

1-1-1936

Curriculum Offerings In Negro Colleges Contributing To Functional Citizenship

Dwight O. W. Holmes

Follow this and additional works at: <http://dh.howard.edu/reprints>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Holmes, Dwight O. W., "Curriculum Offerings In Negro Colleges Contributing To Functional Citizenship" (1936). *Faculty Reprints*. Paper 101.

<http://dh.howard.edu/reprints/101>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Howard @ Howard University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Reprints by an authorized administrator of Digital Howard @ Howard University. For more information, please contact lopez.matthews@howard.edu.

Curriculum Offerings in Negro Colleges Contributing to Functional Citizenship

By DWIGHT OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

IT would seem a simple task to make a statement in answer to the question: What are the curriculum provisions in the Negro colleges directed toward the production of men and women highly efficient in the performance of their tasks as they meet them in daily life? Such a statement, if broadly interpreted, would include every course listed in the catalogue of every college and also every activity which the colleges foster or encourage for the development of youth. For we cannot be permitted to exclude the many activities not carried on in the classroom merely because we have been in the habit of designating them as "extra-curricular." They are all tolerated because they are presumably educative. This means that I might simply refer you to the catalogue statements of the one hundred odd Negro colleges and take my seat.

But the problem is not nearly so simple as that. In the first place, the term "functional citizenship" carries with it as many meanings as there are persons considering it. To one group it signifies the rights, duties and privileges related to the political life of the community. This is evidently a narrow conception. To another group the term refers to those activities concerned with making a living. This view, while stressing a basic obligation, is also a narrow conception of the term "functional citizenship." A third group conceives of the duties of citizenship as including not only these two but of embracing,

in addition, the full gamut of one's activities as a member of a social group. For purposes of this discussion, we will adopt this broader meaning. Functional citizenship, therefore, must be looked upon as having two major aspects. First of all, the good citizen, in order to function properly, must be reasonably healthy and must make a living for himself and his dependents; that is, he must pull his share of the economic load. Second, it must be clearly realized that making a living should be looked upon as only the basic part of the "function" of the good citizen. In addition, an educated man must be a socially useful man. For the whole theory of education is based upon the assumption that the more education one has, the better he should perform his citizenship functions, however, we define the term citizenship.

The present problem, then, is: What are our colleges doing specifically in the direction of preparing young people to perform these two functions more effectively than would otherwise be the case? The word "specifically" is used here in opposition to the rather vague justification of offerings and objectives involved in the loose usage so frequently found in academic circles. To say it with increased definiteness another way, therefore, our question may become: What is a given course of activity or department of study designed definitely to do to the student in order to make him perform better in mature life than he would perform if he had not gone to college?

In certain kinds of educational activity the relationship between means and end is clear. For example, we can readily understand the relationship between training and objectives when military officers attempt to prepare soldiers for their duties. Every act on the rifle range is designed to produce more accurate marksmen. Drill and instruction in sanitation are specifically directed to better health and less wastage of the armed forces by diseases. The training in pitching tents, making beds and digging ditches eventuates definitely in greater skill and hence greater efficiency in performing the necessary tasks when camp is to be pitched or broken and trenches dug for defense. The machine gun is taken to pieces and put together again so that the men may understand how to cure trouble that may develop in the heat of action. Salutes to flags and to officers and other routine performances are definitely planned for the purpose of lifting morale. Our educational problem in this discussion is to determine to what extent the colleges, in like manner, know, in the first place, what they are driving at and, in the second, to what extent the courses and activities are planned with the certain knowledge that they will accomplish the aims set up. All educators will probably claim, without hesitation, that they are preparing citizens to function in life situations.

