

A Study of the Choice of Degree Courses Selected by Students Admitted to The University of Sri Lanka in the Arts Stream: 1974 to 1976

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The choice of degree courses by students admitted to the University of Sri Lanka in the Arts Stream was analysed using the data available at the Central Agency for Admissions. Data for the three years 1974, 75, 76 were used and a clear change of the popularity of courses among those seeking admissions was seen during the three years. The results are analysed against the background of the job orientation of courses and employment prospects.

I. Introduction

During 1975, a sample survey was planned, executed and results analysed by students following the Statistical Services job range of the Development Studies degree as an exercise in conducting sample surveys. The population considered was all students following the Development Studies degree course at the Colombo Campus and one of the many aspects investigated was the choice of degree courses at the time of seeking admissions to the University. The findings of the survey were published (1) and the nature of the results made us continue the study for the whole University population that were admitted in the 'Arts' stream from 1974 to 76.

One of us (I. de S.) selected this topic as the project for the Development Studies degree and with the assistance and guidance of the other two authors carried out the survey which produced the results reported here. Further details would be found in the dissertation submitted for the degree.

In Section II we describe the process used for University admissions in Sri Lanka, and go on to describe the reorganisation of courses introduced after 1972 and each of the new 'job oriented' courses introduced. Section III deals with the methodology used for the survey and the results are given in Section IV. An analysis of the results in Section V is followed by an attempt (in Section VI) to explain the changes in popularity of the various courses together with some suggestions for improvement of the present Arts courses, and University admission procedure.

II. University admissions and job oriented courses

Any student who obtains three passes and over 25% in the fourth subject at the General Certificate of Education (Advanced Level) Examination at one and the same sitting within his first three attempts, is eligible to be admitted to the University of Sri Lanka. Of these only a fraction could be admitted to

1. De Silva, Indralal, 'What students think of the Development Studies course—A Survey carried out at the Colombo Campus.' Proceedings of the WUS Asian Regional Workshop on Non-Formal Education, Colombo (1976), 224.

the Campuses owing to the lack of facilities such as class rooms, laboratories and staff. At present approximately 4000 out of 28,000 eligible candidates gain admission. Those selected for admission (for Arts or Science Streams) are then sent application forms by the Central Agency for Admissions of the University of Sri Lanka, requesting them to give, in order of preference the courses that they wish to follow.

We restricted our study to the 'Arts Stream' as it was here that new 'job oriented' courses were introduced in addition to professional courses such as Engineering, Medicine and Architecture already existing in other Faculties. Before 1972 students who had sat the GCE (AL) examination, if admitted to the University, were selected for courses where they read subjects they took at the AL examination. (See Table I for details of subjects studied at the GCE (AL)). For example a student with Economics, Geography, Sinhala and History could be selected for Social Sciences and may be he would specialise in Economics, having read Economics, Geography and Sinhala during the first year at University. Similarly a student with Sinhala, Pali, Buddhist Civilisation and History would enter the Humanities Faculty. Naturally he could not study Economics and Geography. Admission itself was on the order of merit from among those eligible. With large numbers coming out of schools having offered Sinhala, Pali, Sanskrit, Buddhist Civilisation etc., there were large numbers admitted for courses in Humanities. They on graduation had to find employment from among a limited number of openings available for such graduates, one of the most popular being that of a school teacher producing more students with GCE (AL) qualifications in Sinhala, Pali, Sanskrit, etc. Humanities graduates were able to compete for employment with other graduates when only a degree of a recognised University was the educational requirement. While Humanities graduates were able to join the Sri Lanka Administrative service on this basis, there were many instances where graduates in Science or Social Sciences were preferred although the post was advertised for all graduates. We should however note that this was not the situation 20 years ago when the total number of Arts graduates produced was relatively very low. With the amalgamation of all existing Universities into one University in 1972, certain amount of re-organisation of courses took place. Based on the concept of 'rationalisation', Arts entrants were no longer admitted to the faculties of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, but instead they were requested to choose from a range of 10 degree courses. They were also requested to indicate their choice of campus where a course was offered at more than one Campus. The degree courses offered were the following :

