

# Student Support Services

## A Summary of:

**NATIONAL STUDY OF STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES: Third Year Longitudinal Study Results and Program Implementation Study Update**, 1997 Westat, Inc. (Rockville, MD) by Bradford Chaney, Lana Muraskin, Margaret Cahalan and Rebecca Rak

## Overview

Student Support Services (hereafter SSS) is designed to help disadvantaged students stay in college and graduate by offering academic counseling and peer tutoring. As one of the federal TRIO programs, SSS is funded under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 to help students overcome class, social, academic and cultural barriers to higher education. [Four other TRIO programs work with low-income and first-generation students at different stages of the educational pipeline. Talent Search Centers and Educational Opportunity Centers provide less intensive college information services to young people and adults respectively. [Upward Bound](#) is designed to increase opportunities for disadvantaged youth to attend

## POPULATION

Currently over 700 SSS projects serve 165,000 disadvantaged college students as measured by income (family incomes under 150 percent of the poverty line) and/or parents' educational status (neither parent has graduated from college), or who are disabled. In 1994, 66 percent of SSS participants at the study sites were female and 54 percent were members of minority groups.

college. The Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program prepares low-income and first-generation college students for doctoral programs.]

## Evidence of Effectiveness

SSS showed a small but positive and statistically significant effect for the following measures. Relative to a matched comparison group, SSS students:

- ◆ increased credits earned by a mean of 1.25 in the first year, 0.79 in the second year, 0.71 in the third year, and 2.25 in the three years combined
- ◆ stayed at the same institution at a 7 percent higher rate in the second year (i.e., from 60 percent to 67 percent), and a 9 percent higher rate in the third year (i.e., from 40 percent to 49 percent). SSS students stayed for a third year at any higher education institution at a 3 percent higher rate (i.e., from 74 percent to 77 percent).

*Without intervention from programs such as TRIO, "Students from high-income households enroll, persist, and graduate at much higher rates than students from low-income families ... Enrollment and graduation rates are also impacted by the educational attainment level of the head of the student's household."*

Westat

Students who participated the most experienced the greatest improvement. However, nearly 30 percent of the students had low levels of participation (five or fewer hours of services in their freshman year).

SSS targeted the most disadvantaged students. Compared to the total undergraduate population, SSS participants were older and more likely to be

members of a minority group (54 vs. 25 percent), have had lower levels of academic achievement before college and have dependent children.

The average cost per participant in 1995 dollars was \$867. (The cost per student has decreased over time, from \$1,123 in 1970 to \$744 in 1995, both measured in 1990 dollars).

## Key Components

SSS provides academic counseling and other support services to disadvantaged students to help them stay in college and graduate. The actual package of services offered vary by institution. Services provided include: peer tutoring, counseling/academic advising, special cultural events,

workshops and academic courses designed specifically for SSS students. Some programs are designed as “home-base” programs which assist students in securing needed services from a variety of campus offices. Others are either single-service or full-service programs.

## Contributing Factors

### *Services Addressing Multiple Student Needs*

SSS programs that addressed a wide range of students’ needs--both academic and non-academic--saw the most positive outcomes, as did programs that integrated SSS with other available services. Researchers found that peer tutoring, cultural events, workshops and academic courses designed specifically for SSS participants were particularly effective.

*“In essence, the levels of exposure to services, along with the types of services received, are important determinants of positive project effects. Depending on the amount of funding available, the program may need to choose between having a small effect on a large number of students or a larger effect on fewer students.”*

Westat

### *Sense of Community*

Indirect services, such as attendance at cultural events, had a positive effect on student outcomes, reinforcing the idea that a sense of belonging is as important to succeeding in college as more concrete academic assistance. This sense of belonging was reinforced by workshops and courses for SSS students only, which had a positive impact on retention.

needs. Westat: “It may be that the peer tutors also acted as role models--especially in those cases where past SSS participants served as peer tutors--and thus helped to reinforce that SSS students could succeed and even provide help to other SSS students in the future.”

### *Peer Tutoring was the Service that was Most Consistently Effective*

Peer tutoring was associated with statistically significant positive effects on retention, credits earned and GPA. Researchers suggest that peer tutoring addressed both academic and non-academic

### *The More Students Participated, the More They Benefited*

There was a linear relationship between the level and intensity of student participation in SSS services and positive outcomes. The benefit for individual students depended both on whether they received those services that were most clearly related to positive outcomes, and on the number of hours of those services that they received.

### **STUDY METHODOLOGY**

Researchers compared the college retention rate, grades, and credits of program participants against those of a statistically matched comparison group of college students who were not participants. Data sources included a longitudinal survey of these 5,800 participant and comparison students over three years, service records, project performance reports, surveys of project directors and site visits.

### **EVALUATION FUNDING**

Evaluation funded by U.S. Department of Education.

### **GEOGRAPHIC AREAS**

SSS operates in postsecondary institutions throughout the United States, particularly in larger schools (over 20,000 enrolled). About 34 percent of all freshmen attended institutions with SSS projects.

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

#### **Research Organization**

Bradford Chaney, Senior Analyst  
Westat, Inc.  
1650 Research Blvd.  
Rockville, MD 20850  
(301) 251-1500, Fax (301) 294-2040  
[www.westat.com](http://www.westat.com)

#### **Funding and Monitoring Organization**

David Goodwin  
Planning and Evaluation Service  
U.S. Department of Education  
Office of the Under Secretary  
600 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 4131  
Washington, D.C. 20202-8240  
(202) 401-0263, Fax (202) 401-5943