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6 Business Education: *Grooming for Success*

By Harriet Jackson Scarupa

Dressed for success, carefully typed résumés in hand, seniors from Howard University's School of Business and Public Administration wait their turns to be interviewed for jobs after graduation. Today, the recruiters are from Xerox, Abbott Laboratories and Metropolitan Life. Tomorrow, they could be from IBM, Ford, Coca-Cola, General Electric, the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston or the General Accounting Office.

In a classroom whose tiered seating brings to mind a stage set, three students enact the role of president and executive vice presidents of a company that manufactures sportswear in the Dominican Republic. They are in the midst of justifying their latest corporate decisions before their classmates, the "stockholders." But these students are not just "playing." Their lines reflect intensive research on the company's operations, environment and problems and draw on their overall business knowledge. The name of the course is "Decision Making" and it is offered through the school's management department.

In a book-lined office, a professor who directs the school's Institute for Labor-Management Relations finishes up a report on the institute's upcoming summer training program for African trade union leaders. He plans to deliver the report at a meeting of the Organization of African



PHOTOGRAPHY BY HARLEE LITTLE

"Howard's School of Business and Public Administration is a bustling, fast-paced, high-powered place... All the activity reflects its phenomenal growth."

Trade Union Unity in Lagos the following week. He'll describe two previous training sessions the institute has run for African labor leaders and perhaps touch on sessions it has held for the National Alliance of Postal and Federal Employees and several other groups.

Meanwhile, in a gleaming computer center, students sit before terminals mastering a computer language that will enable them to solve specific business problems; in a seminar room, two executives from a major New York bank lead a seminar on investment banking; in a quiet corner of the library, a student studies for a tough actuarial examination...

Indeed, all over the building regular classes and a variety of academic extras (workshops, lectures, seminars, study sessions, meetings of professional organizations, the administration of professional examinations) seem perpetually underway. Nightfall seems to slow down the school's pace only slightly.

Graduate students, often coming straight from their jobs, hurry in to their classes in "Managerial Accounting" or "Financial Management" or "Business/Government Relations" or "Law and Ethics in Health Services Administration," depending on their major.

Aspiring entrepreneurs from throughout the Washington metropolitan area rush in to attend a seminar on "Financing Your Own Business" or "Tax Planning for Small Business" or "Cash Flow Management," or the like, all sponsored by the Small Business Development Center affiliated with the school.

Always, too, the library is well-used, whether by a casual reader checking out the latest issue of the *Wall Street Journal* or *Business Week* or an intent professor gathering data for a research undertaking bearing such a title as "The Effect of Double Taxation on the Treaties between U.S. and African Countries" or "Empirically

Testing the Value of Relative Strength in Forecasting the Future Performance of a Stock."

What all these mini-scenes convey would be crystal clear to even the most casual visitor: Howard's School of Business and Public Administration is a bustling, fast-paced, high-powered place. The school is bustling because it is booming. All the activity reflects its phenomenal growth.

The Beginning

Fourteen years ago, Howard didn't have any School of Business and Public Administration (although some business-related courses have been offered at the university since 1870). In August 1970, the School of Business and Public Administration became a reality, attracting an initial enrollment of 500. Today, with a student body of 2,011 (1,878 undergraduates, 133 graduate students), it constitutes the second largest school or college in the university (after the College of Liberal Arts). In the past five years alone, enrollment has increased by approximately 90 percent, while its alumni now number 2,211.

Some other facts about the school, facts which have turned into assets:

□ Its students come from 44 states and 43 foreign countries, with entering students having some of the highest mean Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores of those of any school or college in the university, as documented in a recent report issued by Howard's dean of admissions and records.

□ It has a faculty of 59, of whom 42 hold doctorates, with the others either C.P.As, holders of other professional certification or of master's degrees. Supplementing the school's own well-credentialed faculty is an executive-in-residence program which brings leaders of major corporations to the school to share their expertise with students.