1. Development Studies	4 yr	Colombo & Vidyodaya
2. Education	4 yr	Colombo
3. Social Sciences	3-4 yr	Peradeniya
4. Humanities	3-4 yr	Vidyalkara & Jaffna
5. Law	3 yr	Colombo
6. Business Administration	4 yr	Vidyodaya
7. Public Administration	4 yr	Vidyodaya
8. Public Finance & Taxation	4 yr	Colombo
9. Estate Management & Valuation	4 yr	Vidyodaya
10. Commerce	4 yr	Vidyodaya

The Education course had further subdivisions which were not taken into account in this study. When the candidates who satisfied the eligibility condition responded with their order of preference of the above courses, they were allocated to the various courses on merit. The candidates' applications were arranged in the order of merit and they were allocated their first choice until the number that could be admitted to that particular course was filled. Then their second choice was granted and so on. Those candidates with a good aggregate of marks obtained their first preference. All candidates in 1973, 70% in 1974, 30% in 1975 and 1976 were admitted on a district quota basis, but once the number of such places were decided on, they too were allocated on merit from among candidates from the respective districts.

Of the above 10 courses the following six could be considered as almost the same courses as those that existed before 1972.

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (1) Social Sciences | (2) Humanities |
| (3) Law | (4) Business Administration |
| (5) Public Administration | (6) Commerce |

We will now consider the other courses in detail.

Education

The course in Education was very similar to the B.Ed. course conducted at Peradeniya for those who initially entered the Faculties of Arts. Thus Education cannot be classified as a new course except for the fact that this course was originally planned as a three year Diploma course and admission was direct and not after the General Arts Qualifying Examination as was the case at Peradeniya.

The Ministry of Education initiated the course by informing the University of the need for 700 teachers annually to be appointed as Social Science teachers to undertake the new NCGE/HNCE programme. Thus those seeking admission to this course, quite rightly, anticipated immediate employment on completion of the course.

The University admitted 700 to follow a three year diploma course. Student pressure exploited a situation where some students who studied 3 years at University obtained degrees and others did not, and succeeded in expanding the course to lead to a B.Ed. degree, after completing one more year of teaching following the Diploma. The very next year, the Ministry reduced its requirement to 250 and the number admitted was similarly reduced. In 1975 when the first batch of students completed the Diploma, it was not clear whether they would obtain teaching appointments, to fulfil the requirement to receive a degree. There were many student strikes on this issue and of course the uncertainty of employment prospects for those following the course were communicated to those seeking admission, as seen from the results of this study.

The remaining three courses were new and considered 'job-oriented, courses. The intention of those who introduced these courses was not to create job guaranteed courses but to divert some of the students following traditional Arts courses (there was a view that traditional Arts courses were

considered to produce unemployable graduates) to courses which could train them for a few avenues of employment still available according to the planners. It should be mentioned here that statistics on manpower requirements were almost nil and what one official quoted at one meeting was contradicted by other officials later. The University had no guidance at all on this question and student pressure played the major role in some of the decisions taken.

Public Finance and Taxation

Originally 104 (in 1972) were admitted to this course which was introduced to produce graduates who could be employed in the Department of Inland Revenue. In subsequent years the number to be admitted was reduced to about 50. Staff from the Department of Inland Revenue were involved in curriculum work and teaching.

Estate Management and Valuation

As in the case of Public Finance and Taxation this course was designed to produce graduates who could be employed in the Department of Valuation. Here again, although the first batch consisted of 186 students, subsequent batches admitted were less in number (50). Staff of the Department of Valuation were involved in curriculum development and teaching.

Development Studies

A committee consisting of top level government officials recommended the need to produce graduates who could be employed at graduate level positions in expanded development activities such as the District Development Councils. A University committee drafted the syllabus with the expert advice of government servants from relevant departments. The course was to concentrate on 13 areas of specialisations to be divided between Vidyodaya and Colombo Campus. Finally both campuses undertook all specialisations and the word 'job range' crept into the official documents that described the various areas of specialisation. In turn the students expected an assurance of employment in the specific job areas or at least preferential consideration.

The difficulties encountered in conducting this course is well described by Dias ⁽²⁾ and the Work Experience Programme which formed a vital component of this course is explained by Bastianpillai ⁽³⁾. Students follow a Foundation Course consisting of the following subjects in their first year :

Culture, Mathematics, Geography, Political Science, Commerce,
Economics, History, Sociology, General Science and English.

