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EXTENDING THE REACH OF SIMULATION: DECIDE HEADS FOR THE INNER CITY

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ABSTRACT

Many colleges have been called upon to assist in helping minority students develop a sense of self worth. Many minority students do not seriously consider college as a viable alternative or they go to college and have difficulty in adjusting. This though provoking article breaks seminal ground by describing how a high-level computerized simulation was used to help a group of minority students develop a sense of self-esteem and confidence.

INTRODUCTION

In cities across America, a renewed awareness of the problems of inner city communities has emerged. The riots in Los Angeles, as tragic as they were, rang an astonishing alarm and forced the issues of inner city neglect, joblessness and hopelessness onto the front pages. However, while the riots cast a negative light on all of its participants--whites, blacks and Hispanics--young African-American men bore the brunt of the criticism. As was the case in the 60s, a hue and cry has once again gone Out across America that something must be done.

These disturbing events have caused many institutions, from large corporations to small colleges and universities to develop programs to help address the educational roadblocks, which impede minorities from advancing into the mainstream Americana. Colleges, particularly small ones, are looking for ways to increase ethnic/racial diversity on their campuses in attempt to break the negative cycle of frustration and disillusionment among minorities. Schools of Business certainly can be included in this category.

Some institutions have begun a variety of partnership programs designed to bring universities to the inner city and to bring minorities onto the university. However, as Steele notes, many such programs fail because they do not or cannot address an important area for minority disenfranchisement--the failure to provide self-esteem (1992).

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how a computerized business simulation can help instill confidence, enthusiasm, interest--and help foster self esteem--in a typical group of minority students. If self-esteem is indeed an important factor in choosing to go to college, then *colleges--especially small ones--can* use programs similar to the one described here to augment their minority recruitment objectives.

THE COMPUTERIZED SIMULATION

The use of computerized business simulations and games is now a widely accepted pedagogical practice in most business schools across the United States (Wolfé, 1985). While not as prevalent, high schools and grammar schools are also beginning to make use of business computerized simulations.

In the Summer of 1988, the Business School at SUNY-Geneseo began using the DECIDE Simulation as part of an experimental project for high school students who were selected for a special Summer program because of their "high attitudinal abilities." It was believed that high school students with little or no business courses or experience could, nevertheless benefit from using a high level computerized business simulation. While the authors do not know of any research specifically directed toward investigating the use of a high level computerized simulation for high school students, some studies have suggested that differing groups can make effective use and derive educational benefits from the same simulation (Butler, et. alia, 1 979; Hemmasi, Graf and Kellogg, 1987)

Follow-up studies by BOCES, in fact, supported this assertion. Surveys of students who had participated in the Summer programs which utilized a computerized business simulation showed that students not only felt strongly about pursuing an academic (and subsequent professional career) in business, but that they were able to grasp and apply many business concepts.

THE PROJECT

Because the DECIDE project was so successful for the special' high school students, a decision was made to try another experimental project, whereby the DECIDE Simulation would be utilized as the centerpiece for a Summer project aimed at fostering college interest in a group of local minority high school students. The project would be entitled: "DECIDE: A Leadership Development Adventure.' The goals of the program would be:

- to select pre-college courses (in their high schools) which would prepare them for post secondary education;
- complete high school;
- consider post secondary education;
- develop an awareness and appreciation of what a college--and subsequently a profession career--has to offer them.

The students were chosen from Franklin High School located in Rochester, N.Y. Franklin was selected because it has a history of difficulty in retaining students and promoting educational programs. (Democrat and Chronicle, 1991). The Franklin high school faculty in conjunction with the guidance offices at Franklin High and SUNY-Geneseo would attempt to find students who they believed had the ability to go and be successful in college but had not shown any explicit interest in attending college thus far. Also, no financial criteria would be used in determining student eligibility for the project. Twenty students were chosen for the project.

The DECIDE: A Leadership Development Adventure Project has been in use for two Summers (1991 and 1992). Since part of the Project was funded by a number of grants, an evaluation was required. Due to the nature and anticipated outcomes of the Project, most of the traditional measures that are typically employed for research designs appeared to be inappropriate or unworkable. Hence, a longitudinal assessment program was set up between SUNY-Geneseo and Franklin school.

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