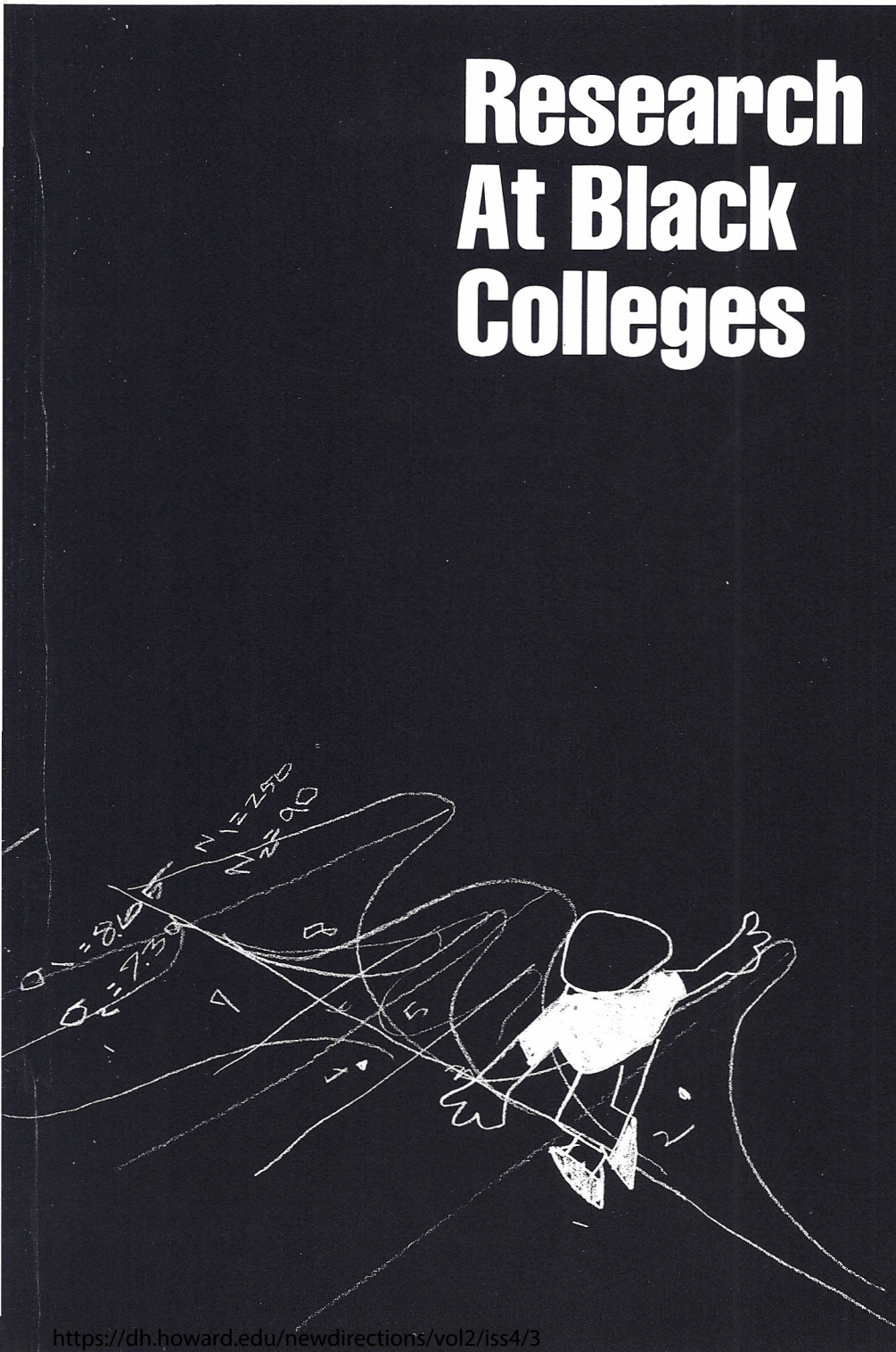
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In 1964 there were 123 educational institutions in the United States that had a predominantly Black student body. Graduates of these colleges and universities have made outstanding contributions in all areas of the American life and culture. For example, a 1973 study by the Services Bureau, Inc., estimated that more than 85 percent of the Blacks in medicine, 90 percent of those with Ph.D.'s, and 95 percent of the nation's Black educators were trained at predominantly Black institutions. While the educational and other services offered by these schools are very important, this article, for the most part, deals with the research roles of these institutions.

