

Pre-College Outreach Programs

A National Perspective

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Introduction

As the other chapters in this volume attest, despite dramatic increases in postsecondary enrollments at American colleges and universities gaps still exist in who goes to college and who ultimately succeeds. Low-income, African American, Hispanic, and Native American populations continue to be underrepresented at institutions of higher education relative to their representation in the traditional college-age population (Nettles, Perna, & Freeman, 1999). Yet billions of federal, state, and private dollars have been spent to close the enrollment and degree attainment gaps (Gladieux & Swail, 1998).

One reason for the persisting gaps may be that traditional approaches to increasing college access (e.g., student financial aid programs) have focused too narrowly on the issue of college enrollment, without sufficient attention to the steps required to be academically, socially, and psychologically prepared to enter and succeed in college. Achieving the goal of increasing college success for underrepresented students is a complex task, particularly in consideration of the many confounding factors that have an impact on a student's potential to succeed. Our ability to further improve the college-going and college-completion rates for our most disadvantaged students is based on the involvement of stakeholders from all areas of society. Success certainly is a concern for our elementary and secondary levels of education, because they are responsible for cultivating the academic potential within students. Success certainly must concern the colleges, for they are responsible for shepherding students through higher education. Yet success is ultimately dependent upon the ability of our society at large to address inequities that affect education and opportunity for all groups.

Working within the constraints of our decentralized system of education only serves to complicate the process. While our entire system of education is arguably the best in the world, there is some noise in the machine that has reduced our ability to better address the needs of education's underclass.

In response to these concerns, policy makers have begun to look at non-traditional mechanisms to improve the education of our students. Three mechanisms in particular sit at the forefront of this policy movement. First, charter schools have become the lightning rod for the conservative movement in education and are the main avenue traveled by many states and localities to foster a sea change in public schooling. But the capacity of charters to have broad structural and systematic impact on the system as a whole is unlikely. The second mechanism is the push for school vouchers. Similar in many ways to the charter concept, voucher programs allow families to choose to enroll their children in a particular public or private school. In addition to providing a choice for families, voucher proponents also share the charter premise that increased competition will ultimately push all schools to change. While some gains may be made through this strategy, it is important to understand that education is very much a closed system. In the voucher-school model, one child's gain may result in another child's loss.

The third focus of policy makers is to look at programs designed to supplement school-based learning. These early intervention programs—designed to improve the academic preparation and college readiness of under-represented groups—do not necessarily have an impact on the systemic problems within our schools. They do provide a safety net for thousands of students who do not get the level of support—academic and social—within their current educational environment to become college ready. Federal and state governments, along with some private organizations, have sponsored these types of programs since the mid-1960s. The most widely known is the Federal TRIO program, established as part of the Johnson administration's War on Poverty. The recent establishment of GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness through Undergraduate Preparation) extended the federal government's role in early intervention. As well, several states established their own early intervention programs during the 1990s (Perna, 1999), the most publicized being the huge support thrown behind pre-college outreach in the State of California in an attempt to counteract the negative effects on campus diversity associated with the ban on affirmative action established by Proposition 209 (see chapters 7 by Jones, Yonezawa, and Mehan; 6 by Oakes, and 4 by Gandara for more discussion).

Despite the focus and resources devoted to early intervention programs by both the public and private sectors, only minimal data and information are available to describe these programs. Our knowledge is largely based on examinations of the federal TRIO Programs, particularly Upward Bound, and other high-profile programs, such as I Have a Dream, MESA, and AVID.

Even for these programs, however, surprising little is known about program outcomes and effectiveness (see Tierney chapter 10). Moreover, we know virtually nothing about the thousands of other programs that are currently operating across the nation. We don't know how many there are, where they are, what they do, whom they serve, and what impact they have on the educational opportunity and success of the students they serve. Clearly our capacity to make prudent programmatic and funding decisions is restricted by this lack of knowledge.

In an attempt to reduce this information and knowledge gap, the College Board, in association with The Education Resources Institute (TERI) and the Council for Opportunity in Education, conducted a national study in 1999–2000 to identify and collect information from all types of early intervention programs operating nationwide. To supplement the survey data, a series of focus groups were conducted with program directors and administrators over the same period. We briefly describe the history of programs designed to increase college access and success and describe the characteristics of programs currently in operation, based on analyses of the data and information obtained from the survey and focus groups.

