Summer College Opportunity Program in Education (SCOPE) Evaluation: Understanding Students’ Goals and Structuring the Program to Meet Students’ Needs

Andrew Wilson

Research Advisors: Dr. Mindy Kornhaber, Assistant Professor, Educational Policies and Studies, and Dr. Patricia Yaeger, SCOPE Evaluation Coordinator, Higher Education

ABSTRACT

The Summer College Opportunity Program in Education (SCOPE) is a summer program for first generation college-bound high school students from minority groups traditionally underrepresented in colleges and universities. The purpose of this research is to help evaluate the Summer College Opportunity Program in Education (SCOPE). This study was conducted on the Pennsylvania State University Park campus. The information was obtained from surveys and interviews. To analyze the interviews, primary patterns and themes were evaluated based on procedures outlines in Miles and Huberman (1984). I investigated the goals for the program that the students have and examined how those goals align or diverge from the stated goals of the program. Overall, the goals of the students and the goals of the program were very similar.

INTRODUCTION

Numerous programs have been developed in an effort to promote academic success for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Many of these programs seek to encourage capable students to pursue postsecondary degrees. One such initiative is the Summer College Opportunity Program in Education (SCOPE), a supplemental educational initiative designed to enable underrepresented students to enroll in and successfully complete their postsecondary education at The Pennsylvania State University in the College of Education.

As the American economy demands a more educated and highly trained workforce, it has become increasingly important for American youth to continue their education beyond high school. Boyer (1997) states

“the first important step in improving the undergraduate college is to help students move from high school to higher education. The goal must be to provide more helpful information and make it possible for students to begin with confidence an educational journey that will lead them to the right college and extend far beyond the college years (p.8).”

Therefore, it is imperative for students to strive for a match between them and their choice of higher education, so the transition process will be smoother. Many institutions of higher education have designed summer transition programs for students entering colleges or universities. The goal of these programs is to ease the transition process students encounter and to enable the student to feel more acclimated to campus life.

The problem of students entering college unprepared for college work is not a recent one. Colleges and universities have long-needed to offer services to students who have difficulty performing at the college level. Consequently, transitional programs were designed by college
and university administrators to assist individuals in overcoming the social and academic difficulties associated with making the transition to college (Shere, 1993). No doubt this will continue to be a challenge for institutions that include educational opportunity in their mission (Higbee & Dwinnell, 1998).

Summer transitional programs have been particularly important because they operate at a critical time when institutions could be effective in preventing student drop out. During this time, students separate themselves from past associations and make the transition into the social and intellectual life of the institution (Tinto, 1987). Along with SCOPE, most often, summer program objectives include maximizing the retention, academic achievement, graduation, and educational development of underrepresented students (Schmidt, 2002 & Shere, 1993).

**Program Overview**

The Summer College Opportunity Program in Education (SCOPE) is a summer program for first generation college-bound high school students from racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented in colleges and universities. The program consists of 16 students. Program staff includes instructors, residence counselors, and a counseling coordinator. This program is aimed at providing students with skills to succeed in college and implicitly encourage minority students to apply to Penn State University College of Education.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this research is to help evaluate the Summer College Opportunity Program in Education (SCOPE). As part of this evaluation I will investigate the goals for the program that the students have and examine how those goals align or diverge from the stated goals of the program. This will help SCOPE program designers know if the program is meeting the needs of the students and if the students and the program share common goals. The assessment aspect of the investigation will bridge the gap between what educators believe students need and what the students feel they need in order for them to be successful in a collegiate environment. The information collected will then be used to inform SCOPE program developers about students’ learning goals and the elements in the program that help students meet these goals. This will enable SCOPE to incorporate those elements into the program for future years.

**Research Questions**

This study attempts to examine the students and their goals for the program. In order for the SCOPE program to be structured to meet students’ needs, the following four questions must be addressed:

1. What do students want to get out of the SCOPE program?
2. What is it that students want to learn in the SCOPE program?
3. Who is most influential in the learning process?
4. How can educators structure the SCOPE program to address students concerns?

