

# A YEARNING FOR LEARNING— WHILE EARNING!

*a study of industrial evening education  
in Northern Illinois\**

Do you want to make a good investment? Who of us does not want to make the best possible investment of time and money?

In no other area of industrial education can a company develop so many employees at a relatively low cost as through a voluntary evening education program. The benefits to the company, to the employee, to the community and the nation make an effective evening education program one of the most profitable investments available to a company.

Each year thousands of adults - male and female - young and old - employed and unemployed - skilled and unskilled - return to the classroom for courses they believe will benefit them. This trend in adult self-improvement has been growing rapidly in recent years and all indications point to an even larger number of adults filling the classrooms in the future. Current estimates of the number now participating in some form of adult education are in the neighborhood of 25 million Americans.<sup>1</sup>

## NEED FOR THE STUDY

Many industries have recognized this trend and have seen this as an opportunity to develop their employees. Adult learning is seen by companies as a three-way cooperative effort on the part of industry, education, and the individual employee. The industrial adult evening program is an opportunity for industry to communicate what skills and knowledges are needed by the employee. In addition to course direction, industry often makes available the talents, facilities, and equipment of the company. Educational institutions contribute the teaching skills and the administrative know-how. The employee, the key to the program, makes a substantial contribution by investing many hours of his otherwise leisure time to classroom study plus many more hours in homework.

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This report is an effort to provide some insight into the types of evening educational programs being offered by firms in the greater Chicago area. The authors recognize the limited nature of the study and hope that this will inspire other industrial educators to do further work on this topic.

## THE PROCEDURE

A questionnaire was sent to a small group, 78 members of the Illinois Training Directors Association (ASTD). Nearly all these members have offices in northern Illinois. No attempt was made to cover all industries; however, an effort was made to get a fairly representative cross section of the Association membership. Within two weeks after mailing, replies had been received from more than one-third of the recipients. A total of 43 responses were tabulated. Of this group, 23 (54%) do not have an evening program, and 20 (46%) do have an evening program.

The questionnaire consisted of 38 questions most of which could be answered by checking the appropriate answer or by a short numerical answer. The first four questions were general and were answered by all respondents. The remaining questions were on evening programs and, if the responding company did not have such a program, they were instructed not to answer.

## THE TOTAL SURVEY RESPONDENTS

This first section of data applied to the entire group of 43 respondents and will be concerned with only the first four questions of the survey.

**Company employee size.** The first question attempted to determine the "employee size" of responding companies. Of the total companies, 26% of the respondents have under 2,000 employees. Of the companies without an evening educational program, 39% are under 2,000 employees. This is in sharp contrast to the companies with an evening educational program, where only 10% are under 2,000 employees.

Many of the large companies without an evening educational program do not have sufficient employees in any one location or do not work regular shifts. This makes evening programs difficult if not impossible.

**In-plant classes.** The same trend in employee education is in evidence in the answers to formal in-plant classes. While only 70% of the companies without an evening program have formal in-plant classes on company time, the figure jumps to 85% for companies with an evening program.

**Educational assistance.** An exception to this division occurred in educational assistance. About 95% of both groups have some form of educational assistance (tuition refund) program. This figure compares favorably with a study conducted by Mr. Frederick H. Black, Jr. which stated approximately 90% of some 200 companies surveyed had a formalized statement of policy and an administrative directive pertaining to their educational assistance program.<sup>2</sup>

## **EVENING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM RESPONDENTS**

Twenty companies responding had an evening educational program. The remainder of this report will be on this group of 20 companies.

**Eligible employees.** Not all of the employees are eligible to enroll in the evening educational programs. In 20% of the companies, less than 2,000 employees are eligible for enrollment. However, only 10% of the companies had less than 2,000 employees. By far the greatest single group is 2,000 to 3,000 employees eligible to enroll as reported by 35% of the companies.

**Purpose of program.** When asked if the evening program was designed to develop employees for a job of a higher skill level or to improve his effectiveness on his present job, every respondent indicated that *both* of these goals were present.

**Selection of registrants.** The evening program in 50% of the companies is open to all employees. However, 25%

make the program available on a selective basis and 15% make the program available only if job related. Another 20% of the companies have other means of selecting employees to participate in the evening educational program.

**Company encouragement.** Almost three-quarters of the companies (70%) actively encourage their employees to participate in the evening educational program. Approximately 50% require the supervisor's signature for enrollment in a class.

**Registration priority.** No priority in registration was given to any group or groups by 40% of responding companies. However, 25% gave priority when the class was job-related. Another 25% gave priority on a first-come first-served basis. If we combine the first-come first-served basis with the number not receiving any priority, 65% of the companies do not give priority to any specific group or groups.

