

May 17, 1954

Raising the educational level of freshman entering college - by Leo Szilard

Our leading colleges seem to be quite aware of the fact that only a small fraction of the Freshman entering the colleges have had an adequate liberal education during their high school years. The object of this memorandum is to discuss a specific step which these colleges could take in order to remedy the situation.

The students who apply for admission to our leading colleges are usually concerned quite early in high school about their chances of getting into one of these colleges and the chances of obtaining a scholarship there. It is this fact which puts our leading colleges in a position to influence the study program of high school students who intend to apply for admission to one of them.

Five to ten of these colleges could agree on a reading program which they would jointly recommend to high school students who plan to apply for admission to one of them. They could make it known that in deciding on admissions and scholarships - in addition to hitherto applied criteria - they would also take into consideration whether a student had taken this reading program. The reading program would not constitute a requirement of admission or a scholarship; but it would constitute an additional recommendation.

The colleges participating in this plan could arrange with the College Entrance Examinations Board that it will certify to the colleges (on the basis of a simple additional test which those who desire it may take) that the student appears to have read a certain number of books selected from the program.

The selection of the reading program will require considerable discussion. At this time I can only tentatively suggest that it should cover the following subjects:

- A. English and American History and literature which would include current literature.

- B. The history of Greece and Greek literature, with the main emphasis on the reading, at least in part, of the original text in English translation.
- C. Possibly Roman history.

The student ought to have some choice and should not be required to read more than perhaps one-half of the book selected. Some new text books ought to be prepared and made available that would serve the student as a guide to this reading program.

Those high schools from which students occasionally or habitually apply for admission to any of the colleges who participate in the plan could be asked to designate one teacher to whom students who take the reading program could turn for advice and who may arrange that such students be relieved, if necessary, from certain other time consuming high school activities.

It is likely that in the beginning only those few high school students who want to apply to one of the participating colleges would take the reading program. But if the high schools respond favorably and are generous in granting relief from other high school activities to the students who take the reading program, it is conceivable that - as time goes on - more and more students might want to join the program for its own sake.

The books selected for this program ought to be made available in a low priced edition to the students and they ought to be obtainable to them at a low price through their high schools.

to students, who elect to take such a test, to enable the Board to certify to the college that the student has, in fact, read a certain number of books out of the total program.

The reading program would have to be agreed upon by the colleges participating in the plan. It might cover English and American history and literature, Greek history and literature and possibly also Roman history, with the main emphasis on reading the original text in part, or in whole, in an English translation. The student ought to have some choice and should not be required to read more than one half of the books listed according to his particular taste.)

It would be essential to obtain the cooperation of the high schools so that each high school from which students habitually apply for admission to any of the participating colleges may designate one teacher who would assist the student with his reading program and arrange for students who take the reading program to be relieved, if necessary, from certain other time consuming activities.

It is assumed that, in the beginning, only those comparatively few high school students who intend to apply to leading colleges would want to take the reading program but, if the high schools respond favorably and are generous in granting relief from other activities to those who take the reading program, it would seem likely that, as time goes on, more and more students might want to join the program for its own sake even though they would not intend to go to any of the participating colleges.

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The books which form part of this program ~~are~~ to be made available in a low price edition to the students, ~~if possible~~ through the high schools.

~~ought~~

↓ and ought to be ~~distributed~~ ~~through~~ ~~the~~ ~~high~~ ~~schools~~
↓ through the high schools.

~~of the available~~ ~~to the students~~

The total reading program might consist of thirty books from which the student would be expected to elect to read twenty of his own choosing. These books are to be made available in some low price edition and the cooperation of the high schools will have to be sought with a view ^{to} of having in each school one teacher appointed to counsel students who take this reading program, and to arrange for having the students relieved from other activities in order to give them sufficient free time to enable them to cope with their reading program. It is assumed that in the beginning there will be only comparatively few high school students ~~who~~ intend^{ing} to enter one of our leading colleges who will take this program but, if the high schools respond favorably, and are generous in granting relief from other activities for those who participate in the program, in time other students might want to join the program for its own sake, even if they plan to enter a college which is not included in the group that sponsors it.

Leo Szillard

Miss Pahr
~~Miss Womers~~
Vibrant
Orest