Clearly, students’ goals are a major factor in assessing the outcomes of this program. According to Higbee and GoldenburgBelle learning goals are significant to the assessment plan (1999). This research is intended to provide The Pennsylvania State University College of Education with information that can help in developing future SCOPE programs that align with participants’ goals.
Program Goals

The central goal of the SCOPE program is to help provide students with information and tools to ease their transition from high school to college and to consider applying to The Pennsylvania State University College of Education (Schmidt, 2002). Along with this main goal, five goals were established for the program in the following areas: (1) Academics Skills; students will be enrolled in a three credit Language & Literacy course and a one credit Technology course that will challenge their abilities in literacy and computers respectively, (2) Social Skills; students will develop skills to cope with the social aspects of college life, (3) Validation; program staff will help students develop confidence needed to successfully adapt to all aspects of a collegiate environment, (4) College Process; students will be introduced to beginning phases of college life including counseling sessions, the college application process, and how to accurately complete a financial aid application, (5) Knowledge of education careers; students will be exposed to all levels in the field of education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

First Generation College Students

There has been a significant body of research on first generation college students, examining the factors that inhibit and enhance success. This research consistently shows that some of the major barriers to success include: (1) lack of self-confidence; (2) inappropriate expectations or knowledge about college environment; (3) lack of connection to the college community or external community; (4) lack of early validation within the college environment; (5) family members who do not understand the goals of college; and, (6) not involving faculty in summer bridge programs and the transition process (Terenzini, Rendon, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg & Jalomo, 1996).

The following are some specific suggestions about what colleges must do to improve the bottom line for first-generation college students, to enhance their learning, success, satisfaction, and retention. Gardner states:

“faculty and student affairs administrators must reconnect our campuses to our host communities and begin working with pre-college students and their families, as well with public school faculty and administrators in respective disciplines, to serve these students and families long before they come to us”(1996, p. 31).

Frequent interaction with faculty members is more strongly related to satisfaction with college than any other type of involvement or, indeed, any other student or institutional characteristics (Astin, 1985). One means of fostering involvement with university faculty is through participation in small, highly individualized orientation classes with built-in opportunities for one-on-one contact with the professor outside the classroom (Higbee, 1989). Orientation is critically important for first-generation students, who often lack essential background knowledge about specific institutions and about higher education (Gardner, 1996).

Summer Transitional Programs

College summer bridge programs or transitional programs for high-risk minority students are becoming an established part of the effort to recruit, retain, and graduate a population of
high-risk students in higher education (Santa, Rita, & Bacote, 1993). Most of these programs are geared towards rising college freshman, but SCOPE focuses primarily on rising high school juniors. According to Maria Schmidt, director of the SCOPE program, usually high school seniors already have their minds made up about college choice and choosing a college major (2002). This program was intended to give students an early start introducing them to Penn State and the college of education.

Sponholz (1996) describes a summer orientation program as a student’s chance to do all of your getting lost and looking like a clueless freshman before the other three classes arrive. Activities are usually organized at lots of various locations on campus, so students can become familiar with the navigating experience. All of these experiences are very important for a first-generation college student who does not have anyone in their house to ask questions about these issues.

**Meeting Students’ Goals**

According to the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, helping students reach their goal is through quality education. The Board states that those who’ve taken classes give the colleges high marks for the quality of education. Also, the Board states most of the students who enroll, meet their goals before leaving college.

Underrepresented students in college have placed great importance on their physical and social skills. In developing competence many underrepresented students have put greater emphasis on physical and manual skills or social skills because they perceive themselves to be more capable in these areas (Higbee & GoldBergBelle, 1999). Astin (1995) proposes that “students learn by becoming involved.” (p.133). Astin defines student involvement as “… the amount of physical and psychological energy that the students devotes to the academic experience.” (p. 134). Astin asserts, “The amount of student learning and personal development associated with any educational program is directly proportional to the quality and the quality of student involvement in that program.” (p.136). High risk students should be encouraged to become involved in the institution at all levels, even if that involvement at times serves as a distractor from academics. As this trend intensifies, faculty and administrators will come to see that the needs of all students lie among a continuum (Higbee, 1984).

According to the Report of the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (NPEC), gave a list of certain programs that students believed opened both eyes and doors to postsecondary possibilities (2001). The programs that appeared to be the most effective ahs the following elements in common:

- Providing a key person who monitors and guides the student over a long period of time – a “mentor,” program director, faculty member, or guidance counselor.

- Making long-term investments in students rather than short-term interventions. The longer students were in the program, the more likely they were reported to benefit from it.

- Paying attention to the cultural backgrounds of students. Many reported having greater success with one group of students than another; it is likely that
backgrounds and expertise of the staff and directors helped them to make cultural connections with the students.

- Providing a peer group that supports students’ academic aspirations as well as giving them social and emotional support.
- Providing financial assistance and incentives.