□ It offers undergraduate students the opportunity to major in eight fields — accounting, computer-based management information systems, finance, hotel-motel management, insurance, international business, management, and marketing — and awards graduate degrees in four areas — business administration, labor-management relations, health services administration and public administration.

□ It operates support centers in accounting, banking, computer-based management information systems, hotel-motel management and insurance. These centers serve to buttress the regular academic program by assisting students through career counseling, scholarship aid, internship placement and liaison with the industries in question.

□ Its vehicles for community outreach include its Small Business Development Center, financed jointly by the university and the U.S. Small Business Administration, and its Institute for Labor-Management Relations, funded initially by a grant from the National Alliance of Postal and Federal Employees. Its efforts to encourage promising minority youngsters to pursue business careers include its summer actuarial program for high school students, funded by the Society of Actuaries and several insurance companies, and a summer business institute for high school students it co-sponsors with the University of Maryland as part of the corporate-supported Leadership Education and Development (LEAD) program.

□ It has witnessed increasing requests to visit the school from recruiters of major corporations, government agencies and not-for-profit institutions, numbering over 100 such visits a year. Related to this has been an excellent job placement rate for its graduates, with students majoring in computer-based management information systems earning the highest average

entry-level salaries for undergraduates (\$24,500 last year).

□ Its undergraduate and graduate business programs are accredited by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), putting them in a statistically elite class. While more than 800 institutions now grant MBA degrees, for instance, only 207 of these have earned AACSB accreditation. Accreditation for the school's public administration program comes from the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, while its health services administration program bears the stamp of approval of the Accrediting Commission on Education for Health Services Administration.

A New Home

The school's undergraduate programs had been based in a converted former warehouse a block or so from the university's main campus, with graduate programs housed in downtown office space. Last fall, with the opening of the school's new building, undergraduate and graduate programs finally were united under one roof. Located on a focal corner of the main campus, the school's new \$13 million home is the largest and most expensive classroom building ever erected at the university and includes a generous array of state-of-the-art equipment. [See accompanying story.]

The building seems a fitting symbol of the school's increasing prominence as well as its growth and popularity. The why of that growth and popularity has a lot to do with national trends. But it also has a lot to do with the particulars of the school's distinctive personality as it has evolved — and as it continues to evolve.

Twenty or so years ago, many bright students across the nation rejected business careers as part of their disenchantment with "the system" or "the Establishment." Today, faced with the reality of a tight, highly-competitive job market which has fostered a heightened concern with careerism, many of them have changed their tune. Study after study also has found today's college students far more conservative than many of their earlier counterparts, an ideological orientation that also would make them more receptive to business careers.

"I'm quite sure it was true that some Black students rejected business because of their disenchantment with the system"

observes the school's dean, Milton Wilson. "But there weren't opportunities for Blacks [e.g. in big corporations] until about 1964. Placement opportunities have been improving since. It's easier for a kid to accept business when he's going to make \$24,000 to start than it is when he's going to make \$12,000 to start out in some other field. That's a fair statement."

The reason for this improvement of opportunities, of course, lies in the impact of the civil rights movement which aroused the nation's consciousness about the importance of equal employment opportunities for all. More specifically, the movement served as a catalyst for the institution of affirmative action policies [now increasingly under attack] which require

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corporations with federal contracts to open their doors to more minorities and to do so in a systematic, planned way.

How wide open the doors are remains a matter of debate. But while it may still be years before we see a Black man or woman as the head of a General Electric or General Motors, these are still far different days from those when any Black man encountered in a plush corporate office suite was likely to be a janitor, mail clerk or messenger. As *Black Enterprise* publisher Earl Graves writes in the February 1985 issue of his magazine: "I am more convinced than ever that opportunities do exist and that they will continue to multiply — but only for those who have acquired the specialized skills and proper training."

In quest of such specialized skills and proper training, Black students are flocking to business programs in record numbers. Consider some figures provided by the National Center for Education Statistics. For the academic year ending in June 1977, Blacks earned 151,723 bachelor's degrees and 9,976 master's degrees in business and management. At the end of

the 1981 academic year (the latest year for which the center can provide statistics) that number had increased to 200,857 and 13,400 respectively. This represents a 34.3 percent increase for bachelor's degrees and a 45.5 percent increase for master's degrees.

