

COURSES IN PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE IN 113 COLLEGS AND UNIVERSITIES

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The purpose of this paper is to present some of the information secured in a survey of courses in preparation for marriage among 113 colleges and universities located in various parts of the United States. The survey was conducted during the academic year 1949-1950 at Saint Paul, Minnesota, under the auspices of the Hamline University Department of Sociology, R. R. Martin, Chairman.

The first objective of the study was to discover how much formal education students of the colleges and universities surveyed are receiving in preparation for marriage, with special reference to sex and its problems. This is an attempt to learn something of the content of the courses that exist, and to bring to the fore some of the specific topics that are emphasized. The second purpose was to gain some knowledge of factors associated with the courses that are offered. In terms of associated factors, some of the questions that were asked of the data were: How many schools offer courses in preparation for marriage? Who attends the courses? Do schools have marriage counselling facilities other than the courses? The third objective was to secure a comprehensive list of films, charts and written materials that are currently used by marriage educators.¹

The data was gathered by a questionnaire which was mailed to 276 schools selected from among the 790 defined as colleges and universities by the Directory of Higher Education for 1948-1949.² In general, the questionnaire was

1. Due to limitations in space the completed list of written material and visual aids is not presented here. However, some of the texts and films that are apparently most popular are included.

2. The Directory of Higher Education is published annually at Washington, D.C. by the United States Office of Education, a Federal Security Agency.

designed to elicit pertinent information about the school as a whole, the departments in which courses in preparation for marriage are offered, the methods of teaching used in conducting the courses, the topics covered (particularly those related to physical aspects of marriage), and the reception accorded the courses by parents and community, and students. The 276 schools that were selected constitute a stratified random sample of all schools as defined above. If all subject to random error, to state that the percentages listed in the results were representative of all schools so defined. Since the condition was not met the figures listed below must be considered as representative only of the 113 colleges and universities that responded. Nevertheless the picture that the results yield, though somewhat statistically biased, may still be of value to those interested in the field.

Ways in which the schools attempt to meet marriage and courtship problems among students. The results indicate that there are at least three basic ways in which the schools help students with their problems and questions. There are formal marriage counselling services, courses in preparation for marriage, and informal advising where it is requested. More precisely, 27 (or 23 percent) of the schools reported having a marriage counselling service on campus, and 10 (or 9 percent) of the schools indicated that an M.D. is available for counselling. Seventy-seven (or 68 percent) of the schools offer one or more marriage preparation courses. No figures are available to indicate the extent of the more informal counselling.

Some general information about the courses. The courses range in length from six to 88 class hours, with the modal course being between 40 and 50 class hours long. Generally speaking these courses are a new development. Among the schools studied only one had a course in preparation for marriage earlier than 1921, whereas early in 1950, only 29 years later, 77 of the schools had instituted one or more courses, and of the 77, 23 (or 30 percent)

of the schools established courses between 1946 and 1950. Since several schools offer two or more courses concurrently in different departments, there are 87 courses among the 77 schools. Of the 87, 61 (or 70 percent) are given in departments of sociology. Home economics departments offer six courses, another six are taught inter-departmentally, and five are found in religion departments. No other department or combination of departments offers more than two of the 87 courses.

In 31 of the 61 courses for which information is available, an instructor in the department in which the course is offered teaches the entire course. Since most of the courses are given in departments of sociology it may be inferred that a large number of the instructors are sociologists. Again by inference, others are probably home economists, ministers, and psychologists. Furthermore, in 29 of the courses it is reported that a medical doctor teaches one or more class hours. In ten of these the doctor teaches one class hour, while in one course at the other extreme, the doctor lectures a total of 15 class hours. In 14 of the courses, the services of other guest lecturers are utilized. These include ministers, a nurse, a biologist, budget experts, a psychiatrist, a judge, and several for whom occupational titles are not given.

Generally the course is offered for credit. This occurs in 91 percent of the courses, while 5 percent are not offered for credit. Information is not available on the remaining 4 percent.

No prerequisites are indicated for admission to 23 percent of the courses, while 40 percent require senior college standing, and 17 percent require previous work in sociology. The requirements for 20 percent include marriage or engagement, courses in psychology, or various combinations of the above. Seven percent of the courses are required of all students, the remainder being voluntary for most students, with a few schools requiring courses in marriage

preparation for majors in home economics or sociology. Three schools report that their marriage courses are officially open to the public. No credit is given to students enrolled in the latter courses.

