

Reading Skills Are National Concern

Class Surveys BC Reading Habits

by Katie Gailes

During the Fall Semester of 1976-77, a survey of student reading habits was conducted by the Business Communications class here at Bennett College. A sample of 100 subjects, randomly selected from the student roster, submitted data for the study.

The survey was prompted by numerous newspaper and magazine articles on functional illiteracy and reading disability. Functional illiteracy is a deficiency in the basic educational skills. Reading disability is failure to decipher print into mental and verbal comprehension of its meaning.

A substantial portion of the U. S. population does not read well enough to function in society successfully. A news article, appearing in the New York Times, told this story:

"Some 12 million persons, 14 years of age and older, cannot read as well as the average 4th grader. Approximately 60 percent of the 13-year-olds cannot follow directions in a simple cookbook; an estimated 18 million adults cannot read well enough to fill out applications for Medicare, Social Security, bank loans, or drivers' licenses."

The students in the Business Communications class were curious about the quantity and quality of reading on campus. A survey instrument was drawn up and administered to the randomly selected group of students. There was an 84 percent return of the questionnaire.

The largest percentage of returns came from seniors and freshmen. This could mean that the middle college years are the most apathetic.

The following magazines, listed in order of popularity, seem to be the favorites among Bennett students: 1) "Essence" 2) "Ebony" 3) "Jet" 4) "Glamour" 5) "Time" 6) "Newsweek" 7) "Psychology Today." Fifty percent of these choices appear to be choices of reading for entertainment only.

Some 43 percent of the students subscribed to their favorite magazines and 28 percent borrowed periodicals from others. It appeared that students do quite a lot of reading other than textbooks and class assignments. In fact, 74 percent said that they read between 3 and 10 outside books per year.

The students also said that they

themselves purchased most of the books they read, with the most frequently purchased being novels. However, given a choice between reading a best-selling novel and watching the movie, 52 percent said that they would prefer watching the movie. However, one learns much more, they say, by reading than by hearing; therefore, we may say that one picture may be robbing students of a thousand words.

Only 29 percent of the subjects had access to and used the dictionary frequently; 12 percent said that they almost never used it even though 94 percent owned a dictionary.

It appears that use of the dictionary, a very old and very effective communication aid, probably should be stressed more even at the college level.

Where one's reading is done can have a decided effect upon reading habits and most of all upon one's reading comprehension. When reading is done where there are many audio and visual distractions, the level of comprehension most likely will be low.

The study showed that even though 40 percent of the students preferred complete silence when reading, only 5 percent did their reading in the library. Seventy-

four percent did most of their reading in the dormitory where there is little possibility of complete silence during normal waking hours. Some students indicated that they prefer reading with distractions such as music, T.V., or both.

When asked if they were interested in improving their reading habits, 93 percent of the subjects answered "yes." When students realize that there is room for improvement, they may be willing to work toward improvement. The desire to read and read better is necessary as motivation toward acquiring and improving reading skills.

No Watermelon for Hamm

by Sabrina D. Sturgis

Barbara Hamm, senior Communications Media (ISP) major from Baltimore, Maryland, assistant dorm director of Jones Hall, presented last Monday evening her "one of a kind" experience in Northern California.

The speech was entitled "I Brought this Watermelon 'Specially fo' y' all!" — or "The Water-

melon Syndrome." Barbara, along with four other students from different colleges left on a one-month Youth Exchange tour sponsored by the United Methodist Church from June 9 through July 9.

The Youth Group toured the Northern part of California representing various black colleges from the South-East and telling the people of the history of the

colleges, the curriculum, enrollment, fees, and the campus life itself.

Barbara told of her experience dealing with people who had never actually seen a black person or held conversation with one before, and to Barbara this was very unbelievable until she had actually experienced it.

The Youth Group's first stop was in Soledad where they presented their first speech. Following the speeches a woman approached them with a gift. To their surprise it was a watermelon. This is where the "Watermelon Syndrome" came to play.

The second stop was Forrestville, a town located 40 miles outside Los Angeles. By this time the Youth Group knew what to expect in the towns ahead. The group was able to rekindle some positive attitudes, and went on with the business at hand of making their presentation.