The phenomenon of Black students gravitating to business programs, then, isn't unique to Howard. What is special about the Howard situation, says Wilson, is this: "We provide the type of education for management you'd find at any of the major business schools as well as include provisions for discussing problems especially associated with Blacks in the world of work."

Wilson is fond of saying that the school's programs prepare students to begin careers "on a fast track." He speaks of the school's charge to train the *leaders* so crucial to the functioning of large and complex organizational structures in business, government and the non-profit sector, people who can "analyze, set goals and establish and implement strategies for their achievement."

We'll pause to meet four of these fast-track students and then go on to highlight some of the programs that drew them to Howard's School of Business and Public Administration. For, current trends notwithstanding, it is the strength of the school's programs that will determine its success over the long haul.

Victor Powell, a second-year student from Baltimore, participated in the actuarial program for high school students run by the school's Center for Insurance Education during the summer of 1983. A strong mathematics student, he was already interested in the actuarial profession, but participating in the summer program solidified that interest. "Actuarial science is a pretty exclusive profession," he's found. "It's very lucrative. And there are a lot of opportunities for minorities because there are very few minorities in the profession and companies are looking for them."

He's already served an internship with the branch of a major life insurance company in New York City and recently passed Part I of the 10-part examination which qualifies a person to move to the top echelon of the profession by becoming a Fellow. Powell eventually intends to become a Fellow, he tells you decisively, and to work in a major actuarial consulting firm.

Alkia Banks, a senior from Front Royal, Va., majoring in computer-based management information systems, has her eye set on working as a programmer or systems analyst in a large company and eventually moving into a management slot. She's held two internships with computer companies, one in Manassas, Va., the other in Glenview, Ill., and she credits her Howard courses with preparing her well for her work at both places. But the preparation wasn't all academic. "Because we work in groups a lot here, you learn to deal with different personalities and learn to still be productive despite the differences," she says. "And that's something you need to be able to do out there in the world of work."

Pauline Wiltshire, a senior accounting major from Trinidad, serves as president of the school's honor society, Beta Gamma Sigma, and works part-time in the Small Business Development Center helping potential entrepreneurs with their bookkeeping skills. Attributing her interest in business to a grandfather in Trinidad who owns a drug store, she says she plans to take the C.P.A. exam next fall and would like to work for one of the "Big Eight" accounting firms that so dominate the profession. Eventually, she'd like to transfer to the Trinidadian branch of such a firm; teaching accounting also appeals to her. "Dealing with financial statements is a challenge," she says, in explaining her obvious enthusiasm for her field. "Plus, the thing I like about public accounting is that you get to interact with people."

Joseph Burno earned an undergraduate degree in electrical engineering from Brown University and currently works as a systems engineer in telecommunications for a major telecommunications company based in Northern Virginia. He's also a part-time graduate student at the school, expecting to earn his MBA at the end of the 1986 academic year. "Although I'm in a heavy technical type job now, my long range goal is in management or marketing, hopefully with the same company I'm with now," he explains. "I felt an MBA would help me go in that direction. Just the fact that I'm in the MBA program has helped my career already by helping me to get a couple of promotions over the past 2½ years."

As an alumnus of a predominantly white school, Burno says he was especially attracted to Howard's MBA program because he thought it would provide him with

"some sort of insight into the Black community that I couldn't get at a majority white school." "And I've found that's true," he adds. "Most of the professors tend to at least try to apply things to Blacks at some point in the course."