A Brief History

Over the past thirty years, the doors of opportunity through postsecondary education have opened dramatically for all groups in the United States. More than 14 million students were enrolled in colleges and universities nationwide in fall 1996, a more than twofold increase since 1967 and tenfold increase since the mid-1940s (NCES, 1999). Growth has occurred at both two-year and four-year colleges and universities and among all racial/ethnic and income groups. The number and representation of African American, Hispanic, and low-income undergraduates attending the nation's colleges and universities are higher today than ever before.

Despite this dramatic increase in access to American colleges and universities, underrepresentation continues. African Americans represented 11.3 percent of first-time, full-time freshmen attending four-year colleges and universities in 1996 but 14.3 percent of the traditional college-age population (18–24 years). Only 6.0 percent of first-time, full-time freshmen attending four-year institutions were Hispanic in 1996, compared with 13.7 percent of the traditional college-age population. The gaps are even more dramatic among bachelor's degree recipients. In 1996 only 7.7 percent of bachelor's degree recipients were African American and 4.9 percent were Hispanic (Nettles, Perna, & Freeman, 1999).

Historically, federal intervention at the postsecondary level has focused primarily on reducing economic barriers to higher education to ensure that no

academically qualified citizen is denied access to college for financial reasons. In 1998–1999, \$43.6 billion of the \$64 billion in financial aid awarded to students from all sources was from the federal government and represents about two-thirds of all federal on-budget outlays for postsecondary education (The College Board, 1999; Hoffman, 1997).

The continued gaps in college enrollment and degree completion despite the dedication of such large amounts of resources suggest that a more comprehensive approach to college access and success is needed. Merely making financial aid available for students to attend college is not enough to ensure that all students have equal access to the benefits associated with earning a college degree (Gladieux & Swail, 1998). A variety of factors influence college enrollment behavior, including educational expectations and plans, academic ability and preparation, information about college options, availability of financial aid, and support from teachers, counselors, family members, and peers (see for example Perna, 2000).

The Federal Approach

The federal government has played a critical role in the development of pre-college outreach and early intervention programs. The federal approach to increasing access to colleges has historically focused on making financial aid available to students through the Pell Grant, campus-based, and subsidized- and unsubsidized-loan programs. More comprehensive programs aimed at increasing postsecondary educational opportunity for educationally and economically disadvantaged students have recently taken on more importance.

As mandated by Congress, two-thirds of the students served by TRIO programs must come from families with incomes below \$24,000. Upward Bound, authorized by Congress in 1964 as part of the Educational Opportunity Act, provides students with academic instruction on college campuses after school, on Saturdays, and during the summer. Over 700 Upward Bound programs are operating around the country. One-third of all TRIO funding in 1998 (\$600 million) was dedicated to Upward Bound (\$220 million) and Upward Bound Mathematics and Science (\$20.1 million).

Talent Search and the Student Support Services programs were added to Upward Bound to form the core of the TRIO programs during the authorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965. In 1992 the federal government expanded its commitment to early intervention-type programs by authorizing the National Early Intervention Scholarship Program (NEISP). This program offers matching grants to states for programs providing financial incentives, academic support services and counseling, and college-related information to disadvantaged students and their parents. Funding for the NEISP was \$200

million in 1993 and nearly \$400 million in 1994, but was reduced to just \$3.1 million in 1995, \$3.6 million in 1997, and \$3.6 million in 1998. Nine state programs have been funded under the NEISP at an average of \$500,000 (Fenske, Geranios, Keller, & Moore, 1997).

As part of the 1998 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, Congress established a new program, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP),¹ to supercede the 1992 NEISP. GEAR UP grants are available not only to state governments, but also to partnerships composed of: (a) one or more local educational agency representing at least one elementary and one secondary school; (b) one institution of higher education; and (c) at least two community organizations, which may include businesses, philanthropic organizations, or other community-based entities. The GEAR UP legislation also includes the “21st Century Scholars Certificate” program. This program, later endorsed and retitled by President Clinton as the “High Hopes” program, notifies low-income sixth to twelfth grade students of their expected eligibility for federal financial assistance under the Pell Grant program. Congress appropriated \$120 million for GEAR UP in 1999 and \$200 million for 2000—a substantial increase over the \$3.6 million provided for NEISP in 1998. More than 670 partnerships applied for the first GEAR UP grants in 1999, and 180 awards were made.

