

Upward Bound Professionals Perspectives on  
Best Practices Related to Retaining Student Participants Throughout the  
Program

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## **Abstract**

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to design and execute a study that describes the perspectives of current Upward Bound professionals over links between best practices and Upward Bound student retention.

### **Methods**

This descriptive study employed a survey of current Upward Bound professionals within the state of Texas. The survey questions were designed by operationalizing the conceptual framework found within scholarly literature.

### **Results**

The results of the survey show; Upward Bound professionals most commonly agree with the activities and programming associated with academic support and social influences. Mixed results were found within the structural effect questions. More specifically, questions associated with accountability received the highest number of respondents to answer there would be no effect or decrease likelihood of student retention.

### **Full Disclosure**

Given the researchers experience as a TRIO alumni and previous employment with an Upward Bound program, there is the possibility that the results and overall tone of this research to be biased.

## I. Introduction

**Scenario:** program director reviewing end of year numbers

It was the first morning in the entire year that there were no Upward Bound activities; the director, Vanessa Jones, welcomed this by pouring herself a large cup of coffee and settling into her office ready to evaluate the past year and put together her report for the Department of Education.

As Vanessa began to review the data collected, she realized they had another year with high student turnover. Several of the participants who joined the program in previous years either did not return or did not complete the fiscal year. A significant amount of participants who were recruited in the current year also did not complete it.

Vanessa had identified this problem in prior years and had spent an enormous amount of time at last year's state conference asking what others did to encourage student participation. She had come back with a spiral filled with ideas. The director and her team spent several weeks brainstorming and planning new ways to engage students and encourage their continued participation within the program. When she had sat down at her desk this morning, she was confident all the new initiatives the program rolled out this year would result in an improvement in student retention.

Shocked and frustrated that this was not the case, Vanessa began researching to see if she could find any resources to help her identify where to focus the programs resources to increase student retention. There were only two more years within the program's grant cycle

and she knew the program would still be evaluated on each one of the students regardless of the fact they were no longer attending Upward Bound activities nor receiving services. Vanessa was nervous over current funding cuts, knowing several programs would not be re-funded in the next grant cycle. With a much more competitive Upward Bound grant application approaching, she knew she needed to find a way to boost student retention. When Vanessa performed research over the subject all she could find were books and articles covering general best practices, impacts of the program, and arguments of the validity of Upward Bound. It was baffling to her that no one had taken the time to cover student retention, especially since she knew her experience with this issue was a common theme across almost all Upward Bound programs she had come across during national, regional, and state conferences. Vanessa felt stuck and had no idea what to do next, she knew she had a great program, one that many students could benefit from, one that would easily get re-funded if only she could figure out how to increase student retention.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There is a current need to boost the United States academic and economic competitiveness globally. In order to foster and maintain a healthy economy as well as compete globally, the United States needs a strong, highly educated, and competent workforce. The country needs students, regardless of their background, who are academically prepared and motivated to achieve success.

Indisputably, degree attainment is a very challenging feat for students who come from low-income families and who are first-generation college students. (Engle & Tinto 2008). Only 38% of low income high school seniors go straight to college as compared to 81% of their peers in the highest income quartile. Then, once enrolled in college, low income students earn bachelor's degrees at a rate that is less than half of that of their high income peers, 21% as compared with 45% (Haskins, Holzer, & Lerman, 2009).

The growing achievement gap in our country is harmful to the potential success as a nation. There is great disparity in educational attainment between America's highest and lowest income students despite similar talents and potential. While there is an abundant amount of talented low income students, relatively few are represented in higher education. While nearly 67% of high income, highly qualified students enroll in four-year colleges, only 47% of low income, highly qualified students enroll. Even more astonishing, 77% of the least qualified, high income students go on to college, while roughly the same proportion of the most qualified, low income students go on to college. (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2012).

### **Upward Bound Basics**

Upward Bound was established in 1965 as one of the three original programs of the TRIO programs. The term "TRIO" was coined to describe Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services; the three educational opportunity programs within the Higher Education Act. With several amendments and additions, Upward Bound is now one of the five federally funded TRIO programs designed to help disadvantaged students complete high school

and prepare for postsecondary education (McLure et al. 1998). Eligible students usually are those from families considered to meet low income standards and whose parents have not graduated from college.

In order to achieve its goal, Upward Bound programs were designed with several important features: cooperation between secondary schools and the sponsoring institution of higher education or non-profit, a curriculum which ranged from remedial education, skill development, aspects of creative thinking and effective expression, creation of positive attitudes towards self and learning, varied program of cultural, recreational, and group activities to augment the academic program (Office of Economic Opportunity 1970).

Typically, students enter Upward Bound between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade. They participate in weekly activities during the academic year and in an intensive summer program. Upward Bound Programs provide free services and activities on a year-round basis to motivate and prepare students for success in education. Students in Upward Bound are eligible to participate in college visits, community service opportunities, and cultural events. Participants of the program also receive instruction in academics and college readiness. Each student is also eligible to receive a monthly stipend. Students are assigned an advisor who provides intensive mentoring and support for participants as they prepare them for the steps to enter and succeed in post-secondary education.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this research is to describe perspectives of current Upward Bound professionals focusing on possible links between best practices and Upward Bound student



retention. This study examines the importance and usage of these best practices in order to retain students with Upward Bound programs. According to the U.S. Department of Education Annual Performance Report, in 2013, 85.3% of all students who participated in Upward Bound programs immediately went to college in the fall following their high school graduations. This rate is even higher by persistence in the program: 91.2% of Upward Bound students who participated in the program for three years or longer and 93% who participated through high school graduation enrolled in a postsecondary program immediately following high school. Retention within the program clearly produces a higher likelihood for the student to enter college, though current literature does not focus on how to keep or improve student retention within the program. For the purpose of this research project, student retention is defined as retaining the student for the next fiscal year.

## **II. Literature Review**

### **Chapter Purpose**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the policy history of Upward Bound and review the literature over best practices for Upward Bound and similar college access programs. As the Upward Bound program serves first generation, low income, and often minority students; literature regarding best practices involving these populations has also been reviewed. Upward Bound professionals are in the depths of actual programming activities, working face to face with the students on a regular basis. The best practices identified in this chapter are used to construct a questionnaire for professionals who see firsthand how they might influence the retention of Upward Bound students.

