

**Student Perceptions of At-risk Youth Education Impacts: A Study of the Gary Job Corps Program**

By

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to describe Gary Job Corps graduates perceptions of program impacts. This study develops a conceptual framework that includes three impact areas: (1) job market preparation; (2) social skills preparation; and (3) future educational preparation. This study utilizes survey research to describe Gary Job Corps students' views on these three impact areas. Overall participants felt that participating in the Gary Job Corps Program had enhanced each of the impact areas. The most positively impacted area was job market preparation. In addition, there are areas where students rate Gary Job Corps relatively low. These areas include the ability to cope with stress, diversity and cultural awareness, and academic abilities. Based upon these findings recommendations were made to enhance the Gary Job Corps Program. These recommendations include; engaging students in stress coping activities, setting goals for students, and taking a prescriptive approach to student failures to promote future academic success.

## **About the Author**

Maureen Rebman Germaine was born in Abington, Pennsylvania and raised in Farmington Hills Michigan and Billerica, England. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Political Science with a minor in International Relations from Grand Valley State University in 2010. Maureen also holds a Masters of Public Administration degree from Texas State University. While conducting this study Maureen worked as a substitute teacher at the Gary Job Corps in San Marcos, TX.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **History and Requirements**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the Job Corps Program and to provide background on Job Corps students. The description of Job Corps will include; a history of the founding of the Federal Job Corps Program, an overview of Job Corps current operations and a description of GARY Job Corps. A description of Job Corps participants will include; program requirements for Job Corps entry and a description of Job Corps demographics. A description of Job Corps and its participants will provide context for this study.

#### **Job Corps Historical Overview**

A brief historical overview of the Federal Job Corps Program is necessary to provide a context for this study. While Job Corps has continued its basic mission, changes have occurred over the past fifty years. The service base of Job Corps has changed and the program has expanded its service centers to accommodate its growing number of participants.

#### *The Founding of Job Corps*

The War on Poverty undertaken by Lyndon Johnson in the 1960's saw the establishment of numerous programs aimed at reducing poverty (Quadagno and Fobes 1995). The Job Corps Program was created to address economic problems facing underprivileged youth by providing a basic education and training participants in skilled trades (Quadagno and Fobes 1995). These

trades differed for men and women (Quadagno and Fobes 1995). Founded in 1964 as part of the Economic Opportunity Act, the initial mission of Job Corps was to:

...prepare for the responsibilities of citizenship and to increase the employability of young men and young women aged sixteen through twenty-one by providing them in rural and urban residential centers with education, vocational training, useful work experience, including work directed toward the conservation of natural resources, and other appropriate activities (Economic Opportunity Act 1964).

In the case of the Job Corps Program it has continued its initial central mission, and strives to improve employment opportunities for economically disadvantaged youths through education (McCarron 2000). However, there have been changes made to the Job Corps Program which have altered its service base and in turn altered who Job Corps is intended to benefit. Specifically, as Job Corps has expanded the percentage of women being assisted has grown and gender roles are no longer explicitly promoted through the program (Quadagno and Fobes 1995).

### *Service Base*

In addition, the Job Corps Program has grown since 1964 and the program services a different demographic (Quadagno and Fobes 1995). The service base of the Job Corps Program has changed since the programs adoption. For example, the age range and the ratio of male-to-female Job Corps students have undergone changes since the programs establishment. In addition, the Job Corps Program itself has expanded.

When Job Corps was founded it focused on providing education and training to young men (Quadagno and Fobes 1995). However, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 required one

third of the Job Corps trainees to be female (Quadagno and Fobes 1995). Separate Women's Job Corps centers were constructed to provide Job Corps Programs to women. However, after the first year only 2,393, or 8.8 percent, of the 27,300 Job Corps students were female (Quadagno and Fobes 1995, 175). By 1967 9,000 women and 31,000 men were enrolled in Job Corps training programs (Quadagno and Fobes 1995). By 2007 approximately 40 percent of Job Corps participants were female (GAO Report 2007, 5). The growth in female participants has been attributed to growing numbers of women entering the workforce who desire training (Quadagno and Fobes 1995).

In 1964 the criterion for entry into Job Corps differed for men and women. Women who were not expected to marry a man with an "above-poverty" income level were deprived entrance (Quadagno and Fobes 1995, 176). Men were given tests in the areas of reading and math to determine eligibility; their female counterparts were not (Quadagno and Fobes 1995, 176). Further, male applicants had to pass medical evaluations which screened them for alcohol addiction, emotional disturbance, and homosexuality (Quadagno and Fobes 1995, 176). Today the criterion used to determine eligibility are applied to both men and women (OJC 2011b).

The curriculum for men and women enrolled in the Job Corps Program was differed in 1964. Men could learn trades such including; carpentry, brick masonry, and mechanic (Quadagno and Fobes 1995, 176). Women were taught skills for low-income jobs and housekeeping skills such as cooking, sewing, typing, and childcare (Quadagno and Fobes 1995, 176-185). Today men and women have the same curriculum.

The age of Job Corps applicants has also changed since the program's founding. Initially, students were required to be between the ages of sixteen and twenty one (Quadagno and Fobes

1995). Presently, Job Corps accepts students between the ages of sixteen and twenty four (Job Corps 2011). The age range of Job Corps students has changed allowing a greater population to enter the program.

### *Program Growth*

Since the founding of Job Corps, the number of students enrolling in Job Corps has increased. In 1964 27,300 individuals attended Job Corps Centers (Quadagno and Fobes 1995, 175). Today this number has more than doubled. Currently Job Corps provides educational services to 60,000 persons per year (Schochet et al. 2008). It is evident that the number of youths in Job Corps programs has grown since the programs adoption. The reason for this growth is bipartisan support of Job Corps, which has been attributed to the program's ability to increase the earnings of its participants (LaLonde 1995, 158).

### **Gary Job Corps Overview**

The Job Corps is a federal program, which provides education and training services through centers that receive federal funding (OJC 2011a). The Gary Job Corps, located in San Marcos, Texas is one of these centers.

Gary Job Corps is the setting for this survey and must be looked at as a separate entity as well as a part of the larger Federal Job Corps Program. The mission of GARY Job Corps is to help educate at-risk youth while creating employable and independent adults (<http://gary.jobcorps.gov/about.aspx>). The goal is to prepare students for entrance into the job

market or to prepare students to continue their education (<http://gary.jobcorps.gov/about.aspx>). This mission is aligned with the mission of the Federal Job Corps Program.

The Federal Job Corps Program is the nation's largest vocational training program for at risk youth (Schochet et al. 2008). The Job Corps Center in San Marcos Texas, Gary Job Corps, is the largest Job Corps facility in the nation. Like all Job Corps, students must meet the federal requirements to enter the program.

GARY Job Corps was established 1965 to provide vocational and educational opportunities to between 1,000 and 2,000 at risk male youths (<http://gary.jobcorps.gov/about.aspx>). Originally an Army base, the barracks and buildings of GARY Army Air Field were converted into dormitories and classrooms. The currently facilities can accommodate 1660 students (<http://gary.jobcorps.gov/about.aspx>). Today male and female students are eligible to participate in programs offered at GARY Job Corps, when the center was founded only male students were eligible to attend (<http://gary.jobcorps.gov/about.aspx>).

GARY Job Corps offers twenty technical training specialties in the areas of business technology, manufacturing, human services, and security training (<http://gary.jobcorps.gov/about.aspx>). Students can receive a GED certification, high school diploma, ESL classes, and/or vocational certifications from the Job Corps. There are sports functions, lectures on site, and other enrichment activities. Further, there are programs to assist students in their transition to university or college (<http://gary.jobcorps.gov/about.aspx>).

## **At-risk Youth**

The term “at-risk” does not have a consistent definition (Moore 2006). Programs define at-risk using different criterion (Moore 2006). The term “at-risk” implies probability or chance of something negative (Moore 2006). For example, outcomes and behaviors such as; poor grades, drug use, and an economic disadvantage can be used to define an individual as at-risk (Moore 2006). Since definitions of at-risk differ depending upon the program, it is necessary to define what is considered at-risk by Job Corps.

## **Job Corps Eligibility Requirements**

To participate in the Job Corps Program potential students must meet several criteria. To be eligible for Job Corps students must address fourteen criteria: age, selective service registration, citizenship, income, barriers, health, consent to participate, childcare arrangements, program suitability requirements, interference requirements, not be under agency supervision, community relations requirements, interface requirements, and rule-based requirements (OJC 2011b). If an applicant meets all of these requirements, and is a veteran of the Armed Forces of the United States or an eligible spouse of a veteran they will be granted priority enrollment (OJC 2011b). Expedited enrollment may be given to victims of natural and man-made disasters.

For the purposes of this study “at-risk” youth or students are individuals who have met these requirements and have been admitted into Job Corps. Describing the criteria for entry into the Job Corps program will provide context and insight into the individuals who will be surveyed in this study and are presented in Table 1.1. The requirements for entry into the Job Corps Program are federally mandated and apply to all applicants (OJC 2011b).

<b>Table 1.1 At-risk Status Criteria for Job Corps</b>	
1	Disability
2	Selective Service
3	Citizenship
4	Income
5	Barriers
6	Health
7	Consent to Participate
8	Childcare Arrangements
9	Program Suitability Requirements
10	Rule-based Requirements
11	Interference Requirements
12	Community Relations
13	Agency Supervision
14	Interface Requirements

(OJC 2011b)

### *Disability*

As previously indicated students must be at least 16 years old and cannot have turned 25 prior to enrollment (OJC 2011b). However, a waiver may be obtained for individuals with mental or physical disabilities (OJC 2011b). Applicants are not required to disclose a disability, but are invited to do so if it will provide them with the age waiver voiding the age requirement (OJC 2011b).

### *Selective Service*

While females are not required to do so, male Job Corps participants are required to register for selective service (OJC 2011b). If the applicant is not registered, the student is not eligible for entry into the program (OJC 2011b).

