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UNC reading program may improve skills

by Dawn Reavis
Staff Writer

Does reading seem to take up all your study time? Are you whizzing through chapters only to find that you are not comprehending the main thoughts? If the answer is yes, then the UNC reading program can help.

The purpose of the reading program is to help interested students as well as faculty members increase their reading and study skills. The program is located on the second floor of Phillips Annex where trained instructors are willing to design individualized course of study. Once enrolled, students can begin improving a variety of study skills such as: reading speed, reading comprehension, study techniques, vocabulary and test taking skills.

"The reading program can also prepare students for graduate school entrance exams," said Mimi Keever, assistant director of the program. "Some students like to come in expecting help three weeks before the exams," she said. "However, for best results students should come in three months before taking the entrance exam," states Keever.

The program serves close to 1,300 students per year and minority students make up 33 percent of the enrollment.

The reading program is needed by more minority students, however, many minority students are deterred. "The reading program is falsely known as a remedial program," states Howard Woodard, instructor of the reading program. The program serves people of all academic levels including professors and Rhode Scholars.

"The best efficient speed for doing well at the university is 325 words per minute," said Henry Powell, director of the reading program. Studies show that you need to read between 325-350 words per minute to do well on most graduate entrance exams.

The reading room is open Monday-Thursday from 8 a.m.-8 p.m. and Friday from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. A small fee of \$10.00 is charged for enrolled students and \$25.00 for staff members. The fee is payable at the time of registration and covers enrollment for a full calendar year. All proceeds go toward part of the operating costs. For more information on the reading program, contact the Office of the Reading Program 962-3782. ■

Test score for blacks nears white score level

David Williamson
University News Bureau

Black children in the United States continue to close the gap between scores they make on standardized achievement tests and scores made by white children, according to a study released Monday.

The study, presented at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association in Anaheim, Calif., shows consistent drops in the average score differences between blacks and whites in both verbal and mathematics skills.

Tests showing how young blacks had improved at ages 9, 13, 17, 18 and 22 include National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) exams, the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the Graduate Record Exam (GRE).

Dr. Lyle Jones, Alumni Distinguished professor of psychology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, conducted the study.

In subjects where white children have improved, black children have improved more, Jones said in an interview. In subjects where achievement scores for whites have declined, scores for black children have declined less.

"The consistency of these trends in National Assessment of Educational Progress exams, which are given to children at ages 9, 13, and 17, suggests that a further reduction in the black-white average differences for these test scores will be seen in the future," he said.

"As an example, many black students born in 1965 will take the SAT this year. They should do better on the tests, relative to whites, than black students did previously, because they have done better on National Assessment tests at earlier ages."

Figures showing the black improvement vary, depending on the tests, the subjects and the age of the students, Jones said. As a result, it is not possible to give a simple percentage depicting black gains, but in some cases score differences have been cut in half.

Blacks born in 1953, for example, scored 20 percent fewer correct answers than whites on the verbal skills section of the NAEP exams, he said. Black children born in 1970, however, scored only 10 percent fewer correct answers than whites on that section of the test.

"At ages 9 and 13, white children performed in 1982 neither better nor worse than in 1973 on mathematics exercise, while black children performed with more than 5 percent more correct answers in 1982," the psychologist said.

"At age 17, both white and black students performed more poorly in 1982, whites by 3 percent and blacks by 1 percent, yielding a 2 percent decline in the white-black average difference."

What has caused the narrowing gap between average achievement levels of the races remains unclear, Jones said.

Among the facts that have been suggested are educational and social programs such as Project Head Start and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Others include the long-term effects of school desegregation, affirmative action programs, improved career opportunities for many blacks and the children's television program Sesame Street.

"While recent progress in average achievement levels of black students has been dramatic, we should not lose sight of the continuing large average achievement differences between white and black children," he said.

To better understand why those differences persist, the UNC-CH scientist undertook a study of factors affecting why black high school student do not do as well as white high school students on math achievement tests.

Dr. Nancy Burton, now with Educational Testing Service in Princeton, N.J., and graduate student Ernest Davenport helped with the study, which looked at a special National Assessment exam given

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