The next stop was Sonora, a mountainous town. Here the Youth Group was to give their presentation at a Youth Festival only to find out when they got there that they were being presented as "Five Gospel Singers." "What?" said Barbara. "We weren't even there for singing. We had no intention of singing!" Later it was found that this was just propaganda to get the people to come.

The final stop was at Reedley, California, where the Youth Group had to sit at an exhibition table and answer the questions the people might wish to ask pertaining to the colleges. It took a while for anyone to approach the table and when a woman did, all she had to say was "They need to get rid of Idi Amin."

However, the distressing point of the trip was not so much the negativism of the white people but also the lack of knowledge of the California members of the Commission on Black Colleges of the United Methodist Church. They had little information on the various Southeast Colleges and had never heard of certain black colleges.

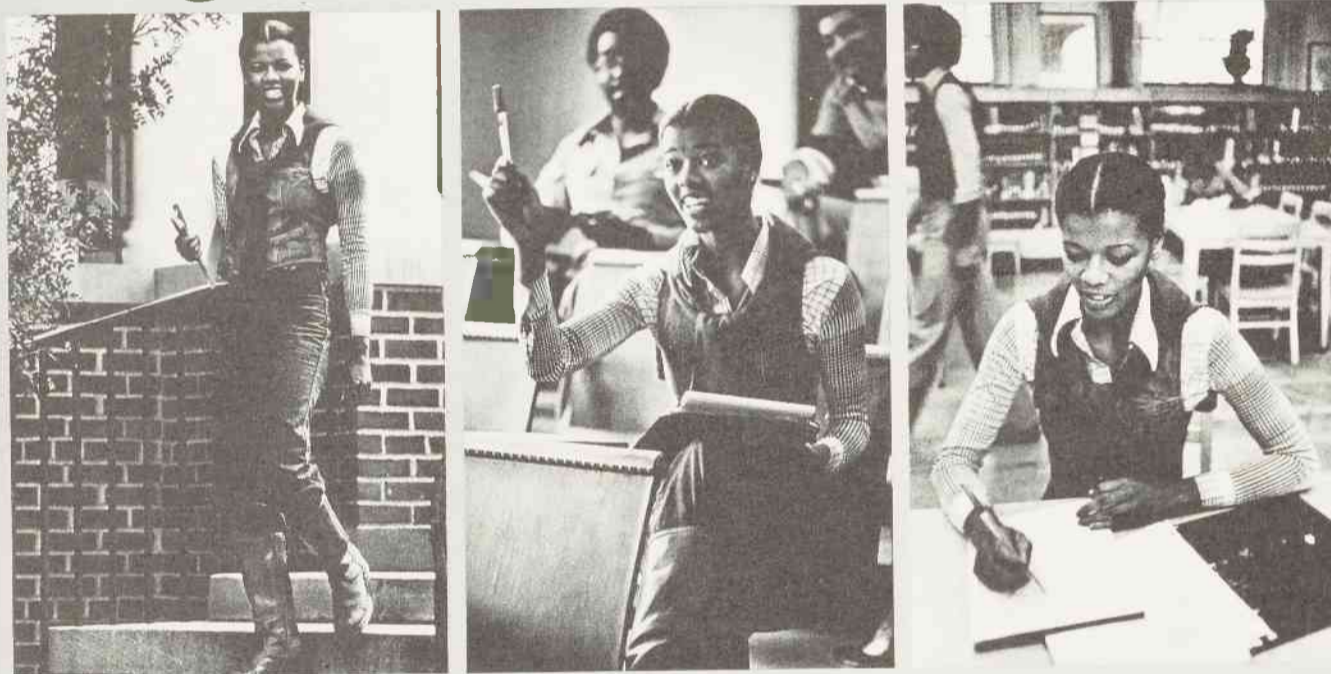
Barbara said, "I was very proud of myself because I had information about my school that they didn't even hold!"

There are a total of five black Methodist churches throughout Northern California. Throughout the entire month the group were not scheduled for any of these black churches, because the Commission had scheduled them for other churches. This was because the Commission "claimed they had picked the churches on a rotating basis," stated Barbara. "But actually representatives haven't ever been to those churches before," she said.

By the end of the tour everyone in the group had been presented a watermelon somewhere during their trip.

Near to the conclusion of her speech, Barbara stated, "We must be seen as people regardless of color; we have a long way to go!"

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