That such an inquiry is pertinent and timely cannot be denied. For, in spite of the many studies that have been made to show the money value of a college education and the advantage that the college-bred man possesses over his degreeless contemporaries in winning a place in *Who's Who* or a seat in Congress—in spite of these rather convincing objective studies, the efficiency of the college in producing what it claims to be aiming to produce has never been so seriously questioned as it is being questioned today. The skeptics, while readily admitting that in highly technical pursuits the college- and uni-

versity-trained men has an infinite advantage over the man of the streets, constantly raise the question whether or not the run-of-the-mill college graduates are more social-minded, possess more civic spirit, exhibit a greater feeling of responsibility for the welfare of the group, work harder and more effectively at their tasks than do persons not blessed with a college education. He even asks whether they are eminently superior to their non-college fellows in the ordinary "pursuit-of-happiness" ideal to which, according to one of our revered documents, all men are entitled.

The persistent critic goes even farther and asks such definite questions as these:

1. Does your graduate from an agricultural college, for example, become a better farmer after finishing college? Or, more pointedly, does he become a farmer at all?
2. How do you account for the high crime rate in America as compared with European countries in spite of the comparatively munificent provisions of educational opportunities here especially at the higher levels? And, since we have in America a far greater percentage of our population in college than they have in European countries, why is our crime rate several times as great as in Europe? Have our colleges failed in the production of competent leaders? And, if so, to what extent are our college curriculums at fault?
3. Of college administrators or faculties or collegiate associations the skeptic might inquire:
 - a. To what extent have your colleges definitely formulated their individual aims and passed the information on to the public?
 - b. Have you limited your activities to the accomplishment of the goals set up?
 - c. Have you organized your curricula in the simplest and most direct manner so as to promote those aims?

- d. Have you made provisions for teaching the courses so formulated and directing the activities so organized in such a way that the end sought may be realized in reasonable degree?
 - e. Do you make any provisions for testing the students before graduation in order to determine their ability to know and to feel and to perform in the manner appropriate to adequately functioning citizens?
2. Other than through the vocational curricula what specific activities are fostered in your school to contribute to this end?
 3. What others would you introduce if you had the resources?
 4. Do you operate an orientation course for freshmen?
 5. If so, is it planned to orient the student (a) to the college; (b) to the vocational fields; (c) to life?

Such questions as these are constantly appearing in books, periodicals and public addresses not as the expression of soreheads and carping critics, but as the honest questionings of earnest and patriotic citizens, as profoundly interested in American education as are those who are professionally engaged in running the schools. Indeed, the more progressive educators of today, even those engaged in that most conservative level of teaching, higher education, are awake to the need of some sort of reform in order that the colleges may show more tangible results of their efforts than they can possibly do today.

In order that this paper might be based primarily upon information supplied by the colleges themselves, a questionnaire was prepared and sent to the presidents of 109 colleges for Negroes. This questionnaire was designed to show:

First, the name of the college, its location, its mode of support and control, its enrollment for 1934-35 and for the first semester of 1935-36 and the number of college graduates for the year 1934-35.

Second, the number of college students who completed courses leading to specific vocations.

Third, the opinions of college presidents concerning a number of items suggested by the following thirteen questions:

1. Does your college include among its declared objectives the making of good citizens?

6. Do you consider this course a success in securing its objective?
7. If not, why not?
8. Do you think that the vocational training as a doctor, teacher, wood worker, etc., as given in our American colleges today is so planned as to automatically prepare the student for functional citizenship at the same time?
9. If not, what additional activities do you suggest to accomplish that end?
10. Give the approximate percent (reasonable guess) of your graduates for the past five years who are working at the vocation for which they have been specifically prepared.
11. In your community what general fields of activity are closed to Negroes by general practice and custom?
12. Do you believe that the Negro colleges should refrain from offering preparation in those fields that are, at present, closed to Negroes?
13. On a separate sheet, if you so desire, please give:
 - a. Any suggestions you have in mind for improving the efficiency of our colleges in the preparation of functional citizens.
 - b. Any points which you think should be treated in such a discussion as this.