More and more, institutions are turning to special programs designed to better prepare underrepresented students for college. Without the voice of the students the reconstruction of such programs are vain. With the voice of the students these programs represent “…a significant beacon of hope for many young people, and having better information about the programs can be beneficial to all levels of education” (NPEC, 2002)

**METHODOLOGY**

**Sample**

Nineteen students from seven different high schools were recruited in the SCOPE program. To be eligible for the program, participants had to be first generation college students from an underrepresented group, enrolled in a college preparatory curriculum, interested in a career in education, with a minimum grade point average of 3.0. Among the nineteen students that were accepted, only sixteen students actually participated. Among the sixteen students that actually participated, only fourteen students were able to participate in the study due to parental consent. All attend public school in a major urban school district in Pennsylvania. The program consisted of five males and eleven females. There were ten African Americans (56%), five Latinos (38%), and one Asian - American (6%). The mean grade point average for the fourteen students was 3.69. Students lived in residence at two dormitories for five weeks, and attended classes designed to prepare academically talented minority students for advancement into higher education.

**Instrumentation and Data Collection**

**Survey – Data**

The students were asked to complete a survey during the orientation session held on the second day of the summer program. Questions in the survey were aimed to focus on students’ academic skills and their attitudes toward colleges. The survey also addressed questions related to students’ academic goals, social goals, validation, and the college process. Students were asked to rate their skills in areas and indicate how important is learning more about those skills to them. The scales on both ends of the survey ranged from one to five-one being weak skills or no importance and five being strong skills or most important. Students’ responses to their learning goals were analyzed using frequency distribution to determine patterns or trends across response categories. I used it to group data into categories and show the number of observations in each category. In this analysis emphasis was placed more on students’ learning goals and who influences those learning goals. For example, Q8 - Reading Comprehension, how the students answer this question determined if this is a major concern to them or do they feel that they need this construct to transition from high school to college. The survey contains one open-ended question (Q66): what would you like to gain from the SCOPE
experience. Responses to that question that referred to similar or related outcomes will be
grouped together. These groups were analyzed, and tentative themes were identified to give the
SCOPE developers’ a better understanding of student goals.

**Interviews**

Individual interviews with program participants provided another source of data. This
approach was chosen because of the voices of students are rarely heard in debates regarding their
lives (Freeman 1999). The voices of disempowered students are even invisible (Nieto 1992). In
Appendix 1, a protocol was developed for the interview that was based on specific goals of the
program. The interview protocol consisted of my four research questions, listed under the
section titled research questions. To achieve a high level of consistency in the questioning
process, I personally conducted all interviews. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.
The interviews were conducted during the third week of the program.

**Limitations**

This study has several limitations. The most apparent limitation for the quantitative data
is the sample size, because SCOPE is a small program. Only fourteen students are included in the
study. Also, the students were not chosen at random, therefore; the results are not generalizable
to other programs or populations. The aim of this research is to shed light on one particular
program, SCOPE, and the extent to which students’ and designers’ goals for the program are
aligned.

**Data Analysis**

Data includes students’ responses to questions about their perceptions of what their goals
to succeed in a collegiate environment are and who influences those goals. To analyze the
interviews, primary patterns and themes were evaluated based on procedures outlines in Miles
and Huberman (1984). As they explain, “Pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes, ones
that identify an emergent theme, pattern, or explanation” (p.67). The data was analyzed using
what Miles and Huberman (1984) refer to as a “start list”, a deductive approach and cross –
group analysis. The start list consisted of what I thought students might say regarding their
personal opinion on why they chose to come to the SCOPE program. This start list was used to
develop codes that addressed themes pertaining to students’ initial interest of the program. To
analyze the surveys, SPSS statistical software was used to determine the frequencies of each
item. This data set was used to determine the mean of each survey item.

**RESULTS**

**Students Learning Goals**

Fourteen surveys were completed and returned, representing a return rate of 100 %. In
Figure 1, the black bars represent the students’ average ratings of their own skills in various
aspects of writing and technology. The gray bars indicate the average level of importance each
skill area has to the students’. Figure 1 shows that students’ rate their writing and computer
skills prior to SCOPE participation. This figure also illustrates the students’ importance for these
areas are high as well. This graph indicates that if their level of importance was high, then their
skills were not as high. This division of skills and technology reaches far beyond higher and
lower ratings of skills. It focuses on where the students see themselves having high skills and
placing less importance on them. The mean score in the writing skills area (Q1-Q8) was 4.125. The mean score in the technology skill area (Q9-Q12) was 4.18. The level of importance for writing and technology skills are 4.45 and 4.05 respectively. The average student reported that they possess more skills in technology than in writing. Students feel that writing is more important to them than technology.