At the end of the first year they were requested to select one of the following 13 job ranges. Selection to a particular job range depended on the candidate's performance at the Foundation Course Examination. The job ranges were :

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|--|---|
| 1. Population and Manpower
Planning | 2. Development Planning and
Administration |
| 3. Banking, Insurance & Finance | 4. Trade and Commerce |

2. Dias, Hiran, D., 'Development Studies in the Colombo Campus—Hopes and Frustration', *ibid.*, 201.

3. Bastianpillai, Bertram, 'Work Experience for Development Studies Special Degree Students—A Review,' *ibid.*, 232.

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|---|-------------------------------------|
| 5. Agriculture and Fisheries | 6. Transport and Communication |
| 7. Statistical Services | 8. State and Foreign Services |
| 9. Industries and Industrial Relations | 10. Tourism and Recreation |
| 11. Social work and Social Administration | 12. Industries |
| | 13. Public and Industrial Relations |

There was no restriction as to the GCE (AL) subjects taken, thus enabling one with a Humanities subject combination to seek and gain admission to this course.

III. Methodology used in the survey

For this survey, data was collected from a sample of students selected for Admission to the Arts Stream at the Colombo, Peradeniya, Vidyodaya, Vidyalandara and Jaffna Campuses of the University of Sri Lanka in the years 1974, 1975 and 1976. Since different numbers of students are admitted to the different courses of study available, it was decided to select a 25% sample at random from the numbers entering each course. Thus if a total of N students are admitted to, say the Development Studies course, then N/4 were selected randomly for inclusion in the survey. This corresponds to a stratified random sampling procedure where the stratification is in respect of the ten possible Arts courses to which students could gain admission.

The above sampling procedure resulted in a total of 1593 students from the above mentioned Campuses being included in the survey. For these students, information relating to subjects studied at the AL examination, medium of study, course to which admission was made and preference given for different courses of study, was obtained for each of the years 1974, 1975 and 1976. This information was obtained from student records available at the Central Agency for Admissions and from applications for entry to the University made by students qualified to do so. After the required information was collected, it was coded and transferred into punch cards. These were then sorted using a card sorting machine which enabled the data to be summarised easily.

IV. Results

(a) Subjects offered at the Advanced Level Examination

It is clear that admissions to the various courses of study would depend on the availability of places for each course, the students performance at the AL examination and in some cases on the students choice of subjects at this examination.

A breakdown of subjects studied before entering the University (see Table I) shows Sinhala (or Tamil), Buddhist Civilisation, History, Government and Economics as the subjects having most popularity. It is clear however, that Sinhala, Buddhist Civilisation, History and Government are decreasing in popularity while Economics seems to be increasing in popularity in both the Sinhala and Tamil media. Other subjects which more students have chosen in 1975 are Commerce and Accounts. As a point of interest, we also note that 2% of the Tamil medium students have offered Sinhala as one of their subjects, and details of the gradings obtained reveal that half of them have obtained credit passes in this subject.

*A study of the Choice of Degree Courses selected by students Admitted to
The University of Sri Lanka in the Arts stream: 1974 to 1976*

TABLE I

**Distribution of GCE (Advanced Level) subjects offered by students
admitted to University Arts Course (Sinhala - and
Tamil medium).**

Subjects	Sinhala Medium			Tamil Medium		
	1974	1975	1976	1974	1975	1976
Sinhala	86.8%	88.2%	73.6%	0%	0%	2%
Buddhist Civilisation	73.1%	72.6%	56.4%	—	—	—
History	59.7%	61.2%	48.9%	54%	53%	44%
Geography	52.0%	49.9%	56.2%	57%	78%	59%
Government	49.5%	44.5%	37.0%	69%	67%	44%
Economics	41.4%	49.0%	60.3%	45%	47%	57%
Accounts	10.4%	9.4%	24.7%	11%	1%	22%
Commerce	10.2%	9.4%	25.1%	12%	1%	27%
Pali	6.0%	4.2%	4.1%	—	—	—
Logic	3.7%	4.2%	8.4%	20%	11%	16%
English	2.3%	1.6%	0.6%	8%	16%	1%
Sanskrit	1.4%	2.2%	0.4%	—	—	—
Christianity	0.9%	0.4%	0.4%	—	—	—
Greek and Roman Civilisation	0.7%	0.4%	0.0%	—	—	—
Buddhism	0.5%	0.2%	0.4%	—	—	—
Hindu Civilisation	—	—	—	17%	25%	27%
Islamic Civilisation	—	—	—	15%	13%	10%
Tamil	—	—	—	87%	81%	68%
Others	1.2%	2.4%	3.4%	9%	4%	21%

