

**Simulations, Games and Experiential Techniques:, Volume 1, 1974**  
**TRACKING THE ELECTIVE: STUDENT-GOAL ORIENTED EDUCATION**

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The basic objective in any course is the stimulation and facilitation of learning of a subject matter by the students in that course. A problem arises in that such stimulation and facilitation is subject to at least three major constraints: effectiveness demands, efficiency demands, and institutional demands.

CONSTRAINTS

Effectiveness relates to the accomplishment of desired objectives. A number of objective sets could be developed to include those of the students, those of the educator for self or for student, or those of the institution for student. When selecting objective sets, the defensible criterion is that the goals of the individual students for that course be attained when such goals are realistic and appropriate. Effectiveness is then greatest when the student is assisted in attaining his individual goals in the course. At the extreme, assuming heterogeneity of students' objectives, totally individualized courses would be demanded. On the other hand, were there complete homogeneity of student objectives or if the students would adopt the goals of the instructor for the course as their individual goals, then there would be high opportunity for effectiveness in a course as there would be a single goal set and the goals would be known to all. We realize, of course, that objectives aren't homogeneous and thus our effectiveness is always below potential when we batch-Process students.

It is apparent, moreover, that there exists a conflict between an educator's effectiveness as determined by his assisting the students in meeting their individual objectives in a course and his efficiency since efficiency is determined by the ability to meet objectives with competence in performance and a minimum of effort. Certainly this desire to minimize effort in a course is a valid objective of the educator; freed resources may be put to other uses such as professional development and community service.

In the drive for efficiency in operations we tend to consider Student objectives in taking an elective course as either homogeneous and relevant or completely replaceable by educator objectives for that course. Efficiency is attained through standardizing student inputs (often through the requirement of prerequisites or educator consent to take the course), standardizing processing (often through the use of uniform assignments and uniform instructional mode), and uniform evaluation. In many respects the traditional and conventional approach to education, based on prescribed curriculum, similar assignments for all students, the lecture as the prevailing mode, standardized testing, and instructor determined evaluation *L 2, p. 5\_I*, is a reflection of the high emphasis on efficiency in universities and may reflect the ultimate

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in the pursuit of educational efficiency. Horngren notes that performance may be both efficient and effective, but that either condition can occur without the other *L* 1, p. 260\_ /.

A third constraint which may limit the educator's pursuit of facilitating student learning has been termed by Faw to be "institutional press" which he considers to be the expectations of the university, community, profession, etc., imposed on educators and their students and somewhat beyond the control of either.<sup>1</sup> Examples of institutional press would include mandatory attendance, mandatory final examinations, adherence to catalog-stated course objectives and descriptions, and instructor evaluation of students.

Tracking the elective is a method of attempting to increase effectiveness with a minimum loss of efficiency while adhering to the various demands imposed by the collective institutional press. Essentially it represents a compromised version of the Faw approach coupled with a traditional, structured approach to education.

### **TRACKING THE ELECTIVE**

As developed below, tracking is a method whereby two alternative routes are available to the student; either of which the student can use to satisfy course requirements and thereby, and at minimum, receive course credit. Of course, the basic intent is that the student will select that route which he perceives will best allow him to meet his personal objectives in selecting the particular elective from all of those electives available to him. Lacking imagination, the Tracks have been titled Track A and Track B. Track A is a structured conventional route while Track B is an experience-oriented and individual—student tailored route. Ideally, Track A would be characterized as highly efficient and somewhat effective while Track B would be viewed as inefficient and highly effective in the realization of student objectives.

#### **Track A**

In the elective courses, specifically Retailing and Promotional Strategy, Track A has represented a structured route to the attainment of course objectives. Some assumptions of the Track, implicit and explicit, are:

1. the instructor sets objectives and the student accepts these as valid;
2. the instructor is the authority and leader while the student is the subject and follows;
3. the instructor is active and transmits information while the student is passive and receives information; and

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<sup>1</sup> report on the near completely individualized environment created by Professor Volney Faw is contained in a chapter in / 2, pp. 29—55/ entitled "A College Professor Gives Freedom Within Limits".

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4. the instructor determines evaluative criteria with the grade as the major course reward while the student accepts the evaluative criteria and the grade as the major reward.

The basic mode utilized in these classes has been the lecture (assumption 3), tempered by the use of guest lecturers and some student presentations. Major individualization has occurred in the allowance of student selection of the topic of the required project though it should be noted that the instructor has often been highly involved in this selection.

Evaluation has been based on a mid-term and final examination and on the project. Student-teacher interaction has tended to be rather slight and mainly involved with student questions in class, term project discussion and assistance in the office, and course post-mortem in less formal settings. Student-student interaction has tended to be negligible in the classroom as befits the formal structure.