Figure 2 represents the students’ knowledge and their importance level in the area of study skills and college entrance exams. The average mean score in the study skills area (Q14) was 4.47. The mean score in the knowledge of college entrance exams (Q13 and Q28-Q31) was 3.77. The level of importance for study skills and college entrance exams are 4.73 and 4.86 respectively. According to Figure 2, the students indicate that it is very important for them to know more about college entrance exams than increasing their study skills. The graphs show that students tend to have very few skills regarding taking, registering, studying, scoring high, and knowledge of questions on college entrance exams.

Their skills in knowledge of college entrance exams are significantly lower than the importance level. The mean for this importance is very close to the most important level mark
on the survey—which is 5. This indicates that preparation for these exams is extremely important to the students. Figure 2 is most important because of the rating the students gave to each question. Students reported that their knowledge of preparing for college entrance exams are relatively low compared to the importance of gaining skills pertinent to college exams.

Figure 3 presents a summary of the social goals of the students. This graph illustrates how the students feel about certain social aspects of the program. These questions range from working in groups to living in residence halls. These finding will shed some light on how well the group interact socially. Students feel that they are socially ready for college life. Their rating on these skills and the level of importance is about the same.

**Figure 2**

![Summer College Opportunity Program in Education (SCOPE) 2002 Understanding Students Study Skills and Knowledge of College Entrance Exams](image)

(N=14)

- **Q13:** Taking Entrance Exams
- **Q14:** Study Skills
- **Q28:** Registering for Exams
- **Q29:** Studying for Exams
- **Q30:** Scoring High on Exams
- **Q31:** Questions on Exams

**Learning Goals**

- Students' Knowledge of Skill
- Students' Importance of Skill
According to Figure 3, students feel that their knowledge about residence halls and the level of importance to them is relatively equal. Overall, students’ feel that their social skills are okay.

Figure 3

**Summer College Opportunity Program in Education (SCOPE)**
**2002**
**Understanding Students' Social Goals**
**(N=14)**

**Interview Data**
While four themes emerged from students’ responses when asked, what made you want to come to the SCOPE program, the responses can be grouped into two broad categories: (1) college credits and (2) experience college life (see Figure 4). The students’ responses, as related
to college credits, can be described as a "great opportunity" and "academic challenges" for minority students. In terms of experiencing college life, responses include two issues: "meet people," and "how it feels to be on the campus." Their responses to these issues were surprisingly similar for all students.

**Figure 4: Why did students want to come to the SCOPE program 2002**

![Diagram showing reasons for students to want to come to the SCOPE program](image)

When asked, “What made you want to come to the SCOPE program”? The students’ answers were related to one of these themes. For example, a student stated the following:

“I want to experience college life and I wanted the four college credits. I heard it was beneficial for minorities.”

Another student responded:

“I don’t know what made me come. Six weeks on a college campus. I wanted to experience college life.”
This seems to be a very common pattern amongst the students. Another students said, “The four college credits and the experience college life. I wanted to see how hard it was because I know I can do the work.

Another commented, “The college credits and the experience of being a college student, taking college courses, being at Penn State because this was on of the colleges I would choose. I also wanted to meet people.”

Almost all (12) of the students responded in this way.

The students did not hesitate to voice their opinions about what do they want to learn in the SCOPE program. As evidence of the seriousness of their thoughts about what they want to learn, it is interesting to note how their goals closely aligned to why they came to the program. It is not surprising, then, that students expressed “I want to learn everything” as one possible learning goal. Their responses can be classified into the following categories: (a) improve writing skills, (b) improve technology skills, (c) prepare for the SAT and ACT, (d) learn about admissions, and (e) get an A average. Figure 5 gives a visual representation of the students’ academic goals.

Figure 5: Academic Goals for Students in SCOPE 2002

Academic Goals of the Students

- Improve Writing Skills
  - Write a Personal Statement
  - Become a College Writer

- Improve Technology Skills
  - Use Microsoft Word
  - Develop Web Pages

- Prepare for SAT and ACT
  - How to Study
  - When to Study

- Learn About Admission
  - When to Apply for College

- Get an A Average

More students focused on improving their writing skills more than anything. One student stated:
“I need more experience and to improve my writing skills. This program will help me prepare for my SAT’s and things like that and talk to people about the admission. Another student commented:

“I wanted to earn my four credits. Everything they were teaching. When they told me I was going to take a technology course I wanted to learn how to develop my own webpage.