(b) Student numbers selected for courses

The number of students entering each course in a particular year in a particular medium for the sample data collected is shown in Table II. For all courses other than Social Sciences and Humanities the intake is the same each year. The slight variations observed are likely to be due to the fact that we are considering only a sample of students instead of the whole population entering into the Arts Stream. We should also note that the number admitted to each course does not appear to be dependent on the medium of study.

TABLE II

**Distribution of Student Admission to University Arts Courses
for a 25% sample.**

University Course of Study	Sinhala Medium			Tamil Medium			Total			Total for all Years
	1974	1975	1976	1974	1975	1976	1974	1975	1976	
Development Studies ...	86	97	93	14	11	12	100	108	105	313
Education	46	40	44	0	6	3	46	46	47	139
Social Sciences	125	114	152	27	18	26	152	132	176	462
Humanities	113	134	136	18	32	30	131	166	164	463
Law	10	9	9	3	4	4	13	13	13	39
Business Administration	14	15	15	0	0	0	14	15	15	44
Public Administration	12	14	13	3	1	2	15	15	15	45
Public Finance and Taxation	8	7	7	0	2	2	8	9	9	26
Estate Management and Valuation	7	8	9	1	0	0	8	8	9	25
Commerce	11	11	11	1	1	2	12	12	13	37
Total	432	449	489	67	75	81	499	524	570	1593

(c) Selection of courses—1st choice

The first choice among Arts courses of students entering the University from 1974 to 1976 is seen from results presented in Table III. It is seen that in 1974 the course holding most popularity among the Sinhala student population is Education while the Tamil students have a high preference for the Social Science course. A change is observed however by 1976 with the Development Studies course gaining in popularity among both Sinhala and Tamil students. Other courses which have increased in popularity over the years are Business Administration, Commerce and Estate Management and Valuation among the Sinhala students, and Public Administration and Commerce among the Tamil students.

TABLE III
Distribution of first choice among University Arts Courses
(Sinhala and Tamil medium)

Course of Study	Sinhala Medium			Tamil Medium			Total		
	1974	1975	1976	1974	1975	1976	1974	1975	1976
Development Studies ...	14%	20%	23%	16%	11%	18%	15%	16%	21%
Education ...	27%	21%	20%	10%	8%	18%	19%	14%	19%
Social Sciences ...	18%	26%	15%	34%	28%	15%	26%	27%	15%
Humanities ...	13%	6%	2%	3%	6%	5%	8%	6%	4%
Law ...	7%	5%	4%	12%	16%	5%	10%	11%	5%
Business Administration...	7%	8%	14%	3%	4%	0%	5%	6%	7%
Public Administration ...	3%	3%	3%	11%	12%	16%	7%	8%	10%
Public Finance & Taxation	7%	7%	7%	9%	11%	10%	8%	9%	9%
Estate Management ...	3%	5%	6%	0%	3%	0%	1.5%	4%	3%
Commerce ...	1%	1%	7%	2%	1%	9%	1.5%	1%	8%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

(d) Students' preference to admitted course of study

Preference shown by students for the course of study to which they were finally admitted is shown in Table IV a and IV b. The first column gives the percentages of those admitted on their first choice followed by other columns showing percentages selected on their second, third, and fourth choice, while the 5th column gives percentage of those who have been unsuccessful in being admitted to any of their first four choices. These two tables reveal a considerable amount of information on their own, showing for instance that there yet remains on the more popular courses (eg. Education and Development Studies in 1976) some students for whom the courses are not within their first four choices.

