

Abstract

For over four decades, Upward Bound programs have influenced students' aspirations and goals toward attending college, college enrollment, and overall educational achievement, providing a standard for successful college preparation for historically marginalized students. Although Upward Bound has helped many Americans prepare for and earn their college degrees, it has been subjected to budget challenges due to the evaluation of federal college preparation programs. Upward Bound in particular, has been contested and controversial for many years, especially as it relates to methodology and conflicting program outcomes from research studies conducted. The intent of the qualitative case study for this research was to capture the perceptions of four project directors and staff regarding the phenomenon of Upward Bound program outcomes and the Annual Performance Report (APR) currently being utilized as an evaluation tool for the U. S. Department of Education. Through this case study, the participants were able to provide personal insight into what methodologies they perceived as effective in evaluating Upward Bound programs. In addition, the case study approach allowed the analysis of the perceptions of participants based on the location and demographics of the program. The findings indicated that the participants' assessment of the APR revealed that they did not perceive it as an effective tool in reporting program outcomes and reflecting participants' success. As the U. S. Department of Education continues to stress accountability and measurable results from the directors, a well-articulated and structured evaluation process will need to be designed to assist Upward Bound directors in documenting their work for internal monitoring, other stakeholders, and the U.S. Department of Education to whom program impact and outcomes impact funding decisions.