It is realized that this questionnaire possessed the inherent weaknesses of all questionnaires as a method of obtaining information and consensus of opinion. Brevity, of

course, was required in order to gain the attention of the receivers since the responses to questionnaires are generally inversely proportional to their length. Simplicity, too, was sought even at the risk of clarity. Brevity and simplicity of statement, however, often lead to diverse interpretation of the same question. It is also recognized that any procedure used for obtaining opinions of individuals through questions requiring "Yes" or "No" answers is of very limited validity. In spite of these limitations, however, the questionnaire referred to was used as the best method of procuring the desired information quickly.

The responses were very gratifying and, in the opinion of the writer, highly representative as the following figures will show. To the 109 questionnaires sent out, 57 replies were received from schools giving undergraduate collegiate instruction, thereby constituting about a fifty per cent response within about a ten-day period. The 57 institutions from which replies were received, however, represented considerably more than a fair sampling of the colleges for Negroes. This number includes 42 four-year college and 15 two-year colleges, of which 23 are publicly and 34 privately supported. Of the publicly supported institutions returns were received from 14 out of the 17 land-grant colleges, two municipal liberal arts colleges and three of the four-year normal colleges. Of the 34 privately supported schools replying 23 are four-year colleges and 11 junior colleges. This group includes some of the largest and most influential of the colleges for Negroes. Twenty of the private colleges replying are under church boards and ten are under independent boards. Two schools did not report enrollment for the present semester. The total undergraduate enrollment of the 55 schools that did report is 19,784, an increase of 2,431 over last year.

The geographical distribution of the colleges responding was wide, the list of states

represented and the number of colleges replying being as follows:

Arkansas	1	Missouri	2
Delaware	1	North Carolina.....	8
District of		Ohio	1
Columbia	2	Oklahoma	1
Florida	2	Pennsylvania	2
Georgia	5	South Carolina.....	5
Kentucky	2	Tennessee	6
Louisiana	1	Texas	7
Maryland	3	Virginia	4
Mississippi	2	West Virginia.....	2

The colleges responding show a satisfactory sampling, too, on the basis of enrollment ranging from eight with an enrollment below 100 to one with an enrollment in excess of 1,000. The distribution of the 57 colleges by enrollment groupings runs thus:

Below 100.....	9	400-499	8
100-199	9	500-799	8
200-299	12	750-1000	4
300-399	6	Over 1000	1

Twelve of the schools graduated from college less than 25 students last year; 16, from 25 to 49; 12, from 50 to 74; 5, from 75 to 99; and 9 sent out over 100 graduates each with the bachelor's degree.

It can readily be seen, therefore, that the schools replying to the questionnaire may be considered as fairly representative of the group under consideration.

The second section of the questionnaire seeks information concerning the work done by the colleges in preparing youth for specific vocations. Making allowances for misunderstandings and omissions, one is immediately struck by the emphatic confirmation of the popular belief that the preparation of teachers is, by far, the major business of the Negro colleges, whatever may be the designation of a particular institution of learning. In response to the request for information as to the number of colleges students completing their courses leading to specific vocations, 50 of the 52 colleges giving usable replies, either specifically state or

indicate by the figures given, that from 70 to 100 per cent of the students graduated prepare for teaching. In 11 replies, the number of graduates preparing for teaching is identical with the total number of graduates, although only four of the 11 schools thus replying are designated as institutions exclusively devoted to the preparation of teachers. In no one of the 52 replies does any other vocation run even a close second to teaching.

According to the responses given, those graduates who made specific preparation for some vocation are distributed among a total of fifty vocations. But, after making obvious adjustments and combinations, the vocations for which more than a combined total of ten students was reported as having received specific preparation appear to number only 14. These 14 vocations arranged in descending order of frequency on the basis of the number of graduates preparing for definite vocations are shown below. The number of schools assigning students and the average number of students per school reporting, are also given.

