

Professor battles school files

They are called "cumulative files," and they grow in schools as the child grows, gathering bits of information from teachers, counselors and administrative personnel.

Ostensibly, they contain academic data: "superior math skills" or "needs remedial reading." They are intended to aid future teachers in program planning, according to Prof. Charles Moody.

"But national studies have uncovered many abuses of record keeping. Often the data refers to the student's behavior or home life and is impressionistic rather than factual," he said.

"Moreover, the records are often accessible to potential employers, social workers and others without legitimate educational interests. The only people to whom they are 'confidential' is the subject and his parents."

THE MISUSE of student records was discussed during a recent series of student rights conferences, sponsored by Moody's Program for Educational Opportunity (PEO). The topics also included sex bias in high school athletics, due process in school discipline and freedom of the press and speech in the public schools.

The free conferences drew several hundred teachers, administrators, board members and community residents.

"The large majority admitted they are unclear about the implication of the new laws and court rulings on record keeping and other student rights," according to Charles Vergon, assistant project director of PEO. "Unanimously, they did not feel that students and parents understood the new developments."

For example, a new federal law, the 1974 Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, restricts the content of cumulative files and outlines the rights of a student or his parents to inspect, copy or challenge these records.

Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination in high school athletics. Several recent court cases outline the due process rights of students who are being suspended or expelled.

TO HELP educators and the public understand the recent changes, PEO and the Saginaw Student Rights Center have jointly published a legal-educational bibliography on "Student Rights and Responsibilities."

It was conceived and assembled by Vergon and Junious Williams, director of the Student Rights Center until its federal funding expired. Williams is now a consultant for PEO.

"One of the most difficult problems

in assuring the protection of student rights is that of informing the educational community that students do have rights," Williams said. "We hope the bibliography will help educators and attorneys make knowledgeable decisions in the area of student rights and responsibilities."

Twenty-two major categories in the bibliography include corporal punishment, police in schools, searches in schools, pregnant students, dress and grooming, student demonstrations, freedom of speech and student records. Within the 150 subtopics, the researchers have cited relevant court cases, magazine articles, monographs and dissertations.

Vergon and Williams have also developed a "Rights and Responsibilities Workshop" to help teachers and students deal with such issues as physical abuse, truancy, dope possession, "underground" newspapers, dress codes and school newspaper censorship. This and other workshops are conducted by PEO staff through the

state at no charge to the school or school district.

THE PEO HAS also compiled a question and answer sheet on the policies outlined in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. It covers the questions most often raised by parents concerned with school record keeping.

For example: "How do I get to see my child's cumulative file?" "How do I decipher the test scores?" "What recourse do we have if the information is inaccurate?"

This summer, PEO is completing reports on the conference proceedings and developing training programs in bilingual education and sex discrimination.

The program is financed under a contract with the U.S. Office of Education to provide technical assistance to school districts in the process of desegregation. Since it began in 1970, this has included staff in-service training

programs, consultation, resource materials and research services.

"One of the most prevalent problems we encounter is conflict concerning student rights and responsibilities in the high schools," the U of M professor said. "In the newly desegregated school, the conflict is reflected in the gross disparity in the proportion of minority students suspended and expelled from school, compared with their white counterparts."

"A lot of desegregation effort is devoted solely to the mixing of bodies, getting the kids on the buses and distributing them to the schools," he explained.

"There is too little attention to the kinds of structural changes that are needed to eliminate discrimination altogether."

"Our aim is to change behaviors and create the kind of climate in which we can move from desegregation to integration and equal educational opportunity for all."

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Zuckerman honored

Paul Zuckerman, president of the national United Jewish Appeal and chairman of the World Fund-Raising Committee of the Jewish Agency for Israel, has been given an honorary doctorate in philosophy by Bar-Ilan University in Israel.

The degree, awarded to the Franklin philanthropist by the 20-year-old university, was presented for Zuckerman's efforts to aid millions of distressed Jews around the world.

This is the second such degree awarded to Zuckerman this year. In May, Siena Heights College, a Catholic liberal arts school in Adrian, honored the philanthropist with an honorary doctorate of humane letters because "He has contributed positively to the welfare of millions of people of all faiths through his extraordinary and consistent dedication to humanitarian causes."

Zuckerman is chairman of the board of Velvet-O'Donnell Corp., a manufacturing and importing firm concentrating on food and beverage products. He is a co-founder of the Jesuit Maryglade College, on the board of United Foundation and a member of the national board of the Council of Catholics, Jews and Protestants.

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