Usually, in fact, the injection of a Black perspective into the academic program comes in such a natural, informal way (although the school does offer one formal course dealing specifically with Black economic development). "We do try to give students some acculturation to the Black experience and the problems they may have later on in adjusting to the larger environment," explains Otis Thomas, the school's associate director for academic programs. "This comes out through the

"When you ask administrators and faculty members to describe the school's programs, the adjectives that keep cropping up are *quantitative, broad and practical.*"

concerns of the people who work here and in the way we try to bring in Black professionals, introduce them to the students and have them talk to the students. But we do it in an informal way — not in the curriculum as such — and to me that's the more effective way."

Academic Programs

In general, when you ask administrators and faculty members to describe the school's academic programs, the adjectives that keep cropping up are *quantitative, broad and practical.*

"*Quantitative* refers to the emphasis the school places on mathematics and economics and its aim to develop people who have analytical abilities," explains John Faxio, the school's director of cooperative education and placement. "By that, I mean people who are able not only to function and do it sort of by rote, but who know *why* they're doing certain things."

Closely tied to this quantitative focus is the school's strong acknowledgment of the importance of the computer and computerization in the business world today.

Explains Milton Wilson: "Every student here now has to take two courses in computers. I usually say there are at least three stages of computer performance: literacy, competence and expertise. There is no student who graduates from here who doesn't at least meet the competency level."

The department of computer-based management and information systems started in 1976 as the smallest unit in the school. Now it is the second largest (after accounting), points out Otis Thomas, who oversees the department. He attributes the lure of the department to the reality of the job market (skilled computer people are in demand and are projected to remain so well into the future); the success of the program in terms of job placement ("near 100 percent") and the high starting salaries earned by its graduates ("\$21,500-\$27,000 for undergraduates").

"Our program is designed to turn out systems analysts whose primary job duty or responsibility is to solve business problems using data processing tools and techniques," he explains. "We don't stress theory. We stress application. Say if a manager has a problem in market forecasting or accounts receivable, our students will be expected to go in and write a computer program that would address that problem and, hopefully, provide the manager with the type of information needed so solve it."

But the curriculum for computer-based management and information systems students, like that for all majors in the school is a *broad* one. "Before we designed the program I went and spent a couple of summers on internship with industry (e.g. Alcoa, Du Pont) and we talked to other people in the corporate world," Thomas observes. "And their primary complaint was that the traditional person who was trained in computer science had a difficult time trying to understand the language of business administration, the accounting, financial language. So we designed our program so students take courses in all facets of business administration — in management, in marketing, in finance, in accounting — and we mesh this together with giving them the technical background in computer science. And it has worked pretty well."

Students at the school, regardless of their major, take courses in three general areas, he points out: their area of spe-

cialization; a common body of management knowledge; and general education in the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. The aim of this multi-faceted approach to education is to ensure that a student will not be so narrowly focused on his or her particular specialty that he or she is unable to see the broader context in which that specialty is placed.

The *practical* side of the school's orientation is equally easy to document. In the classroom it is most evident in those courses which utilize the case-method approach. Charles Murphy, an associate professor in the management department, illustrates this approach by describing a class he teaches on "Decision Making:"

"The idea of using cases is to help students understand some of the practice nuances involved in making decisions in the business world. So we take up business cases that require students to go through a process of acquiring the information they need. That may involve writing letters, making telephone calls, doing library research. They must determine what information they need and evaluate that information and choose the best alternative in order to solve a problem — or make the best decision.

"One case is about a company that produces sportswear in the Dominican Republic. The company faces many quandaries about whether it should continue producing the clothes there, what kind of clothes it should produce, how it is going to distribute its clothes in the U.S. or in some other country. . . . The students would have to evaluate the industry, know something about the production and marketing of clothes and the finance involved in the operation, know something about the environment, for instance: What's the interest rate? What's the unemployment rate? The students would have to know about volume, styles. They'd have to understand the international dimension. What are the labor laws like in the Dominican Republic? The climate? The terrain? If the factory is inland, how do you get your clothes to the port and what is going to be the cost of that?"

Students tackle such problems working as a team. They develop a report, present it before Murphy and other students in the class and must justify their decisions when challenged. Proponents of the case-method approach find it an effective learn-





ing tool in that it encourages students to learn from a company's mistakes and take corrective action, allows them to apply their studies to a real world situation and gives them the chance to make the kind of high-level decisions they would be unable to make in an internship or entry-level job.

