

No Better Time to Plan

With unemployment at record levels and job competition at a frightening peak, less than 75 percent of the 10.4 million college graduates who will enter the labor force by 1985 are expected to be able to find positions that suit both their abilities and expectations.

That means, of course, that more than 25 percent (2.7 million) of these hopeful, career-minded college graduates will be disappointed in their job search.

Hard facts such as these point up the very critical need for every potential job-seeker, whether just starting out or contemplating a change, to devote time to thoughtful, informed career planning.

Rather than playing roulette with one's future

— choosing a career much like children play pin the tail on the donkey — one should make every effort to match one's interests with the fields presently offering the best career opportunities.

Among the fields holding the most promise for growth, for instance, is health care which needs registered nurses, respiratory therapists and dental hygienists. Also needed in the future will be legal assistants, electrical engineers, systems analysts, petroleum engineers and computer service technicians.

Among the jobs with little or no growth potential are secondary school teachers, political scientists, college and university faculty, librarians, school counselors and administrators, and sociologists.

Virginia Taylor, Publisher

BEST OF LUCK IN PURSUIT OF YOUR CAREER GOALS!

COMPETENCY IN EDUCATION NEEDED

Twenty percent of the 17-year-olds in the United States are functionally illiterate.

This means they are unable to perform those functions necessary in daily life, such as reading and understanding a job application or safety directions.

The finding came from tests given to a sample of 17-year-olds by the National

Assessment of Educational Progress, which periodically measures educational achievement of various age groups.

"Those are our students—the kids we think are doing fine," said Scott Thomas, associate director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. "Think of it—one out of five seniors. We're now spending \$1,800 a year for

their education and 20 percent can't do functional reading tests. The public is saying, 'What have these kids been doing in school for 12 years?'

"The public is obviously very uncomfortable about the high school diploma," said Thomas.

A movement is surging across the nation to make the diploma something more than an award to a student who has kept a seat warm for four years and practiced acceptable school behavior, added George Weber, associate director of the Council for Basic Education.

A high school diploma, Thomas said, should not signify that a student is prepared for college or a job. "The meaning," he emphasized, "should be that a student has sufficient skills to learn independently and function in society."

And so, now 18 states have started or are developing competency tests, and bills have been introduced in 15 other state legislatures, requiring some type of exam. Some individual school districts, apart from their states, are beginning their own programs.

Oregon has the broadest—and most complicated—competency requirements. Beginning next year, students must demonstrate proficiency in 10 areas to qualify for the high school diploma. Besides reading, writing and computation, they must meet locally adopted standards in such areas as citizenship, environment and street and highway safety. Some school districts have drawn up lists of more than 200 mandated competencies.

Educators are split between two styles of competency tests. Some favor reading and math proficiency at some grade level, usually eighth or ninth. Others want students able to demonstrate ability to deal with actual situations.

The difference is that a test to measure reading achievement may include, for example, an item to examine understanding of the French Revolution. A "survival

skills" test might have a question on a rental contract.

Los Angeles, for example, is moving along the "survival skills" approach. A 120-question test is divided into three sections: "Can You Follow Directions?" (Dealing with applications, claims forms, driver's licenses, and similar items); "What's In It?" (reading signs, classified ads, warranties); and "What Does It Mean?" (maps, bank statements and cash register tapes).

"The argument for survival skills is that it brings in more daily vocabulary and practical situations," Weber said. "The argument against is that if these things are too narrow, there will be a temptation to actually teach how to read a driver's license test."

Weber said schools will develop teaching units on every specific item, narrowing the score of the curriculum.

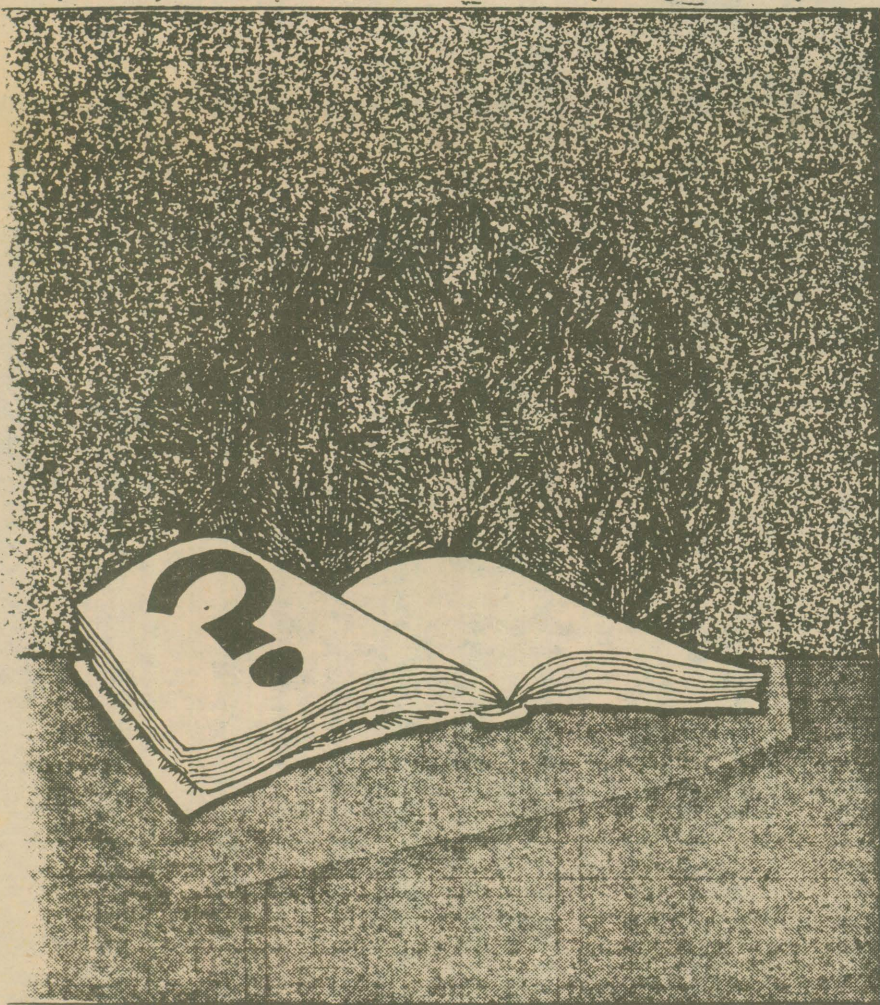
An even broader approach is taken by Denver, the pioneer in the competency test movement. It has had such a program since 1959, when the superintendent said the schools must be accountable to the community for their graduates.

Denver gives a four-part competency test to all ninth-graders in reading, grammar, spelling and mathematics. Students must demonstrate ninth-grade proficiency to get a high school diploma.

If a student does well in all four areas, no further test is given. If not, a student must take a remedial class in any area he or she fails, then is retested.

Initially, 15 percent of Denver students flunked. Now, only one and one-half percent fail to demonstrate a ninth-grade competency by their senior year in high school. They receive a certificate of attendance instead of the regular diploma.

The competency test movement, said Thomas, is the outgrowth of social promotion—the practice of promoting to the next grade a student even if he fails to do the academic work.



Black Cat's BEBOP FABLES



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