Nongovernment Programs

Early intervention programs are also sponsored by nongovernment entities, including private organizations, foundations, and colleges and universities. Perhaps the most prominent private early intervention program is the I Have a Dream (IHAD) Program, established in 1981. Now almost a part of popular American folklore, the program originated when Eugene Lang, a New York businessman, made a visit to his former East Harlem elementary school and guaranteed the 61 students in his presence the financial resources for college if they graduated from high school. That promise has expanded to 180 projects in over 60 cities across the nation, serving more than 13,000 students, and has doubtless led other philanthropists and agencies to establish similar programs.

Other large-scale programs have shown success in serving needy students. The MESA (Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement), MSEN (Math Science Education Network), and Puente Programs are examples of efforts that have been replicated across the nation to form networks of programs.

There are hundreds of other examples of programs around the country that provide support via some outreach mechanism. Colleges and universities sponsor outreach programs, many supported by TRIO and GEAR UP, but

others on their own account or by the support of corporate sponsors or nonprofit organizations (e.g., National Action Council for Minority Engineers).

A National Survey

In 1999, the College Board, in association with The Education Resources Institute (TERI) and the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE), designed and administrated the National Survey of Outreach Programs.² The survey was designed to provide detailed information about all types of early intervention programs. This information is expected to help practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and philanthropists better understand the programs that are currently serving students around the country. Second, the survey was also intended to provide the backbone for a web-based searchable database system for public use. This system will not only assist practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and philanthropists, but will also help build a network that can be used to develop and strengthen partnerships between programs.

In addition to the survey, a series of focus groups were held around the country with program administrators to provide a more focused discussion with program directors and other personnel about the issues and challenges facing education and early intervention programs. Together, the information regarding early intervention programs provides a unique perspective on the landscape of programs across the nation.

Describing the Landscape

The survey yielded usable responses from 1,110 programs nationwide, with programs from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and Micronesia.

Of the respondents to the survey, federal TRIO programs (Upward Bound and Talent Search) account for one-third ($N = 363$), while GEAR UP programs account for 9 percent ($N = 102$). In addition, about one-fifth of the programs completing the survey are sponsored by businesses, private organizations, or individuals (see Table 1.1; TRIO programs are, on average, much older than other programs, with an average age of 16 years).

Financial Support

The most common source of financial support for early intervention programs is the federal government. About half of the responding programs

TABLE 1.1
Distribution of Survey Respondents by Program Type, Average Year of First Operation and Average Number of Students Served

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>TRIO</i>	<i>Gear Up</i>		<i>Other Federal</i>	<i>State Funded</i>	<i>University Funded</i>	
			<i>Up</i>	<i>IHAD</i>			<i>Funded</i>	<i>Other</i>
Number of programs	1,110	363	102	26	137	166	97	219
Percent of respondents	100%	33%	9%	2%	12%	15%	9%	20%
Year first operated	1989	1984	1998	1992	1989	1989	1989	1991
Numbers of students served 1998–1999	827	425	2,585	121	748	1,203	717	1,264

Note: Other includes programs funded by businesses, private organizations and individuals.

receive financial support from the federal government, about one-fourth receive financial support from state governments, and one-fourth receive financial support from colleges and universities.

Most programs receive financial support from more than one source. For example, one-half of the non-TRIO, non-GEAR UP, and non-IHAD programs that received federal funding also received financial support from a state government. More than one-fourth of these programs received financial support from a college or university, and one-fourth received financial support from business or industry. About one-half of the non-TRIO, non-GEAR UP, and non-IHAD programs that received state funding also received financial support from a college or university. A higher share of IHAD programs than of other responding programs appear to receive financial support from AmeriCorps, community organizations, business or industry, private foundations, and fundraising. Colleges and universities are an important source of in-kind support for about one-half of TRIO, GEAR UP, other federal, and state-funded programs. Community organizations are an important source of in-kind support for GEAR UP and IHAD programs. About one-third of responding programs received in-kind support from local school systems.

Program Location

More than one-half (57 percent) of the responding programs are based at a college or university, 16 percent at a school, and 13 percent within the community (See Table 1.2). TRIO programs are generally based at postsecondary institutions (80 percent), while GEAR UP programs tend to operate from schools (39 percent), and IHAD programs are largely community-based (69 percent). The majority of other federally and non-federally funded programs are based on college campuses.