It also seems to be a fun way to learn. Indeed, closely related to the use of cases is the use of games as instructional devices. Murphy, who admits to a childhood fondness for the board game, Monopoly, is now refining several games he uses in courses on "Business Policy" and on "Entrepreneurship" to bring them even more in tune with the operations of the real business world. One game, which will utilize personal computers, will build in some "personality probabilities" into the executive decision-making process, he explains.

Games aside, outside the formal academic curriculum, the school's *practical* emphasis can perhaps best be seen through the work of its support centers and through the wide array of internship and cooperative job experiences it is able to provide for students.

"The support centers are designed to bridge the gap between academic classes and the world of work," explains Maurice Williams, director of recruitment and special projects. "They act as enrichment and reinforcement of the curriculum."

Specialized Centers

In 1974, the first of the school's centers, the Center for Banking Education, was established with an initial grant from the American Bankers Association. It was to serve as a prototype for other support centers both within the school and at other institutions, observes center director Georgellen Marshall, who then launches into a description of the role of her particular center.

"In this school," she explains, "banking is not a major. It is a subspecialty. We invite students from all the majors other than an industry-connected major (such as insurance) to join the center. We have finance students, marketing students, accounting students, management students since banks are such inclusive types of institutions they would use all those skills.

"By joining the center students get an extra measure of professional development: two required courses ("Commercial Banking" and "Bank Credit Administration"); seminars, workshops and meet-

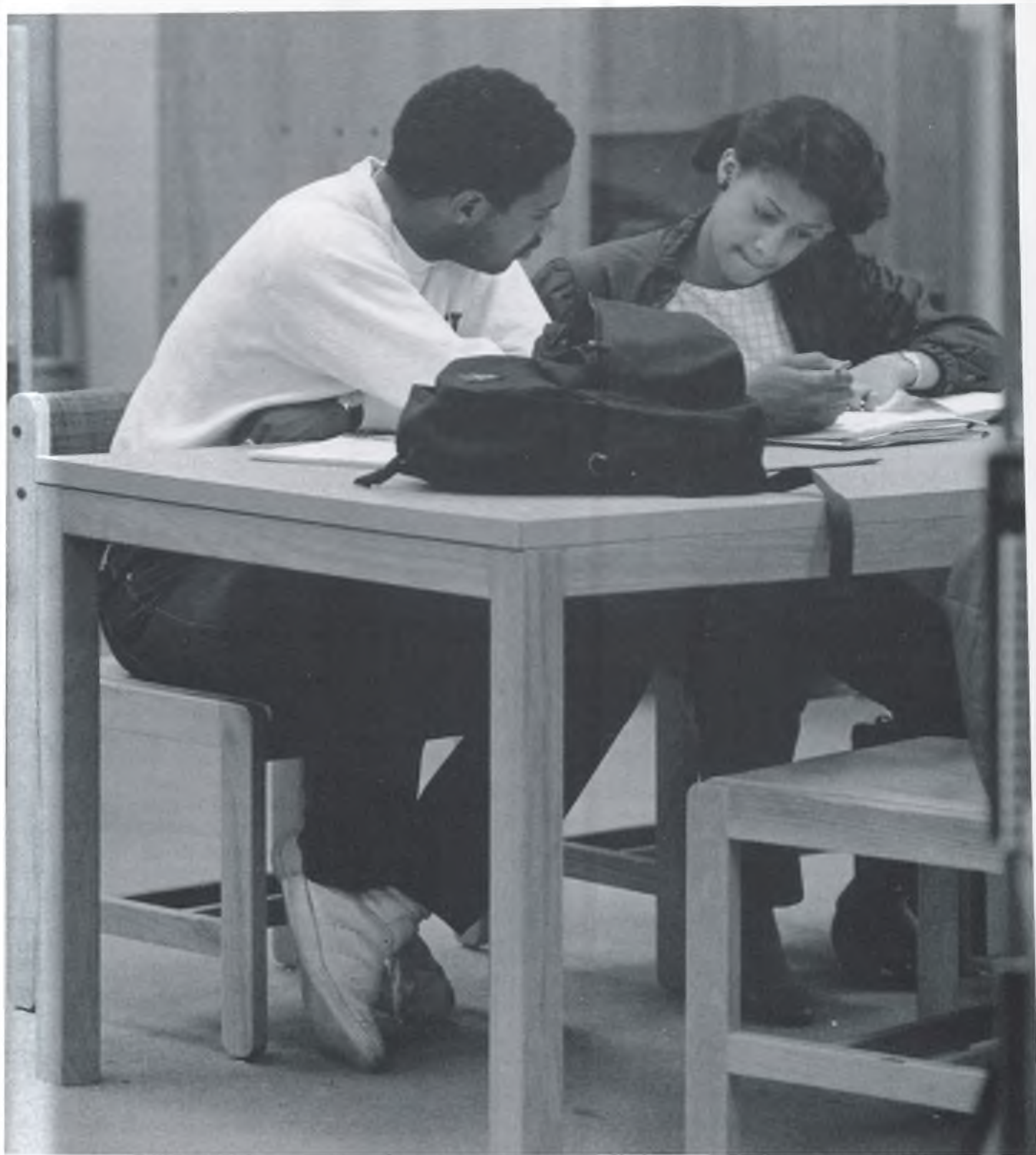
ings; an internship school where they spend one week in intensive training and different bankers come in to talk about working successfully in the corporate environment; and the internships, where students get hands-on experience working at a commercial bank. They might assist lending officers doing credit analyses on different applications, for instance, or advise customers on new products the bank is offering." Students hold internships at banking institutions in the eastern corridor and at a few key banks elsewhere in the country. At the same time, the center has maintained strong ties to the United National Bank which operates a branch near the campus.