As a federally funded program under the Department of Education, all Upward Bound programs are required to track students up to ten years, four years within high school and six years after high school graduation. When a student joins the program, they are placed in a cohort and program objectives are evaluated by cohorts. If a student does not continue participation within Upward Bound and does not continue to receive services, the program is still responsible for tracking the student up to the ten-year period and stays within the cohort. Upward Bound programs are required to annually report the extent to which they meet or exceed the goals approved within their application as outcome criteria (Dortch 2016). Table 1.1 provides the outcome criteria to which Upward Bound programs are evaluated and definition of rigorous secondary school program.

<b>Table 2.1 Upward Bound Outcome Criteria</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Participant school performance, as measured by the percentage of participants with a specified cumulative grade point average</li> <li>2. Participant academic performance, as measured by the percentage of participants scoring at or above the proficient level on state standardized tests in reading/language arts and math</li> <li>3. Participant academic performance, as measured by the percentage of participants scoring at or above the proficient level on state standardized tests in reading/language arts and math</li> <li>4. Secondary school retention and graduation of participants, as measured by the percentage of participants re-enrolling at the next grade level or graduating with a regular high school diploma</li> <li>5. Completion of a rigorous secondary school curriculum (<b>see box below</b>), as measured by the percentage of current and prior participants expected to graduate who actually graduate with a regular high school diploma and come a rigorous secondary school curriculum</li> <li>6. Postsecondary enrollment of participants, as measured by the percentage of current and prior participants expected to graduate</li> <li>7. Completion of a postsecondary degree, as measured by the percentage of prior participants enrolled in an Institution of Higher Education within a specified timeframe who graduate with a degree within a specified period</li> </ol>
<b>Rigorous Secondary School Program of Study (Definition of Criteria #5)</b>
<p>A rigorous secondary school program of study is defined in regulations as a program of study that is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognized as such for the no-longer-funded Academic Competitiveness Grant (ACG) Program (HEA Section 401A)</li> <li>• An advanced or honors program established by the state</li> <li>• Any program in which a student successfully completes at least four years of English; three years of mathematics, including algebra I and a higher-level class; three years of science, including one year each of at least two of the following courses: biology, chemistry, and physics; three years of social studies; and one year of a language other than English</li> <li>• A program identified by a state-level partnership that is recognized by the no-longer-funded state Scholars Initiative</li> <li>• Any program for a student who completes at least two courses from an International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Program and receives a score of a “4” or higher on the examination for at least two of those courses; or</li> <li>• Any program for a student who completes at least two Advanced Placement (AP) courses and receives a score of “3” or higher on the AP exams for at least two of those courses.</li> </ul>

Source: Dortch, C. (2016). The TRIO Programs: A Primer. *Congressional Research Service: Report*, 4-5.

Rodriguez et al. (2015) highlight lack of participation within Upward Bound programs as its greatest limitation, emphasizing the need to identify effective retention strategies and not just best practices. Yampolskaya et al. (2006) found that students classified in a similar college access program that had a high attendance rate within program activities showed significant improvements in grade point average, where those who had a low attendance rate did not. Similarly, they believed further research should be done on how program elements influenced student participation in order to reach their overall goal preparing the student to enter and be successful in college.

### **Policy History**

During a State of the Union address on January 8, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson announced the War on Poverty, launching legislation proposed as a response to a national poverty rate of nineteen percent (Orleck & Hazirijian 2011). The Higher Education Act (HEA) was signed in 1965 creating the TRIO programs, including Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services (McElroy & Armesto 1998). President Johnson's intent in signing the HEA of 1965 was for all high school seniors in America to have the opportunity to apply to any college or university and not be turned away because of their socioeconomic status (Lee 2005).

Over the years, The TRIO Programs have been expanded and improved to provide a wider range of services and to reach more students who need assistance. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2011), the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 added the fourth program to the TRIO group by authorizing the Educational Opportunity Centers. The 1976 Education Amendments authorized the Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs, initially

named the Training Program for Special Programs Staff and Leadership Personnel. Amendments in 1986 added to the sixth program, the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program. Additionally, in 1990, the Department created the Upward Bound Math/Science program to address the need for specific instruction in the fields of math and science. The Upward Bound Math/Science program is administered under the same regulations as the regular Upward Bound program, but it must be applied for separately. Finally, the Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2001 amended the Student Support Services (SSS) program to permit the use of program funds for direct financial assistance (Grant Aid) for current SSS participants who are receiving Federal Pell Grants.

The Upward Bound program's goal is to increase the rates at which targeted students enroll in and graduate from post-secondary institutions by providing fundamental support such as help with the college admissions process and assistance in preparing for college entrance examinations (McElroy & Armesto 1998). Two-thirds of the students served must come from families with income at 150% or less of the federal poverty level and in which neither parent graduated from college; the other third of students must be one or the other (McLure & Child 1998). Participants of the program receive instruction in: literature, composition, mathematics, and science during after school tutorials, Saturday college days, and during a summer camp. Students in Upward Bound are eligible to participate in college visits, community service opportunities, and cultural events (Dortch 2016). Also according to Dortch (2016), Upward Bound students are eligible to receive a monthly stipend up to forty dollars during academic months and sixty dollars during summer months. The Department of Education identifies 810 Upward Bound programs nationally and 77 within the state of Texas in the fiscal year 2016.

During this time, they allocated over \$270 million for these programs (Department of Education 2016).

### **Introduction to Best Practices Framework**

The chapter presents the literature review supporting the categories and subcategories of best practice concepts pertaining to retention as applied to Upward Bound and similar programming. The three categories include: academic interventions, social influences, and structural effect. By discussing these concepts, it confirms the relevance of the issues at hand and provides the basis for the ensuring operationalization of these concepts into formal survey questions. This chapter uses the literature to present and defend a best practice framework and is designed to outline each imperative area which has been identified through research and prove the validity of each concept.

### **Academic Support**

Upward Bound intervenes in students' lives helping them develop academic knowledge and skills required to enter and succeed in college. College access programs provide academic support to students designed to improve their grades and overall performance in order to increase their ability to enroll and thrive in rigorous coursework (Kuh et al. 2011). Kezar indicates course selection in high school as one of the most substantial predictors of college enrollment and success (2001). The literature links the ability to be successful in these rigorous courses in high school as a positive indicator of their ability to handle college level course work. By focusing on academic support, Upward Bound programs are working towards all seven of the outcome criteria reviewed in Table 2.1. The literature identifies three elements used in

programming to provide this academic support; academic interventions, strategically timed interventions, and the ability to adapt interventions to students' academic needs. The goal of providing the academic support as a way to improve students' grades and their capability to take rigorous coursework as it is linked to high college success rates and could increase possibility of hitting multiple outcome criteria.