Rank of Fourteen Vocations Prepared For

Rank	Vocation	Schools Reporting	Students Reported	Average Per School
1	Teaching	42	1542	37
2	Medicine	10	92	9
3	Religion	14	75	5
4	Social Work....	10	62	6
5	Business	11	57	5
6	Agriculture	9	54	6
7	Music	11	45	4
8	Mechanic Arts	4	29	7
9	Dressmaking ..	6	27	5
10	Nursing	5	19	4
11	Dairying	2	17	9
12	Dentistry	7	16	2
13	Law	5	15	3
14	Tailoring	3	12	4

Running from 10 students down to one, a number of vocations are reported, including

contracting, veterinary medicines, library service, pharmacy, engineering, editing, laundering and printing. Several colleges reported vocations for which two graduates had qualified. One college modestly claimed to have turned out one professional baseball player, but none admitted having prepared students for professional careers on the grid-iron.

Conclusions are to be drawn from this table with great care since the data are subject to errors from so many sources. The original sheets indicate that a number of the replies to this section of the questionnaire have been made in haste and with obvious omissions. Internal evidence from the compiled data confirms this belief. For instance, although, as indicated above, probably 75 per cent of the students in our colleges have teaching as their vocational objectives, yet only 1,542 students out of a total of 3,008 graduates are so reported. This is evidently due to the fact that several schools training a considerable number of teachers failed to fill in the proper block with figures, using instead such terms as "many," "a large number," etc. Three schools evidently misunderstood the question and gave totals for a number of years. These had to be eliminated.

Again it is difficult to believe that 54 graduates in agriculture is the combined output of the 14 splendidly equipped colleges devoted to agriculture and the mechanic arts which reported. Or, as deeply religious as the Negro is supposed to be, and with the splendid opportunities for service and leadership offered by the ministry, is one to believe that only 75 students out of 3,000 graduates of our colleges look forward to careers in the church?

Allowing for all errors, however, the array does have considerable comparative value since it shows the relative frequency of vocational choices and hence the relative importance given by our colleges to preparation for a number of life careers. Whether these

ratios are best in view of all the circumstances or whether steps should be taken to modify them through vocational guidance or otherwise, are questions which this paper is not intended to answer. But they are questions which we must soon face and attempt to answer through action if our colleges are to function which is their only social justification.

The third section of the questionnaire can be briefly summarized in respect to replies to the direct questions.

1. Fifty-four of the 55 answers in the affirmative indicate that the making of good citizens is one of the declared objectives of practically all of our colleges. Without discussion we can agree that this should be one of the main objectives of a college and that all activities should be regulated with that end in view.
2. Forty-nine replies indicate the existence of orientation courses, seven their non-existence.
3. Of the 43 replies giving the aims of orientation courses, in 18 cases the orientation is to college, to vocation and to life; in five cases it is to college and to vocation; in six cases, to college and to life; in nine, to college only; in three, to life only, and in two, to vocation only.
4. Thirty-five out of the 42 colleges believe that the orientation courses achieved their objectives and 7 either thought otherwise or were in doubt.

From the inquiries concerning the orientation courses it is evident that our colleges have been eager to follow this movement in higher education in an attempt to give more direction to the work of the earlier years of the college careers of our students in order that they may find themselves. That some doubt exists concerning the effectiveness of such courses is not surprising, in view of the experimental nature of all such orientation devices. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that one of the first steps in the preparation

of functioning citizens is to give them a broad view of the world in which they must live and act, to afford them an early opportunity to explore their own aptitudes and to acquaint them with the nature of the college as a social instrument to promote their progress toward desired ends. This means, of course, that orientation courses must be more than a set of devices on how to study and how to use the library or set of rules for the government of students. They must be much more comprehensive than this, including much of the subject matter taken from orthodox and so-called standard courses, co-ordinated and rearranged for the purpose in view. Indeed, the indications are that we have about reached the end of the first stage of experimentation with short-time orientation courses in American colleges with the realization that effective orientation may well occupy the entire first two years of college.