It is now becoming increasingly clear that the dominant power structure and its allies are using a variety of sophisticated methods to destroy Black institutions. During the Fifties and the Sixties, the country experienced, almost overnight, a complete disappearance of Black primary and secondary schools, both in the private and public sectors. Black professionals who served as important role models for Black children were fired or demoted in many communities, especially in the South. For many years, these Black schools provided a pool of talent for Black colleges. In other words, it was possible for a Black student to move from elementary school through professional training in a predominantly Black educational setting. Today, this particular opportunity does not exist for more than 90 percent of Blacks living in this country. These conditions have had a negative impact on the overall development of the Black community.

In some ways, however, it seems that Blacks are beginning to make inroads into the general economy, especially at the white-collar level. For example, in 1960, 16.1 percent non-whites were employed in the white-collar category, but in 1970, the figure rose to 27.9 percent, according to the U. S. Bureau of Census. On the other hand, there was a decline

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6 both in services and farm occupations for Blacks during this period; a slight increase in the blue-collar occupations. Many Blacks who were able to move into important professional jobs in government and in industry received their undergraduate degrees from predominantly Black institutions. According to a 1971 report by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, the alumni of these institutions total more than 385,000.

As Black communities started to pressure predominantly white colleges and universities to admit more Black students, these schools responded with a variety of programs which, in many instances, isolated Black students from the mainstream of the academic experiences at the predominantly white institutions. And when Black students started graduating in increasing numbers from these institutions, the government—both at federal and local level—and in a few cases interest groups (Black and white) began to pressure Black schools to admit more white students; to hire additional white faculty members; to consolidate and modify their curricular.

According to available data, Black colleges and universities are shown to be in the midst of an intense struggle for survival. For example, in the 1971 Carnegie report, the following basic issues were enumerated:

- Black students now have more options in choosing places to obtain college level education.
- Colleges founded for Blacks must now compete with other institutions for students and faculty members.
- Colleges founded for Blacks must now compete with predominantly white institutions for financial support from government agencies and from foundations interested in providing young Blacks with greater access to educational opportunities.
- Emergence from isolation has reopened historic debates on the role of the colleges and universities founded for

Blacks in educating men and women for participation in the life of the nation.

■ Competition of colleges founded for Blacks for students, faculty, and financial resources increasingly center less on what these colleges have achieved for Black Americans during the past century and more on their quality in the present as compared to white institutions.

These issues relate in a direct way to the role and function of Black colleges in a pluralistic industrial society. Black educators are still struggling with the definition of a Black university and its relationship to the struggle for Black self determination. Both white and Black writers have commented on this issue. In general, Black writers have attempted to deal with it from the perspective of the developmental needs of the Black community. Unfortunately, many of the proposals advanced by them have been unrealistic in the sense that they cannot be implemented, given the political realities in both white and Black communities.

If Black colleges are to survive in the academic struggle for relevance, they must relate to the concerns and needs of the community; they must look for new models for apportioning the proper mixture of research, education, and service functions. Dr. James E. Cheek, president of Howard University, made the following comments in 1970 that dealt with the challenge facing urban and predominantly Black institutions:

“Society must depend upon its institutions not only to provide the ingredients for social stability, but also the direction for social change. Educational institutions, and particularly institutions of higher learning in our society, inescapably become the meeting ground where the issues of social value and social change come together.

“Precisely because the ‘urban crisis’ and the ‘racial crisis’ interlock, colleges and universities which have historically opened their mission and purpose and directed their resources and

efforts with reference to the problems related to care cannot escape their responsibility to address themselves determinedly to the crisis of the cities.

“The health of a civilized society is dependent upon the health of its cities; a modern technology and industrial society such as ours cannot maintain its strength if its cities decay. The decay of the cities can become the decay of the nation.

“This University (Howard) views keenly its responsibilities as it relates to this problem and must now begin the difficult but possible task of preparing itself to develop the new knowledge, the new technology and to train the social scientists and social technologists to define the problems but also to develop the solutions.”

What is implied by Dr. Cheek is the need for Black colleges to reassess their traditional roles, both in the broader community and in the Black community. These schools, therefore, need to develop innovative programs in research, education, and services to meet the emerging needs of the Black community.

State of Social Research at Black Colleges

One of the gross neglects of Black colleges and universities has been in the area of research. Although they have in general contributed much in the field of teaching disadvantaged students, there has been a failure on the part of these schools to carry out definitive social research. Notable exceptions include Atlanta University, Fisk University, Howard University and Tuskegee Institute—under the guidance of particular individuals such as W. E. B. DuBois, Charles S. Johnson, E. Franklin Frazier, and Monroe Work.

In discussing factors which influence the state of research at Black colleges, Arthur L. Bacon in 1974 identified the following: Lack of funds for research and scholarly activities, competition for people interested in and qualified to do research, lack of graduating students going

on to graduate schools, overwork of staff, and professional isolation.

These factors are not mutually exclusive; for they should be seen as interacting variables which condition research activities at Black colleges.