### *Citizenship*

To participate in Job Corps, students must meet one of the citizenship criteria. A student must be a citizen of the United States or a resident of a United States territory (OJC 2011b). In addition, persons who are asylees, parolees, permanent resident aliens, or immigrants who have been authorized by the Attorney General meet this criterion (OJC 2011b).

### *Income*

In order to participate in Job Corps, students must be classified as “low income”. They can meet this requirement in several ways including; being a member of a household that receives food stamps or being a foster child. Documentation must be provided to ascertain the income level of an applicant (OJC 2011b). Similar to the age requirement, persons with disabilities can receive a waiver and participate in the program without being classified as “low income” (OJC 2011b).

### *Barriers*

To be admitted into the Job Corps Program an applicant must have one or more barriers to education and employment (OJC 2011b). The barriers that qualify an applicant for admission are: having dropped out of high school, a need for career training or further education, poor basic skills (ex. Reading skill below an eighth grade level), homelessness, being a foster child or runaway, and parenthood (OJC 2011b) . If an applicant has one of these barriers then the barrier qualification is met (OJC 2011b).

### *Health*

Health information must be disclosed to Job Corps before a student can be admitted into the program (OJC 2011b). A form entitled “Authorization for Use and Disclosure of Your Health Information” must be signed by the applicant (OJC 2011b). If the applicant is a minor their guardian must sign the disclosure (OJC 2011b). In addition, applicants are also encouraged to complete ETA Form 653, the Job Corps Health Questionnaire and produce a physician report describing injuries, illnesses, and any medications being taken (OJC 2011b).

### *Consent to Participate*

To participate in Job Corps consent is required (OJC 2011b). If a person is a minor parental consent is required, unless the applicant is classified as an emancipated minor (OJC 2011b).

### *Childcare Arrangements*

To be admitted into the Job Corps Program a student must prove that they have childcare for all of their children (OJC 2011b). During a participants enrollment Job Corps centers will assist the parent in maintaining childcare arrangements for their children (OJC 2011b).

### *Program Suitability Requirements*

To be admitted into Job Corps it must be demonstrated that Job Corps is the best way to meet an applicant’s educational needs (OJC 2011b). If the applicant desires to obtain a high school diploma or GED and participate in technical training the desire to complete both must be indicated (OJC 2011b) . If the participant already has a GED or high school diploma and wishes

to obtain technical training is must be indicated (OJC 2011b). Regardless of the credentials an applicant wishes to obtain after graduation from Job Corps they need to obtain employment, enter the military, or continue their education (OJC 2011b).

### *Rule-based Requirements*

A Job Corps applicant must demonstrate an understanding of Job Corps rules and group participation (OJC 2011b). The applicant is required to meet with the Admissions Counselors and answer a set of questions to determine their ability to meet requirements (OJC 2011b).

### *Interference Requirements*

Applicants must demonstrate interference with other students' participation (OJC 2011b). Applicants must not display threatening or disruptive behavior (OJC 2011b). A set of questions is asked by the Admissions Counselors to determine if the requirements are met and the student is suitable for Job Corps (OJC 2011b). In addition, a consent form must be signed (OJC 2011b).

### *Community Relations*

Applicants must express a willingness to participate in community services and be willing to act in a manner that reflects positively on the Job Corps Program (OJC 2011b). The applicant will be asked specific questions by the Admissions Counselors to determine whether he or she meets these requirements (OJC 2011b).

### *Agency Supervision*

Job Corps applicants must not be under court or agency supervision (OJC 2011b). This includes being on probation, parole, suspended sentence, or under supervision of an agency due to court action or institutionalization (OJC 2011b). An applicant should not have court fees in excess of \$500 (OJC 2011b). However, there are exceptions which allow individuals to be admitted into Job Corps despite being under agency supervision or indebted to the courts (OJC 2011b).

If an applicant is under agency supervision they may still be admitted to the program if the applicant; has been released from supervision, the release does not violate regulations, the applicant responded positively to supervision, and the individual is permitted to leave their local area or state when participating in Job Corps (OJC 2011b). If an applicant owes the courts over \$500 if one of the following requirements are met; an applicant settles their fines prior to enrollment, the court suspends the obligation during the student's time at Job Corps, or the Regional Office of Job Corps grants a waiver to permit the applicants entry (OJC 2011b).

### *Interface Requirements*

A Job Corps applicant must be able to maintain sound discipline (OJC 2011b). Background checks are conducted to ensure that all applicants meet this requirement (OJC 2011b).

## **Job Corps Student Characteristics**

### *2007 DOL Statistics*

The 2007 Department of Labor statistics on Job Corps included a survey of participant ethnic/racial makeup, age, and sex. The data collected indicated that Job Corps racial/ethnic makeup in 2007 was; 52 percent were African American or Black, 25 percent White, 17 percent Hispanic, 3 percent American Indian, and 2 percent Asian or Pacific Islander (GAO Report 2007, 5). 38 percent of the students enrolled were under the age of 18 (GAO Report 2007, 5). Of the students who were not minors 20 percent of the students were 18 years old, 15 percent were 19 years old, 10 percent were 20 years old, 11 percent were between the ages of 21 and 22, and 5 percent were 23 or older (GAO Report 2007, 6). A majority of students, 60 percent, were male (GAO Report 2007, 4).

Over the past two decades a majority of Job Corps Participants have been male. Approximately 40 percent of the participants have been under the age of 18. A majority of students have been minorities, with minorities composing 75 percent of the Job Corps student body in 2007 (GAO Report 2007). These statistics are for the Job Corps Program on a national level. Local area statistics may differ depending upon the racial/ethnic makeup of the area in question, but national data provides a context for the overall program.

### *Regional Characteristics*

Job Corps centers are divided into regions. Region 6 includes students from Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas (Burghardt and Schochet 2001). Gary Job Corps is located in San Marcos, Texas and is in Region 6 (Burghardt and Schochet 2001).

In 2011 Region 6's student population was 40.4 percent female and 41.9 percent of students were under the age of 18(Burghardt and Schochet 2001, 40). The ethnic/racial composition of Region 6 was 38.1 percent Black, 24.7 percent White, 27.9 percent Hispanic, and 9.4 percent American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander or Other (Burghardt and Schochet 2001). Regional data provides a more narrow view of Job Corps participant's characteristics than National statistics. Combined they provide context for the Job Corps program.

### **Research Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the following study is to describe GARY job Corps graduates perceptions of program impacts. Chapter two will describe three key impact areas (1) graduates perceived job market preparation impacts; (2) graduates perceived social skills preparation impacts; and (3) graduates perceived educational preparation impacts. The next chapter will examine literature on these three impact areas and describe the conceptual framework for this study.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Perceptions of Program Impacts**

The purpose of this chapter is to succinctly review scholarly literature concerning vocational training institutions. Student perceptions of vocational training program impacts. This chapter describes three key impact areas: (1) graduates perceived job market readiness; (2) graduates perceived social skills readiness; and (3) graduates perceived higher educational readiness. It is assumed that perceived readiness is a measure of an impact of the program. The multiple dimensions of these categories will be described to provide background and an enhanced understanding of the complexities of vocational training program goals. A conceptual framework will be constructed from the literature presented to describe student's perceived impacts of participating in vocational education programs, such as those provided through GARY Job Corps.

#### **Introduction**

The quantifiable effects of vocational education programs have been extensively examined by government entities, including as the Government Accounting Office (GAO) and the Office of Job Corps (OJC) (GAO 1995). Under the Department of Labor, the OJC examines data directly concerning Job Corps program empirical impacts, which are expected to coincide with programs goals (OJC 2011a). Empirical impacts of the Job Corps Program are important because they provide the government with an assessment of program impacts. However, student perceptions of program impacts are also important. Positive student self-perceptions, or self-confidence, are correlated with their rates of success and failure in current academic

environments (Pershey 2010). Student self-perception has been linked to program satisfaction (Pershey 2010). Therefore, program impacts for Job Corps should be reflected in the perceptions of program participants.

Students who are overconfident in their abilities are often partially aware of their educational limitations (Miller and Geraci 2011). Students may appear overconfident in their abilities, but they have the ability to perceive their shortcomings. If students are able to perceive their own academic shortcomings they are also capable of perceiving their own improvements. Therefore, students are capable of perceiving program impacts and their own abilities.

Studies on academic performance support the assertion that students perceptions of their academic abilities impact academic performance. A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies focusing on student self-beliefs and academic achievement concluded that student beliefs partially impact their academic performance and behavior (Valentine et al 2004). Students' beliefs alter their perceptions and their actions.

Students' perceptions alter their behavior and this behavior impact their levels of success. According to a longitudinal study focusing on academic achievement, students' beliefs in relation to their academic abilities were the greatest indicator of academic success (Valentine et al 2004). Therefore, education and training potentially impact a student's perception of their abilities. In addition, students' perceptions of academic abilities impact their behavior (Valentine et al 2004). Meaning, training impacts students' perceptions of their abilities, and these abilities in turn impact behavior. Thus perceptions can be utilized as an indicator of performance and behavior.

Studying the impacts of vocational educational programs targeting at risk youth demonstrates the impacts students should ideally perceive. If programs are beneficial to the

student it should be evident in their perceptions of the programs benefits to them as an individual. Students' perceptions of educational programs should reflect the ideal type. This makes literature on program effectiveness and program impacts integral to the understanding of student perceptions.

To ascertain student's perceptions in relation to an ideal type, in this case program impacts and effectiveness, it is necessary to describe program impacts. Specifically, a literature review on the measurable results of vocational education programs for at risk youth is required. These results will compose the ideal type. The different impact areas and concepts composing measurable impacts for educational programs for at risk youths will be described. In doing so, an understanding of impact areas can be developed and an understanding of possible student perceptions will be formulated. This will outline the ideal type and provide an indication of expected student perceptions.