In this connection it seems appropriate to suggest that the college faculties must realize that there is nothing sacrosanct about the division of knowledge into subjects or the content of courses because they have been so for a hundred or even a thousand years, but that both are instruments to facilitate thought and that as instruments they may be modified to meet changing conditions. On the other hand, it is no sure sign of progress to discard, because it is old, that which has survived the experiments of the years and thus proved its intrinsic worth. In dealing with the curricula of our schools we have frequently been tossed between the Scylla of Progressive Education and the Charybdis of extreme classicism. Properly organized and skillfully taught orientation courses, in my opinion, will prove the compass and pilot to guide us safely through the dangerous narrows of present-day educational reform.

The following quotations taken from the catalog of one of the Negro colleges indicates in a general way the nature of a series of orientation courses covering the three ma-

major fields of knowledge, namely, The Humanities, The Natural Sciences and The Social Sciences. In each field the survey courses cover two years, although only the work of the first year is here quoted. The part quoted is required of all freshmen while the work of the second year, not quoted here, is required in accordance with the student's field of concentration.

Humanities

First-Year Survey.—A course designed to acquaint the student with man's great contribution in literature, philosophy, and religion, and art from ancient times to the present day, to introduce him to standards for judging the quality of such work, and to develop in him an appreciation for the best in these fields. The historical approach will be used. A syllabus directs the reading of the students while the instructors supplement the work with discussions, conferences, and quizzes.

Natural Sciences

First-Year Survey.—This course is designed to acquaint the student with the world of nature in which he lives, and the methods of science by which an understanding of this world has been attained. In the beginning a survey of general principles, concepts, and applications will be made to enable the student to secure a comprehensive view of the world as interpreted by the physical sciences. Following this, a survey of the essential theories, facts, and principles of the entire field of biology is presented. Discussions, laboratory demonstrations including a display of living specimens, anatomical mounts, models, charts, manikins, and representative photomicro-projections. Conferences and quizzes are used to supplement the student's reading which will be directed by a syllabus accompanying this course.

Social Sciences

First-Year Survey.—The first year social science survey studies economic, political, and social institutions in the

perspective of the industrial revolution. The study contrasts the social order that preceded the industrial revolution with contemporary society and traces the processes of transformation by which these changes were brought about. This gives the student a suitable background for the understanding of present social problems. A syllabus directs the reading of the student and the instructor supplements this work with lectures, conferences, and quizzes.

Such a series of survey courses is designed to orient the student to the general field of knowledge and hence, in a comprehensive way, to life. It is given here merely as an example of the direction in which reform is moving to correct the hodge-podge elective system of the past in which students, aided and abetted by faculties have been scrambling for credits and diplomas with little regard for knowledge or development or even specific skills. There is no reason to believe that either orientation courses or survey courses, however well organized and administered, can magically cure all the ills from which our colleges suffer; nor can they guarantee functional citizens as the end product. But they are hopeful signs since they indicate a serious endeavor to give the incoming student proper care at the beginning of his college career.

The eighth question of the third section of the questionnaire is: Do you think that the vocational training as a doctor, teacher, wood worker, etc., as given in the American colleges today, is so planned as to automatically prepare the student for functional citizenship at the same time? Of 54 replies only 13 were in the affirmative, 33 in the negative and six responded with a question mark. This means that a large majority of the executives replying to this question believe that the mere preparation of people to earn a living either in the professions or in the trades is no guarantee that they will function as good citizens should. And our daily experi-

ence often seems to confirm that verdict. For in many communities the leadership in service, in economic and social direction, in reform, in action of all kinds, is not in the hands of college men and women where one would expect to find it. In a meeting which I attended a few days ago, one of the speakers, who holds a strategic position in the Federal service, emphasized the fact that he was not able to arouse the educated members of the race in the several communities to take an active interest in matters which, though not touching them directly were of vital concern to the group as a whole.