The center also serves to give students "that extra polishing the financial institutions find so important: the image, the dress, the articulation, the writing skills," Marshall says. And it provides students with a means to address the question of how to deal with any racism, subtle or otherwise, they might encounter in the financial world.

"When you work in any competitive arena people use any tool available to them to gain a competitive edge," notes Marshall realistically. "Racism is one. We've had many successful Black role models come to the school and talk very frankly about the different ways to successfully deal with those instances of racism that are likely to occur. (Sometimes, for instance, not confronting it [racism] may be the most appropriate and effective response.) It's very helpful, though, for students to think about it [racism] in advance and to give them some tools so they can feel they can be in charge of the situation and not just helpless."

This kind of sharing of experiences seems to be ongoing. "I see graduates from the center all over Wall Street," Marshall says. "They're forming networks, welcoming newcomers [from the school] so they won't step into a cold environment."

Even with the deregulation of the banking industry, she predicts that the job outlook for students who are groomed through the center will remain good. "Banks are undergoing revolutionary kinds of changes, true," she says. "A different landscape for financial institutions is emerging with the lines becoming blurred between the Merrill Lynchs and the Sears, which offer the entire range of financial services, and commercial banks. But they



will all need managers with the same kind of preparation and skills."

Speaking of the job outlook for students affiliated with another of the school's support centers, the Center for Insurance Education, director James Chastain sounds a similarly

upbeat note. "Our students have a combination of things that make them employable," he observes. "They not only have the good academic education of the School of Business and Public Administration and the department of insurance, but they have two or three summers' work with an insurance company and almost all of them

also have passed professional insurance examinations that are normally taken by people in the industry. Most of our students receive three or four job offers."

A visit with John Faxio, director of cooperative education and placement, reinforces this upbeat note about the job outlook of not only students enrolled in the

banking and insurance centers, but of students throughout the school. "Not all of our graduating students utilize the placement center," he explains. "We have a large number of international students and corporations require that they have permanent visas even to be interviewed, so that knocks out about 15 percent [from seeking jobs through the placement center]. About 20 percent of our students [American and international] go on to graduate school. Approximately 70 to 75 percent of our students utilize the placement center and out of that group, at the time of graduation this past year, 65 percent were placed through the center. That percentage has increased since then."