Total time expenditures for the three semester credit courses, by the students, are expected to approximate the schedule below:

<u>AREA</u>	<u>TIME IN HOURS</u>	<u>% COURSE GRADE</u>
Class attendance (non—mandatory)	40	
Study for mid—term examination	20	25
Research and writing of project	40	50
Study for final examination	<u>20</u>	<u>25</u>
Totals	120 hours	100%

### Track B

In the same electives, Track B has represented an unstructured and highly experience-oriented route to the attainment of course objectives. In this instance, objectives are a blend of those of instructor and student with a major emphasis on student objectives. Some assumptions of the Track are:

1. the instructor and student are mutually involved in setting objectives;
2. the student is involved in an educational experience and the instructor is enthusiastic;
3. the instructor and student are both active, but the student is considerably more active;
4. the instructor sets broad evaluative criteria, but the student is involved in developing specific evaluative criteria;
5. the student is personally involved, is self-motivated, is responsible for outcomes, and is capable of tailoring the course to his individual goals and aspirations which the instructor views as valid but modifiable; and
6. the major reward for the student is individual gratification rather than the grade.

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Following a week of overview lectures for all students, the students are given the option, irrevocable, of selecting the Track they desire to pursue. Students selecting Track B are then scheduled for an interview with the instructor.

During the interview session the student and instructor discuss the educational and career objectives of the student, develop a topic that matches subject matter to student objectives, consider information sources that would be valuable in developing the project, and consider the form that project reporting will take (film, tape, written report, etc.). The student is highly encouraged to consider the community as a resource base and, when faced with problems, to seek out community professionals for assistance. While university services including faculty, library, audio-visual services, and computer services are available, the student is highly encouraged toward the community.

Following the interview, during which a tentative contract is developed, the student is given a list of questions from which a sample will be drawn for the final examination. These questions are all taken directly from the assigned text and are intended to fully cover the subject matter of the course.

Evaluation is based entirely on the final examination and on the project. The student is released from class attendance and responsibility for the mid-term examination. All freed time is to be used on the project. Expected time expenditures are given below:

AREA	<u>TIME</u> <u>IN</u> <u>HOURS</u>	<u>%</u> <u>COURSE</u> <u>GRADE</u>
Study for final examination	30	<u>25</u>
Reserach and project development	<u>90</u>	<u>75</u>
Totals	120 hours	100%

Ideally the student would not be seen until a completed project is submitted and the final given. Practically some Track B students are very frequently about either seeking advice or sharing their enthusiasm and findings. Some even attend class sessions.

### ACCEPTANCE OF THE TRACKS

After utilizing tracking at two universities over a period of three years, it has become apparent that the number of students in any elective opting for Track B will not exceed 15% of those enrolled. This rather low figure has been rather a disappointment, but expected. Certainly the prior educational experiences of students have been of a highly traditional nature. Additionally it is possible that Track B is perceived as a high risk option by students; one in which there is freedom to learn but freedom to fail as well. Enrollments in other experientially-oriented courses including independent studies, entrepreneurship, and consulting indicate that students are primarily structure-oriented.

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The first and obvious gain is that Track A tends to be highly efficient and effective. It is more efficient in that students not wishing to remain in class are allowed an alternative. Voluntary and stated commitment to Track A may serve to induce a favorable attitude and positive response toward the course and the objectives of the course.

Track B results are somewhat more difficult to evaluate. Additional instructor time involved for a tracked course has ranged from 30 to 40 additional hours in the course of a semester. From this, one can derive a crude measure of efficiency sacrifice. The expectation has been that efficiency will be sacrificed for increased effectiveness in meeting student objectives.

Final examination grades of Track B students have tended to be normally distributed. Projects, on the other hand, have been of two distinct types: those that have far exceeded the instructor's expectations and those that have not met his minimum requirements.

Among the superior projects were the following:

1. A demand analysis for a self—repair auto maintenance facility--resulted in financing and currently is in operation.
2. A demand and cost analysis for a specialty convenience restaurant——resulted in financing and currently is in operation.
3. A demand and cost analysis for a specialty clothing store——demand was inadequate for the operation.
4. A trading area analysis for a heating repair facility——a suitable location was selected and building is currently being undertaken.
5. Replication of a classic communications experiment.
6. A radio audience survey——students currently self—employed market researchers.
7. A survey of business school graduates conducted for the purpose of developing promotional literature for the College of Business Administration.

Observation indicates that those best utilizing the experience have been older and have had either graduate school or entrepreneurial orientations. There were no differences in terms of grade point averages or year in school for those successful or unsuccessful in Track B.

While it would be possible to screen Track B candidates for maturity and motivation, such a procedure would change the nature of the program and would not allow persons to realize their potential or recognize their weaknesses. Similarly, demanding frequent conferences would further impact on efficiency while increasing structure.

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A method has been advanced which attempts to transform a conventional elective course into split track course. The intent is to allow those students desiring structure a conventional course while allowing an additional route for those seeking personally meaningful experiences access to those. There is a sacrifice in efficiency but there is an intended increase in effectiveness. Results utilizing tracking have been mixed.

### REFERENCES

1. Horngren, Charles T., Accounting for Management Control, (2nd ed., Englewood Cliffs: Prentice—Hall, 1970).
2. Rogers, Carl R., Freedom to Learn (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill, 1969).