### **Secondary Academic Interventions**

Traditionally, college access programs like Upward Bound and Talent Search, focus on increasing cognitive factors, which include: test taking skills, test preparation, study skills, note taking, etc (Caldwell & Siwatu 2003). Legislation requires all Upward Bound projects to provide instruction in mathematics through pre-calculus, laboratory science, foreign language, composition, and literature through summer programs and academic year supplemental services (Cahalan & Goodwin 2014); though the intensity, focus, and frequency vary based on program design. In an effort to reduce students' struggles in college, college access programs function as a supplement and extension to a student's weekday curricular and extracurricular experiences (Gullatt & Jan 2013). Upward Bound students attend sessions after school, on Saturdays, and during the summer focused on both cognitive skills and academic instruction (Tinerney & Hagedorn 2002). Upward Bound programs offer tutoring as another avenue of addressing the student's academic needs (Pitre & Pitre 2009). College access programs which link state and local curriculum to their programming increase the rigor of their academic interventions and help ensure students understand the content of a course as well as how to prepare for it (Gullatt & Jan 2003). According to Gullatt and Jan (2003), academic services

provided by college access programs aim to counter negative school or community influences such as lack of rigorous curriculum and poorly trained teachers. Pitre and Pitre (2009) argue that students are better prepared by college access programs when they focus on cognitive factors, assist students with the completion of high school requirements, provide tutoring, as well as offer academic and study skill workshops.

### **College Readiness**

Conley (2007) suggests that one of the major reasons students falter in college is their experiential disconnect between low high school standards and high college expectations. First-year students commonly express surprise that their college courses are fundamentally different from high school courses. College instructors expect students to draw inferences, interpret results, analyze conflicting source documents, support arguments with evidence, and solve complex problems that have no obvious answer, draw conclusions, offer explanations, conduct research, and generally think deeply about what they are being taught (National Research Council 2002). College courses also move at a faster pace, often requiring students to read eight or nine books in the same amount of time it took them to read only one in high school (Standards for Success 2003).

Strategic exposure of high school students to college-level work on college campuses, as part of a college preparation program, gives high school students a vision of their own ability to undertake and succeed in post-secondary education (Gullatt and Jan 2003). Upward Bound's summer program often entails a full-time residential stay at the local college for up to eight weeks, including intensive educational courses (Cabrera & Padilla 2004; Hunt & Hardt 1969).



During the summer, Upward Bound provides students syllabi with each course and provide senior seminars which align with Conley's (2007) key concepts to enhance college readiness in students. Some Upward Bound programs have arrangements with target colleges to allow participants to earn college credit for courses taken as part of the summer program (Cahalan & Curtan 2004).

### **Adaptation to student needs**

Effective programs adopt strategies that enable the program staff to know students as individuals with unique needs, strengths, and weaknesses. Often Upward Bound staff use a needs assessment tool in order to alter services to best address the students' needs (Grimard & Maddaus 2004). In addition, programs which pay attention to students' cultural backgrounds and attempt to incorporate this into the structure and content of the programming allow for a successful structure. The program curriculum of Upward Bound projects should include content that is appropriate in preparing students for future success (Grimard & Maddaus 2004). The majority of students involved in Upward Bound or similar programs enter with low educational expectations compared to their peers.

### **Social Influences**

Inman and Mayes (1999) note that first generation college students are less prepared for academic reasons as well as social ones. Being away from home, family, friends, and significant others tends to concern both the male and female potential Upward Bound student. Tours, college preparation days, and the summer programming take the students outside their comfort zones and into a new environment often with new peers. Programs that can increase

parent involvement, facilitate peer support within the program, and provide positive adult mentors tend to alleviate the social obstacle and they can benefit retention of students in the program as well as contribute to the students' success. Grimard and Maddaus (2004) specify one of the crucial obstacles that low-income students, like those Upward Bound serve, face in preparing for college is social. Social influences are the most powerful and persuasive power over us, especially the influence of those who make up our immediate social network. The ridicule and praise, acceptance and rejection, approval and disapproval of our fellow beings can do more to assist or destroy our change efforts than almost any other source (Grenny et al. 2013). Tapping into this source of influence can lead to greater retention throughout the program.

### **Parent Involvement**

There is evidence, qualitative and quantitative, that social support including support from parents is related specifically to a minority student's overall success (Zulli et al. 1998). Though in many cases, parents from low social economic backgrounds find it difficult to support their college bound child using traditional forms. Time, transportation, lack of financial resources, linguistic barriers, not feeling welcomed and lack of awareness of activities, restrict these parents from participating (Williams & Sanchez 2011). Research indicates that programs which can engage parents can reduce the negative side effects of poverty on students. Programs must understand the strong influence poverty, immigrant status, and low levels of education play with parent interactions (Chrispeels & Rivero 2001). Students from certain minority backgrounds find themselves conflicted between the fulfillment of their obligations to family and their educational responsibilities (Dennis et al. 2005). Educating parents plays a key

role in allowing them to have a positive involvement in their student's future, though programming time and location must be convenient. Many of these parents care about their children's education, but find it difficult to attend school events or meetings when they occur in the middle of the day or during their work hours. Minority immigrant parents report more barriers to participation and subsequently are less likely to be involved at school when compared to native-born parents (Turney & Kao 2009). Collaboration between families and schools is extremely important for the success of minority youth, and school-based programs are in the position to bridge this relationship. Programs need to work against barriers to parental involvement in order to create a strong sense of community (Vega et al. 2015). In doing so, parents can gain skills, knowledge, and confidence, which can ultimately help their children succeed academically.

The first step in lessening barriers to parental involvement is establishing workable and realistic ways to engage parents in the education of their children. Williams and Sanchez (2011) identified three themes that lessen or reduce barriers to parent involvement: involvement opportunities, incentives, and effective communication.

Parent meetings, social events, and workshops that are planned in the evenings or weekends make it more feasible for parents to attend. Programs which allow parents to place input in scheduling meeting and events, increase overall parental involvement (Berzins & Lopez 2001). Providing some form of child care at these programming events, or allowing for other children to attend broadens the opportunities for parents to attend as well.