TABLE 1.2
Distribution of Programs by Organization or Institution Housing the Program

<i>Program type</i>	<i>Total</i> %	<i>TRIO</i> %	<i>Gear</i>		<i>Other</i> Federal %	<i>State</i> Funded %	<i>University</i>	
			<i>Up</i> %	<i>IHAD</i> %			<i>Funded</i> %	<i>Other</i> %
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
College/univeristy	57.2	79.9	28.4	—	48.2	54.8	69.1	42.0
School	15.6	7.7	39.2	19.2	17.5	15.1	10.3	18.7
Community	13.4	8.8	6.9	69.2	16.1	11.4	6.2	20.5
Other	13.8	3.6	25.5	11.5	18.2	18.7	14.4	18.7

Note: Other includes programs with more than one base.

TABLE 1.3
Distribution of Programs by Primary Location of Services

<i>Location</i>	<i>Total</i> %	<i>TRIO</i> %	<i>Gear</i>		<i>Other</i> Federal %	<i>State</i> Funded %	<i>University</i>	
			<i>Up</i> %	<i>IHAD</i> %			<i>Funded</i> %	<i>Other</i> %
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
College campus	45.5	54.0	7.8	—	46.7	47.6	62.9	44.3
Elementary/secondary school	34.7	34.2	80.4	46.2	28.5	33.7	21.5	21.5
Students' homes	0.3	—	—	7.7	—	—	—	0.5
Community center	5.6	4.4	2.0	23.1	4.4	4.2	4.1	9.6
Other	13.9	7.4	9.8	23.1	20.4	14.5	7.2	24.2

For nearly one-half of all programs, the primary location of program services (which may be different from where a program is located or housed) is a college campus. For GEAR UP programs, however, services are typically delivered at an elementary or secondary school. Elementary and secondary schools are also the primary location of services for about one-half of IHAD programs, one-third of TRIO and state-funded programs, and one-fifth of university funded programs, suggesting that a substantial number of programs have strong ties to K–12 schools and school systems. About one-half of all programs serve students of a particular school or school district, and one-fourth target a particular community. The majority of TRIO, GEAR UP, and IHAD programs target services toward students attending a particular school or school district.

Program Goals and Services

As other research (Perna, Fenske, & Swail, on press) has concluded, the most commonly stated goal of early intervention programs is to increase

college enrollment rates. Among the three most common goals of the responding programs are to promote college attendance, college awareness, and college exposure, with about 90 percent of programs reporting each of these goals (See Figure 1.1). These goals appear to be relatively more common for TRIO and GEAR UP programs, likely because both programs were explicitly created to focus on college access. Building college awareness and college exposure is likely to be associated with higher educational aspirations, one of the most important predictors of college enrollment (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999; Perna, 2000).

Building student self-esteem and providing role models are also common goals. As Levine and Nidiffer (1996) concluded, support and encouragement from a mentor, whether a parent, relative, or empathetic member of the community, can play a critical role in college enrollment for students from low-income families. Role modeling is a particularly highly ranked goal for the GEAR UP programs, likely because mentoring strategies are emphasized in the evaluation of program proposals. Other common goals include increasing college completion, increasing high school retention and reducing dropouts, and involving parents.

Improving academic skills was also among the most frequently reported goals, likely reflecting the research showing that academic achievement and preparation are important predictors of both predisposition toward and actual enrollment in a college or university (See Adelman chapter 2; Hagedorn & Fogel chapter 8; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Manski & Wise,

