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Letter to the Editor

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor:

Re: Bessent and Bessent, 1980, "Student Flow in a University Department: Results of a Markov Analysis" (*Interfaces* Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 52-59, April).

I feel I must comment on the paper by Re: Bessent and Bessent, 1980, "Student Flow in a University Department: Results of a Markov Analysis" (*Interfaces* Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 52-59, April). While it is good to see a mathematical model being used for planning in a university department, I would dispute the authors' statement that: "... the application is in an area and of a size which has received little attention from Management Science."

As the authors are no doubt aware, models based on Markov processes are frequently used in manpower planning, and one of the earliest examples may be found in Gani [1963]; this dealt with student numbers at a *national* level (for Australia), but the model used is almost identical to that described by Bessent and Bessent. This similarity may be underlined by the frequent use of a single university or department as a numerical example in manpower planning textbooks such as Grinold and Marshall [1977] or Bartholomew and Forbes [1979]; it is a good choice for a teaching example because of the small number of states.

Perhaps the reason why "reports of microanalytic studies are uncommon" is not that the studies themselves are rare but that, as Bartholomew and Forbes state in Section 4.8 of their book, "... the subject has long ceased to have the novelty required for publication." I appreciate that the publication criteria of *Interfaces* are different from those of most journals, but both you and the authors should beware of sweeping statements such as that cited above.

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