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# Upward Bound at 50: Reporting on Implementation Practices Today

## Executive Summary

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**November 2016**

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## Executive Summary

Launched in 1965, Upward Bound (UB), is one of the oldest and largest of the federal college access programs targeted to low-income students and those who would represent the first-generation of college completers in their families. Currently, UB serves more than 60,000 high school students at a cost of about \$4,300 per youth and offers an array of academic and college transition support services. While much about the structure of Upward Bound and the services to be offered are prescribed in legislation, little is currently known about the focus or delivery of these services or the extent to which they vary.

This report addresses this information gap by describing the approaches that Upward Bound projects use to provide core program services—advising, tutoring, academic coursework, college exposure, college entrance exam preparation, college application assistance, and financial aid application assistance. Data come from a survey of Upward Bound project directors at institutions (mostly colleges) that host the projects. The primary goal of the survey was to help identify common (or uncommon but promising) practices that could inform program improvement studies that Congress requires the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to conduct. The survey results may also be useful as policymakers consider the upcoming renewal of the Higher Education Act, which authorizes and funds the Upward Bound program.

The survey suggests several key findings about the implementation of core services among Upward Bound projects:

- **In four of the seven core service areas—coursework, tutoring, college exposure, and college application assistance—there was a dominant approach (used by at least 50 percent of projects) to how projects focused their activities.** For example, at least half of projects reported spending the most time with students by (1) offering coursework as supplemental (noncredit) classes (58 percent), (2) helping with homework for tutoring (69 percent), (3) working with students to research colleges by using guidebooks or online tools for college exposure (56 percent), and (4) helping students complete actual college applications for application assistance (50 percent). There was no dominant approach to how projects focused their efforts when it came to academic advising, ACT/SAT prep, and financial aid prep services (see Table ES.1).
- **When, where, and how services were delivered differed across service areas.** There was no dominant approach to *when* projects offered services except for tutoring, which was typically available after school (68 percent). The dominant location for services (*where*) was at the projects' host institution for coursework, college entrance exam prep, and college and financial aid application assistance (reported by two-thirds of projects), but other services were more likely to be provided at students' high schools (tutoring and advising, 54 and 56 percent of projects). Finally, tutoring and college entrance exam preparation services were most

commonly delivered (*how*) in groups (55 percent and 74 percent, respectively), while academic advising, college application assistance, and financial aid assistance were typically provided one-on-one between a staff member and the student (between 51 and 64 percent, see Table ES.2).

- **Variation in the focus and delivery of services appears related to the urbanicity and type of institution (4-year, 2-year, and non-higher education) that hosts the project but not to other project characteristics examined.** There were few substantive differences<sup>1</sup> (at least 10 percentage points) in the percentage of projects reporting each potential approach by project size (number of students served), per-student funding, and whether the host institution was a Minority-Serving Institution (see Table ES.3). However, there were several differences across projects of different urbanicity and institution type. To illustrate the extent of variation in project focus (not shown in the summary table), project hosts that are two-year institutions of higher education (IHEs) were more likely to focus coursework on offerings where students could earn college credit (24 percent)—also called “dual enrollment”—than were non-IHEs (11 percent).

**Table ES.1. Focus of core UB services**

Focus of core services <sup>1</sup> (dominant approaches are in bold) <sup>2</sup>	Percent (%) of projects with indicated focus <sup>3</sup>
<b>Academic coursework</b>	
<b>Offered only non-credit courses<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>58</b>
Offered any courses for college credit	19
Offered any courses for high school credit	35
<b>Tutoring</b>	
<b>Homework help</b>	<b>69</b>
Subject-specific remediation	15
Study skill development	6
Other activities	5
No defined structure	5
<b>Academic advising</b>	
On course requirements for high school graduation	16
On college entrance requirements	13
On study skills	16
On academic goals	40
On non-academic issues	5
On other topics	11
<b>College exposure</b>	
<b>Assistance in researching colleges</b>	<b>56</b>
Assistance in researching college majors	15
Recruitment information sessions	14
Exposure to working professionals	6
Assessing college outcomes	9

<sup>1</sup> Differences of less than 10 percentage points were considered unlikely, in the study team’s judgment, to affect policy or the emphasis of technical assistance that might be provided.

Focus of core services <sup>1</sup> (dominant approaches are in bold) <sup>2</sup>	Percent (%) of projects with indicated focus <sup>3</sup>
<b>College entrance exam preparation</b>	
Studying for subject-specific tests	30
Taking practice tests	29
Learning test-taking skills	24
Information on the structure of the tests	7
Guidance on stress management	2
Information on how the tests are scored	0
Other services	7
<b>College application assistance</b>	
<b>Guidance on completing applications</b>	<b>50</b>
Guidance on submitting applications on time	19
Assistance with accessing applications	11
Writing application essays	6
Narrowing college choices based on net costs	5
Narrowing college choices based on college outcomes	2
Other	6
Recommending students apply to 4+ colleges	38
<b>Financial aid assistance</b>	
Advising on aid requirements	18
Determining the information needed for FAFSA	31
Tracking progress toward completing FAFSA	31
Information to parents about aid	8
Estimating net costs	1
Obtaining application fee waivers	1
Other services	11

<sup>1</sup>“Focus” was mostly determined on the basis of a question that asked projects to report on which approach they spent the most time on with students (tutoring, academic advising, college entrance exam prep, college application assistance, financial aid assistance) or which approach was used to serve the greatest number of students (college exposure). The focus of academic coursework is an exception and reflects the percentage of projects offering each approach.

