

COCC Refund Efforts In Progress

By Donald Alderman
Refunding efforts have begun on a phased-out program that was designed to provide North Carolina welfare mothers with education, training and job skills development.

"With the exposure we've had, there is real potential for the program to be highly successful provided we are given the chance, commented Ms. Paula Drew while stating the need for continued funding of the

College Outreach Computer Consortium (COCC) in North Carolina.

The COCC began operating at four black institutions of higher learning — two public and two private — in April, 1981. The six-month federally funded project, according to administrators, has not realized full potential because of its short life span.

"I would like to see more people have the opportunity to benefit from the COCC experience," said Ms. Scherrye Williams, the program's recruiter-counselor at North Carolina Central University. "You can't get a feel for the program's worth when measured over a short period of time."

The four institutions — NCCU, St. Augustine's College, Shaw University and Fayetteville State University — are presenting a proposal to the U.S. Department of Labor seeking refunding of the jobs skills program that was proposed under the Carter Administration's Welfare Reform Act.

Ms. Drew, COCC recruiter counselor at NCCU, said refunding depends largely upon the labor department's evaluation of the program's effectiveness.

However, Ms. Vernessa Taylor, COCC secretary, says it is difficult to determine success without continuity. She says considering the time involved in organizing the program, effectiveness should be based on an evaluation of goals and objectives over at least a one-year period.

Members whose families are dependent upon government assistance such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children and Food Coupons have benefited tremendously from the education and jobs skills training provided by the COCC. The majority of parents involved in the program at NCCU have been able to land jobs within the private sector, requiring no public assistance, according to COCC administrators.

Sixty-four per cent of participants were able to land meaningful employment or further pursue higher learning — a success rate which indicates

there is great potential for the COCC to assist economically and educationally disadvantaged mothers who head households.

The program is also a good investment of taxpayers' dollars. Tax dollars are better spent, some suggest, by helping people to help themselves than by perpetuating the "welfare trap."

Ms. Taylor said the 101 participants at NCCU have signed a petition urging Gov. Jim Hunt to support the COCC refunding efforts, and petitions are being circulated throughout the Durham community that will demonstrate widespread support for the program.

The COCC project seeks to utilize a computer-based curriculum concept entitled "Plato" as a means of advancing academic levels, and to develop marketable job searching skills. Participants are

Ruffin Urges Academic Excellence

By Donald Alderman
Benjamin Ruffin, assistant to Gov. Jim Hunt, urged students at North Carolina Central University during National Mindpower Week to get serious about education in order to narrow the disparity of black professionals in the United States.

Ruffin said it is distressing to know that there are no black doctors in eighty North Carolina counties and no black attorneys in 67 of the state's counties. Blacks do not have many professionals to convey their interests to society.

"It is distressing to know that less than one per cent of the engineers in this country are black, and less than one per cent of the country's certified public accountants are black."

"This means," Ruffin said, "we have a new challenge. We have to go back to the classrooms. We must use all our time productively. We must bridge the gap."

He said the disparity of black professionals is of such high proportions that black students must sacrifice nearly all social life in order to bridge the gap.

"If your friends want to boogie all night, tell them 'I can't go, I'm going to the library and book tonight'... You'll have time to party. We need to bridge the gap," Ruffin said.

He said the black schools have a special mission and anyone who speaks otherwise is "absolutely wrong and misinformed." He urged the students to covet the education opportunity because "so many didn't have the chance."

"You're fortunate," Ruffin said. "The (education) baton has been passed on to you. You're getting a good education, take it back to the community. We have a challenge and there is no time to waste."

Being academically excellent is the best way for blacks to preserve black schools, he said.

"We must prepare academically. If we don't, these schools are going to be closed or taken over."

"Why maintain the schools if students are not going to achieve or take them seriously — like some of us are doing," Ruffin asked. "It's distressing to see some of us wasting our time," he remarked.

Along with getting an education, students must get a good understanding of actions and actors that shape happenings around the world. Understanding, Ruffin said, will enable graduates to effectively contribute to society.

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