In addition to better involvement opportunities, offering incentives to students and parents encourages parents to be more involved. Whether it is food, raffle prizes, extra credit for the student, or a token of appreciation to the parents, Williams and Sanchez (2011) state these incentives bring in parents.

Keeping parents informed and setting effective communication with parents builds the foundation to which parental involvement blossoms. According to Quiocho and Daoud (2006), sending information home in multiple languages, specific to the community needs, and providing parents with multiple avenues to receive information is most successful. In addition, providing an open door policy, sharing up to date contact information, using social media, and providing a calendar of events are helpful to facilitate communication. By holding involvement opportunities that better sync with the parents needs in, creating incentives, and forming a foundation of effective communication, as Graham-Clay (2005) reasoned, programs are able to build a sense of community, which results in greater parent involvement.

### **Peer Support**

Gandara (1998) found numerous programs with supportive peer groups built into their program contribute to the effectiveness of student achievement. Peers can provide support that is more directly instrumental to academic outcomes by forming study groups, sharing notes, and experiences, and giving advice about classes to take and strategies to use (Richardson & Skinner 1992). It is these types of activities that parent support cannot cover, especially parents of first generation students. Palmer and Gasman (2008) use the example of “My brother’s keeper” to illustrate the importance of students relying on peers for motivation

and encouragement. Programs that can facilitate and support the formation of peer groups with the similar goal of academic success will in turn facilitate perseverance and persistence toward graduation and college. Palmer and Gasman (2008) identify peers as a rich source of social capital. Lack of these relationships could greatly hinder students' academic success. Upward Bound students identify peer group experiences key reasons they actively participated in the program (Grimard and Maddaus 2004). The students enjoyed meeting people from other schools and ethnic groups, and were able to form strong peer connections within the program.

Peer groups influence students' attitudes and behavior through the norms that they communicate to their program members. While faculty play an important role in the educational development of students, most researchers believe that student peer groups are principally responsible for socialization (Chickering 1969; Feldman & Newcomb 1969). The research in social psychology and higher education has suggested peer groups are critical in students' educational experience. Program staff should make peer groups a deliberate and positive part of the educational process within their programming (Hurtado et al. 1998). These findings suggest that faculty influence could be amplified or weakened by the interactions students have with their peers. Promoting interaction between students of different backgrounds within the program could provide peer support. Programs can use peer support as a positive change agent for retention (e.g., pairing new members with tenured members, providing opportunities for team building, and giving student free time with peers).

### **Positive Adult Mentors**

Poverty, in and of itself is not the issue, but what is, typically denies access in terms of positive role models and other social resources (Madyun 2011). One of the most significant

obstacles minority and first generation students' face is a lack of guidance. Counselors are overwhelmed dealing with troubled teens and schools are faced with inadequate resources, so there is insufficient access to guidance (Rodriguez et al. 2014). Research followed several Latino students and discovered that they did not know how to research universities, how to decide on a career, or whether to enroll in a community college or a four-year university (Stern et al. 2010).

Participants in Palmer and Gasman's research (2008) explained how access to role models and mentors emerged as a significant factor to support their academic success. These same participants were able to identify a relationship between mentoring and persistence. Mentoring is commonly defined as a one-to-one relationship between a caring adult and a student who needs support to achieve academic, career, social, or personal goals (McPartland & Nettles 1991). The goals for the relationship of mentorship should be clear and within the mentor's power to achieve, and the mentor must be empathetic, able to assess accurately the needs of students, and able to apply resources appropriately and regularly (Flexman et al. 1988). Overwhelmingly the literature points to the most successful models of mentoring to be those structured around a few well defined objectives that will in turn help the student to undertake specific actions and that requires regular face to face contact.

Consistent among Upward Bound and similar programs is their effectiveness in developing close, caring relationships with a knowledgeable adult who monitors the student's progress (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). Students of these programs look for dependable, trusting, knowledgeable, relatable, caring staff with to connect. Lauver and Little (2005) explain that

students describe programs they enjoy participating in as family. They develop a trusting relationship with staff members and feel cared about; in turn, these relationships improved the participants' likelihood of staying in the program. Successful programs focus on building strong bonds between staff and new members within the first few months and are able to dedicate one-on-one time with each student. Programs with staff that are able to relate their experience, expertise, and interests tend to connect with the students. The Raising Ambition Instills Self-Esteem (RAISE) program uses its staff as mentors for their students by being part counselor, part friend, and role model (McPartland & Nettles 1991).

When asked "who really cares," Vega, Moore, and Miranda research (2015) found Upward Bound students overwhelmingly identified both their parents and staff as supportive of their educational goals. Parents with students in the program were often more involved, which may be a result of the required parental attendance at certain events. Peer groups developed in Upward Bound added another angle to social influence and helped with students' academic success as well as their continued participation within the program. Upward Bound participants have increased participation in higher education, increased postsecondary enrollment and increased education completion expectations and a greater willingness to seek out supports on campus (Pitre & Pitre 2009; Myers & Schirm 1999; McLure & Childs 1998). These findings indicate students experiencing support from persons who care about them have enabled them to feel more comfortable seeking out support when they reach college campuses.

### **Structural Effect**

Structural aspect of programming is designed around rewards, accountability, changing the environment, hiring and maintaining quality staff.

## **Incentives**

Older teens want greater independence by making money and taking on adult responsibility, and they may have the very real burden of contributing to their family's income (Lauver & Little 2005). In traditional Upward Bound programs, stipends are given out to students based on their participation, with each program having its own way to break down the stipend; although the monetary incentives alone do not seem to solve the programming retention issue. Several programs find the need to provide more incentives. Programmatic rewards such as priority to participate in a desirable activity, priority timing for lunch, opportunity to pick who they room with in overnight events promote consistent attendance (Lauver & Little 2005).

## **Accountability**

Programs that raise academic achievement adopt high standards for participants and expect high performance from staff. Youth should show the connection between frequent participation and a brighter future to both the parent and student.

According to Lauver & Little (2005), programs must make program expectations and criteria clear and available. The importance of regular attendance must be met by explicit standards for students and parents. This standard should correlate with the minimum level necessary to achieve positive outcomes. Programs whose participants attended regularly commonly required a new student orientation for both parents and students. These programs also had them sign a form of written commitment, conveying a clear message that attendance is important. Staff members can help with attendance by expressing to students that they are valued and missed when they are not present. Simple activities such as greeting the students as



they arrive and leave, or seeking them out at school to make that connection help reinforce a programmatic caring sense.

