

Is Independent Study an Answer?

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Is independent study an extension method that will reach urban adults? Can independent study contribute to solving some problems of the urban crisis? The authors believe it can. They say independent study is appealing, has a liberal admission policy, and allows the adult to study at his own rate—and while he holds a full-time job. But to be effective, independent study must expand its curricula to include courses like criminology, theory and principles of community development, urban sociology, and Afro-American literature.

What opportunities do leaders in continuing education have to advance adult learning in the nation's complex urban centers? At first glance, you might say few, if any. However, on closer observation, you may claim that continuing education through independent study can and is presently meeting the needs of many adults who are exposed to urban living demands.¹

A complex mixture of urban activities does in fact exist. These conditions, however, shouldn't exclude the possibilities of independent study being valuable to a vast number of adult residents.²

The Urban Crisis

Viewing the learning needs from a different perspective, you

might ask, "What is the urban crisis in the eyes of independent study?" Urban crisis is more than a ghetto. It's more than an improperly furnished and overcrowded community school. It encompasses a wide variance in economic levels, ethnic groups, and value systems. Urban crisis is definitely something more than crime in the streets, even though crime may well be a regular symptom of distress and turmoil. These points can be considered normal ingredients the urban dweller must learn to live and cope with.³

More adult leaders should realize that the urban problem is more than blighted ghettos with ill-constructed housing, cramped educational facilities, and a mounting rate of crime.⁴ The urban crisis involves all people in metropolitan areas, in-

cluding the housewife who's dissatisfied with her surroundings, the serviceman who returns from Vietnam to find he can't get a job, the teacher who doesn't remain up to date with current events or new teaching methods, or any adult who harbors petty hatreds toward people with a different color of skin. Thus, the pool of potential learners in urban areas is indeed quite large!

Independent Study

It's truly a complex mixture of people and ideas that constitutes the urban crisis. It's people of all ages independent study is striving to serve.

William G. Shannon, executive director of the American Association of Junior Colleges, recognizes these facts as he warns:

There is an urgency, then, that characterizes our present social and educational situations dictating a need for a close look at what we're doing and calling for prompt, responsible action.⁵

Now is the time for all forms of education, including independent study, to perceive the entirety of the problem—the whole picture.

Independent study can offer urban adults not just 8 or 12 years of schooling, but continuing, life-long education. It should provide education to all people, whether they're students, parents, factory workers, or housewives. As Shannon recently stated:

. . . every person . . . should have a chance to develop his talents

through education and society should help provide this opportunity for its survival.⁶

Modern independent study with all the innovative aids to learning has far greater appeal than the earlier, sterile, drab approach of one textbook frequently found in outmoded correspondence courses.

Advantages of Independent Study

Independent study, compared to earlier traditional correspondence study, provides several advantages in its quest to advance adult learning opportunities to those caught in the urban crisis.

In general, independent study is an appealing form of adult education.⁷ Recent research by the State University of Iowa concerning independent study showed that the largest number of enrollees "are secured from the age group 20 to 35."⁸

The independent study method has a far more liberal admissions policy than many formal courses. For example, an individual, who wants to complete his high school education, can prepare through independent study for a certificate, diploma, or achievement of equivalency, now essential for many adults to find employment or advance to a better position.

Two more advantages of independent study which go hand-in-hand are the ability to study at one's own rate and the opportunity to learn while working. An individual doesn't have to leave home or work to continue his education.

When an adult has completed an independent study course or is in the process of completing the subject matter, he develops a sense of self-sufficiency and pride. He knows he can do the work and has the ability to compete with others in the game of life. Self-sufficiency through educational skills helps the adult cope with his massive urban demands.

Projections for Independent Study

Broadly based independent study programs should be implemented to help bring added educational opportunities to residents of urban areas.

