Profile: Howard London

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HOWARD LONDON

In many respects these are exciting times at Bridgewater State. Although much of the attention has been on issues relating to funding and tuition, Bridgewater has been quietly but methodically moving through a critical process of self-study which will lead to a refocused and revitalized campus community.

Heading the self study program at Bridgewater is Sociology professor Howard London. Howard leads a large faculty, staff and student committee system charged with delivering reports on twelve facets of college life from academic programs to finance to publications. The self study process, which is required for accreditation by the New England Association for Secondary Schools and Colleges (NEASC,) is currently moving toward a completion date of Fall, 1992 when a team of experts from NEASC will travel to Bridgewater to evaluate the college's programs using the work of the self study team.

Howard London comes well prepared for his chairmanship of Bridgewater's self study process. With a Ph.D. in Sociology and an additional Masters in Social Work from Boston College, Howard has developed a research interest in the sociology of education, particularly with respect to the relationship between family background and the educational environment of the modern American student. Howard is currently involved in three research projects connected to his interest in the sociology of education.

Howard has written the lead article in a forthcoming book, of which he is the co-author, on how first generation college students negotiate the various cultural and family obstacles to success in higher education. Howard is especially interested in exploring the impact of social class constraints and family dynamics on academic performance. For example, the first in a family to attend college both fulfills hopes for upward mobility, but also threatens family cohesiveness by creating a social class gulf due to new standards of achievement.

Howard's work with first generation college students has also become part of an ongoing study that is based on long oral interviews. Howard has interviewed scores of college students to develop what he hopes will be a comprehensive analysis of the connections between the home setting and the choices and performance of young people in college. Howard feels there is a relationship between family environment and such factors as selection of academic programs, work patterns, length of time in college, grades and problems such as drug and alcohol use.

Howard is also a major participant in a study sponsored by the Exxon Education Fund to examine general education requirements at New England colleges and universities, focusing on those institutions with modest financial resources. Working with a team of educators based at UMass Boston, Howard is interviewing faculty and administrators at these schools to determine how to best design or redesign general education programs in order to meet the ever changing needs of today's undergraduate. Howard believes that general education programs tell a great deal about a college and how it is meeting the challenges of educating students in the 1990s.

Amidst all the work demanded by the college self study and his considerable research efforts Howard is recognized as one of Bridgewater's finest classroom teachers. His courses in the sociology of education and the sociology of organizations are high on students "must take" list. Like many Bridgewater faculty members, Howard is accessible to the students and is always interested in talking to students about how their life outside the classroom affects their life in the classroom.

Outside his academic work Howard is an avid jogger and the father of two children, Katie and Eric. Howard shares his busy schedule and his joy for running with his wife Barbara, a Boston internist.

As Bridgewater moves through the 1990s and adjusts to inevitable economic and political change, the work of Howard London is certain to be an integral part of how this college defines itself and how it deals with the charge of preparing students for the challenges of tomorrow.