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TABLE IVa
**Distribution of the choice on which students were admitted to University
Arts courses (Sinhala Medium).**

University Arts Courses		Development Studies	Education	Social Sciences	Humanities	Law	Business Administration	Public Administration	Public Finance and Taxation	Estate Management and Valuation	Commerce
Those admitted on their first choice	74	49%	96%	57%	45%	80%	100%	0%	100%	43%	27%
	75	61%	92%	68%	16%	100%	100%	0%	100%	100%	46%
	76	65%	84%	36%	7%	67%	100%	15%	100%	78%	36%
Those rejected on 1st choice but admitted on second choice	74	26%	0%	15%	20%	10%	0%	58%	0%	43%	27%
	75	19%	8%	15%	7%	0%	0%	93%	0%	0%	18%
	76	14%	7%	13%	3%	0%	0%	85%	0%	11%	46%
Those rejected on 1st two choices but admitted on 3rd choice	74	17%	2%	9%	16%	0%	0%	17%	0%	14%	18%
	75	11%	0%	4%	15%	0%	0%	0%	0%	8%	27%
	76	10%	2%	18%	13%	11%	0%	0%	0%	11%	18%
Those rejected on 1st 3 choices but admitted on 4th choice	74	8%	2%	5%	6%	0%	0%	17%	0%	0%	9%
	75	4%	0%	7%	23%	0%	0%	7%	0%	0%	9%
	76	3%	6%	8%	21%	11%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Those not admitted on any of their 1st four choices	74	0%	0%	8%	13%	10%	0%	8%	0%	0%	19%
	75	5%	0%	6%	39%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	76	8%	7%	25%	56%	11%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

TABLE IVb
**Distribution of the choice on which students were admitted to University
Arts Courses (Tamil Medium)**

University Arts Courses		Development Studies	Education	Social Sciences	Humanities	Law	Business Administration	Public Administration	Public Finance and Taxation	Estate Management and Valuation	Commerce
Those admitted on their 1st choice	74	50%	—	63%	6%	67%	—	33%	—	0%	0%
	75	27%	33%	61%	16%	75%	—	0%	50%	—	0%
	76	75%	67%	23%	13%	50%	—	100%	100%	—	0%
Those rejected on 1st choice but admitted on 2nd choice	75	36%	—	18%	28%	0%	—	33%	—	100%	100%
	75	37%	17%	17%	3%	25%	—	0%	0%	—	100%
	76	8%	0%	12%	4%	0%	—	100%	0%	—	100%
Those rejected on 1st two choices but admitted on 3rd choice	74	7%	—	11%	11%	33%	—	34%	—	0%	0%
	75	18%	17%	0%	12%	0%	—	0%	0%	—	0%
	76	8%	6%	15%	3%	0%	—	0%	0%	—	0%
Those rejected on 1st three choices but admitted on 4th choice	74	7%	—	4%	5%	0%	—	0%	—	0%	0%
	75	0%	33%	17%	13%	0%	—	0%	0%	—	0%
	76	9%	0%	12%	30%	50%	—	0%	0%	—	0%
Those not admitted on any of their 1st four choices	74	0%	—	4%	50%	0%	—	0%	—	0%	0%
	75	18%	0%	5%	56%	0%	—	0%	50%	—	0%
	76	0%	33%	38%	50%	0%	—	0%	0%	—	0%
Total		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	—	100%	100%	100%	100%

V. Analysis of Results

We have briefly commented on some aspects of the results while presenting them in Section IV. We analyse these results in detail in this section.

Before we proceed further, it is important to note that the population considered for this study is the population of students admitted for Arts courses in 1974, 1975 and 1976. This is not equivalent to the population of students who sat the AL examination nor to the population of students eligible for admission. Thus the results presented may not give a true picture of those sitting for or qualifying at the AL examination. They only give us information on the students who gained admission.

Table I shows the distribution of subjects taken by those who gained admission. Restriction on subject combination imposed for certain courses of study taken together with the procedure of stratified sampling adopted by us makes this distribution vary from that of those who sat the AL examination and also that of those who were eligible for admission.