According to Bacon, there is a negative attitude toward research and faculty members who are engaged in this activity. The basic assumption on the part of some is that research is incompatible with teaching—the primary objective of these schools. Moreover, there is inadequate funds to support research activities. These colleges have not been able to receive large research and development grants from federal and private agencies. Moreover, it is argued that Black colleges have not been able to recruit well-qualified and research-oriented individuals because of the competition they face from affluent white institutions.

Many faculty members at Black colleges feel they are overworked—in that their course load is very heavy; they serve on many overlapping committees, and spend considerable amount of time counseling students. Also, many of them feel isolated professionally—in that they are not heavily involved in professional meetings. A careful review of the factors which influence research activities at Black schools suggests that the problem is related more to the system or to external causes rather than internal variables. Bacon noted:

“An abundant amount of talent and desire for research does exist in our Black colleges though much of it is frustrated by the inequities within the institutions and the society at large. Many of the adversities facing research and the researcher in predominantly Black schools are inherent in our system which is full of social injustices.”

Lack of funds for research is a serious problem. Since most predominantly Black schools suffer from inadequate financial support for basic academic programs, it is clear that they must rely on outside

government provides the major sources of funding and support for research at the nation's colleges and universities. In 1970, the federal government provided \$3.668 billion in aid to colleges and universities in this country. But only \$125.5 million or 3.4 percent of all federal aid to higher education went to Black colleges, according to the Federal Interagency Committee on Education. Also, during the 1970 fiscal year, only 0.3 percent of Research and Development (R&D) funds went to Black colleges. The R&D grants have traditionally been used to strengthen research activities at universities and colleges.

Since The National Science Foundation gives grants primarily for R&D activities and training in the sciences, it is interesting to note how well Black colleges have managed. In 1972, \$458.7 million was awarded to colleges and universities by the National Science Foundation. Of this amount, \$352.2 million went to 100 predominantly white colleges and universities. The largest amount of support to a Black college, \$811,000, went to Tuskegee Institute. For a white college, the largest amount—\$21.9 million—went to the University of California at San Diego. These data clearly show that Black colleges have not gotten their fair share of federal funds for R&D activities.

Need for Research

Research can play an important function in helping to solve basic problems in the Black community and in strengthening the academic positions of Black colleges. Although there are many factors which create a negative environment for research and for researchers at Black colleges, it is possible for some of these conditions to be changed. Bacon, in 1974 concluded that in order to improve the research output of Black colleges, they must: Change their general attitude and encourage research and scholarly activities of their faculty, consider research and scholarly activities in their

search grants, compete with the largest predominantly white institutions in the area of recruiting faculty by assuring the prospective faculty members of at least moral support in doing research, encourage student participation in research projects, compute work time of faculty with consideration for research activities and the fact that laboratory activities are as important and time consuming as lectures, and create research resources and utilize and promote interinstitutional communication and cooperation in the area of research.

Through these changes, it should be possible to establish viable research programs at some of the Black colleges. With such programs, one can expect direct benefits both to the general community as well as to the Black community.

Social Problems and the Urban Community

To a large extent, social problems are directly related to the concentration of Black people in large cities. Although Black people make up 12 percent of the total population, 58 percent of Blacks in this country live in central cities. However, the proportion of whites living in central cities is only 28 percent, according to a 1971 Census Bureau report. In these communities, one can observe a multiplicity of problems, such as inadequate health, meaningless education, malnutrition, crime and violence, bad housing and drug abuse. The urban Black community has developed a variety of mechanisms to cope with these problems; many social programs have been designed to deal, specifically, with these issues. However, no meaningful solution is yet at hand.

Often ignored is the fact that most Black colleges and universities are in urban communities. For example, Washington, D. C., has four: Howard University, Federal City College, District of Columbia Teachers College and the Washington Technical Institute. In Baltimore metropolitan area, there are two: Morgan State University and Coppin State College. In

8 Nashville, there are three: Fisk University, Meharry Medical College and Tennessee State University. In Atlanta, there are five: Atlanta University, Clark, Morehouse, Morris Brown and Spelman Colleges.

The basic question, therefore, is this: What roles are these institutions playing in dealing with problems which plague urban Black communities? There are many researchable problems in cities where these colleges are located. Through research, it is possible to find solutions to some of the problems.

As implied above, research efforts should be focused on important issues affecting the Black community. One does not need large sums of money to conduct research projects at a small scale. In fact, it is wise to begin with small projects that can be developed into more comprehensive research plans. Each college collects a variety of information about students and faculty members. With a little creativity, research projects can be developed from the collected data.

Through a small research grant program where funds are raised either by faculty contributions, administrative support, or a combination of the two, a variety of research projects can be developed.