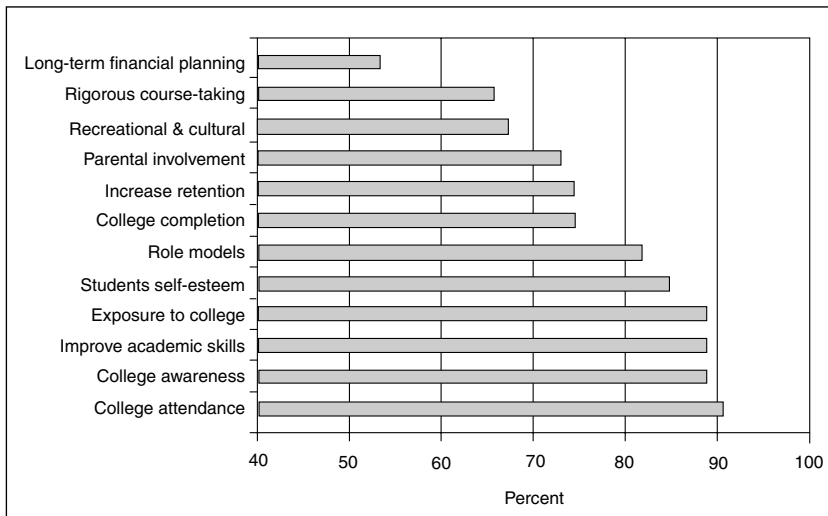


Figure 1.1. Most common goals of early intervention programs

1983; Perna, 2000; St. John, 1991; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999). Nonetheless, the goal of promoting rigorous course taking is less common, ranking only eleventh out of 14. This may suggest a potential weakness of some programs, given that researchers have shown that the quality and intensity of the high school curriculum is a more important predictor of bachelor's degree completion than test scores or class rank, particularly for African American and Latino students (Adelman, 1999) and that taking at least one advanced mathematics course is associated with a higher probability of enrolling in a four-year college or university among students who are at risk of dropping out of high school after controlling for other variables (Horn, 1998). Slightly more than one-third (37 percent) of the responding programs specified a particular academic focus. The most common areas of focus are science, mathematics, and technology.

To some extent, the particular services offered mirror the reported program goals. Table 4 shows that the most common service is college awareness, reported by 86 percent of the programs. Other relatively common activities that are related to college awareness include campus visits and meetings with college faculty and students.

Services that may help students acquire some of the noncognitive skills that are important to the successful integration of students into campus life are also relatively common. Such services include social skill development, cultural activities, and leadership development.

TABLE 1.4
Program Services Offered by Quintile

<i>Top Quintile service</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Second Quintile service</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Middle Quintile service</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Fourth Quintile service</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Bottom Quintile service</i>	<i>%</i>
College awareness	85.8	Academic advising	70.9	Meetings college faculty	66.4	Computer-skills training	56.2	Remedial instruction	33.7
Social skills development	79.1	Career counseling	70.6	Reading & writing	62.8	Preparatory courses	54.2	Employability skills	25.9
Campus visits	76.8	Critical thinking skills	69.4	Grade monitoring	60.1	SAT/ACT training	54.1	Accelerated courses	25.5
Cultural activities	75.3	Leadership development	68.9	Personal counseling	56.8	College fairs	47.7	College-level courses	23.3
Study-skills training	71.9	Math/science instruction	67.6	Academic enrichment	56.7	Career days	41.2	Job placement	17.4

Most programs also provide services to develop the academic skills and preparation required to enter and succeed in college. These services include critical thinking skills, study-skills training, mathematics and science instruction, reading and writing instruction, grade and attendance monitoring, and academic enrichment. Again, despite research showing the relationship between high quality coursework and college enrollment, only about one-fourth of all responding programs offer accelerated courses and/or college-level courses.

Program services are delivered via a variety of instructional approaches. About three-fourths of all programs utilize workshops and classroom instruction. Role modeling, tutoring, and mentoring are also frequently used by all types of programs, but particularly by IHAD programs. More than one-half of all programs also use assessment and testing practice for their students (60 percent) or peer group learning groups, a well-documented approach to academic and social development among underrepresented populations (Fullilove & Treisman, 1990).

Working with Parents

Parental involvement was a common theme emerging from the focus groups. Research supports the often heard perception that parental involvement is critical (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989; Hossler, Schmit, & Vesper, 1999). Some evidence suggests that parental support and encouragement is the single most important predictor of postsecondary educational plans (Jun & Colyar, Chapter 9; Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999). Nonetheless, focus group participants were equally quick to note that effectively involving parents is quite challenging, especially when family and social stresses are intertwined with low income.

The survey data showed that most programs do try to involve parents. More than two-thirds (69 percent) of all programs offer a parental component, while about one-fifth (22 percent) of all programs mandate parental involvement. Parental involvement is very common in GEAR UP and IHAD programs (more than 90 percent of these programs include a parental component). Nearly one-half of the GEAR UP programs have a mandatory parental component. About one-half (46 percent) of all programs require parents to sign a contract in order for their children to begin participating in the program. Parental contracts are most common among TRIO programs (71 percent) and least common among GEAR UP programs (19 percent).