The subject offered by the largest number is Sinhala/Tamil. This has remained so over the three years but the percentage has dropped from 87% to 73% for Sinhala and 68% for Tamil. The percentage offering Sinhala, Buddhist Civilisation, History and Government in the Sinhala medium and Tamil, History and Government in the Tamil medium dropped over the three years under study. Economics, Accounts, Commerce and Geography are subjects where in both media, the percentage of students that offered these subjects increased over the three years, but they are a long way from being the most popular subjects. However, we note that once popular subjects like Pali, Sanskrit have been offered by very few students and that the popular Humanities subjects now are only Sinhala/Tamil, Buddhist Civilisation and History.

We now come to the first choice of those admitted to the Arts courses, and some idea about the popularity of courses is found from results presented in Table III. Among those admitted in the Sinhala medium, the most popular courses were Education in 1974, Social Sciences in 1975 and Development Studies in 1976. These courses had been the three most popular combination of courses during all three years. Taking individual courses, the popularity of Education reduced from 27% to 20% during the three years. Development Studies on the other hand has increased in popularity from 14% in 1974 to 23% in 1976. Social Sciences became more popular with the 1975 batch and again dropped in popularity in 1976. This situation could be explained by the fact that with the introduction of job oriented courses including Education, the once popular Social Sciences course dropped in popularity. Then as students following these courses encountered problems of employment, Social Sciences again gained popularity. Repeated strikes to obtain teaching appointments for those who completed three years of the Education course led to a drop in popularity of Education and an appreciation of the course content of the Development Studies courses may have resulted in the slow but steady increase in the popularity of this course in spite of the uncertainty of securing employment on graduation. As opposed to the course in Education, Development Studies students had yet to graduate and information on the problems of securing employments was still not available. Other courses that have shown a

marked increase in popularity are those in the Faculty of Management Studies, namely Business Administration and Commerce. The percentages are relatively low due to the special requirements at the GCE (AL.)

While the above analysis is applicable when we study Table III on its own, care must be taken in interpreting the percentages given in this table with results in Column I of Table IV. In so doing we should take into account the sample sizes corresponding to each course given in Table II. For example Table III shows that in the Sinhala medium only 7% gave Business Administration as their first choice in 1974. This is roughly 30 students of the sample. Table IV shows that 100% of those admitted gave this course as their first choice. Table II gives this number as 14 students of the sample. Thus 14 (100%) out of 30 (7%) students of the sample have obtained their first choice. This means that about 50% of those who indicated this course as their first choice gained admission to the course. A similar calculation shows that in 1976, 61 (65%) out of 112 (23%) students have obtained their first choice on the Development Studies course while 37 (84%) out of 98 (20%) obtained first choice on the course in Education. Thus 54% of those who indicated Development Studies as their first choice had gained admission for this course while only 36% of those who indicated Education as first choice were successful to be admitted to Education. This shows that although Development Studies is more popular (with a higher percentage of first choice) admissions to the Education course was more difficult.

Other information that we find very interesting from Table III is that in spite of the majority having the required subject combination, the percentage choosing Humanities as first choice was only 13% in 1974 and as low as 2% in 1976. Students seeking admission have already seen the problems facing Humanities graduates and have opted for other courses. In order to fill the nearly 500 places available for Humanities, as much as 56% had been admitted from those who did not include Humanities in their first four choices. This means that more than half the student population that study Humanities have not selected this course. On the other hand, if the University is to choose from those who like the course, then they will have to take students with a lower aggregate at the AL Examination and leave out students who are more qualified. Thus the University, in trying to be fair by those who have performed better, are admitting them to courses they like less. The most reasonable solution to this problem would of course be to reduce intake to unpopular courses and increase the intake to the 'job oriented' course.

So far we have discussed the results for Sinhala medium students. In the Tamil medium, the picture is similar with Development Studies, Education and Social Sciences being the most popular. The popularity of the Social Sciences course had dropped from 34% to 15% while Education has increased from 10% to 18% with a drop to 8% in 1975. Public Administration, Public Finance and Taxation and Commerce have increased in popularity and Humanities is very low in popularity. It is noted that although the popularity among Sinhala students was for Business Administration as compared to Public Administration, the order is reversed in the Tamil medium, thus indicating the traditional preference of the Tamil population for employment in the public sector.

