

Upward Bound

A Summary of:

“The Impacts of Upward Bound: Final Report for Phase I of the National Evaluation,” Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. (April 1999)

Focus

- Early Childhood
- Primary School
- Middle School
- ✓ Secondary School
- Postsecondary
- ✓ Extended Learning

Overview

Established by the Higher Education Act (1965), the Upward Bound (UB) program is one of the largest federally funded college access programs in the country, other than financial aid and scholarship programs. In 1999, 44,000 students participated in 563 sites across the country. At least two-thirds of UB participants at each site must be both low-income and potential first-generation college students, and the primary goal of the program is to prepare these students for college. Students enter the program in their first or second year of high school and may continue to participate through the summer after high school graduation. UB offers tutoring and counseling during the school year and a six-week academic program, which is often held at a two or four-year college, during the summer. [UB

POPULATION

Nationally, the three largest racial/ethnic groups of youth involved in UB are African Americans (50%), Latinos (22%), and whites (21%). Native Americans and Asian Americans also participate. Less than one-third (29%) of Upward Bound applicants are males. The study focused on representative sample of 67 randomly selected project sites across the country and included approximately 1,500 program participants, the majority of whom (82%) came from low-income families.

is one of five TRIO programs funded by Title IV of the Higher Education Act. The others are: Talent Search, Educational Opportunity Centers, Student Support Services and the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program.]

Key Findings

Findings from this evaluation of Upward Bound were mixed with small and inconsistent impact for students overall, but larger, consistently positive impacts for students who entered the program with low educational expectations. (All findings reported are significant at the 0.1 level).

A comparison of UB students to a control group found that the program participants:

- ◆ Earned more non-remedial high school credits in math (0.2 credits).
- ◆ Were more likely to receive financial aid to attend college (33% vs. 30%).

- ◆ Earned more non-remedial credits at postsecondary institutions (6.8 vs. 5.7).
- ◆ Were more likely to remain in school (35% vs. 28%).

However, when compared to non-participants, UB participants had similar:

- ◆ Cumulative GPAs.
- ◆ Enrollment in postsecondary institutions (two or four-year college or vocational/technical schools).

When researchers analyzed the two groups according to race/ethnicity, they found that:

- ◆ Latino UB youth completed 10% more high school credits than Latinos in the control group. They were also less likely to drop out of school and more likely to earn non-remedial credits in four-year colleges.
- ◆ African American UB youth earned 16% more Advanced Placement credits than their peers in the control group, and they earned fewer credits in remedial courses while attending two-year colleges. The program had no impact on overall numbers of credits taken or drop out rates.
- ◆ White UB youth earned 10% more high school credits than their peers in the control group. They were also less likely to drop out of school, and they earned less remedial credit in college.

The lower the expectation to attend college prior to joining the program, the more significant the results. When compared to a similar control group, UB students who had entered the program with low expectations to attend college:

- ◆ Earned about three more high school credits (mostly in sciences and social studies)
- ◆ Were more likely to graduate from high school (65% vs. 52%)
- ◆ Were 12% more likely to attend four-year colleges
- ◆ Earned about seven more credits in four-year colleges

When compared to males in the control group, UB male participants (of every race and ethnicity):

- ◆ Earned two more high school credits and four more credits at four year colleges
- ◆ Were less likely to drop out of school
- ◆ Were more likely to attend a highly selective four-year college

For other subgroups, the program had the following effect:

- ◆ Girls took fewer remedial classes than their peers in the control group when attending two-year colleges, but otherwise UB had little impact on high school graduation and college access for girls.
- ◆ Low-income students earned three times more Advanced Placement credits and were less likely to dropout of high school than peers outside of the program.
- ◆ Students participating in the program for more than one year were 14% more likely to attend a four-year college and earn five more college credits than students who stayed in the program for less than one year.

Students had the opportunity to participate in Upward Bound for all four years of high school, but 35% left the program during the first year and an additional 20% drop out of the program before the end of their senior year in high school. The average length of time in the program was 19 months.

Students who participated through their senior year reaped the greatest benefits from UB. About 85% of the students who remained in UB their senior year enrolled in college the fall after they graduated from high school, and approximately two-thirds of these students enrolled in four-year colleges.

Program Components

Upward Bound is a year-round academic enrichment program for disadvantaged students (grades 9-12) that includes counseling, after school classes during the year, and intensive summer programs.

- ◆ During the school year, UB staff provide weekly, academic support for program participants through high school visits, tutoring and mentoring relationships.

- ◆ After school, UB participants can take advantage of high level courses usually taught at nearby two- and four-year colleges, but sometimes held at a high school or community-based organization.

The summer programs, often hosted by two- and four-year colleges, provide intensive academic training with classes in math, the sciences, arts, literature, and other subjects. The summer programs run six weeks, and they provide UB participants a vision of the possibilities and promises of higher education.

Contributing Factors

Challenging Academic Environment

The advanced academic coursework after school and during the summer programs is comparable to college preparatory programs enjoyed by more advantaged students. Exposure to college level work on college campuses gives disadvantaged students a vision of themselves undertaking and succeeding in postsecondary education.

Student-Centered Initiative

Rather than focusing on reforming an entire school or intervening in the families and communities of young people, UB focuses on raising the academic achievement of each individual student.

Student Commitment

The benefits of the program were greatest for students who committed to the program for all four years of high school, but not all students could commit for that long. Many left the program in order to get jobs or because transportation to program sites was unavailable.

Evaluator Comments

Evaluators argued that since the impact of the program on students entering with lower expectations was consistently positive across a range of achievement outcomes, UB might be more effective if students with lower educational expectations and poorer academic records were recruited in greater numbers by, for instance, targeting ninth graders with C and D averages.

To address the high program dropout rate of participants seeking paid employment, evaluators suggest that UB provide “employment opportunities that complement the design and curriculum” of the program.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

Mathematica researchers examined longitudinal survey data from a group of program applicants who were randomly assigned to participate in either the program (1,479 UB participants) or a control group (1,320 members). The groups were selected during the 1992-93 and 1994-95 school years. The almost 3,000 youth in the study came from a sample of 67 UB sites, also randomly selected. The groups were subdivided into subgroups according to gender, race/ethnicity, expectation to attend college, low-income and potential first generation of college student. These youth filled out baseline questionnaires between 1992 and 1994, and follow up surveys in 1994 and 1996. Researchers also collected high school and (when available) college transcripts, as well as project staff evaluations of students. This was an interim report of a longitudinal study, so most of the participants had completed high school, but few were of an age to have finished college. Findings are most reliable with regard to high school outcomes. Future studies will report more accurate data on postsecondary achievement.

EVALUATION & PROGRAM FUNDING

The U.S. Department of Education conducted and funded the evaluation. The program is funded by the federal government under the Higher Education Act.

GEOGRAPHIC AREAS

UB sites are located in all fifty states and the District of Columbia. Mathematica did not indicate the location of specific sites examined for the evaluation.

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