Programs often establish an early intervention plan for those students whose participation begins to slip (Lauver & Little 2005). These early intervention plans commonly encompass the staff making immediate contact with both the student and their parent, as well as making another written agreement with the student for improved attendance. Both the student and parent are reminded of program expectations and actions the program may take if attendance or any behavior issue becomes something to be addressed. Acting fast once the student first begins to struggle can prevent further retention issues.

### **Structural Capability**

Although most outreach programs focus on developing academic skills, program administrators believe that more attention should be given to developing and keeping proper structural capability; providing a safe place with privacy, adequate office space and location and access to technology.

Programs working within the schools have found that principals are often reluctant to give up control of space and at times reserve the right to reclaim the space at any time (Halpern, 1999). The ownership, size, and structure of space of these programs shape them in many ways. Lauver and Little (2005) note that ensuring participants' physical and psychological safety when meeting with program staff is critical in their connection to the program. Inadequate square footage, lack of privacy, constant movement, and other constraints cause

not only inconvenience to the program, but overall programs report affecting the shape of student behavior and comfortability, thus causing retention issues.

The use of computers and other information technologies is an emerging issue for many programs. Programs need to build strategic plans for purchasing, upgrading, and using technology (Perna & Swail, 2001). Fostering the necessary relationships requires face-to-face contact, access to technologies, and greater access to program staff.

### **Staffing**

The San Francisco Beacon Initiative evaluation identified quality staff as an essential factor to a program's success (Walker & Arbreton 2004). Positive relationships between staff and participant are associated with long term participation; therefore, program staffing is critical to the program's success. Among the related issues are hiring staff that support the mission and goals of the organization and providing ongoing professional development (Perna & Swail 2001). As in the larger child care and youth serving fields, turnover of field or front line staff in community-based programs is constantly high (Halpern 1999). According to Perna and Swail (2001), the College Board survey indicates that about 80 percent of these programs have five or fewer full time paid staff. Focus group participants indicated that many programs have high staff turnover rates, in part because of low salaries and limited opportunities for professional advancement. Turnover occurs at any time of the year and it is not uncommon for programs to have staff vacancies for long periods of time. This places more responsibilities on current staff, adding to the workplace stress and could potentially throw programs into chaos. It may also force the program to lessen their requirements in order to hire quickly (Halpern

1999). A well-functioning staff is a proven key factor in student retention. Strategies to reduce turnover and keep quality staff are essential to program success.

### **Conceptual Framework<sup>1</sup>**

Based on supporting literature, a practical ideal model of retention for the Upward Bound program includes three categories: Academic Interventions, Social Influences, and Structural Effect. Each category has subcategories. The conceptual framework for the categories and subcategories is summarized in Table 2.2 and is accompanied by a list of the supporting literature.

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<sup>1</sup> See Shields & Rangarajan (2013) and Shields & Whetsell (2017) for more information on conceptual frameworks.

**Table 2.2 Conceptual Framework**

**Title: Upward Bound Professionals Perspectives on How to Retain Students Throughout the Program**

**Purpose: The purpose of this research is to describe perspectives of current Upward Bound professionals over best practices to retain students within the program.**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Supporting Literature</b>
<b>1. Academic Support</b>	Kezar (2001); Caldwell & Siwatu (2003); Gullatt & Jan (2003); PACE (1997); Conley (2007); National Research Council (2002); Standards for Success (2003); AYPF (2001); Grimard & Maddaus (2004); Inman & Mayes (1999)
1.1 Secondary Academic Interventions	
1.2 College Readiness	
1.3 Adaptation to Student Needs	
<b>2. Social Influences</b>	Zulli, Frierson, & Clayton (1998); Williams & Sanchez (2011); Chrispeels & Rivero (2001); Dennis, Phineey, & Chauateco (2005), Turney & Kao (2009); Vega, Moore, & Miranda (2015); Berzins & Lopez (2001); Quioco & Daud (2006); Graham-Clay (2005); Gandara (1998); Richardson & Skinner (1992); Palmer & Gasmen (2008); Grimard & Maddaus (2004); Chickering (1969); Feldman & Newcom (1969); Hurtago, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen (1998); Madyn (2011); Rodriguez, rhodes, & Aguirre (2014); Stern (2008); McPartland & Nettles (1991); Gullatt & Jan (2003); Lauver & Little (2005); Pitre & Pitre (2009); Myers & Schirm (1999); McLure & Childs (1998)
2.1 Parent Involvement	
2.2 Peer to Peer Influence	
2.3 Positive Adult Mentorship	
<b>3. Structural Effect</b>	Lauver & Little (2005); Halpern (1999); Perna & Swail (2001); Walker & Arbretton (2004); Perna & Swail (2001)
3.1 Incentives	
3.2 Accountability	
3.3 Structural Capability	
3.4 Staffing	

### **III. Methods**

#### **Chapter Purpose**

This chapter discusses details associated with design and methods used in this research. This study uses a survey to collect data from current Upward Bound professionals within Texas. This chapter is organized such that details related to the survey method are presented first and concludes with a discussion of Institutional Review Board exemption and human subject protection.

#### **Survey Research Setting and Participants**

The primary objective of this study is to describe the perceptions Upward Bound professionals have over the link between best practices and student retention. There are currently 77 Upward Bound program grants within Texas, representing around ten percent of the nation's Upward Bound programs. The survey was administered to a sample of the Texas-based programs. The survey was formulated to elicit opinions on various aspects of possible links between best practices and student retention. Some items for the survey were drawn from existing literature. Other items were formulated by the researcher based on previous experience working with the program.

The survey was then disseminated to a purposive sampling of 143 Upward Bound professionals within Texas, which included all 77 programs and consisted of direct service staff, directors, and supportive staff. A list of all current Upward Bound programs was collected from

the U.S. Department of Education website and e-mail addresses were collected through a web based search of the programs listed within Texas. Once all the e-mail addresses were collected, Qualtrics web survey platform was used to administer the survey to each potential participant since access to this platform is free for Texas State faculty, staff, and students. An e-mail requesting completion of the survey was crafted with a description of the study, estimated time for completion, and anonymous link to the survey. Table 3.1 provides the complete survey instrument. The web survey was first administered to Upward Bound professionals on June 29, 2017. Two reminder emails were sent to non-respondents on July 7, 2017 and July 13, 2017. The survey was closed on July 14, 2017.