### **Impact Area Description**

Three categories, or impact areas, will be explored in this chapter. These impact areas were selected because they directly relate to the mission statement of the Federal Job Corps Program. The impact areas described relate directly to the mission of the Federal Job Corps Program and therefore, GARY Job Corps. The categories correlate with measures utilized by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Department of Labor (DOL) in their evaluations of the Job Corps Vocational Training Program. The direct link of the impact areas to the mission statement of the Job Corps Program, in combination with the impact areas linkage to data deemed relevant by the federal government, make the impact areas to be studied relevant.

The three categories in question: (1) graduates perceived job market readiness; (2) graduates perceived social skills readiness; and (3) graduates perceived higher educational readiness, address the overarching mission statement of the Job Corps Program. Specifically, the Job Corps Program aspires to provide education to at risk youth to develop more productive, employable, and responsible citizens (OJC 2011a). Hence Job Corps desires to provide training, or education, employability, and foster citizenry and sociability.

The impact areas selected for study similarly address the mission statement of the GARY Job Corps Program. According to the GARY Job Corps website the mission of the Job Corp is to: "...support the Job Corps program's mission of teaching eligible young people the skills they need to become employable and independent and placing them in meaningful jobs or further education." (<http://gary.jobcorps.gov/about.aspx>) The Job Corp mission statement indicates that the goal of the GARY Job Corps Program includes furthering education, enhancing employment, and promoting student social independence. These three goals directly correlate to the three impact areas: (1) perceived social skills preparation; (2) perceived job market preparation impacts; (3) and perceived educational preparation impacts, selected for this study. Therefore, these three areas are valid categories for description.

The Government Accountability Office is one agency concerned with the program impacts of the Federal Job Corps Program (GAO 1995). The GAO is primarily concerned with employment outcomes of Job Corps graduates. The GAO evaluates employment and the satisfaction of employers with the behavior and skills exhibited by graduates (GAO 1995). The GAO assesses graduate preparation for the job market and social skills. It can be concluded that these categories are valid areas for description.

The Department of Labor evaluates multiple outcomes of the Job Corps Program to determine program effectiveness. These areas include educational skills, continuation of education, and job attainment (GAO 1995). These outcomes directly relate to perceived job market impacts and perceived educational preparation impact areas and justify the description of these two specific impact categories.

The impact areas focused on in this chapter are valid areas for study based upon their correlation to goals set by the Federal Job Corps Program, GARY Job Corps, and measurements used by the Government Accountability Office and the Department of Labor. The federal government sees these impact areas as significant therefore; these impact areas are valid areas for study. The categories described are outlining the ideal type that should be reflected in the perceptions of Job Corps graduates.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The purpose of the conceptual framework is to outline the impact areas to be addressed in the literature review and to display the supporting literature for each impact area. The three impact areas to describe are: (1) graduates perceived job market readiness; (2) graduates perceived social skills readiness; and (3) graduates perceived higher educational readiness. Each impact area is indicated and divided into its three subsections with supporting literature. Table 2.1 presents the conceptual framework.

<b>Table 2.1 Conceptual Framework</b>	
<b>WH1: Graduates Perceived Job Market Preparation Impacts</b>	
WH1a: Employability	Bloom (2010), Brown and Thakur (2006), Bugaz (2008), Lee (2009), McQuaid et al. (2005), Schochet et al. (2008)
WH1b: Income/wages	Flores-Lagunes (2010), GAO (1995), Lee (2009), McConnell and Glazerman (2001), OJC (2011a)
WH1c: Career Aspirations	Kortering and Braziel (2009), Schnorr and Ware (2011), Schochet and Burghardt, (2008), Staff et al. (2010)
<b>WH2: Graduates Perceived Social Skills Preparation Impacts</b>	
WH2a: Diversity and Cultural Awareness	Glazerman et al. (2000), Nelson Laird (2005), Probst (2003)
WH2b: Ability to Handle Stress	Armacost (1989), Matsuba et al. (2008)
WH2c: Behavior	Matsuba et al. (2008), Schochet et al. (2008) Glazerman et al. (2000)
<b>WH3: Graduates Perceived Educational Preparation Impacts</b>	
WH3a: Continuing Education	Brock (2010), Lehmann (2009), McConnell and Glazerman (2001), Schochet et al. (2008).
WH3b: Academic Abilities	Glazerman et al. (2000), Ruzzi and Kraemer, (2006), Schochet et al. (2008), Schochet and Burghardt, (2008)
WH3c: Academic Confidence	Miller and Geraci (2011), Valentine et al. (2004)

## **Job Market Preparation**

One of the primary goals of vocational youth education programs is to prepare graduates for entry into a competitive job market. Impacts of education programs targeting at risk youth encompass many facets of employment preparation. The most fundamental of these facets are employment status, income/wages, and career aspirations. The supporting literature for these impact areas is from various forms of studies including; studies of student perceptions, government mandated studies and reports, and evaluation studies.

## *Employability*

Employability is an important and measureable aspect of student preparation of the Gary Job Corps Program. Increasing employability is a key outcome measure of at-risk youth programs. The concept of employability refers to the capacity to obtain new employment (McQuaid et al. 2005). A broad approach to the concept of employability includes factors such as labor demands and personal skills (McQuaid et al. 2005). The concept of employability is difficult to measure as it includes multiple facets such as; teamwork, honesty, adaptability, and communication skills (Bugaz 2008). For the purposes of this literature review, employment status will be used to assess employability as it is a facet of employability.

Government sponsored education programs have produced inconsistent results concerning job placement (Bloom 2010, Lee 2009, Schochet et al. 2008). Students who participated in vocational programs for at risk youth are frequently unemployed post-graduation (Lee 2009, 1077). This indicates vocational programs targeting at risk youth are limited in effectiveness. These limitations should be mirrored in student's perceptions of Job Corps impacts.

One possible explanation for the inconsistent employment outcomes are confounding variables and factors education programs and students cannot control. For example, the job market is becoming increasingly competitive and youth unemployment is at record highs (Brown and Thakur 2006). In 2004 only 36.4 percent of youths aged sixteen to nineteen were employed (Brown and Thakur 2006). The percentage is 8.8 percent lower than the employment rate in 2000 (Brown and Thakur 2006). This indicates that rates of teenage employment have declined.

Students completing vocational training are entering a poor job market where obtaining employment is challenging.

Despite a bleak employment outlook, many training programs for at risk youth have a positive impact on long-term employment propensities (Lee 2009, 1007). Employability is different from employment. Employability refers to a student's ability to ascertain and maintain a job while employment simply refers to a status. Similar patterns of employability have been described in impact studies on the Federal Job Corps Program (Schochet et al. 2008, 1872). . Positive impacts are indicated after three years, and increase further in the fourth year after graduation (Schochet et al. 2008, 1872).

Comparative studies focusing on education programs for high school dropouts indicate that multiple vocational institutions increased employment for graduates through subsidized employment (Bloom 2010, 96). Programs including the National Guard ChalleNGe and the Federal Job Corps Program, indicated increases in employment without subsidies (Bloom 2010, 96). This demonstrates that vocational education programs can be successful. While employment may not occur directly following a student's graduation from a vocational education program, participating in vocational education programs can yield positive results over a prolonged period.

Based on this literature review, the self-reported employability of at risk youth vocational education program graduates is an important descriptive category of program impacts. Students perceptions of their employability are expected to reflect program impacts. Perceptions of employability provide an indication of the programs ability to achieve one of its key goals, increasing graduate employability and employment. If students think they are employable they should be more likely to gain employment.

## *Income/Wages*

Wage impacts are another facet of job market preparation. Income and wage impacts follow a similar pattern to the employment status of graduates of vocational programs targeting at risk youth (Lee 2009, 1091). As graduates gain employment the average wage of graduates increases and employment rates don't see growth until four years after graduation (Lee 2009). This would indicate that students do not necessarily see automatic wage increases from program participation. Not all students are going to be earning higher wages immediately following graduation. However, students are potentially aware of long-term earning benefits. Students who graduate, are in a position to observe wage scales and paths for advancement in their respected fields as they search for employment opportunities and participate in interviews. This allows for students to perceive the future wage benefits of participation in Job Corps without personally experiencing long-term impacts.

The 1995 GAO Report suggests the impact of the Federal Job Corps Program is pronounced (GAO 1995). According to the report, graduate wage increases were approximately 25 percent higher when graduates were compared to their counterparts, individuals who did not participate in the Federal Job Corps Program (GAO 1995, p.2). Students who participate in the Job Corps Program see significant financial advantage as a result of their graduation. These benefits however, may not be as pronounced as the GAO report indicates. Positive wage effects are indicated long-term, generally four years after program completion (Lee 2009, 1091). These impacts are limited in scope with only a 10 percent impact (Lee 2009, 1091). This suggests that wage impacts are not as pronounced as the 1995 GAO Report indicates.

Indicators wage increases as a result of vocational education can be measured by comparing wage increases to high school education equivalents. Graduates from Job Corps institutes demonstrate increasing earnings consistent with the completion of one extra year of high school (McConnell and Glazerman 2001, 48). This implies that participation in Job Corps Programs produces wage increase however, they are limited. In addition, the income benefits derived from vocational education programs are not necessarily consistent across all racial, socioeconomic, and ethnic groups (Flores-Lagunes 2010). Although many students are seeing benefits from vocational education, certain demographics are not receiving the same benefits. Therefore, not all students will perceive congruent wage impacts of vocational education.

Economic hardships can alter the wage impacts Job Corps students receive, and therefore perceive. The 2012 Federal Budget Justification suggests job placement results have been decreasing for vocational program graduates since 2004 (OJC 2011a, 19). Students are not as likely to be employed and therefore, they are less likely to have consistent income (OJC 2011a). While the OJC Report (2011a) indicates that there are wage benefits to participating in Job Corps, current benefits are not expected to be as pronounced as in previous years. Therefore, students would not be expected to perceive drastic wage impacts as a result of program participation.