Because many of the students participating in early intervention programs have parents with no postsecondary experience, a primary function of about one-half (58 percent) of the parental programs is to provide opportunities for parents to learn about college and realize that college is possible for

their child. About one-half (51 percent) of the programs request parents to participate in activities with the student. Other services designed to increase knowledge and information about college are financial aid guidance, campus visitations, and meetings with college faculty and students. About 16 percent of parental programs offer instructional programs to parents, giving them the chance to develop their own academic skills. As Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) have argued, improving parents' sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed in school may increase their level of involvement in the child's education.

Learning ways to effectively coordinate with parents appears to be a challenge many programs are facing. About one-fourth (27 percent) of all programs, and 40 percent of all GEAR UP programs, reported that coordination with parents was at least somewhat of a problem or area requiring additional resources.

Program Operation

About two-thirds (67 percent) of responding programs provide services to students year round. Four out of five TRIO, GEAR UP, and IHAD programs report that they are year round, compared with only one in three

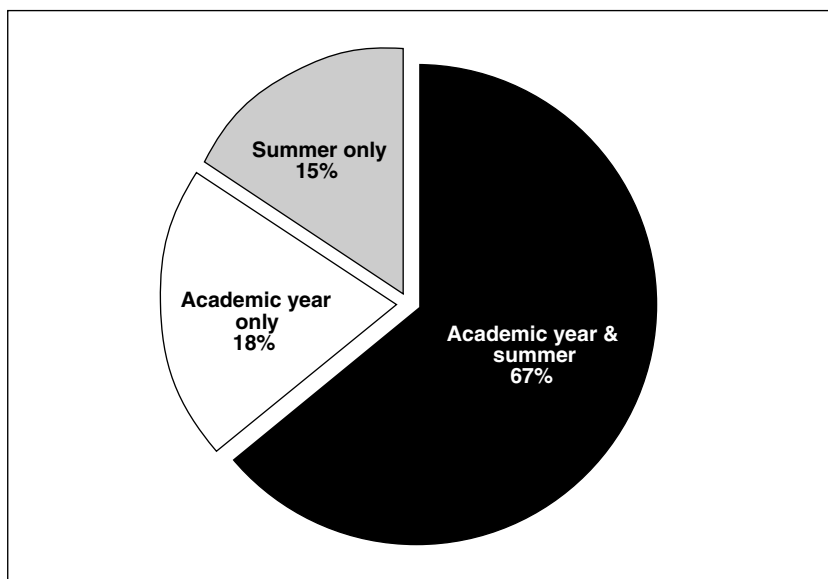


Figure 1.2. Distribution of programs by period of operation

university-funded programs. About one-fifth (18 percent) of all programs operate specifically during the school year and 15 percent operate summer-only programs. About 38 percent of university-funded programs offer services only during the summer.

About one-half (53 percent) of all programs offer services to students both during school hours and after school. More than one-half (60 percent) of all programs offer services on the weekends. The duration of program services varies, with some programs offered for a few days and others for several years. Program capacity also varies, averaging 636 students and ranging up to the tens of thousands (e.g., large, state-wide programs). About one-half (46 percent) of all programs are capable of serving fewer than 100 students per year, one-fourth have a capacity between 100 and 500 students, and one-fourth have a capacity of more than 500 students.

Targeting Students

Early intervention programs generally focus on “educationally or economically disadvantaged students.” About two-thirds (62 percent) of all programs report that they target students with certain characteristics. Targeting of services based on economic disadvantage appears to be more common than targeting of services based on educational disadvantage. About three-fourths (80 percent) of survey respondents indicate that their program specifically targets low-income students. The extent to which services are targeted toward low-income students varies by program sponsor, ranging from 70 percent of university and state-funded programs to 99 percent of TRIO programs. Minority and potential first-generation college students are also common target populations for early intervention programs (69 percent and 71 percent, respectively).

Only about one-third of all programs report targeting students at risk of dropping out of high school (36 percent) or students of low academic ability or achievement (38 percent). More than one-third (39 percent) of all programs target students of high academic ability or achievement, and one-fifth (22 percent) of the programs target gifted and talented students.