<sup>2</sup>“Dominant” approaches are those reported by at least half of all projects.

<sup>3</sup>The “percent of projects with indicated focus” summarizes content focus reported across multiple survey questions for college application assistance and academic coursework. For this reason, percentages may total more than 100 percent for these two core services.

<sup>4</sup>“Noncredit” was not a response category in the survey but was computed as the difference between the percent of projects offering coursework and those that indicated offering coursework for either high school or college credit.

**Table ES.2. When, where, and how UB services are delivered**

Delivery approach (dominant approaches are in bold) <sup>1</sup>	Percent (%) of projects most commonly implementing indicated delivery approach <sup>2</sup>						
	Academic coursework	Tutoring	Academic advising	College exposure	College entrance exam prep	College application assistance	Financial aid application assistance
<b>When services were provided</b>							
Before school	1	1	1	0	0	0	0
During school	21	13	43	21	12	26	20
<b>After school</b>	28	<b>68</b>	35	16	31	36	39
Weekends	39	16	19	45	48	31	20
Other	12	2	3	19	10	7	9
<b>Where services were provided</b>							
<b>Host institution</b>	<b>65</b>	41	44	41	<b>69</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>High school</b>	30	<b>54</b>	<b>56</b>	10	24	35	28
Local college	3	1	0	38	2	1	1
Local community center	1	2	0	0	1	1	1
Online	1	2	0	1	3	1	0
Other	1	0	0	9	1	1	0
<b>How services were provided</b>							
<b>One-on-one</b>	N/A	40	<b>64</b>	N/A	10	<b>64</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Group</b>	N/A	<b>55</b>	33	N/A	<b>74</b>	32	41
Online	N/A	4	0	N/A	9	3	7
Other	N/A	1	3	N/A	6	0	0

<sup>1</sup>"Dominant" approaches are those reported by at least half of all projects.

<sup>2</sup>"Most Common" was determined on the basis of a question that asked projects to report on which approach was used to serve the largest number of students. The most common approaches for how academic coursework and college exposure services were provided are the exception because this question was not asked. Findings related to these two services are marked as N/A.

**Table ES.3. Variation in the focus and delivery of services by key project characteristics**

Project characteristic (groups)	Approaches for which the percentage of projects implementing varied by characteristic			
	Focus of core services	Delivery of services		
		❖ When	➤ Where	✓ How
Size (small vs medium vs large)				
Per-student funding (low vs moderate vs high)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic advising: on academic goals</li> </ul>			
MSI (MSI vs other IHE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>College exposure: assistance in researching colleges</li> </ul>	❖ Coursework: offered year round	❖ College entrance exam prep: offered year round	
Urbanicity (urban vs suburban vs rural/town)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coursework: offered for college credit</li> <li>Academic advising: on study skills &amp; academic goals</li> <li>College entrance exam prep: on learning test-taking skills</li> <li>College application assistance: providing guidance on submitting applications on time &amp; recommending students apply to 4+ colleges</li> </ul>	❖ Coursework: offered year round	❖ Financial aid application assistance: offered year round	❖ College entrance exam prep: offered year round
		➤ College entrance exam prep: offered at multiple locations		

Project characteristic (groups)	Approaches for which the percentage of projects implementing varied by characteristic			
	Focus of core services	Delivery of services		
		❖ When	➤ Where	✓ How
Institution type (4-year IHE vs 2-year IHE vs non-IHE)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coursework: offered for college credit</li> <li>• Tutoring: on homework help</li> <li>• College exposure: assistance in researching colleges</li> <li>• College entrance exam prep: on studying for subject-specific tests</li> <li>• College application assistance: providing guidance on submitting applications on time &amp; recommending students apply to 4+ colleges</li> <li>• Financial aid application assistance: on determining the information needed for FAFSA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Coursework: offered year round</li> <li>❖ Tutoring: offered at multiple times</li> <li>➤ Tutoring: offered at multiple locations</li> <li>➤ Advising: offered at multiple locations</li> <li>➤ College application assistance: offered at multiple locations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Transportation provided during the school year</li> <li>✓ Financial aid application assistance: service delivered 1:1</li> </ul>	