Based upon this literature review, the self-reported wages impacts of at risk youth vocational education program graduates is an important descriptive category of program impacts. Perceptions of wage impacts provide an indication of the programs ability to achieve one of its key goals, increasing the earning potential of its graduates. Students' perceptions of wage impacts should reflect the ideal type.

## *Career Aspirations*

Goals and aspirations are an aspect of at risk youth education programs. Research has indicated that those who are unsure of their career goals earn less than their career oriented counterparts during young adulthood (Staff et al.2010). This makes career aspirations and goals important to a young adults earning potential. Students who participate in vocational programs, such as the Job Corps, are expected to report higher career aspirations after completing their education.

Education programs seek to promote a student career maturity, or understanding, to create long-term goals, foster overall happiness, and construct realistic expectations (Schnorr and Ware 2011). The construction of realistic expectations can be influenced through career exploration. The length of participation in education programs targeting at-risk individuals is positively associated with increasing student career exploration (Schnorr and Ware 2011). Thus students who complete their educational goals should perceive a positive impact upon their perceived career aspirations.

In order to foster positive career aspirations, educational programs promote career exploration through various methods. Tools, such as vocational assessments, have been shown to provide youths with an understanding of themselves and achievable career options (Kortering and Braziel 2009, 33). The form of assessment is used by the Job Corps similarly attempts to enhance students understanding of career options. Students enrolled in Job Corps programs apply for the program they wish to peruse after talking to counselors who inform them of career paths and opportunities (Schochet and Burghardt 2008). This method of assessment allows for students to view and comprehend their career options. Students who are informed of their career options

and are obtaining an education, it would be expected that they would perceive higher career expectations for themselves.

This literature review indicates that the self-reported career aspiration impacts of at risk youth vocational education program graduates is an important descriptive category of overall program impacts. The ideal type should be reflected in student perceptions of program impacts. Thus perceptions of career aspirations provide an indication of the programs ability to achieve one of its key goals, promoting productive and self-sufficient citizens.

### **Social Skills Preparation**

One of the primary goals of at risk youth education programs is to enhance the social skills of graduates. Impacts of vocational programs targeting at risk youth encompass many facets of social skill preparation. The most fundamental of these facets are diversity and cultural awareness, ability to handle stress, and behavior. The supporting literature for social skills impact areas is derived from various forms of studies including; studies of student perceptions, academic studies, federally commissioned studies and evaluation studies.

#### *Diversity and Cultural Awareness*

Preparing students for entry into a diverse society is an important part of vocational education programs targeting at risk youth. The Federal Job Corps Program aims to promote diversity and understanding through cultural awareness instruction (Glazerman et al. 56, 2000).

As students' behavior and awareness changes they are expected to perceive alterations in their behavior.

Diversity awareness programs for university level students, many of whom are the same age as Job Corps participants, have demonstrated positive results with students showing increased levels of respect and tolerance (Probst 2003). These results are indicative of what is expected to be prevalent among youth participating in vocational education programs. Alterations in behavior towards persons of different backgrounds and cultures, should be perceived by students graduating from vocational institutions and reflect the ideal type.

Studies focusing on students in introductory university courses, a majority being within the age range of those participating in vocational education programs, demonstrate that exposure to diversity training had positive impacts upon academics and social agency (Nelson Laird 2005). This suggests that cultural awareness courses, targeted toward a specific population, can be successful in altering the perceptions of students' vocational education program age students.

Based upon this literature review, the self-reported diversity and cultural awareness of at vocational education program graduates is an important descriptive category of program impacts. Perceptions of diversity and cultural awareness provide an indication of an at risk youth educational programs ability to achieve one of its key goals, promoting diversity. Student perceptions should reflect this ideal type or goal.

### *Ability to Handle Stress*

The ability of students to handle stress and life pressures are important skills emphasized in educational programs. Students who learn how to cope and handle life-stresses should perceive an alteration in their behavior and coping abilities.

In a study of high school students, many whom are of similar age to Job Corps students, approximately 10 percent indicated that they did not know how to handle stress adequately (Armacost 1989). Social life, alchemic pressures, racial tensions, employment and various external influences were viewed as stressors by students (Armacost 1989). As vocational program graduates enter the job market it is vital for them to be able to tactfully and productively handle stress. As students gain the ability to handle stress in a constructive manner they are expected to perceive improvements in their stress-management.

Employment and training programs for at risk youth have been used to promote stress management (Matsaba et al 2008). By providing job training, work experience, and counseling, educational programs can lessen stress and promote physiological healing and wellbeing (Matsuba et al. 2008, .23-24). Therefore, at risk youth training programs can promote stress management through education. This increased ability to manage stress should be apparent in student perceptions of their coping mechanisms.

Based on this literature review, the self-reported ability of vocational program graduates to handle stress is an important descriptive category of program impacts. Perceptions of student ability to constructively handle stress provide an indication of the programs ability to achieve one of its key goals, enhancing social skills and sociability. Student perceptions reflect are expected to reflect the ideal type.

## *Behavior*

One goal of vocational training programs for at risk youth is to enhance and improve the social behavior of its participants. Vocational programs offer a variety of classes aimed at promoting life and social skills, with the goal of improving attitudes (McConnell and Glazerman 2001). Improvements in behavior should be reflected in students' self-perceptions. Ideally, there should be substantive behavioral improvements.

The Federal Job Corps Program promotes desirable social and workplace behaviors (Glazerman et al 2000). It researchers have hypothesized that programs are altering behavior and enhancing employability, increasing employment opportunities and furthering the success of program graduates (McConnell and Glazerman 2001). If students' behaviors are improving and producing positive results, students should perceive improvements in their behaviors.

Empirical research supports the assertion that participation in vocational education programs positively impacts how graduates interact with other persons (Matsuba et al. 2008). Studies focus on the most evident or extreme forms of negative social behavior, namely criminal activity (Schochet et al. 2008). However, alterations in extreme negative behavior indicate a behavioral shift in vocational program graduates and are relevant to overall behavioral trends.

Criminal behaviors, and extreme socially undesirable criminal activity, are shown to decrease as a result of participating in at-risk youth education programs (Schochet et al. 2008, 1874). Approximately 29 percent of participants in the Federal Job Corps Program were arrested in the year after graduation as opposed to 33 percent of their counterparts (Schochet et al. 2008, 1874). The offenses committed were also considerably less severe/violent and conviction rates were considerably lower (Schochet et al. 2008). These results indicate that behaviors can be

altered through participation in the vocational education process. Therefore, prior to re-entering the workforce a shift in perceptions of acceptable behavior occurred. Students are expected to reflect this shift in their perceptions of themselves.

Based upon this literature review, the self-reported behavior of at risk youth vocational education program graduates is an important descriptive category of program impacts. Perceptions of behavior impacts provide an indication of the programs ability to achieve one of its key goals, increasing the sociability and behavior of its graduates. Students' perceptions of their behavior should reflect this ideal type.

### **Educational Preparation**

Preparation for employment and entry into society are important aspects of vocational training programs targeting at risk youth. However, preparation for continuing education, educational confidence and increased academic achievements are additional goals of educational programs for at risk youth. Educational attainment is the final goal and impact area in this chapter. The supporting literature for social skills impact areas is derived from various forms of studies including; studies of student perceptions, academic studies, and evaluation studies.

#### *Continuing Education*

The continuation of education is a desired result of vocational education programs targeting at risk youth. Minorities and lower income students, who make up a substantial portion of the Job Corps student body, are underrepresented in higher education (Brock 2010). Gary Job

Corps encourages these underrepresented students to seek employment, and to continue their education by assisting them with the transitional process to higher education (<http://gary.jobcorps.gov/faq.aspx>). If a student has altered their opinion on continuing education it due to program participation they will be aware of the programs impact. Students are expected to perceive how their desires to continue education have been influenced by the Job Corps Program.

Education is viewed as a valuable form of social capital. Students from working-class backgrounds are being pushed, by themselves and their families, to attain higher levels of education to achieve social mobility (Lehmann 2009). Graduates of vocational education programs are similarly encouraged to continue their education; however, the rates of university and college attendance for graduates are minimal (McConnell and Glazerman 2001). As students are not continuing their education, students are not expected to perceive increased abilities to continue education as a result of the Job Corps program.

Multiple studies mirror the limited effect of Job Corps on college attendance. According to McConnell and Galzerman, Job Corps Programs do not have a significant impact upon college attendance (2001). Additional studies suggest that the Federal Job Corps Program has no effect upon college completion rates (Schochet et al. 2008). Therefore, the impacts of vocational training institutions, such as the Federal Job Corps Program, are minimal. If students choose to continue their education success rates indicate limited effects. Therefore, it is expected that students do not perceive increased abilities to attend college as a result of participating in vocational training institutions for at risk youth.

Based upon this literature review, the self-reported ability of students to continue education after graduation from at risk youth vocational education program graduates is an important descriptive category of program impacts. Perceptions of student's ability/willingness to continue education provide an indication of the programs ability to achieve one of its goals, furthering the education of program graduates.

### *Academic Abilities*

Vocational education programs for at risk youth, such as the Federal Job Corps, frequently require participants to acquire a GED certificate with the hope of increasing graduates educational capital (Glazerman et al. 2000). The retention rate for vocational education programs varies among alternative educational programs for youth (Ruzzi and Kraemer, 2006). Students may enter into programs to attain a degree or certification, but rates of achievement are not consistent among vocational programs and centers. Therefore, depending upon the institute in question students may have differing perceptions of the programs ability to increase their academic abilities.