When asked if any group or groups were excluded from the evening program, 60% responded in the negative. However, 15% declined to answer this question.

**Counseling service.** A counseling service is provided by 75% of the responding companies. This service is to help the employee plan his further education. Here is an area in which the training director can be of major service to the employee.

**Minimum and maximum enrollment.** A minimum class enrollment of 5 to 15 students is required by most of the responding companies. However, 25% of the companies have no minimum enrollment for the evening educational classes. Approximately 50% of the companies feel that 20 to 25 students is a reasonable maximum enrollment. Only 15% have no maximum enrollment.

**Frequency of class offerings.** Most of the companies (65%) offer evening programs twice a year. An additional 35% offer classes as needed.

**Time of classes.** Over half of the companies start their evening classes be-

tween 4:00 and 5:00 P.M., probably right after work. Another 35% offer the classes between 6:00 and 7:30 in the evening. Still another 10% of the companies failed to answer this question.

**Location of classes.** Approximately 40% of the companies have the majority of the courses taught in-plant. The remaining 60% of the companies have both in-plant classes and classes held in other locations. When asked where out-of-plant courses were being conducted, 70% indicated the use of high schools, junior colleges and colleges.

**Audio-visual aids.** All the companies make available chalk boards and motion picture projectors for their evening program classes...and, 90% use slide projectors. Over half the companies use other visual aids in their evening program. Only video tape is not presently being used by most of the companies.

**Teachers.** The company supplies over half the teachers in most programs. Only 5% of the classes are completely taught by company instructors.

**Tuition.** Tuition is not paid by only 5% of the companies. The majority, 60%, pay tuition after the course is completed while 30% prepay or do not charge tuition.

**Books.** Books for the evening courses are purchased by the employees in 45% of the companies. Another 50% of the companies have some means by which the employees do not pay for the textbooks used in the company evening program.

**Desired program participants.** In every case, the company evening educational program is open to employees of the company only. The general public and dependents of employees are not enrolled in the company evening programs.

**Course certification.** Over half of the courses offered by the company evening programs lead to a degree or a certificate.

**Course content.** Of courses being conducted in the company evening educational programs, technical subjects,

first-line management, supervision courses and basic skills are the three most popular areas. Only 15% offer courses for the top management.

**Program bulletin.** Most of the companies (60%) do not print an evening program bulletin.

**Enrollment and graduates.** The respondents indicated that 70% of the companies enrolled between 26 and 500 students in evening courses in 1967. Graduates in the program fell to the point where only 55% of the companies had graduates in the 26 - 500 student range. On this question, 25% did not indicate the number of graduates in their program. A recent study on dropouts from adult classes from industrial training by Wilburn C. Ferguson indicates an overall dropout rate of 24.3% as being typical for one company's program.<sup>3</sup>

**Program growth.** Employees participation in the evening educational program was increasing in at least 45% of the responding companies. Fifty per cent did not answer this question. Only 5% indicated that employees' participation was decreasing. While 50% of the companies also indicated an increase in the number of courses being offered, no companies reported a decrease in course offerings. Again, 50% did not answer this question.

**Identification for promotion.** A program to identify employees who have prepared themselves for a higher level job is in effect in 80% of the companies. A program to identify employees who have prepared themselves for a job in a different area in the company is in effect in only 60% of the companies.

**Policy on out-of-plant classes.** Courses offered at the local schools are included in the evening programs of 60% of the companies. Also, 40% of this group follow the same policy concerning tuition and books as for classes held in-plant. Approximately half of the companies assist the local schools in recruiting teachers for evening programs.

**Federal-state assistance.** About three-quarters of the companies do not receive any state or federal assistance in their evening educational program. Also, none of the companies offer courses to the general public that will help them meet minimum requirements for employment.

**Problems.** The two major problems expressed by the companies are not enough courses and the difficulty in finding teachers. None of the companies consider poor instructors, high cost, poor top company management support or long courses to be a problem.

**Company industry.** Most of the companies offering evening programs are engaged in manufacturing, mining, or construction.

#### SUMMARY

It must be remembered that this study was limited to a small number of companies (78) in one geographic area (Northern Illinois).

