

Hill: Pragmatist in abstract world of academia

By MICHAEL MATUSZEWSKI

Usually, you can separate the idea from the man.

But Joseph E. Hill, president of Oakland Community College, defies that rule of thumb.

The abstract, the intangible—these are the lifeblood of academia. Yet Hill relishes discussing educational theory and its application to the real life world of OCC with its four campuses.

What it boils down to is personalized instruction.

Hill's language could be confusing to the man on the street. He speaks matter-of-factly of "human feedback circuitry," "mission statements," "supportive variables" and "impact criteria." But his office is in the George A. Bee Administrative Center in Bloomfield Hills, not NASA Mission Control in Houston.

"I'm just a damned old ham. So you'll have to put with me," he said with a chuckle. With that, Hill was off on another jaunt through a forest of

perplexing terms and esoteric concepts, made even more complex by explanations phrased in abstractions.

HILL CAME TO OCC as president in 1968 after several years as dean of Wayne State University's graduate program. He asked the school's board of trustees for 10 days to explain and begin implementing his "conceptual framework." He has been there ever since and has a contract running through 1982.

Before Hill arrived, OCC was a strange animal in the world of higher education. Its firmly educational structure rested on an open-campus concept. "You came and went as you pleased; there were no class sessions," said Hill.

Instructors were seen as educational consultants. Getting an education hinged on the student's initiative. Individual effort and a battery of audiovisual aids were stressed. Such a system had worked well with several top-flight graduate courses at Purdue University in the mid-1960s.

OCC was a kind of trendsetter in trying that concept on a campus-wide basis. Hill said.

It was less than a resounding success. Hill, however, credited the board of trustees with "having the guts" to try something different.

That changed following Hill's arrival. OCC opted for more formal structure, although it still tried to provide a number of options for learning.

"Oakland Community College accepts the premise that no two students seek meaning in the same manner. We believe that 90 per cent of the students with normal ability can learn 90 per cent of the material 90 per cent of the time if teaching methods and media are adjusted to the student's educational cognitive style," Hill said.

He said the college maps this "cognitive style" of each student "to provide a picture of the various ways in which the individual searches for meaning."

"It identifies cognitive strengths and weaknesses," he added. "This in-

formation can be used to build a personalized program of instruction."

IN ITS OWN WAY, the OCC of 1977 is just as much a trendsetter as its predecessor a decade ago.

The confusing terms Hill uses in describing OCC's "conceptual framework" have been turned into concrete programs and tangible results. Since 1968, for example, the number of OCC administrators has declined from 84 to 27. The introduction of a systems approach, an analysis of the relationships of various educational factors and a million-dollar IBM computer have helped to make that reduction possible.

The community college's reliance on systems analysis also has helped make available a number of options designed to make learning easier.

"Many people don't really know what I'm about," said Hill. He maintained, however, that in an increasingly technological society, education must become more "conceptualized."

"Community colleges can prove to be the leadership. We can become the prototype of the educational conceptual framework," he said.

While OCC's open campus experiment did not succeed, Hill defended its intentions. "If some of those students had pursued the straight style of education, they probably would have failed," he said.

"It's our goal to match different styles with different students."

He said that the system, which makes this form of education go, was not forced on any of the school's teachers.

One of his goals for the future, Hill added, is to expand the use of systems analysis in education. The OCC Conference and Institutes Con-

figuration has given the educational theory international audience. Models of the system employed by OCC have been set up by schools as far away as Israel and India, Hill said.

He added that they now were trying to interest the Detroit public schools in establishing an experimental program at the lower educational levels.

"I firmly believe that if our work has explicit knowledge and information that is not available in other forms, it's our obligation to share it."

Just as OCC is attempting to force a trail in personalized, individual education, Hill has set the school on a path that is rigidly individualistic in its own right.

Hill stressed, "Each one of us makes a difference. We must never forget that; the day we do is the day they take over." The OCC president has applied that premise to the institution as a whole.

The multi-campus community college is not affiliated with the Michigan Community College Association (MCCA) or any of the state's other community college interest organizations. "No one can speak for OCC but OCC," he said.

"One way to be heard is to stay on the outside and with your own opinion. That way, they will have to listen to your opinion."

And this nonaffiliation attitude, Hill said, allows OCC a "very good" working relationship with them. "We provide all the materials and information they request just as if we were a member, but we won't let them speak for us."



JOSEPH E. HILL
Personalized education

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Dear Doctor:

How frequently should a dog be dewormed?

J.B., Birmingham

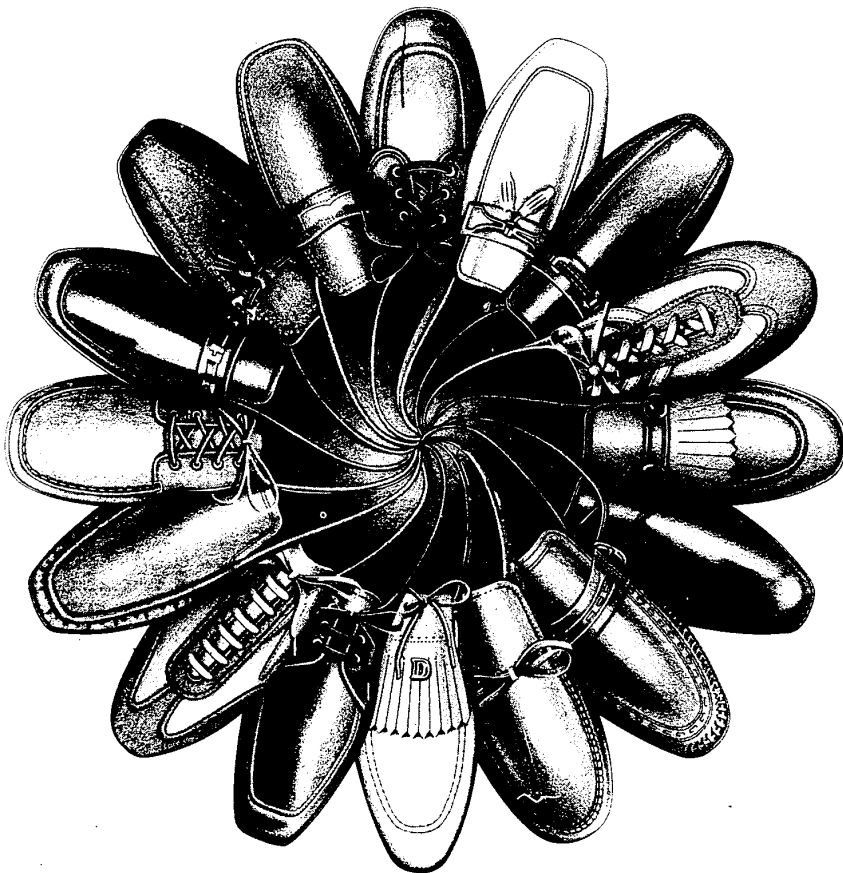
Dear J.B.:

Only after professional diagnosis of gastro-intestinal parasites. A microscopic examination of the stool to detect intestinal parasites should be rou-

tinely performed at least yearly on adult dogs that live fairly isolated from other animals. Puppies should be checked for worms at the time of weaning and thereafter depending on their health and physical condition. If any gastro-intestinal problems occur (such as nausea or diarrhea) further stool checks are warranted.

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