Indicators of academic success have been recorded for the Job Corps Program on both the center and Federal Level. Federally, literacy levels have been shown to be positively influenced by Job Corps education and training (Glazerman et al. 2000). Overall educational measures such as certificate attainment rates vary among the 125 Job Corps centers (Schochet and Burghardt, 2008). This suggests that while students may see perceive positive literacy impacts as a result of participating in the Job Corps program, overall program impacts may be perceived differently.

In its entirety, Job Corps has furthered the education of program participants, with students spending approximately a thousand hours or more in education or training (Schochet et al. 1871, 2008). It is important to recognize that of the thousand hours spent in training or focusing on academics 774 were spent on training (Schochet et al. 1871, 2008). Thus vocational educational programs, such as Job Corps, target and can impact academic abilities. These impacts are expected to be apparent in student perceptions of their academic abilities.

Based on this literature review, the self-reported academic abilities of at risk youth vocational education program graduates is an important descriptive category of program impacts. Perceptions of academic abilities provide an indication of the programs ability to achieve one of its most important goals, educating its program graduates.

### *Academic Confidence*

Promoting academic confidence is an important part of the educational experience for high school, college, and vocational educational institutions. Increasing academic confidence is a goal of vocational education institutions targeting at risk youth. If academic programs are altering academic, students should be able to perceive this alteration.

Students have been the focus of multiple studies regarding academic confidence. These educational studies are relevant because the Federal Job Corp Program has high school and GED courses for its participants. Students may at times display overconfidence in their abilities, but are of partially aware of their educational limitations (Miller and Geraci 2011). Meaning, students are expected to perceive their levels of academic confidence.

Educational limitations account for a portion of their academic achievements or failures (Valentine et al. 2004). Academic confidence is important to foster learning. Educational attainment and can be promoted by vocational institutions. Students are expected to not only perceive their abilities but link their abilities to their educational achievement and thus their education confidence. Students are expected to perceive a link between educational achievement and their educational institution, if their education has impacted their level of confidence.

Based upon this literature review, the self-reported academic confidence of at risk youth vocational education program graduates is an important descriptive category of overall program impacts. Student perceptions of academic confidence provide an indication of the programs ability to achieve one of its goals, promoting and encouraging student's academic abilities and confidence.

## **Summary**

The literature concerning vocational education programs targeting at risk youth, like that of the GARY Job Corps, suggest that education programs have various effects on overarching program goals. The three overarching program goals of vocational institutions have been expressed in three distinct impact categories; (1) graduates perceived job market readiness; (2) graduates perceived social skills readiness; and (3) graduates perceived higher educational readiness. The literature for each of these impact areas indicates that they are important indicators of program effectiveness and that student perceptions can be used to examine their ideal types. Chapter 3 will outline and operationalize the methodology utilized to study student perceptions of program impacts.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter discusses the methods utilized to describe student perceptions of at risk youth vocational training program impacts. The impact areas developed through the literature review are operationalized to construct questions for vocational training program graduates. The questions were presented to the participants in an anonymous survey format.

#### **Research Technique**

A survey format was deemed the appropriate tool for gathering information in this descriptive study. A survey has the benefit of allowing respondents to remain anonymous (Babbie 2011). In addition, a survey reduces response bias (Babbie 2011). Surveys reduce response bias because subjects do not feel compelled to provide answers they believe would please their interviewer (Babbie 2011).

Statements are utilized in this study to describe students' perceptions. For each statement subjects were asked to indicate their level of agreement using a linkert scale. The linkert scale used has five categories; Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Neutral or No Opinion (N), Agree (A), and Strongly Agree (SA). This allows for quantifiable data to be collected, and provides subjects with a range of choices that exceed the standard yes or no answer (Babbie 2011). This provides for a broader range of answers and allows for participants to indicate varying levels of agreement or disagreement.

For each statement a comments section was provided. By allowing for comments qualitative data can be collected. This data is important because it can reveal patterns or aspects

not covered by close-ended questions (Babbie 2011). To encourage subjects to offer input on all aspects being studied a comments section was provided for every statement in the survey. In addition, participants were invited to comment on the back of the survey.

## Operationalization

Table 3.1 summarizes the conceptual framework<sup>1</sup> and connects the sub-categories to the questions used in the questionnaire. Each statement in the survey addresses one specific aspect from one of the descriptive categories. A copy of the survey can be found in appendix A.

<b>Table 3.1 Operationalization</b>	
<b>Graduates Perceived Job Market Preparation Impacts</b>	
Employability	Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my employability
Income/wages	Participating in the Job Corps Program will have a positive impact upon my future earnings
Career Aspirations	Participating in the Job Corps Program positively affected my career goals
<b>Graduates Perceived Social Skills Preparation Impacts</b>	
Diversity and Cultural Awareness	Participating in the Job Corps Program has made me more culturally aware
Ability to Handle Stress	Participating in the Job Corps Program has made it easier for me to cope with stress
Behavior	Participating in the Job Corps Program has positively affected my behavior
<b>Graduates Perceived Educational Preparation Impacts</b>	
Continuing Education	Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my desire to continue my education
Academic Abilities	Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my academic abilities
Academic Confidence	Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my level of academic confidence

<sup>1</sup> See Shields (1998) and Shields and Tajalli (2006) for an expanded discussion of conceptual frameworks.

### *Graduates Perceived Job Market Preparation Impacts*

In this study, one measure of Students Perception of Job Corps effectiveness is students' perceived job market preparation impacts. In this study perceived job market preparation will be measured by describing student perceptions of employability, income/wages, and career aspirations. The word perception will not appear in any of the following operationalized statements as students are reporting their perceptions by answering the questions in their opinions.

In this study, Job Corps impacts on students' employability are measured by observing changes in student's perceptions of their employability. This measure was operationalized in the following statement, "Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my employability."

In this survey, Job Corps impacts on student wages/income levels are measured by observing changes in student's perceptions of their future wages/income. This measure was operationalized in the following statement, "Participating in the Job Corps Program will have a positive impact upon my future earnings."

For the purposes of this survey, Job Corps impacts on students' career aspirations are measured by observing changes in student's self-reported perceptions of their employability. This measure was operationalized in the following statement, "Participating in the Job Corps Program positively affected my career goals."

### *Graduates Perceived Social Skills Preparation Impacts*

Another measure of Students Perception of Job Corps effectiveness is students' perceived social skills preparation impacts. In this study perceived social skill preparation will be measured by describing student diversity and cultural awareness, ability to handles stress, and behavior. The word perception will not appear in any of the following statements because students are reporting their personal perceptions or opinions in this survey.

In this survey, Job Corps impacts on students' diversity and cultural awareness are measured by observing changes in student's levels of diversity and cultural awareness. This measure was operationalized in the following statement, "Participating in the Job Corps Program has made me more culturally aware."

In this study, Job Corps impacts on students' abilities to handle stress are measured by observing changes in students' perceptions of their ability to handle stress. This measure was operationalized in the following statement, "Participating in the Job Corps Program has made it easier for me to cope with stress."

For the purposes of this survey, Job Corps impacts on students' behavior are measured by observing changes in student's views on their own behavior. This measure was operationalized in the following statement, "Participating in the Job Corps Program has positively affected my behavior."

### *Graduates Perceived Educational Preparation Impacts*

The final measure of Students Perception of Job Corps effectiveness, utilized in this study, is students' perceived educational preparation impacts. In this study perceived student educational preparation impacts will be measured by describing students desires to continue education, their perceived academic abilities, and their levels of academic confidence. The word perception will not appear in any of the preceding statements as students are reporting their perceptions in this survey.

For the purposes of this survey, Job Corps impacts on students' desires to continue education are measured by observing changes in student's desire to continue their education. This measure was operationalized in the following statement, "Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my desire to continue my education."

In this study, Job Corps impacts on students' academic abilities are measured by observing changes in student's perceptions of their academic abilities. This measure was operationalized in the following statement, "Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my academic abilities."

Finally, for the purposes of this survey, Job Corps impacts on students' academic confidence are measured by observing changes in student's levels of self-reported academic confidence. This measure was operationalized in the following statement, "Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my level of academic confidence."

## Sample

The interview subjects for this study are GARY Job Corps graduates. During the month of March 141 students graduated with a majority graduating in the final week of March. The survey was distributed during the first two weeks of March. A total of 40 surveys were provided to school counselors. Not all of the graduates were eligible to participate in the survey because some graduates were minors, hence 27 surveys were distributed. The surveys completed can offer an insight into student perceptions of program impacts despite the 21 responses.

The selection process was not randomized and was based upon subject availability; all participants were 18 or older. Participants who did not clearly indicate their demographics or did not indicate either their race, sex, or age are listed as “not indicated”. The demographics of survey participants are displayed in Table 3.2.

<b>Table 3.2 Participant Demographics</b>		
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	8	38%
Female	12	57%
Not Indicated	1	5%
<b>Race</b>		
Black or African American	8	38%
White	5	24%
Hispanic	5	24%
Mixed	1	5%
Not Indicated	2	10%
<b>Age</b>		
18	5	24%
19	1	5%
20	5	24%
21	3	14%
22	2	10%
23	1	5%
24	1	5%
Not Indicated	3	14%
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>100%</b>

## **Survey Distribution**

The distribution of the survey instrument was approved by the Deputy-Director of Student Relations at Gary Job Corps. No identifying information was requested or collected. In addition, student participation was voluntary and no compensation was offered to students.

Copies of the surveys were provided to transition coordinators by the Deputy-Director to be distributed to students. The transition coordinators gave the students the surveys prior to graduation. Subjects were instructed read the consent form prior to answering any portions of the survey. Subjects were instructed to not talk to the coordinators about the content of the survey. The surveys were placed in manila envelopes to ensure that participants' answers remained confidential.

## **Data Analysis**

The information collected in this study included both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data collected was placed into tables. Both the quantitative and qualitative data collected will be described in Chapter 4.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the data collected. A breakdown of responses by sex, race/ethnicity, and age will be provided in this chapter. Three impact areas will be summarized (1) graduates perceived job market preparation impacts; (2) graduates perceived social skills preparation impacts; and (3) graduates perceived educational preparation impacts. This chapter will summarize results in accordance with the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 2 (Table 2.1). Student comments are presented alongside empirical data to provide a more comprehensive description of students' perceptions.