### Operationalizing the Conceptual Framework into a Survey

3.1 Survey Operationalization Table	
Category	Questionnaire Item
<b>1. Personal Background Information</b>	
1.1	1. Which of the following best describes your position within the Upward Bound Program? <b>(Advisor/Coordinator/Specialist, Director/Assistant Director, Support Staff)</b> 2. How many years have you worked within Upward Bound? <b>(Less than a year, 1-4 years, 5-9 years, 10+ years)</b> 3. Are you an Upward Bound or TRIO alumni? <b>(Yes, No)</b>
<b>2. Academic Support</b>	
2.1 Secondary Interventions	4. Workshops designed to strengthen test taking skills <b>(Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning)</b> 5. Activities that focus on building reading, writing and math skills <b>(Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning)</b>
2.2 College Readiness	6. Curriculum programming which links to college readiness standards <b>(Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning)</b> 7. Summer programming which exposes participants to college level work <b>(Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning)</b>
2.3 Adaptation to Student Needs	8. Needs based surveys, which adapt services to student's need <b>(Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning)</b> 9. Programming that attends to and incorporates student's cultural background <b>(Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning)</b>

<b>3. Social Influences</b>	
3.1 Parent Involvement	<p>10. Developing an effective parent and program staff relationship (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p> <p>11. Offers opportunities outside of regular school hours for parent activities (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p> <p>12. Offers incentives for parent events (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p> <p>13. Provide multiple avenues of communicating with parents (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p>
3.2 Peer to Peer Influence	<p>14. Team building activities during programming events (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p> <p>15. Formal or informal mentor program for new students (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p> <p>16. Allowing for free time during program events for students to mingle (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p>
3.3 Positive Adult Mentorship	<p>17. Developing a positive trusting and caring relationship between the staff and program students (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p> <p>18. Building strong bonds between staff and new students with dedicated one-on-one time during the first few months (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p> <p>19. Staff who finds ways to relate to every student (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p>
<b>4. Structural Capability</b>	
4.1 Incentives	<p>20. Structuring stipends around attendance of program events (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p> <p>21. Using creative non-monetary incentives to increase attendance including but not limited to: snacks, food, leadership opportunities, and community service opportunities (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p>
4.2 Accountability	<p>22. Having a written commitment for students and parents to sign when entering the program, which establishes and articulates the importance of regular attendance (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p> <p>23. Holding a new student orientation for both the student and parent to attend covering program expectations (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p> <p>24. Including an early intervention plan or probation period for new students (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p>
4.3 Structural Capability	<p>25. A safe space with privacy for student meetings (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p> <p>26. A constant dedicated space for students to know where to find program staff (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p> <p>27. Student access to resources (i.e. computers, internet, printers, Microsoft Office, etc.) (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p>
4.4 Staffing	<p>28. Recruiting qualified staff (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p> <p>29. Hiring staff who are passionate about the mission of Upward Bound (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p> <p>30. Using incentives to increase staff retention (<b>Increase the student's likelihood of returning, No effect, Decrease the student's likelihood of returning</b>)</p>

The conceptual framework was operationalized by a close examination of current literature pertaining to best practices. This section reviews how the concepts in the conceptual framework were operationalized. As shown in Table 3.1, the first category is titled “Personal Background Characteristics,” where the participant is asked to identify their position title, years with Upward Bound, and if they are TRIO alumni. This information is asked in order to review and determine potential patterns that may arise within results based of their specific title, years of experience, and position as a former student.

The remaining survey questions fall under Upward Bound activities which influence participant’s retention. The participant is asked to respond to whether the activities/best practices identified within the conceptual framework increase the student’s likelihood of returning to the program, have no effect, or decrease the student’s likelihood. For example, discussed in the literature review, Palmer and Gasman (2008) identified the importance of students relying on peers for motivation and encouragement and how fostering this social capital could conclude in higher student retention. This information was translated into questions within the section 3.2 Peer to Peer Influences in the Survey Operationalization Table.

### **Strengths of Survey Technique**

A variety of steps have been taken to increase the reliability and validity of the survey while decreasing error in the results. As there is no prior literature or surveys seeking to answer what works in order to retain students within the program, the questions were developed for the first time. Bhattacharjee (2012) states various recommendations to increase the reliability of research: (1) using questionnaires decreases the subjectivity of data collected; (2) asking



questions pertaining to topics respondents care about; (3) avoiding the use of ambiguous terms; and (4) using simplistic syntax and dictation in questions. By conducting this study on a relatively new topic within academic literature, this study hopes to gather the views of as many Upward Bound professionals to increase the validity and reliability of results. The survey contains all labeled responses. Scales that feature fully labeled responses have been found to be more reliable and easier for respondents to answer (Sue & Ritter, 2012).

Coverage error is minimal in this study. Coverage error occurs when parts of the population are not included in the sampling method, leading to different data being gathered from the sample (Sue & Ritter, 2012). The survey was distributed to each Upward Bound program in Texas via email addresses, in an environment where internet use is frequent among professionals. Sue and Ritter (2012) state in university or workplace settings, "Coverage error poses less of a problem," due to constant access to the internet. Also, this survey has been developed with Qualtrics software which also creates a smartphone version of the survey for those who may access the email solicitation on their phone and wish to take the survey on their mobile device.

### **Weaknesses of Survey Technique**

Due to the gap of literature within this area of study, the survey has no questions which have been validated in other scholarly writings. Sue & Ritter (2012) recommend using survey questions from past scholars as a guide to designing questions. Though questions were closely related to best practices found in the literature, they were not questions that had been used before.

The response rate creates limitations regarding the repetitiveness of survey respondents. As discussed prior, the survey was sent out to the 77 current Upward Bound programs in Texas only accounting for roughly ten percent of the amount within the nation. This restriction on population sampling is likely to reduce the number of respondents to the survey significantly, further reducing representativeness of survey constituents.

### **Survey Data Analysis**

Qualtrics software recorded the responses of individuals who answered the entire survey and partial responders alike. Therefore, there are some discrepancies in the number of responses from question to question on the survey. Perceptions of respondents concerning the link between activities and best practices to retention are reported using a variety of descriptive statistics. Frequency distribution tables were used to assess counts and percentage of respondent attitudes towards student retention. Cross-tabulation analyses were also conducted to analyze the patterns among responses to two or more survey questions at the same time.