An underlying premise of early intervention programs is that support services and information about college and financial aid are provided to students and their parents early enough in their schooling so as to influence educational outcomes. Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (1999) suggest that most of the damage (educationally speaking) to student opportunity has largely occurred by the eighth grade. Students who score poorly on standardized mathematics and reading tests in the eighth grade are unlikely to improve during the course of the next four years. Nonetheless, the survey data suggest that only 10 percent of all programs (but 81 percent of

IHAD programs) first offer services to students while they are attending elementary school, and about one-third of all programs (but 87 percent of GEAR UP programs) begin program services during the middle school years. The tendency of GEAR UP programs to begin services during middle school years is not surprising given that in order to be eligible under the federal GEAR UP program, counseling and other support services must be provided to at least one grade level of students beginning no later than the 7th grade and continuing through the twelfth grade. For about one-half (58 percent) of all programs (but 76 percent of TRIO programs) services are first offered to students during the high school years. For many of these programs, when they start and who they target depends largely upon the original mission and goals of the program. While we now understand more clearly the importance of starting early, many programs were designed to specifically target high school or middle school students.

Incentives for Participation

The most common external reward provided to program participants is a certificate of recognition, used by 69 percent of survey respondents. While all programs receiving funding under the federal National Early Intervention Scholarship Program must guarantee that all eligible low-income participants will receive the financial assistance necessary to attend college, the extent to which other early intervention programs use financial benefits appears to vary by program sponsor. About 89 percent of IHAD programs offer college scholarships, compared with only one-fourth of TRIO programs and 41 percent of GEAR UP programs. More than one-half (60 percent) of all TRIO programs offer a cash stipend for participation, compared with only 14 percent of GEAR UP programs and university funded programs. About one-third of TRIO programs offer reimbursement for tuition and fees, compared with only about 10 percent of GEAR UP, state-funded, and university-funded programs. About one-fifth (21 percent) of all responding programs offer participants academic credit.

Program Staffing and Training

About 87 percent of responding programs indicated that they had at least one paid staff member. Seventy-nine percent employ full-time staff and 67 percent employ part-time staff. More than one-half of all programs (57 percent) employ college students. Nearly one-half (43 percent) of all responding programs use volunteers.

Most programs (79 percent) require an average of 17 hours of pre-service training for staff members. Pre-service training appears to be more common among TRIO programs. Nearly all (95 percent) of all programs hold regular meetings between program staff and coordinators.

Program respondents generally report being very satisfied with their ability to recruit, train, and monitor staff. Only 12 percent of all programs reported that program staff recruitment or staff training is a problem or needs additional resources (rated 4 or 5 on scale of 1 to 5). Given that GEAR UP is a newer program, it is not surprising that a higher share of GEAR UP programs reported that staff training (22 percent) is a “problem” area. Only 6 percent of all programs report that staff monitoring is a problem.

Program Evaluation

Almost all (94 percent) responding programs reported conducting program evaluations. About three-fourths (75 percent) report that they track program completion and 64 percent report that they track high school graduation. Only 29 percent of all programs report tracking graduation from college. Just 17 percent of all responding programs indicated that program evaluation was a somewhat or high problem area.

Although these rates of evaluation are very high, we know from experience that evaluations of these programs are generally weak (see Tierney, chapter 10). Programs have few funds to hire external evaluators to conduct regular evaluations, and most have little or no expertise to conduct their own data collection and analysis. This is a major problem area for most programs, as they have little to present to the public and their funders about successes, apart from anecdotal information.

Conclusions and Implications

The data and information presented in this chapter provide a picture of the number, types, and variety of early intervention programs that are currently operating across the nation. The results of this descriptive study suggest that early intervention programs do not necessarily follow any particular model, but still gravitate to many similar strategies, services, and concepts. Some of the programs are managed and organized in a very corporate manner, with efficient centralized control. The success or failure of other programs sometimes falls on the back of one person. What is most striking in talking with program directors throughout the nation is the shared commitment of staff to the students they are trying to serve. For most, it is a labor of love.

The National Survey of Outreach Programs does not answer all of our questions about early intervention programs. It is not evaluative, only descriptive. The landscape provided by the survey may help us better understand the programs and perhaps design large-scale evaluations to determine best practices for particular audiences. As a conclusion to this chapter, we thought it was important to share the viewpoints of program directors from our focus group sessions. In the half-dozen focus groups, involving over a hundred program directors across the nation, these themes consistently came up when talking about essential elements of successful outreach endeavors. It is our hope that future research may focus on testing these perceptions with actual program outcomes.