In summary the results of this study indicated:

1. Around 2,000 employees seems to be the point at which most companies start an evening educational program.
2. In-plant training seems to parallel the growth of the evening program.
3. Nearly all companies have an educational assistance program.
4. Most companies place some restriction on who may participate in the evening program. The types of restrictions seem to vary between companies.
5. A minimum class size of 5 to 15 students and a maximum class size of 20 to 25 is used by most companies.
6. Most evening programs are conducted twice a year, and over half are started right after work.
7. Classes are held mostly out of plant at local high schools and colleges.
8. Good use is made of visual aids.
9. When we consider that video tape is rather a recent development in education perhaps the 30% of the companies using this technique is a substantial number.
10. Teachers come from both in and out of company sources.
11. Most companies pay tuition for the employee and about half provide books.
12. Companies are interested in providing educational opportunities to employees only.
13. Most of the courses lead to a degree or certificate.
14. Most of the courses are in technical subjects, first-line supervision courses and courses in basic communications and mathematical skills.
15. The majority of the companies do not print an evening program bulletin.
16. Enrollment and the number of course offerings are on the increase.
17. The employees are interested in both upgrading skills for their present job and preparing for a job in a higher skill level.
18. Most companies have a program to identify employees who are preparing themselves for promotion.
19. A majority of the companies include courses offered at local schools as part of the evening program and many follow the same policy for tuition and books as they do for in-plant courses.
20. About half the companies cooperate in finding teachers for evening programs in local schools.
21. State and Federal assistance is not received in most evening programs.
22. Finding teachers and not enough courses are the two largest problems encountered.
23. Most companies find the evening program instruction good, the cost low, support by top management and employees interested in comprehensive courses.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Most companies recognize the need to develop their personnel and see the evening educational program as an opportunity to provide their employees with the technical knowledge and skills needed for advancement. These companies are entering a phase in industry-education cooperation that was unknown in the past. The benefits to both parties are numerous. However, it will be the employee that will determine the success of this partnership. He is investing in the program in a very personal way—he gives his personal time, his energy and his capacity to learn.

As every adult educator knows, the most severe critic of a voluntary adult education program is the student. If he is not benefiting from the program, he will not participate. However, if he is *sure he is benefiting* from the program, it is nearly impossible to drive him out of the program.

It is therefore recommended that the trend of providing an open evening educational program be continued and expanded. The natural control of the student's voluntary participation will

force the program to be both meaningful and beneficial—or the program will die for lack of students.

Some large companies can afford to go it alone. But most small companies must work out a cooperative plan for providing the kind of education and training needed. An example of this kind of cooperation is provided in the Supervisory Development Program worked out with eighteen industries by one of the authors in the greater De Kalb, Illinois, region in cooperation with Northern Illinois University. A two-year sequence leading to a certificate is provided by the University in cooperation with an advisory committee which helps recruit the adult students and assists in developing curriculum. One hundred and eighty-five students were enrolled this past year, and 33 have now received their certificates. The sequence includes Supervision, Communications, Basic Business Economics, and Teaching and Learning on the Job.<sup>4</sup> The Elgin, Illinois community is enrolling 75 supervisors for the fall 1968 program, cosponsored by the local Association of Commerce. Even as this survey is completed other companies are entering the educational

field. Changes are being made in existing programs. Undoubtedly, the situation a year from today will be vastly different as more companies add educational opportunities for their employees. It is hoped, therefore, that this survey will lead to other efforts to explore and improve on industry's evening educational programs.

As Alice in Wonderland said to the Queen, "It takes all the running we can do to stay in the same place!"

## REFERENCES

1. Johnstone, John W. C. "Volunteers for Learning," Report No. 89, National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago, Feb. 1963.
2. Black, Frederick H., Dr. "Educational Assistance Programs: A Survey of Company Practices," *Training and Development Journal*, Dec. 1967, pp. 42-46.
3. Ferguson, Willburn C. "Drop-outs from Adult Classes in Industrial Training: A Recent Study at Motorola Aerospace Center," *Training and Development Journal*, Feb. 1968, pp. 44-56.
4. A booklet describing the program can be obtained by writing to the Division of Adult Education, College of Continuing Education, Northern Illinois University, De Kalb, Illinois.

## GOVERNMENT SUPPORTED COAL INDUSTRY TRAINING

The U.S. Office of Education is supporting programs to train workers for the bituminous coal industry, U.S. Education Commissioner Harold Howe II has announced.

Training is being provided at the request of the National Coal Association, the Bituminous Coal Operators Association, and the United Mine Workers Union. These organizations estimate that at least 49,000 new, trained employees will be needed in the industry during the next five years.

The Office of Education's Division of Vocational and Technical Education and Division of Manpower Development and Training are working with the coal groups on plans for programs to prepare young people and adults for employ-

ment in the mechanized soft coal industry. A number of programs already are under way to provide training in mine safety, operation of earth moving equipment, and mine machinery maintenance and repair.

The average age of miners is 45 years, and under the provisions of the union welfare and retirement program it is possible for them to retire at age 55 after twenty years of service.

An industry spokesman has estimated that 30,000 new mining personnel will be needed during the next five years to replace losses from normal attrition, while opening of some 100 new mines now being planned will create an additional 19,000 jobs.