Alert extension educators can render a valuable service by operationalizing many of the courses that are relevant to specific clientele groups in the ghetto community. For example, independent study departments can expand their curricula to include criminology, theory and principles of community development, ethnic minorities in the United States, racial and cultural relations, urban sociology, and Afro-American literature.⁹ These courses can be expanded to a full-credit basis to better inform all adults of the increasing urban problems and their causes and effects. The curricula should be continually updated and expanded to meet today's demands.

On a noncredit basis, a review course that may lead to a certification of high school equivalence can be offered to all American adults. In addition, other noncredit courses

can be explored and offered on a trial basis. Such a curriculum will help develop the adult's knowledge and skills in areas such as electronics, radio, mechanics, photography, and computers. Other practical noncredit offerings include child rearing, delinquency prevention, self-discovery, and youth leadership.

University independent study departments should communicate closely with state employment agencies, welfare agencies, prisons, homes for unwed mothers, and vocational rehabilitation centers.¹⁰ These contacts will often help bring educational programs to the socially, economically, and educationally disadvantaged.

Independent study representatives often travel through metropolitan areas to meet inner-city and suburban school counselors, county youth agents, and teachers of adults. These efforts bring about a closer working relationship between urban educators and independent study departments and help to meet the needs of adult learners through relevant educational programs.

One measure of effectiveness for independent study in urban areas is revealed by the University of Missouri-Columbia's enrollment from the St. Louis and Kansas City urban areas. Over 33 percent of all independent study enrollments during 1968-69 came from these 2 population centers. During this time, the Independent Study Department enrolled more than 12,000 people.

The potential for expanding independent study into the urban

community is evidenced in a more recent monthly report from the University of Missouri-Columbia campus. Table 1 illustrates this trend.

Table 1. New independent study enrollment for May, 1970, for the University of Missouri-Columbia campus.*

Source of enrollment	Number of enrollees
Six urban Missouri counties	158
Balance of other 114 Missouri counties	143
Out of state	152
Total for month	453

* "New Independent Study Enrollment for May," *University of Missouri Extension Newsletter*, July 10, 1970.

Note that 6 urban counties in Missouri provided more than 50 percent of the new independent study enrollment during the month of May. At the same time, 108 counties provided less than 47 percent of the in-state enrollment.

In summary, more than half of the new enrollments are in fact coming from the urban centers. In actual practice, the inner-city dweller has a great deal to gain by individual study when items of reward like a high school diploma are available through independent study.

We believe modern independent study can be used as an effective method of attacking the urban crisis. Its teaching techniques can be numerous and varied, thereby increasing the chances of appealing to more adult learners. The 70s will no

doubt bring an even greater need for the urban dweller to become more involved in the process of individual development and lifelong learning. Hopefully, Extension, through independent study methods, will share equitably in this all-important challenge to American education.

Footnotes

1. Donald A. Deppe, "The Adult Educator: Marginal Man and Boundary Definer," *Adult Leadership*, XVIII (October, 1969), 119.
2. Abbie Ziffern, "The Urban Agent Program of the Urban Studies Center," *Adult Leadership*, XVIII (October, 1969), 107.
3. Arthur E. Durfee, "Helping Others Improve Performance," *Journal of Extension*, VIII (Summer, 1970), 19.

4. David W. Minar and Scott Greer, *The Concept of Community* (Chicago, Illinois: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), p. 47.
5. William G. Shannon, speech given at the American Association of Junior Colleges International Assembly, Honolulu, Hawaii, February 26-March 5, 1970.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Gerald J. Pine and Peter J. Horne, "Principles and Conditions for Learning in Adult Education," *Adult Leadership*, XVIII (October, 1969), 109.
8. "Aspects of Independent Study" (Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa, Division of Extension and University Services, 1970), p. 3.
9. Ziffern, "Urban Agent Program," p. 107.
10. *Ibid.*

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I certify that the statements made above are correct and complete.

(Signed) Jerold W. Apps, October 6, 1970, *Editor*