White Domination of Research on Blacks

In the absence of Black social scientists conducting meaningful research dealing with problems affecting the Black community, the task has been left to white researchers and writers. Unfortunately, much of the research by these researchers has tended to focus on pathology or weaknesses, rather than the positives or strengths of the Black community. In general, social science research has had a tremendous impact on social policies and programs. It can be seen, in many instances, where concepts such as cultural deprivation, genetic determinism, inadequate mother thesis and learning disabilities have served as theoretical foundations for a variety of social problems in the Black community. These

problems include, infant stimulation programs, special education, career education, professional and para-professional programs.

White social scientists have colonized the Black community with research and demonstration projects, in conjunction with private and public financial support. During the past several years, there has been a significant shift in the political climate in this country relative to the support of social programs designed to broaden opportunities for disadvantaged groups in society. Leading white intellectuals, such as Arthur Jensen, Richard Herrnstein, Christopher Jencks and Edward Banfield have advanced arguments which question the utility of compensatory programs for helping the poor, especially Black people, to improve their conditions. While in many ways the government—both at federal and state level—seems to be giving only lip service to equality of opportunities, it continues to support research on Black people. But the research as implied above is being used to justify the government's objective of "benign neglect." Thus, it is evident that Black social scientists must take a larger responsibility for research problems which impact on the development of the Black community.

As Blacks begin to develop innovative strategies for implementing—through research—the goals of self-determination, it is important that certain questions concerning the conceptual, ethical, and methodological basis of behavioral science and its applications to the Black community are raised.

Analytical Skills

By not being able to engage in social research at many Black colleges, Black educators and students have been deprived of a vital area of academic training. Academicians need the experience afforded by research to enrich their work in the same sense that students need the opportunity to learn basic research techniques in order to become competent in

their respective fields. There is a shortage of Blacks trained in research methodology and in other analytical tools utilized in the behavioral sciences.

For Blacks to seriously challenge the current wave of anti-Black research, they must be in a position to understand the mathematical language which other researchers use. Unfortunately, most social science departments at Black colleges have not given proper attention to research design and courses in statistics. To some extent, Black professors at these colleges have not emphasized training in these areas. And students do not demand training in quantitative analysis because most of them tend to take an "easy" major or course so that they can graduate. Consequently, too many students who graduate from Black colleges in the social sciences lack basic quantitative skills. Many of these students do not go to graduate school because they know that they don't have adequate analytical skills for competing with white students. In many instances, Black students who go to graduate school tend to dodge meaningful research and statistical courses. *This process must be stopped.*

Research courses plus experience in carrying out research projects in an organized manner can bridge the quantitative gap for many students as well as for some faculty members.

Course Development

A basic problem at many small Black colleges is the proliferation of course offerings. In many cases, these colleges just copy the course offerings of prestigious white schools. Black colleges need to develop curriculum based on the reality of their experience, but with proper attention to relevant professional accreditation guidelines.

In many instances Black colleges offer too many courses, given the size of the faculty. In some cases, one can find a department offering 20 courses with only 3 full-time faculty members. One must question this practice. It is not necessary

for each college to have separate social science departments. A one or two-person department is not wise. And it is not necessary for each social science department to offer its own research and statistics courses. Cross-listing of courses is one mechanism for consolidating limited resources at small colleges. This does not require a grant; it requires some conceptualization and a sincere desire to strengthen the educational output of small colleges.

Institutional Research

It is possible to use the office of institutional research as a learning laboratory for students in the behavioral sciences. Many Black colleges and universities have such an office, but they are not properly utilized. In general, Black colleges should not view the office of institutional research from a narrow perspective. Students as well as faculty members should work closely with this office in conducting small scale research projects. By mobilizing all the human and other resources, the institutional research office can identify and conduct projects which will aid in the survival of Black colleges and universities.

Research Centers

To successfully compete for a large scale funding, it is necessary for some Black colleges to establish social research centers. Several institutions, such as Howard University, Tuskegee Institute and Morgan State University, have already developed research centers which have both in-house and external financial support. The benefits of such research centers include the following: assistance with the recruitment of faculty and staff, research internships for students and faculty, publicity for the university, publications, increased funding for the school, more professional options for faculty members and staff, faculty consultation, coordination of limited resources, and better community services.

centers need to be established at selected colleges and universities. A 1972 survey sponsored by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to determine the research and training capabilities of Black schools concluded: that there are ample expertise, facilities, and desire to establish comprehensive research and learning centers. Blacks need several large research/demonstration centers but they should not be competitive; they should be cooperative arrangements among several colleges in a given locality and in a particular substantive area. □

Lawrence E. Gary, Ph.D., is director of the Institute for Urban Affairs and Research at Howard University. This article was excerpted from a paper developed through a grant by the National Institute of Mental Health.