Examining now the distribution of the choice on which students were admitted (Tables IVa and IVb) we see that all selections for the Business Administration and Public Finance and Taxation for all three years have been done on their first choice. We should note that the actual numbers admitted are small. The 100% mark was reached in two other courses in 1975, namely Law and Estate Management and Valuation. However, the figures for Social Sciences is rather low (36%) and Humanities a paltry 7%. The figures for Commerce and Public Administration are also low at 36% and 15% respectively but here the reason may be that those eligible for Commerce and Public Administration indicate Business Administration as their first choice. If you take the figures of those admitted on 1st and 2nd choices (add figures in Column 1 and 2) then Commerce has 82% and Public Administration 100%.

At the other end of Table IVa we have (Column 5) the percentages of students admitted to courses which were not within their first four preferences. It is alarming to note that 56% of those admitted in 1976 to read Humanities fall into this category. Other figures are 25% for Social Sciences, 11% for Law, 8% for Development Studies and 7% for Education. If one combines Columns 4 and 5 of Table IVa to find the percentage that was admitted to a course that was not one of their first three choices, then there are 77% such students admitted for Humanities in 1976, while the figure was only 19% for 1974. As mentioned earlier, those figures show the increasing unpopularity of the Humanities course very well.

The corresponding figures for the Tamil medium given in Table IVb present a similar picture with 50% for Humanities, 38% for Social Sciences and 33% for Education as the percentages for whom these courses were not within their first four choices. The small size of the stratified sample make the figures for the rest of the courses, where only a small number were admitted, unreliable.

VI. Conclusions and Comments

The results analysed above show clearly a change in the popularity of subjects offered at the G.C.E. (A.L.) Examination and also a change in the popularity of the various University courses. We have seen that the average Arts entrant is sensitive to the employment potential of the various courses and that he is more interested in professional courses than purely academic courses. This is shown in the drop in popularity of Social Sciences at Peradeniya, once considered the most prestigious Arts course. Arts graduates who study the same subjects as at the G.C.E. (A.L.) have been produced in excess of our needs. On the other hand, the new 'job oriented' courses have created their own problems of overspecialisation in a narrow field. The fact that students for these courses are selected at entry itself creates further problems as there is no possibility of shifting to another course later. In fact most students had no clear understanding of the courses they selected and entered the University for. This is bound to result in a large drop out rate (this study did not examine this aspect but the drop out rate is high).

We also see the immense popularity of the Management courses. Here the students find that there are openings for employment, even at a level lower

than that for graduates. This is not so in the case of other Arts courses. Unfortunately the University does not have sufficient places on these courses to admit even all those who had given such courses as their first choice.

The authors feel that some changes are necessary to overcome those deficiencies of the present Arts courses and the University admission process. A possible way in which this could be achieved smoothly is by making the following changes.

Admit Arts students to faculties of Arts or Management. All these students will follow for the first year or the first two years basic academic courses in subjects they have studied at the G.C.E. (AL) classes as well as other subjects such as Mathematics and Statistics which would be prerequisites for some of the third and fourth year courses. After the basic courses, students could select their courses of study with an emphasis on academic or professional training. For example, a student may specialise in Economics or go for professional courses in Education, Public Finance or Statistics. In the Faculty of Management Studies, the split into Public Administration, Business Administration etc. could take place after the basic courses.

This structure would be much more flexible if a course unit system is introduced. Students would, after the basic courses, select the course units needed for the degree they like, provided they have the prerequisites. Those who are not interested in a four year special degree would work towards collecting sufficient course units to receive a general degree. Those expecting to go into the teaching profession may take some units in Education. This will also allow the Social Science student to offer a few Humanities course units and vice versa. The present 'job ranges' can be retained in the form of course units leading to specialisations such as Banking, Statistics and Demography.

The above system will also reduce the drop out rate as students if disillusioned with what they hoped to read could easily change course in mid stream. Also they have one or two years of University experience before they are to decide on the areas of specialisation.

Further improvements are possible if all Campuses are to follow the same syllabii for the basic courses. Then it would be possible to allow inter Campus transfers on the results of the basic course examinations, to the good students who would want to specialise in a field available only at another Campus. This method could also be used to admit students to the Campuses from affiliated Colleges which would conduct only the basic courses.