Due to the number of respondents, this chapter will focus upon the total responses of the sample and general patterns. Overall, students responded positively to the statements presented. Women more strongly agreed than males with statements relating to future earnings, stress, behavior, academic abilities, and academic confidence. Men more strongly agreed than women with statements relating to cultural awareness and diversity, and the desire to continue education. Older students more strongly agreed with statements pertaining to employment and social skills than their younger counterparts.

#### **Graduates Perceived Job Market Preparation Impacts**

The first three statements participants were asked to evaluate students perceived levels of job market preparation. These statements address employability, income/wages, and career aspirations.

*Employability*

Students were asked to evaluate whether participating in the Gary Job Corps Program increased their employability. The results of the student’s self-assessments are presented in Table 4.1.

<b>Table 4.1 Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my employability</b>			
	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral/ No Opinion</b>	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Sex</b>			
Male = 8		13%	88%
Female = 12	17%		83%
Not Indicated = 1			100%
<b>Race</b>			
Black or African American = 8	25%		75%
White = 5			100%
Hispanic = 5		20%	80%
Mixed = 1			100%
Not Indicated = 2			100%
<b>Age</b>			
18 = 5	20%	20%	60%
19 = 1			100%
20 = 5	20%		80%
21 = 3		100%	
22 = 2			100%
23 = 1			100%
24 = 1			100%
Not Indicated = 3		33%	67%
<b>Total = 21</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>86%</b>

Of the 21 participants, 86 percent either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my employability.” Five percent of students neither agreed nor disagreed and 10 percent of students disagreed with the statement. Older students more strongly agreed with this statement. All participants above the age of 21 agreed with the statement. Students of both sexes strongly agreed with the statement. Eighty-

three percent of women and 88 percent of men agreed that Gary Job Corps increased their employability.

Two students provided comments in the comments section provided for this statement. The first participant, a 23 year-old White Female, commented, “Before I came I had no job skills and no real work experience.” The other participant to comment on this statement was a Hispanic Male of 18 years. In response to the statement he commented, “Only if you take full advantage of all the things Job Corps has to offer. Like certifications.”

#### *Income/Wages*

Participants were asked whether participating in the Gary Job Corps Program had a positive impact upon their future earnings. The results of the participant’s self-assessments are presented in Table 4.2.

<b>Table 4.2 Participating in the Job Corps Program Will have a positive impact upon my future earnings</b>			
	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral/ No Opinion</b>	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Sex</b>			
Male = 8		38%	63%
Female = 12		8%	92%
Not Indicated = 1			100%
<b>Race</b>			
Black or African American = 8		13%	88%
White = 5		40%	60%
Hispanic = 5		20%	80%
Mixed = 1			100%
Not Indicated = 2			100%
<b>Age</b>			
18 = 5		40%	60%
19 = 1			100%
20 = 5		20%	80%
21 = 3		100%	
22 = 2			100%
23 = 1			100%
24 = 1			100%
Not Indicated = 3		33%	67%
<b>Total = 21</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>81%</b>

Of the total participants, 81 percent agreed with the statement “Participating in the Job Corps Program will have a positive impact upon my future earnings”. Nineteen percent of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and none of the respondents disagreed with the statement. Older students more strongly agreed with the statement. All participants over the age of 21 agreed that attending Gary Job Corps would have a positive impact upon their future earnings. A greater percentage of women agreed with the statement than men. Ninety-two percent of women agreed with the statement compared to 63 percent of men.

One student, a White Female aged 23, commented upon the statement she was asked to evaluate. She wrote, “With a diploma in a trade it opens a lot more doors than I would have had before it helped me toward a teaching career.”

*Career Aspirations*

Participants were asked to evaluate whether participating in the Gary Job Corps Program positively affected their career goals. The results of their self-assessments are presented in Table 4.3.

<b>Table 4.3 Participating in the Job Corps Program positively affected my career goals</b>			
	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral/ No Opinion</b>	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Sex</b>			
Male = 8		13%	88%
Female = 12		17%	83%
Not Indicated = 1	100%		
<b>Race</b>			
Black or African American = 8		13%	88%
White = 5		40%	60%
Hispanic = 5		40%	60%
Mixed = 1			100%
Not Indicated = 2	20%		80%
<b>Age</b>			
18 = 5		20%	80%
19 = 1			100%
20 = 5			100%
21 = 3			100%
22 = 2			100%
23 = 1		100%	
24 = 1			100%
Not Indicated = 3	33%	33%	33%
<b>Total = 21</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>81%</b>

Of the 21 participants, 81 percent agreed with the statement “Participating in the Job Corps Program positively affected my career goals.” Fourteen percent of participants neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and 5 percent disagreed. Both male and female students strongly agreed with the statement. Eighty-three percent of female participants agreed with the statement in comparison to 88 percent of males. No the students provided comments in relation to this statement.

### **Graduates Perceived Social Skills Preparation Impacts**

The next three statements participants were asked to evaluate students perceived levels of social skills preparation. These statements address diversity and cultural awareness, ability to handle stress, and student behavior. Student assessments of the aforementioned statements are presented in the following section of Chapter 4.

#### *Diversity and Cultural Awareness*

Participants were asked to evaluate whether participating in the Gary Job Corps Program made them more culturally aware. The results of their self-assessments are presented in Table 4.4.

<b>Table 4.4 Participating in the Job Corps Program has made me more culturally aware</b>			
	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral/ No Opinion</b>	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Sex</b>			
Male = 8	25%		75%
Female = 12	17%	42%	42%
Not Indicated = 1			100%
<b>Race</b>			
Black or African American = 8		13%	88%
White = 5		40%	60%
Hispanic = 5		40%	60%
Mixed = 1			100%
Not Indicated = 2	20%		800%
<b>Age</b>			
18 = 5	20%	20%	60%
19 = 1		100%	
20 = 5	40%	40%	20%
21 = 3	33%		67%
22 = 2			100%
23 = 1		100%	
24 = 1		100%	
Not Indicated = 3		33%	67%
<b>Total = 21</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>57%</b>

Of the 21 participants 57 percent agreed with the statement “Participating in the Job Corps Program has made me more culturally aware”. Twenty-four percent of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and 19 percent disagreed with the statement. Males more strongly agreed with the statement than their female counterparts. Seventy-five percent of male students agreed that attending Gary Job Corps made them more culturally aware in comparison to 42 percent of female students. No comments were provided in response to this statement.

*Ability to Handle Stress*

Students were asked to evaluate whether participating in the Job Corps Program made it easier to cope with stress. The results of their self-assessments are presented in Table 4.5.

<b>Table 4.5 Participating in the Job Corps Program has made it easier for me to cope with stress</b>			
	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral/ No Opinion</b>	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Sex</b>			
Male = 8	50%	13%	38%
Female = 12	25%	17%	58%
Not Indicated = 1		100%	
<b>Race</b>			
Black or African American = 8	38%	25%	38%
White = 5	40%		60%
Hispanic = 5	40%		60%
Mixed = 1			100%
Not Indicated = 2		100%	
<b>Age</b>			
18 = 5	60%	20%	20%
19 = 1			100%
20 = 5	60%	20%	20%
21 = 3	33%		67%
22 = 2			100%
23 = 1			100%
24 = 1		100%	
Not Indicated = 3		33%	67%
<b>Total = 21</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>48%</b>

Of the 21 respondents, 48 percent agreed with the statement “Participating in the Job Corps Program has made it easier for me to cope with stress”, 19 percent of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and 33 percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement. Older students more strongly agreed with the statement. No students over the age of 21 disagreed with the statement. Women more strongly agreed with the statement than their male counterparts. Thirty-eight percent of males agreed with this statement in comparison to 58

percent of females. Fifty percent of males disagreed with the statement in comparison to 25 percent of females.

One participant provided a response in the comments section for this statement. The participants, a 23 year-old White female commented that, “I went to the art room and learned to do a lot of things I hadn’t before which help me distress.”

*Behavior*

Participants were asked to evaluate whether attending Gary Job Corps Program positively affected their behavior. The results of their self-assessments are presented in Table 4.6.

<b>Table 4.6 Participating in the Job Corps Program has positively affected my behavior</b>			
	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral/ No Opinion</b>	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Sex</b>			
Male = 8	25%	25%	50%
Female = 12	17%	17%	67%
Not Indicated = 1			100%
<b>Race</b>			
Black or African American = 8	25%	13%	63%
White = 5	20%	60%	20%
Hispanic = 5	20%		80%
Mixed = 1			100%
Not Indicated = 2			100%
<b>Age</b>			
18 = 5	40%		60%
19 = 1			100%
20 = 5	20%	40%	40%
21 = 3		33%	67%
22 = 2			100%
23 = 1		100%	
24 = 1			100%
Not Indicated = 3	33%		67%
<b>Total = 21</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>62%</b>

Of the total respondents, 62 percent agreed with the statement “Participating in the Job Corps Program has positively affected my behavior”. Nineteen percent of the respondents were neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and 19 percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement. Females more strongly agreed with the statement than males. Fifty percent of males agreed with this statement in comparison to 67 percent of females. Twenty-five percent of males neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and 17 percent of females. Twenty-five percent of males disagreed with the statement and 17 percent of females disagreed with the statement. No comments were provided in relation to this statement.

### **Graduates Perceived Educational Preparation Impacts**

The final three statements participants were asked to evaluate measured students perceived levels of educational preparation. These statements address continuing education, academic abilities, and academic confidence. Student assessments of the aforementioned statements are presented in this final section of Chapter 4.

#### *Continuing Education*

Students were asked to evaluate whether participating in the Job Corps Program increased their desire to continue their education. The results of their self-assessments are presented in Table 4.7.

