

Program 'Not Racist' - Eisenman

"The University's special educational opportunity program in no way will impede the admission of any regular student to the University and in no way will lower the standards of the institution," David Eisenman, spokesman for the Martin Luther King fund committee, stressed Friday.

Eisenman sits in on meetings of the chancellor's special committee charged with implementing the program, which was announced only a few weeks ago.

"One of the casualties of any crash program like this is adequate communication with people not directly involved," Eisenman said. "The result in this case has been widespread interest but little factual information to dispel misunderstandings."

One of the most frequent charges, Eisenman said, is that the program is itself racist since it seeks to bring Negroes to the University because they are Negroes, and without regard to their qualifications.

"This never has been the goal of the program," he reported. "In establishing it the chancellor was recognizing there is much human talent in the states which not being developed because of poverty and educational deficiencies.

"He has committed the University to seeking people who have the capacity and will to acquire higher education. We will take them, help them overcome their past educational deficiencies, assist them financially, and in this way reclaim valuable human resources," Eisenman said.

It is true that most of these students will be Negro," he continued, "but this is due to the situation in Illinois and is not the result of desires of University administrators.

"Participants in a much smaller but similar program at Berkeley include Mexican-Americans, American Indians, Puerto Ricans and similarly disadvantaged Whites as well as Negroes," Eisenman pointed out.

He reiterated that both programs are designed to admit students not in spite of their lack of qualifications, but rather because of their very genuine qualifications.

High school grades and test scores certainly are important indicators usually, he said. But the inherent defects of impersonal screening devices of this sort are magnified seriously when they are applied to students who have been systematically out of touch with

environmental and formal educational benefits.

"The University indeed does want to increase the percentage of Negroes here," he said, "but not because they are black. We simply recognize that their conspicuous absence is evidence that a particular group of students who could, with some initial assistance, meet and exceed our standards are being systematically excluded by current social and economic conditions and our underdeveloped potential for getting them started here."

Another misunderstanding which is widespread is that these 500 students will replace 500 who would have been taken if this program had not been started. Eisenman said the chancellor made it clear at his chat last week that these students are coming in additional to the usual freshman class. Anyone turned down through the usual admission procedures would have been turned down in any case.

"To argue that if we have facilities for an additional 500 students we should take some more of those who have had all the breaks already is to miss the entire point," he added. "We do not have facilities, we are making them. That's why we are raising money for (Continued on Page 14)

these kids' aid. The extraordinary inequity which they have experienced calls for extraordinary efforts to redress it and reclaim this great human potential for their sake and for ours," he said.

He continued by stressing that the chancellor has done what he can by committing the University to the development of the necessary tools to locate students with potential but poor background, assist them financially and help them to remedy deficiencies.

"It is up to us, as members of the University community, to back the chancellor in this commitment. We do this both materially and symbolically through donations to the Martin Luther King fund."

A third rumor which Eisenman reports is that students in the special educational opportunity program will be graded differently from or have easier courses than regularly admitted students. He reported that although plans are being made for whatever remedial courses should prove necessary, once these students enter regular courses they will be graded just like anyone else.

"The chancellor's task force acknowledged that many of these students may have to spend five years instead of four," Eisenman reported. However, special classes will be kept to a minimum.

"The chances are quite good that any personalized tutorial programs which grow out of these students' needs will be available to all students," Eisenman reported. "The physics department, for example, already provides seniors who can be consulted in the evenings by any students in lower level courses."

"Having these students down here will be far from detrimental to our educational program as Chancellor has stressed," he said. "First there are the extremely educational effects of increasing the diversity of cultural, economic and social backgrounds of our students, which will help make the University experience more directly relevant to real societal problems and challenges."

Eisenman continued: "The increasingly critical situation in the nation dramatized the immediate need for significant programs of this sort, and the chancellor announced the current special educational opportunity program in early May.

"It is designed to find, aid, and see through ALL those people whose childhood conditions and poverty exclude them from our usual entrance routes — a group

whose absence is dramatized by the absence of black faces on this campus.

"The conspicuousness of that minority's skin color — in this case the conspicuousness of its absence — dramatizes the tragedy inherent in every situation which excludes people who have aptitude and talent from being able to develop that talent. In our state perhaps a majority of such people are also Negro; there are certainly a large number who are not, however, but are just as neglected and just as worth being offered a chance for their sake, and for ours, who live in an increasingly interdependent society with them."

Eisenman concluded by stressing that accepting these students, with their particular severe problems, will force the University to learn how to deal better with all individual students, "all of whom have strengths and weaknesses which require the kind of attention which it has frequently been charged is not given here.

"I got quoted once in the New York Times as saying this was a Midwestern factory," he mused. "By initiating what appears to be the biggest program in the nation for reclaiming the human talent lost in our wretched slums and depressed rural areas, we are on the verge of returning to a situation more closely analogous to an artisan's workshop."