1. *Clear, focused mission and vision.* Early intervention programs need to be clear about the desired outcomes of student participation. Because of limited budgets, staffing, and other resources, one program simply can't do it all. Consequently, programs must be tightly focused and operate in a systematic, efficient manner to maximize their effect on student learning and preparation.
2. *Start early.* As Levine and Nidiffer (1996) recommended, programs need to start early, well before high school if possible. A review of racial/ethnic group differences in NAEP scores suggests the challenges associated with inadequate academic preparation exist as early as the fourth grade (Nettles & Perna, 1997). While specific interventions are appropriate during high school and between high school graduation and college matriculation, intervention must begin by at least middle school.
3. *Motivate students.* Students must be motivated and committed to work hard. Perhaps the most critical intervention a program can make is to orient youth to long-term goals and the importance of a strong work ethic. Financial incentives sometimes work, but as Levine and Nidiffer (1996) concluded, the sound advice of a trusted mentor or tutor will often make the difference.
4. *Involve parents.* Parent involvement sends a clear message to the student: "This matters, and so do you." Unfortunately, the most at-risk populations appear to have the least support at home. Participants consistently described the challenges associated with their parental programs, particularly with regard to keeping parents interested and involved. Despite these challenges, practitioners consistently pointed to the importance of parental involvement in their intervention efforts.
5. *Collaborate.* Programs that work in a vacuum don't succeed in the long run. The best run programs are those that work closely with

school and district administrators to link the programs with school curricula and schedules. Programs that work with business and industry, community organizations, and all levels of educational institutions appear to be more stable and effective. Leveraging external support also helps broaden both program accountability and responsibility.

6. *Sustain funding.* Emphasis on national standards, school reform, and accountability has changed attitudes about program funding and operation. Public and private funders are asking for evidence from programs that show progress toward specific goals. Understanding the nexus between funding and programming philosophies is also important. Whereas funders are interested in providing enough funding for programs to become stable and self sufficient, program administrators are interested in extending their external funding as long as possible. Building a more compatible and cooperative alliance between funders and programs may help ameliorate these inconsistent attitudes.
7. *Practice professionalism and personal development.* Program staffing is critical to successful practice. Programs need to have effective hiring strategies to support the mission and goals of the organization. Programs must also provide ongoing professional development to build and keep the staff. Many programs, especially the smaller programs, have high staff turnover rates, in part because of limited salaries and opportunities for professional advancement.
8. *Use proven practices.* While research continues to provide updated information on “best practices” in pre-college outreach, experience is the primary source of information on what works. A higher level of services is offered to students when programs collaborate or learn from one another. Programs should not try to reinvent the wheel, but adapt proven strategies that fit the mission and goals of their program.
9. *Rely on standardized processes.* Stable programs rely on standardized processes and content, such as standardized curricula. Programs should be developed based on the identified needs of the students, school and community.
10. *Incorporate technology.* Mirroring the growing importance of technology within society, the knowledge and use of computers and other modern technologies is an emerging issue for many programs. Programs need to build strategic plans for purchasing, upgrading, and effectively utilizing technology. Although most outreach programs focus on developing academic skills, more attention must be given to developing the technological capacity that complements knowledge acquisition.

Some may argue that early intervention programs are too expensive, serve too few students, and are too inefficient with respect to program dropout rate. Nonetheless, because they appear to have the components that the literature suggests are important to promote college access and degree attainment, we remain optimistic about their role. If society could regenerate the school systems, early intervention and pre-college outreach programs would not be needed. But the reality is that schools are failing and children are falling through the cracks without even being noticed. At a minimum, these programs provide a lifeline to those students who have the potential but aren't getting served as serious contenders. Indeed, many feel that programs need to do a better job of working within the construct of school reform as a partner, not as an accessory.

Thus, a challenge is placed on the table. To proponents of early intervention programs, provide us more systematic evidence of the positive impact you suggest is occurring through these programs. And to critics—show us alternatives that better meet the needs of our underrepresented populations.

Notes

1. See www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/gearup.

2. The National Survey of Outreach Programs was directed by Dr. Swail while at the College Board. Both authors were responsible for the design of the survey and subsequent data analysis. Further information on the National Survey, including a more elaborate analysis and presentation of data, as well as the web-based program directory, may be found at www.collegeboard.org.

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