<b>Table 4.7 Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my desire to continue my education</b>			
	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral/ No Opinion</b>	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Sex</b>			
Male = 8			100%
Female = 12	8%	33%	58%
Not Indicated = 1			100%
<b>Race</b>			
Black or African American = 8	13%	25%	63%
White = 5		40%	60%
Hispanic = 5			100%
Mixed = 1			100%
Not Indicated = 2			100%
<b>Age</b>			
18 = 5		20%	80%
19 = 1			100%
20 = 5	20%		80%
21 = 3		33%	67%
22 = 2			100%
23 = 1		100%	
24 = 1		100%	
Not Indicated = 3			100%
<b>Total = 21</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>76%</b>

Of the 21 participants, 76 percent of participants agreed with the statement “Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my desire to continue my education”. Nineteen percent of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and 5 percent disagreed. Men more strongly agreed with the statement than women. All of the male respondents agreed with this statement in comparison to 58 percent of females. Thirty-three percent of females neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and 8 percent of females disagreed.

Two comments were provided by students in the comments section for this statement. One student, a 23 year-old White female commented, “I love to learn I always have!” Another

student, a Mixed raced 21 year-old female commented “It has made me want to go to college and further my career.”

*Academic Abilities*

Participants were asked to evaluate whether participating in the Gary Job Corps Program increased their academic abilities”. The results of their self-assessments are presented in Table 4.8.

<b>Table 4.8 Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my academic abilities</b>			
	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral/ No Opinion</b>	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Sex</b>			
Male = 8	25%	25%	50%
Female = 12		42%	58%
Not Indicated = 1			100%
<b>Race</b>			
Black or African American = 8		25%	75%
White = 5	20%	60%	20%
Hispanic = 5	20%	40%	40%
Mixed = 1			100%
Not Indicated = 2			100%
<b>Age</b>			
18 = 5	20%		80%
19 = 1		100%	
20 = 5		60%	40%
21 = 3		33%	67%
22 = 2		50%	50%
23 = 1		100%	
24 = 1			100%
Not Indicated = 3	33%		67%
<b>Total = 21</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>57%</b>

Of the 21 participants, 57 percent agreed with the statement “Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my academic abilities”. Thirty-three percent of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and 10 percent disagreed. Women more strongly agreed with the statement than men. Fifty percent of males agreed with this statement in comparison to 58 percent of females. Twenty-five percent of males were neutral in comparison to 42 percent of females. 25 percent of males disagreed with the statement and no women disagreed with the statement.

One student provided a statement in the comments section for this statement. The student, a 21 year-old African American/Black male, commented “It has helped me with my math, it has helped me improve those skills”.

#### *Academic Confidence*

Finally, participants were asked to evaluate whether participating in the Gary Job Corps Program has increased their levels of academic confidence. The results of their self-assessments are presented in Table 4.9.

<b>Table 4.9 Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my academic confidence</b>			
	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral/ No Opinion</b>	<b>Agree</b>
<b>Sex</b>			
Male = 8	25%	25%	50%
Female = 12		33%	67%
Not Indicated = 1			100%
<b>Race</b>			
Black or African American = 8		38%	63%
White = 5	20%	60%	20%
Hispanic = 5	20%		80%
Mixed = 1			100%
Not Indicated = 2			100%
<b>Age</b>			
18 = 5	20%	20%	60%
19 = 1			100%
20 = 5		60%	40%
21 = 3		33%	67%
22 = 2			100%
23 = 1		100%	
24 = 1			100%
Not Indicated = 3	33%		67%
<b>Total = 21</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>62%</b>

Of the 21 participants, 62 percent agreed with the statement “Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my level of academic confidence”. Twenty-nine percent of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and 5 percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement and 5 percent strongly disagreed with the statement. Women more strongly agreed with the statement than men. Fifty percent of males agreed with this statement in comparison to 67 percent of females. Twenty-five percent of males neither agreed nor disagreed in comparison to 33 percent of females. Twenty-five percent of males disagreed with the statement and no females disagreed. No comments were provided in regards to this statement.

## Summary of Findings

Students rated all areas positively, with the exception of the ability to handle stress. Students rated employability the most positively with 86 percent agreeing that their employability was benefited positively by participating in Job Corps. Income/wage and career aspirations were both rated positively by 81 percent of participants. Desire to continue education was rated favorably by 76 percent of participants.

Students rated their desire to continue education, academic abilities, academic confidence, behavior, and cultural awareness positively, but levels of agreement were not as strong. Academic confidence was rated positively by sixty-two percent of students and academic abilities were rated positively by 57 percent of students. Sixty-two percent of students rated behavior impacts positively and 57 percent rated cultural awareness positively.

Students rated the ability handle stress less well. Forty-eight percent of students rated their ability to handle stress positively. This was the only area to receive a minority of students agreeing with the statement provided.

Overall, older students rated statements more positively. Women also rated the statements more positively than their male counterparts. The next chapter presents some reasons for the effectiveness in certain areas and makes recommendations to improve other areas.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The purpose of this research project was to describe Gary Job Corps graduates perceptions of program impacts. This study used existing literature to develop a conceptual framework including three impact areas: (1) graduates perceived job market preparation impacts; (2) graduates perceived social skills preparation impacts; and (3) graduates perceived educational preparation impacts. This study utilized survey research to describe these three impact areas.

The purpose of this chapter is to assess the implications of the survey results described in Chapter 4. The conclusions section of this chapter will be divided into the three sections in accordance with the three impact areas used in this study. These conclusions are followed by a set of recommendations which address all of the impact areas used in this study.

Only instructors who teach academic classes such as English and mathematics are required to have a teaching certificate. Therefore, some instructors may not be aware of specific practices that could be beneficial in the classroom and enhance the Job Corps experience. This makes the following chapter particularly relevant to staff members without formal training. This chapter also contains recommendations that may be new to formally trained instructors.

#### **Graduates Perceived Job Market Preparation**

Overall graduates displayed positive views in regards to Gary Job Corps ability to prepare them for the job market. Students' responses indicate that Job Corps has positively affected their employability, future earnings, and their career goals. However, there is room to enhance student job market preparation.

## *Employability*

A majority of students responded positively when asked to rate the statement “Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my employability.” Eighty percent agreed with the statement. Older students more strongly agreed with the statement. This indicates the respondents felt that Gary Job Corps has increased their level of employability. However, as one individual noted improving employability will “Only if you take full advantage of all the things Job Corps has to offer. Like certifications.” Older students may take advantage of the extras Gary Job Corps has to offer. This would account for their more positive responses.

A majority of study participants indicated attending Gary Job Corps had increased their employability; this is consistent with the findings in the literature review which suggests that Job Corps produces employable graduates. However, 10 percent of students surveyed disagreed with the statement. Enhancements can be made to the program to improve students’ perceptions of their employability. In doing so students would be more confident when searching for employment.

To enhance employability, students should examine the various facets of employability with an instructor. These facets include; teamwork, honesty, adaptability, and communication skills (Bugaz 2008). Areas in which students are struggling should be identified and targeted as areas for improvement. Students can further develop these skills with the guidance of an instructor. By enhancing employability skills students will be more confident in their ability to achieve employment. This confidence will make them more attractive to employers (Bugaz 2008).

### *Income/wages*

Eighty percent of students responded positively when asked to rate their agreement with the statement, “Participating in the Job Corps Program will have a positive impact upon my future earnings.” The rest of the students neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Women indicated seeing a greater benefit than men. This indicates that attending Gary Job Corps made the respondents feel that their future earnings would be positively impacted by their attendance. This is consistent with the findings of the literature review, which indicates Job Corps graduates earn more than their counterparts who did not participate in the program. Therefore, in order to improve students perceptions of wage impacts all students should be informed of the wage benefits of graduating from Job Corps.

### *Career Aspirations*

A majority of students responded positively when asked to rate the statement “Participating in the Gary Job Corps Program has positively affected my career goals.” Eighty-one percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. This indicates the sample felt that Gary Job Corps positively affected their career goals.

While a majority of students felts that Gary Job Corps positively affected their career goals, 33 percent neither agreed nor disagreed and one individual disagreed strongly that participation in Job Corps positively affected their career goals. As seen in the literature review enhancing career aspirations is a goal of educational programs such as Job Corps. Since not all participants view participation in Gary Job Corps as having a positive impact upon their career goals, enhancements can be made to the program to improve students’ career goals.

Students do not pursue their desired career goals because of barriers (Tang 2008). To ensure students achieve their goals, it is necessary to discover what specific barriers each student faces, and how the student can overcome their barriers (Tang 2008). For example, students with misconceptions about career paths should be provided with information concerning potential careers and students who lack motivation need to discover why they are unmotivated (Tang 2008). Job Corps Counselors and teachers should help students discover these barriers and assist students in breaking them down.

### **Graduates Perceived Social Skills Preparation**

Overall participants displayed positive views of Gary Job Corps ability to enhance their social skills.. Students' responses indicate that Gary Job Corps has positively affected their feelings towards diversity and cultural awareness, and student behavior. However, participants were mixed in their views concerning Gary Job Corps impact on their ability to handle stress. There are measures that can be taken to further understand students' views on social skill preparation and enhance students' experiences at Gary Job Corps.

#### *Diversity and Cultural Awareness*

A slim majority, 57 percent, of students responded positively when asked to rate the statement "Participating in the Job Corps Program has made me more culturally aware". This indicates the sample felt that Gary Job Corps positively affected their understanding of diversity and cultural awareness. Men felt their diversity and cultural awareness was benefited more than their female counterparts. Female participants may already have been culturally aware, or they may not be seeing the same positive impacts as men. The literature review in Chapter 2 indicated

that one goal of Job Corps is to enhance diversity and understanding. Since not all participants view participation in Gary Job Corps as having a positive impact upon their understanding of diversity and cultural awareness, enhancements should be made to the program.