**Note:** Variation was examined for a subset of approaches, including how projects reported spending most of their time or serving the most students during the school year for each of the core service areas (“focus”) and the delivery methods that are hypothesized to most influence student involvement in Upward Bound (e.g., making services convenient by offering them at multiple times or in multiple locations). The percentage of projects reporting each of the approaches was calculated for groups of projects defined by their characteristics. For example, per-student funding was derived as the average grant award amount divided by the number of students and then split into three equal-sized groups of projects representing low (<\$4,167), moderate (\$4,167–\$4,466), or high (>\$4,466) funding. Project size was based on the number of participants expected at the time of grant award in FY12, and the three groups were defined as small (<63 participants), medium (63–77 participants), or large (>77 participants). Urbanicity was based on information from the Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS) on the locale of the host institution, and groups were defined as urban, suburban, or rural. Differences between groups are noted only where they are “substantive” (at least 10 percentage points); differences of lesser magnitude (less than 10 percentage points) were considered unlikely by the study to affect policy or the emphasis of technical assistance that might be provided. Expert judgement was used to set the bounds for the differences considered to be substantive

### More on Upward Bound

Upward Bound is a federal precollege program designed to help economically disadvantaged students prepare for, enter, and succeed in college. First initiated under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and then incorporated into Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA), it is one of ED’s eight TRIO programs aimed at helping disadvantaged students to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to postbaccalaureate programs.<sup>2</sup> Students who must be low-income or potential first-generation college students, or both—usually enter the program while in grade 9 or 10 and may participate in Upward Bound through the summer following grade 12 (for three to four years total). The 819 Upward Bound projects funded in 2012 are hosted primarily by 4-year and 2-year postsecondary institutions but also by nonprofit and other organizations. They partner with specific high schools from which they recruit students and, in some cases, work with in delivering services (target schools).

Upward Bound project services are well established, defined largely by specific statutory language in HEA. There are 7 required services (see Table ES.1) and a required summer program that simulates a college-going experience for participants and can take place any time between June and

<sup>2</sup> For more information, see <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/trio/index.html>.

August. While the statute designates the required services, Upward Bound projects choose whether to offer those services during the school year, the summer program, or both.

### More on This Study

The 2008 reauthorization of the HEA required that ED conduct studies of TRIO programs that focus on program improvement. Specifically, it called for a study or studies that would identify particular institutional, community, and program practices that are effective in improving key outcomes for participating students. Given that the most recent systematic data collection on Upward Bound implementation occurred in the 1990s (Moore, 1997), ED determined that a critical first step in identifying effective practices was to better understand the current practices in place.

To learn about these practices, a web-based survey was administered in summer 2013 to the directors of regular Upward Bound projects.<sup>3</sup> The survey was closed on September 19, 2013, with responses from 773 of the 819 projects (94.4 percent). Data from the survey was combined with information from a program database at ED (e.g., the number of students served, grant amount) and from the Integrated Postsecondary Data System (IPEDS) maintained by ED's National Center for Education Statistics (e.g., locale of the host institution) in order to divide projects into groups based on their characteristics; these groups were used to analyze implementation variation.

The purpose of this study is to describe Upward Bound offerings and the way that grantee projects deliver core services. Like all studies, this study has some limitations. First, it relied on information reported by Upward Bound project directors and did not attempt to independently verify the information that was reported. Second, while it explored several project characteristics that may be associated with the delivery of core services, other factors could be associated with service delivery that were not examined in the study. Third, it does not attempt to link the implementation of services to student outcomes or explain *why* Upward Bound projects with different characteristics might deliver services differently.

### Implications and Considerations for Upward Bound Program Improvement

The results from the survey point to strategies that might benefit from further investigation because they are supported by related research but have been adopted by relatively few Upward Bound projects. For example, recent research reviewed by ED's What Works Clearinghouse<sup>4</sup> suggests that dual enrollment (where students earn college credit while still in high school) could

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<sup>3</sup> The development of the survey questionnaire drew on prior research on Upward Bound implementation and benefitted from the input of outside experts on college access programs, Upward Bound project directors who participated in pretesting the questionnaire or who provided suggestions during the regular public comment period, and the Council of Opportunity in Education (COE)—the professional association that represents TRIO programs. Project directors were promised that their responses would be confidential and presented only in the aggregate.

<sup>4</sup> For more information see <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/aboutus.aspx>.

have promise for improving the college enrollment, persistence, or completion of students like those in Upward Bound (An, 2012; Giani, Alexander, & Reyes, 2014; Struhl & Vargas, 2012). Currently, less than a quarter of Upward Bound projects (19 percent) offer any coursework for which students could earn college credit. In addition, as part of advising, 10 percent of projects ask students to focus on the ranking or selectivity of their colleges of interest. But emerging evidence indicates that motivating students to focus on the quality of these schools (average freshman SAT/ACT, graduation rates), along with net costs, could lead some of them to enroll where there is a better academic match and to stay in school longer (Hoxby & Turner, 2013). The benefits of these strategies, as well as other underutilized practices supported by rigorous research not yet reviewed by the WWC, for the Upward Bound program are not currently known. To learn about these potential benefits, ED is currently evaluating a college advising strategy designed in part to improve college matches for Upward Bound participants.