When non-coeducational schools are eliminated, the percentages are adjusted to equalize the registration differentials between men and women, it becomes possible to discover whether those of one sex have a greater tendency to enter marriage courses than do persons of the other sex. In this instance the data shows that when these adjustments are made, the woman student is 2.4 times as likely to enter such a course as is the man.

It is of interest to note that men and women students are separated for instruction in only one of the coeducational schools offering courses in preparation for marriage. It might be expected that presentation of rather detailed information relating to subjects that could be embarrassing when offered to a mixed class would produce unfavorable reactions to the courses. Apparently this is not the case. An attempt was made to discover something of the way in which the courses are received by students, and parents and community. Sixty-nine of the schools answered the question designed to secure this information. Among these there are no reports of unfavorable reception on the part of either group. On the other hand, 20 percent report enthusiastic receptions by parents and community, and 70 percent report enthusiastic receptions by students. The remainder are either favorable or expressed no opinion.

A breakdown of coverage of topics with relation to physical aspects of marriage. The main emphasis of the study of course content was concentrated on the physical aspects of marriage. In order to facilitate filling out the questionnaire, a check list of possible topics was provided. The respondents giving affirmative answers to a general question in which they were requested to check whether or not the subject of sex is dealt with were asked to check

whether or not the subject of sex is dealt with were asked to check the particular topics included. Eighty-seven percent of the schools with courses in preparation for marriage introduce the topic of sex. The coverage of individual topics as derived from the check-list, is listed in order of their decreasing frequency. The frequencies are expressed as a percent of the 67 schools having courses involving sex information. (1) Extra- and pre-marital relations, 91 percent; (2) Contraception, 90 percent; (3) Sterility and sterilization, 88 percent; (4) Abortion, 79 percent; (5) Pregnancy and pre-natal care, 78 percent; (6) Male and female anatomy, 78 percent; (7) Psychology of sex adjustment, 67 percent; (8) Venereal disease, 67 percent; (9) Labor and delivery, 58 percent; (10) Prostitution, 49 percent; (11) Sexual aberrations, 45 percent.

Texts and visual aids. The returns indicate the use of a wide variety of documents and exhibits, including books, selected periodical literature, films, slides, and charts, as well as clinical specimens, such as the human fetus, placenta and others. While the limitations of this report do not permit a complete listing of the foregoing, the following texts and films appear most frequently in the study; (1) Landis and Landis, Building a Successful Marriage, 24; (2) Duvall, When you Marry, 22; (3) Becker and Hill, Family, Marriage and Parenthood, 21; (4) Dowman, Marriage for Moderns, 17; (5) Burgess and Locke, The Family, 17; (6) Fishbein and Burgess, Successful Marriage, 17; (7) Nimkoff, Marriage and the Family, 15; (8) Baber, Marriage and the Family, 13; (9) Groves, Marriage, 11; (10) Popenoe, Modern Marriage, 11.

A total of 47 films were reported, most occurring only once or twice. The following were mentioned three or more times: (1) Human Reproduction, McGraw-Hill, 8; (2) Human Growth, University of Oregon, 7; (3) Human Growth, McGraw-Hill, 3; (4) It Takes All Kinds, McGraw-Hill, 3.

The marriage course as offered among colleges reporting. More often than not the school has a course in preparation for marriage for which credit is given and which has been instituted since the beginning of World War II. The course is more popular with women than with men students. It is about 40 class hours in length and is taught in the department of sociology. Generally the instructor does not call in guest speakers, however, when he does a physician is usually his selection. Prerequisites to admission are set up, in most cases barring lower division students.

The course is offered coeducationally even though there seems to be a rather frank discussion of topics that in the past have been considered tabu. A number of topics related to marriage and its problems are covered. Regarding physical aspects of marriage, the topics most frequently presented are extra- and pre-marital relations, contraception, and sterility and sterilization. The one text most widely used is Building a Successful Marriage by Landis and Landis. Lectures are most frequently supplemented by collateral readings, yet at times one or more films are shown.

From the data it appears that courses in preparation for marriage are becoming an integral part of the college curriculum. The future of the "movement" is, of course, difficult to predict with certainty, however, if the present trend continues, within a few years the college or university not offering at least one course in the field will be a rarity.