

Why Does MC Have So Many Under-Prepared, Students and What IS It Doing to Help Them?

by Ann Morris

In recent years, the declining quality of American schools has received much media attention. Studies showing that large numbers of American students cannot perform such basic tasks as locating Mexico on a map of the world have tarnished the image of a country that once set a standard of educational excellence for the rest of the world. In the wake of President Bush's trip to Japan, for instance, a high ranking Japanese official was quoted as saying that America is unable to compete in international trade because American workers are "lazy and illiterate." Furthermore, North Carolina and other Southern states have become the target of national derision in light of several studies which place students from this region at the bottom of the bottom of the SAT score ranks.

Apparently, some Methodist College professors are displeased with the quality of the education that incoming students have received in the public schools. In a recent *Small Talk* article on "tough" teachers, Methodist College English professor Dr. Michael Colonnese stated that he believed that "many entering freshmen are ill-prepared for the rigors of college study." Dr. Robert Perkins, a history professor, stated that some of his students don't have the requisite background to do well in the history courses he teaches. Dr. Bitterbaum, Dean of Ac-

ademic Affairs, in a recent interview with *Small Talk*, expressed agreement with this assessment. "We do bring in a number of under-prepared students," he said, "and as a small liberal arts college, we have an obligation to help them."

According to a proposal that Methodist College recently submitted to the U. S. Department of Education asking to be considered for a Title III grant, under-prepared students are those "who are inadequately prepared in fundamental skills and who have not developed the necessary learning tactics that would enable them to progress satisfactorily through the Methodist College program."

According to Admissions Director Alan Coheley, these students may not have taken advantage of the college-preparatory classes offered by their high schools or may have attended high schools which offered inadequate college preparation.

Primarily due to financial reasons, Methodist College has found it necessary to lower its admission standards to admit students who, in the past, would not have been considered admission-worthy; however, it is not alone in doing so. Studies show that the post-baby boom demographic slump has forced even more prestigious Colleges and Universities to accept students whose high school records would not have met admission criteria in the past.

It does seem that more under-

prepared students are being admitted to Methodist College every year. The average SAT score of the freshmen entering Methodist College was at an all-time high of 910 for the class entering in 1988. Scores have fallen each year since. The average score was 905 in 1989, 880 in 1990, and 847 in 1991. The college considers a student who has an SAT score of 750 or lower or a high school GPA of less than 2.5 to be academically under-prepared, and it admits approximately 80 freshmen per year who fit into one or both of these categories.

Methodist College accepts such under-prepared students for several reasons.

According to the Title III grant proposal, its "open admission policy" is "occasioned by the financial necessity to survive due to our tuition-driven environment and also by our mission to serve first-generation college students from low and moderate income families."

The financial situation at Methodist College is indeed much more precarious than that of most other small private liberal arts colleges in the state. According to the same proposal, our college's endowment is "undesirably small" both in absolute terms and in comparison with endowments of comparable colleges across the nation. The market value of the college's endowment fund is \$2,946,466, or \$3,436 per full-time equivalent student, compared with an average of \$26,294 per full-time equivalent

student for all four-year non-profit colleges. This study suggests that the average college endowment for colleges that are comparable in size to Methodist is 750% larger than the Methodist College endowment.

Because its endowment is so small, Methodist College, unlike many other colleges, must rely on tuition dollars to meet most of its financial requirements. In fact, 90% of the 1991 operating budget came from tuition and fees.

In addition, a lower-than-average retention rate costs the college money. This low retention rate is thought to be caused by the large number of under-prepared students who are accepted here at Methodist; students who lack basic skills are more likely to become overwhelmed by the work-load and drop out or fail out of school. Only 18% of the freshmen who entered Methodist College in 1987 graduated within four years, while the four-year graduation rate from all private colleges averages 53%. The college lost the estimated \$504,000 per year in tuition and housing and other fees that the students who dropped out or transferred would have spent had they remained at Methodist. Furthermore, the subsequent drop in enrollment makes it necessary that the college spend funds to recruit new students to fill those vacancies.

See STUDENTS Page 2

Where Does Our Money Go?

By Eric Kimbel

Any student who has ever attended a Presidential forum knows that Methodist College is essentially a tuition-driven institution. Students have often voiced complaints about how and where their tuition dollar is spent at these forums. *Small Talk* recently acquired a summary copy of the 1991-92 budget and the projected summary budget for the 1992-93 school year from President Hendricks in order to inform the student body about the college's expenditures.

The total anticipated revenue for the 1991-92 school year is \$10,302,341 while the total anticipated expenditure is \$10,298,463. The anticipated surplus for the 1991-92 school year is \$3,878.

The projected 1991-92 revenues are divided into three subsections: educational and general revenue, auxiliary enterprises, and capital. The educational and general revenue includes student fees, funding from the Methodist church, rents, alumni contributions, and other sources of income. The 1991-92 anticipated educational and general revenue totals \$8,169,841.

The auxiliary enterprises include the cafeteria, the residence halls, the student store, athletics, and others. These enterprises are expected to add \$2,130,500 to the 1991-92 revenue. Projected capital revenue is \$2,000.

The projected expenditures for the 1991-92 school year are divided into categories of educational and general, and

auxiliary enterprises.

The educational and general category is 82.7 percent or \$8,515,556 of the total revenue of the College for 1991-92 year. The education and general budget line is further divided into more specific entries. The cost of instructing students is by far the largest expenditure of the college. Instruction amounts to \$2,453,340 or 23.8 percent of the entire anticipated revenue for 1991-92 school year. Academic support accounts for 3.4 percent of the revenue of 1991-92, while student services spends 8.5 percent of the total revenue. Institutional support, which includes annual salary increases, new positions, and other expenses accounts for 18.6 percent of the revenue. The O & M plant will spend 9.1 percent of this year's

budget. Scholarships account for the second largest expenditure of the College during the 1991-92 school year. Scholarships will claim 19 percent, or \$1,960,800, of the 1991-92 budget.

The second category of expenditures is Auxiliary Enterprises. This accounts for 17.3 percent of the \$10,302,341 anticipated revenue of the 1991-92 school year. The cafeteria is the largest expenditure of the auxiliary enterprises. The Cafeteria will spend 5.8 percent of the anticipated revenue for 1991-92. The Student Union, Bookstore, Athletics and Residence Halls will spend 9.5 percent of the revenue, while Performing Arts will spend 1.8 percent of the 1991-92 revenue.