In anticipation of the reply of this negative majority the next question was: What additional activities do you suggest to accomplish that end? The following are typical, and in my opinion, very significant replies. One president writes: "More active laboratory experience in human relationships." Another says: "The vocations should be more pragmatic to bring out the relationships of the vocation to civic responsibility. To allow longer periods during training for application of the vocation in real situations outside of the school environment." A third suggests that we "Give the student a real job in social service and the study of public activities, welfare, taxation, public and private ownership." These and many other valuable proposals were made in response to the request for suggestions covering a wide range of activities. These suggestions indicate that the composite reaction of those replying was that, for some reason, the contact of student and teacher through the work of the classroom which, after all, is the major activity of the college, is falling short of its aim to produce functioning citizens and that in order to compensate for this failure we must depend upon other activities; or, by implication at least, that some profound reform must take place in the classroom itself. Perhaps the solution is to be found in a combination of both.

After all, functional citizenship is a social matter, a question of social adjustment and social responsibilities to be learned only by dealing with people. The college for the student has been, in the past, a cloistered and unreal world. We have been saying to him from time immemorial, "When you go out into the world," meanwhile carrying out the figure by attempting to pour into his empty saddlebags a miscellaneous assortment of knowledge in preparation for his journey on the assumption that when he entered that far country he would be able to reach down into this well assorted store and meet any demands that might be made upon him. Few educators today will deny that this has been a serious mistake and that we have been too much engrossed in teaching subjects instead of teaching people. To this remark the ultra-conservative teacher asks: "Teach people what?" and the reply is: "How to think." Subject matter must be conceived of as an instrument and not as an end. The belief that we can cover, in college, the entire range of human knowledge and have the student know anything when he gets out is a delusion, as every experienced man of the world will tell you. But teach a student how to procure, to test and to handle facts in college and the accumulation of knowledge will take care of itself when the need arrives in the work of the world. Some years ago, the writer possessed great faith in the efficacy of technical training in schools as a direct preparation for the job, but even that faith has about all oozed away, certainly with reference to the trade levels of skill. The industrial activities of the world are so mechanized today that a man of normal intelligence can become an acceptable worker in any one of fifty industrial fields after an apprenticeship of two weeks on the job and be a success, too, so long as the job holds out. Since this is so, why force such a task upon the school?

It is popular now-a-days to pose as an

iconoclast, or in the language of the press, as a "fearless critic," of this or that. Such is certainly not the ambition of the present writer. But, after many years in this field of endeavor, he seriously believes that education at all levels has become terribly stuffed and is about ready for considerable debunking and simplification. And one of the most serious fallacies under which colleges labor today is that, merely by having learned professors stand up and talk to eager youth, each from three to five hours a week for thirty-six weeks, we are giving them an education.

The curriculum offerings of our colleges need not be so extensive as many of them are to afford the basis for proper education. For all that we can do is to discover talent and to direct and inspire people with the resources at our command. But the methods of using these resources must be considerably modified if the colleges are to be effective. Every field of knowledge offers abundant material to give students stuff to think about, to talk about and to act about. The teachers must learn how to use this material in such a way as to afford opportunity for practice in the art of effective functioning.

Corollary to all this is the inevitable conclusion that there must be an integration of

the school with the world. A number of college executives, in their replies, suggested an extension of extra-curricula activities in order to give opportunities for practice and participation to a larger number of students. This is good so far as it goes, but so long as it is confined to the college community the activity is, to the student, a make-believe of life. The co-operative plan in operation at Antioch College for a number of years is much more likely to help college students to know what citizens should do and to learn how to do it.

In conclusion, the discussions of the recent "Conference on the Social Science Offerings in Negro Colleges" held at Johnson C. Smith University in October last are commended to those interested in this problem. One of the stated objectives of that conference was "To suggest means for articulating the instruction in social sciences with life, the activities and institutions of the surrounding community." The same can be done with other subjects, although perhaps not with the same directness and ease. When we find the way to do this without breaking up either the college or the community we shall then be well on our way to a more copious production of functioning citizens.