### **Survey IRB Exemption/Human Subject Protection**

This research study was approved an exemption by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) on June 28, 2017, under application number 2017825. The IRB is an independent ethics committee used in research in the United States that has been formally designation to approve, monitor, and review biomedical and behavioral research. Although the category is called “exempt,” this type of research does require IRB review and registration. The exempt registration process is much less rigorous than an expedited or full committee review. To

qualify, research must fall into six federal defined exempt categories. These categories present the lowest amount of risk to potential subjects because, generally speaking, they involve either collection of anonymous or publicly-available data, or conduct of the least potentially-harmful research experiments. To protect the identity of human subjects responding to the survey, anonymous data was collected during the survey by using the Qualtrics Anonymous link. Qualtrics' website states that "no identifying information such as name or email address is collected unless you specifically ask for it in the survey" (Qualtrics 2017). Therefore, this survey did not collect any personally identifiable information from the respondents. The preliminary email message sent to respondents stated that "all answers to the survey are completely anonymous, and participation is entirely voluntary giving respondents the option to skip questions or quit the survey at any point." The same statement was posted on the opening page of the Qualtrics survey.

#### **IV. Results**

The purpose of this chapter is to present results from the survey. Results captured the perspectives of Upward Bound professionals on best practices, as identified through the literature review, and the effect those practices have on student retention within the program. Each category within the survey is examined and results are summarized.

##### **Survey Response Rate**

As indicated in Chapter III, the survey was administered to all 77 Upward Bound programs within Texas to 143 professionals. Seven emails bounced back, and as a result, the survey was administered to a total of 136 potential respondents. A total of 30 professionals

responded to the full survey resulting in a response rate of approximately 21%. The following sections of this chapter provide details of results obtained from the survey.

**Category 1: Personal Background Information**

The first category on the survey was “Personal Background Information.” The goal of this set of questions was to gather information about the respondents to see if job position variable are tied to perspectives. This section also provides information over the tenure the professional has been with Upward Bound and whether they are TRIO alumni. Again, this information was gathered to see if either of these variables are tied to perspectives.

**Table 4.1 Respondents Position and Tenure in Upward Bound**

		Job Position			
		Advisor/Coordinator/Specialist	Director/Assistant Director	Support Staff	Total
Years	Less than a year	3	0	1	4
	1-4 years	7	4	2	13
	5-9 years	5	1	0	6
	10+ years	3	3	1	7
	Total	18	8	4	30

**Table 4.2 Respondents Position and Alumni Status**

		Trio Alumni		
		Yes	No	Total
Job Position	Advisor/Coordinator/Specialist	7	11	18
	Director/Assistant Director	2	6	8
	Support Staff	0	4	4
	Total	9	21	30

Out of the respondents, 60% were advisors, 27% were either a director or assistant director, and 13% were Support Staff. Out of the 18 identified as an advisor, 17% had been with the program for less than a year, 66% had been with the program between 1-9 years, while 17% had been with Upward Bound for 10+ years. Though, overall 64% of those who responded to the survey identified they were employed with an Upward Bound program for 1-9 years. The next comparison observed was between respondents' job positions and whether they were a TRIO alumni. Overwhelming out of the 30 respondents, 70% were not alumni while 30% were alumni. Out of the group only two directors or assistant directors were alumni.

## **Category 2: Academic Support**

As discussed before, Upward Bound programs spend a large amount of time and resources on academic-focused programming. To review responses for each subcategory within Academic support, see Table 4.3 below. When Upward Bound professionals were asked what effect workshops focused on strengthen test taking skills and activities focused on building reading, writing, and math skills; 77% of the respondents said they increased the student's likelihood of students returning to the program. When it came to college readiness, 80% of respondents believed providing curriculum programming which linked to college readiness standards increased the student's likelihood of returning.

<b>Table 4.3 Academic Support</b>	
Academic Support N=30	Increases Student likelihood of returning
<b>Secondary Interventions</b>	
Test Taking	73%
Reading, Writing, Math	77%
<b>College Readiness</b>	
Curricular Programming	80%
Summer Programming	94%
<b>Adaption to student needs</b>	
Needs based survey	67%
Cultural background programming	87%

When asked about whether exposing participants to college level work during summer programming increased the students' likelihood of returning, 94% of respondents indicated it did.

When asked about adaption to student needs by using a need-based survey, 67% believed it increased student's likelihood of returning, while 30% believed it had no effect or decreased student's likelihood of returning. Overwhelmingly, 87% of respondents believed programming that incorporates student's cultural background increased the student's likelihood of returning.

## **Category 2: Social Influence**

To review responses for each subcategory within Social Influences see Table 4.4 below.

<b>Table 4.4 Social Influence</b>	
Academic Support N=30	Increases Student likelihood of returning
<b>Parent Involvement</b>	
Acessibly Timed Events	73%
Incentives	73%
Effective Communication	73%
<b>Peer to Peer Influences</b>	
Team Building	95%
Peer Mentoring	87%
Student Free Time	87%
<b>Positive Adult Mentorship</b>	
Building staff and student relationship	100%
Dedicating one-on-one time with new students	100%
Staff relating to each student	100%

The first few questions in this category are focused on parent involvement. All three questions in the section were all answered the same by the 22 respondents. 73% of the respondents believed developing effective parent and program staff relationships, offering opportunities outside of regular school hours for parent activities, and offering incentives at these events all increase the likelihood of student’s returning to the programs. Though 26% believed these best practices had no effect over student’s likelihood of returning.

The peer to peer influence section begins with a question over team building activities, and 95% of respondents believed they increased student’s likelihood to return. The next two questions over mentoring programs for new students and allowing free time for students to mingle, 13% of respondents believed it had no effect while 87% believed it increased the student’s likelihood of returning. Out of those who choose no effect for allowing free time for students to mingle, 75% of them identified themselves as either a Director or Assistant Director.

When it came to the positive adult mentorship, respondents answered all three questions in this section the exact same. All respondents answered they believed developing a positive trusting and caring relationship between staff and students, building bonds between staff and new students with dedicated one-on-one time, and staff finding ways to relate to every student increased students' likelihood of returning.

### **Structural Capability**

The first two questions under structural capability focuses on incentives. When asked what effect structuring stipends around attendance of program events, 18% of respondents believed it would have no effect over student's likelihood of returning to the program. Though 82% believe it would increase their likelihood. The next questions covered using creative non-monetary incentives to increase attendance; 83% of respondents answered that offering these would increase the student's likelihood of returning. Those who identified as TRIO alumni answered with the majority, while every respondent who choose using non-monetary incentives to have no effect were not past TRIO participants.