Research indicates that informational interactions between students and instructors, such as participating in forums, can promote cultural understanding (Sanner et al. 2010). It is suggested that workshops, forums, and classroom discussions on cultural understanding and diversity be held. Gary Job Corps students should be guided in constructive discussions about diversity and culture by their instructors. In doing so students would a better understanding of diversity and culture.

#### *Ability to Handle Stress*

Forty-eight percent of students responded positively when asked to rate the statement “Participating in the Job Corps Program has made it easier for me to cope with stress”. This falls short of a majority. This indicates that a majority of participants did not feel their experience at Gary Job Corps positively affected their ability to handle stress. As the literature review shows stress management is one component of the educational experience. However, female students indicated their abilities to handles stress were enhanced more than their male counterparts. Perhaps an activity that females engage in at Gary Job Corps helps them deal with stress more effectively, or perhaps male students already were able to deal with stress effectively before they attended Job Corps. This is an area for improvement.

There are numerous ways to approach stress management. Studies have suggested that yoga, humorous interactions, and reading are three viable ways for students to cope with stress

(Rizzolo et al. 2009). By engaging in 30 minute sessions of either yoga, humor, or reading students lower their levels of stress (Rizzolo et al. 2009). Therefore, Gary Job Corps should encourage students to visit the library or gym located on site. In doing so it would allow for students to reduce their levels of stress.

### *Behavior*

A slim majority of students, 52 percent, responded positively when asked to rate the statement “Participating in the Job Corps Program has positively affected my behavior.” This indicates participants had mixed views concerning Gary Job Corps ability to positively affect their behavior. Female students saw a greater benefit than their male counterparts. It is possible that male participants already demonstrated good behavior. However, it is also possible that male students do not see the same results as female students. According to the literature review, participating in Job Corps improves student behavior and students should be able to perceive this change. However, respondents were mixed in their views on Gary Job Corps impacts upon their behavior. Enhancements can be made to the program to improve student perceptions of their behavior.

It is difficult to predict student behavior after graduation however; it is possible to address behavior problems while a student is enrolled at Gary Job Corps. Behavior improvements can carry over into the job market. There are several ways to improve student behavior. Rather than taking disciplinary action in response to every negative act, instructors should select one or two specific behavior issues they will discipline for a small period of time, such as a week (McKissick et al. 2010). After this time period is up they should target another type of inappropriate behavior (McKissick et al. 2010). Randomizing the inappropriate behavior

to be targeted and corrected each day has been shown to decrease disruptive classroom behaviors as students do not know what they will get in trouble for each day (McKissick et al. 2010). Studies have also concluded that a teacher praising a student reinforces positive behavior and increases appropriate behavior (Moore Partin et al. 2010). Therefore, instructors at Gary Job Corps should focus on praising students when they have exceeded expectations and randomly target/correct specific inappropriate behaviors.

### **Graduates Perceived Educational Preparation**

Overall participants displayed positive views of Gary Job Corps ability to enhance their education. However, there are areas in which students displayed concern. However, there are areas for improvement. Students' responses indicate that Job Corps has positively affected their views on continuing education, academic abilities, and academic confidence. There are measures that can be taken to further understand students' views on educational preparation.

#### *Continuing Education*

A majority of students responded positively when asked to rate the statement "Participating in the Job Corps Program has my desire to continue my education." Eighty-one percent of respondents agreed with the statement. This indicates respondents felt that Gary Job Corps positively affected their desire to continue their education. Male students indicated their desire to continue their education was greater than their female counterparts. It is possible that female students already desired to increase their education before entering the Gary Job Corps Program.

The high desire for students to continue their education directly contradicts the findings in the literature review which indicate that Job Corps does not have an impact upon higher education attainment. This suggests that students may desire to go to college after participating in Job Corps, they do not follow-through. This is an area that needs to be explored so that improvements can be made to the program.

Knowledge of educational requirements is strongly related to university attendance (Frenette 2010). Students who are aware a university degree is required to obtain certain positions are more likely to attend university regardless of academic performance, socioeconomic background, and sex (Frenette 2010). This suggests that it is possible to raise educational attainment by providing students with information on the educational requirements for their desired career paths (Frenette 2010). Therefore, in order to increase higher-education attainment Gary Job Corps should ensure that students are aware of educational requirements for achieving higher level positions in various fields.

### *Academic Abilities*

A slim majority of students responded positively when asked to rate the statement “Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my academic abilities”. Fifty-seven percent agreed with the statement. One student in particular noticed an improvement in their math skills. Female students indicated their academic abilities were enhanced more than male students. The literature review indicates students see an increase in their academic abilities because participants earn diplomas and certifications while at Job Corps. Students should perceive an increase in their academic abilities. However, as a sizable number of students did not

agree with the statement, there is room to enhance graduate perceptions of Gary Job Corps ability to improve students' academic abilities.

Students who feel their academic abilities are not adequate need encouragement and should focus upon improving for future endeavors not reflect on past failures (Martin 2011). By focusing on how to solve problems promotes future success. In addition, students should be asked if they feel there are any barriers to their academic success that Gary Job Corps can address (Tang 2008). By identifying barriers, such as a lack of motivation or a difficulty in a particular subject a student can work with an instructor to improve their performance.

### *Academic Confidence*

A majority of students, 62 percent, responded positively when asked to rate the statement "Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my level of academic confidence." This indicates participants felt that Gary Job Corps positively affected their level of academic confidence. In addition, female students saw a greater benefit in this impact area than their male counterparts. Perhaps male students were already confident in their abilities. It is also possible that they did not see the same benefits as female students. As noted in the literature review, students increase their academic abilities while at Job Corps. Therefore, their academic confidence should increase. As not all respondents view participation in Gary Job Corps as having a positive impact upon their academic confidence, enhancements can be made to the program.

One method to improve student academic confidence involves enhancing educational perseverance. Educational perseverance can be fostered by helping students set goals and that

fears of academic inadequacy can be reduced by seeing past failings as diagnostic efforts that can be improved upon (Martin 2011). By increasing perseverance and reducing fear academic courage can emerge which over time can become academic confidence (Martin 2011). It is suggested that Job Corps instructors work with students to set goals and encourage students' efforts.

## **Conclusions**

The purpose of this research project was to describe Gary Job Corps graduates perceptions of program impacts. Three Impact Areas were described: (1) graduates perceived job market preparation impacts; (2) graduates perceived social skills preparation impacts; and (3) graduates perceived educational preparation impacts. After describing these impact areas it is evidence that Gary Job Corps provides multiple benefits to those who participate in the program. However, the program could be enhanced.

This study did not seek to provide explanations for students' perceptions of Gary Job Corps effectiveness. Seeking out explanations for students mixed perceptions on the program impacts described in this study would allow for Gary Job Corps to uncover reasons for student dissatisfaction. If these reasons are uncovered, solutions could be formulated to enhance the effectiveness of Gary Job. A more extensive study would be beneficial in clarifying graduates perceptions of the Job Corps Program and in formulating program enhancements. A more extensive survey is recommended.

The literature review in Chapter 2 indicates that the Federal Job Corps Program produces positive results beyond the capabilities of any other at-risk youth program in the United States. This study indicates that youths enrolled in Gary Job Corps recognize positive results, especially

concerning their future earnings, employability, career aspirations, and desires to continue education. Yet there is room for improvement especially concerning students social skills.

Gary Job Corps employees continue their excellent work. It is evident that students recognize the benefits of attending Gary Job Corps. However, enhancements can be made to the Job Corps Program. It is recommended that student interviews be conducted while students are enrolled at Gary Job Corps to assess students' perceptions of the program. It is further recommended that; instructors take a prescriptive approach to students failures in order to promote future success, barriers to student success be explored, students be encouraged to engage in stress coping activities, and that students should set goals for themselves. By following these recommendations, it is possible to enhance Gary Job Corps graduates perceptions of the program.

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## Appendix A: Survey

## Survey of GARY Job Corps Students

This study is being conducted as part of a graduate research project to fulfill requirements for a Masters Degree in Public Administration.

You were selected as a participant for this survey because you have completed the Job Corps Program. This survey is anonymous. Your identity and answers are confidential. A summary of the findings can be provided to you upon completion of the study, if requested. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. If you have questions or concerns about this study, please contact me at mg1654@txstate.edu or my supervisor, tl28@txstate.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact: IRB chair, Dr. Jon Lasser (512-245-3413 – lasser@txstate.edu), or Ms. Becky Northcut, Compliance Specialist (512-245-2102). By continuing to the attached survey, you indicate your consent to be in the study.

Instructions: Read the statements bellow and check the box that reflects your views (Strongly Disagree = SD; Disagree = D; No Opinion/ Neutral = N; Agree = A; Strongly Agree = SA) . Please provide additional comments in the space provided. If you require additional room please write on the back of the survey.

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Comments
1. Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my employability						
2. Participating in the Job Corps Program will have a positive impact upon my future earnings						
3. Participating in the Job Corps Program positively affected my career goals						
4. Participating in the Job Corps Program has made me more culturally aware						
5. Participating in the Job Corps Program has made it easier for me cope with stress						
6. Participating in the Job Corps Program has positively affected my behavior						
7. Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my desire to continue my education						
8. Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my academic abilities						
9. Participating in the Job Corps Program has increased my level of academic confidence						

## Demographics

Instructions: Check one box

Sex	Race	Age
<input type="checkbox"/> Male	<input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American	<input type="checkbox"/> 18
<input type="checkbox"/> Female	<input type="checkbox"/> White	<input type="checkbox"/> 19
	<input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic	<input type="checkbox"/> 20
	<input type="checkbox"/> Asian	<input type="checkbox"/> 21
	<input type="checkbox"/> Native American	<input type="checkbox"/> 22
	<input type="checkbox"/> Mixed	<input type="checkbox"/> 23
		<input type="checkbox"/> 24