In explaining the school's attractiveness to recruiters, Faxio cites the combination of the school's sound academic program, the preparation students receive in interviewing techniques, résumé writing and adapting to the environment of their chosen profession, and the practical job experiences they receive either through internships or the cooperative program.

Under the cooperative program, for instance, a student alternates full-time study with three extended full-time work assignments. This delays the student's graduation by one year, but it also gives the student a lead-in to a permanent position and a better understanding of the interrelationship between the theory and practice of a given profession, Faxio explains. Students have held cooperative jobs with such employers as IBM, General Motors, the General Accounting Office and the Bureau of the Census. These are the same types of employers — Fortune 500 companies and large government agencies — that regularly send recruiters to the school seeking bright young talent for permanent positions.

And, as these bright young graduates march off into the sunlight of corporate America, with visions of SUCCESS dancing in their eyes, what's in store for them?

Over the past half dozen years or so, there have been studies made and books written about how Blacks who have entered corporate America, in particular, are fairing, about how far up the corporate ladder they can climb. Reading through such materials can be a sobering experience. In an article entitled "Black MBAs: Room at the Top?" in the August-September 1978 issue of *MBA*, two researchers had this to say about even those Blacks who hold

what many consider an automatic ticket to success, the MBA degree:

"While access discrimination has declined, 'treatment' discrimination — including such areas as promotion, job training, and salary increases — continues to frustrate minority MBAs. . . . There is apparent enthusiasm in corporate efforts to recruit black talent. Once inside, however, the black MBA may find himself with no place else to go. Blacks hold virtually no decision-making positions. While an insignificant handful hold positions such as board directorships, president, or execu-

"As these bright young graduates march off into the sunlight of corporate America with visions of SUCCESS dancing in their eyes, what's in store for them?"

tive vice president, most are assigned to stereotyped 'black' jobs or staff (as opposed to line) positions."

A similar observation is made by Gregg Watson (a Howard alumnus) and George Davis in their book "Black Life in Corporate America: Swimming in the Mainstream" Doubleday, 1982):

"We heard repeatedly [from some of the corporate Blacks interviewed for their book] that when you reach a certain level your career is stopped dead by the unwillingness of white males to accept blacks into the decision-making positions at the top of the company, or to accept them in line management jobs that control profit-and-loss."

What does this all mean for the graduates of Howard's School of Business and Public Administration? Will they be able to make major corporate decisions and set key business policies in case-method classrooms at Howard but not in the real world? Will their bright hopes of upward mobility grow dimmer and dimmer as they move through the corporate world? Will they become some pretty disappointed folk 20 years down the line?

"There are going to be some disappointed people in the corporate world —

Black or white," answers Dean Milton Wilson. "You've got to realize — and I'm not trying to support it but tell you like it is — that a corporate organization is like a pyramid. The higher you go, the keener the competition. So, sure, there are going to be some disappointed people."

As for the outlook of the school's graduates, in particular, he observes: "In terms of initial placement, we can place more students than we have. In terms of upward mobility once students get in a corporation, which is what you're asking about, we don't have a long period of time to measure. We only started in 1970 and for a part of that 14 years our graduates were really not under the programs that are currently in effect. But our graduates are doing well, very well. We don't have them at the executive vice president level because, in the first place, they're too young and haven't been out there that long yet."

"But we do have some alumni — an example is the man who was business and legal consultant to ABC during the Olympics [Donald Gadsden, class of 1973] — who are in significant, essential and high-level positions in business and government."

"I don't want to talk about others' experiences," he says, referring to those gloomy accounts of upward mobility unfulfilled, "because I think *we're* different." He laughs then, and it's a most optimistic laugh, a laugh that seems to echo down the corridors of the bright, bustling building that houses the School of Business and Public Administration. □