The next three questions cover accountability and how certain best practices influence retention. When asked about having a written commitment for students and parents to sign once entering the program, 59% answered it would increase student's likelihood of returning, while 41% answered it would have no effect. The next questions covered holding a new student orientation for both the student and parent. This time, 77% answered it would increase while 23% answered it would have no effect on students' likelihood to return. Then Upward Bound professionals were asked about including an early intervention plan or probation period for



new students; 64% answered it would increase, 27% answered it had no effect, and 9% answered it would decrease the likelihood of student's returning.

Structural capability questions covered the physical space used by Upward Bound staff. When asked about the effect of having a safe space with privacy for student meetings, 82% of respondents believed it would increase the likelihood of students returning. A constant dedicated space received a similar result with 86% answering it would increase the likelihood. All those who indicated they were TRIO alumni fell within the majority, while the 14% who answered that constant dedicated space would have no effect on student retention were not alumni. For both of these questions no one believed either of these two items would decrease the likelihood. When it came to providing access to resources, 91% believed it would increase likelihood, while 9% answered it would have no effect on their likelihood of returning.

Earlier questions under the social influence asked about positive adult mentorship. This section focuses on staffing for those positions. The first two questions in this section received the same results. All 30 respondents answered that recruiting qualified staff and hiring staff that were passionate about the UB mission would increase the student's likelihood to return. The last question asked about using incentives to increase staff retention, 70% believed it would increase and 30% believed it would have no effect over student's likelihood to return. Below in Table 4.5, the percentage of respondents who answered that each of the subcategories would increase student's likelihood of returning can be reviewed.

<b>Table 4.5 Structural Effect</b>	
Academic Support N=30	Increases Student likelihood of returning
<b>Incentives</b>	
Attendance structured stipends	82%
Non-monetary	83%
<b>Accountability</b>	
Written commitment	59%
New student orientation	77%
Early intervention plan or probation	64%
<b>Structural Capability</b>	
Safe space	82%
Constant dedicated space	86%
Access to resources	91%
<b>Staffing</b>	
Recruiting qualified staff	100%
Hiring passionate staff	100%
Incentives to increase staff retention	70%

## V. Conclusions

### Chapter Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to review and summarize the research presented in this study. Results from the survey are discussed. This chapter also discusses the contributions and the limitations of this research. After a thorough summarization of the finding and examination of the contributions and limitations, recommendations for future research and suggestions for the area of focus for potential research are presented.

### Research Summary

This applied research project described the perspectives of Upward Bound professionals regarding the link between best practices and student retention. The research was conducted

to give Upward Bound professionals an idea of what effect current best practices are having on a student's likelihood to return to the program the following year. In doing so, hopefully Upward Bound professionals can take the information within this research and adjust, add, or remove current practices in order to increase student retention within the program.

### **Summary of Findings**

Overall the group of respondents seemed to answer question similarly, having very little variance in response. When it came to questions over positive adult mentorship, all 30 of the respondents believed the three best practices presented in these questions would increase the likelihood of students returning. Similarly, when it came to staffing for these positions that form the adult mentorships, there was a bit of mixed results. The first two questions pertaining to recruiting qualified staff and hiring staff that are passionate about the Upward Bound mission received 100% answering it would increase student's likelihood to return the following year. Though even after answering how influential staff are in the adult mentorship section and the first two questions in staffing section, 30% of respondents answered using incentives to increase staff retention would have no effect in student likelihood of returning.

The accountability section provides subtle mix results and is the only section to have respondents answer with the decrease likelihood option. Holding a new student orientation for both the student and parent to attend covering program expectations was seen favorable to increase student likelihood to return, with 77% respondents choosing this. Though the respondents were fairly split with 59% believe having a written commitment for students and parents would increase likelihood while 41% believe it would have no effect. Including an early

intervention plan or probation period for new students seemed to be the most controversial question within the survey; 67% answered it would increase, 23% answer it would have no effect, and 10% answered it would decrease likelihood for students to return.

As all Upward Bound programs function different due their agreements with school districts for which they work, this often reflects the difference in each program's structural capability. 82% of respondents believed a safe space with privacy would increase likelihood of student's returning and 86% believed a constant dedicated space would also increase likelihood. Results were bumped up to 91% increase of likelihood when asked about providing access to resources: computers, internet, printers, and Microsoft Office. Considering Upward Bound serves low income students, it is not surprising that they would return to a program to continue their availability to resources that may be more difficult to access otherwise.

## **Contributions**

The survey contributes to the overall research of best practices within college access program, more specifically Upward Bound programs, and is the first to survey for a connection between the best practices and effect on student retention. This research provides feedback for Upward Bound professionals to consider when developing and reviewing their programming/activities. This study provides a basis that could be take a step further to create a model for student retention.

## **Limitations**

This research has been conducted with limited resources that create various limitations to the reliability of results. First and foremost, the greatest limitation of this research has been time. This applied research project conducted had to be approved by the IRB, conducted and concluded all within a single summer semester posed many challenges to the reliability of the results. Ideally, the survey could have been distributed at the Texas Association of Student Support Services conference in order to better inform and recruit participants. Unfortunately, the staff conference was held in early spring, and the other time several professionals would be gathered would have been at the end of summer for the student conference.

The results of this survey had to be interpreted with caution due to a low response rate. Summer programming takes several Upward Bound staff out of their offices and could have factored into a low response rate. During the summer is also the most common time period for Upward Bound staff to use their vacation time. Furthermore, the unverifiable possibility of non-response bias due to it being conducted as a web-based survey is present in the results.

## **Future Research Recommendations**

This study can be extended in many different ways in the future. Future researchers should seek to administer the survey at Upward Bound conferences and seek to survey an equal number of advisors, directors, and support staff. Involving more stakeholders would be beneficial to the holistic view of the research including the students, parents, teachers, school and administration. Future researchers may add different research questions to gain a diverse perspective than gathered.

Moreover, future research may find that the conceptual framework does not include all important elements of best practices. Therefore, future researchers may seek to expand or retract the scope of the study, specifically the survey. The final recommendation for future research is for researchers to utilize as much time as possible to gather a response rate which sufficiently represents the population.

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