All of the students’ responses were similar and related to the themes mentioned in Figure 5. The suggestion of the need to become a better writer was stated frequently.

Figure 6 represents that is helping the students meet their overall learning goals. The graph indicates that parents are the most influential factors in learning. The students named numerous people who helped them meet their academic goals. Teachers and counselors ranked second (29%) as the most influential factor in helping students meet their goals. Students reported that peers are the third factor encouraging them to succeed.

Finally, some students felt no one contributed to their learning goals. These students felt they are the motivators of their academic success.
DISCUSSION

Although the forgoing documents gave positive program attributes of the SCOPE program, no program ever actually attains perfection. I feel I would not be doing my job as an evaluator if I did not attempt to report some of the areas mentioned by program participants that may need some work and attention next year. It is the spirit of ongoing program development that the following observations and recommendations are provided.

A. Program Goals and Students’ Goals: The goals of the SCOPE program are well defined. The academic component of the program allowed the students to think critically and study strategically. Students’ comments on the academic aspect of the program were relative to the goals of the program. Students even felt that the work should have been just a little bit more challenging. The social portion of the program, as one student stated, “helped us overcome our fear of meeting new people. Students enjoyed living in the college dorms. Even though some felt the rooms could have been more conducive for living, they really enjoyed living with people they didn’t know. Overall, socially, they enjoyed themselves.

B. The Career in Education. When the students were asked what made you want to come to the SCOPE program, most of them responded by saying, “to get four college credits. Not one student stated their purpose was to learn more about education careers. Not one student commented about education advantages. Since the program was intended for minorities in education, more students should have been pumped up about teaching careers. The ultimate purpose was to increase the number of minority teachers in the classroom. More emphases should be placed on teaching careers.

C. SAT and ACT Preparation. The students responded tremendously high to questions on college entrance exams. Students said they wish they had a class for five days a week on this subject. The preparation for these exams is really important to this pool of students. They understand what they need to achieve on these exams in order to be admitted to a reputable college. This element of the program should not only be used as apart of next year’s goals. Given the importance students placed on this aspect of the program, SCOPE staff should consider expanding this aspect of the program next year.

D. Mission Statement or Conceptual Framework. Mission statements or a conceptual framework are very crucial to the success of a program. This statement should be one that reflects all aspect of the program. A clear mission statement is essential for establishing goals and objectives and for formulating plans to meet those goals and objectives. This will allow the SCOPE staff and students to keep in mind their purpose for being in the program.

E. Parental Involvement. Students reported that the most influential factor in their learning was their parents. Since the parents are more concerned, I think some of the successful aspects of the program are due to the parents. For example,
sending a weekly copy of the students’ progress with comments from each instructor. Send parents supportive information on how to validate their kids for academic success. These factors may possibly increase success of the students.

F. *Equality in the Program.* Many students complained that there should be an equal number of girls and boys in the program. Students also reported that a rule should be made about criticizing someone’s culture. Students reported that they applied to the program with the intent to be freed of all prejudices.

G. *Unstructured Time.* Some students felt that they should have more free time. One student commented, “I can’t read for two hours straight because my eyes get tired”. Students should be required to have time for themselves. Some time set aside for their own use will allow the students to free their minds and reflect on the events of the day.

H. *Personal Journal.* Students should be required to write a journal. The need to express oneself in a safe and controlled manner is a powerful means to improving self-esteem and personal relationships. This should be a requirement in the writing course. This will allow the students to measure their own progress and give the students time to reflect.

I. *Residence Counselors.* Students as a whole feel that the residence counselors are going above and beyond the call of duty to meet the students’ needs. The residence counselors are definitely motivating the students.

J. *Language and Literacy.* In the area of writing instructors commented on the weakness of the students’ writing. Several specific suggestions should be reviewed in order to strengthen students’ writing skills: (1) the use of the writing center should be mandatory, (2) students should be required to attend the writing center three times a week, and (3) students should be given a workbook that will allow them to practice grammar, mechanics, and punctuation, sentence organization, and essay content. Daily assignments should be given to strengthen these areas.

K. *Professional Development Portfolio.* Students have been stuffing assignments in notebooks and folders for years, so what's so new and exciting about portfolios? Portfolios focus on students' natural tendency to save work and become an effective way to get them to take a second look and think about how they could improve future work.

L. *Office Hours.* During the interview, students reported that the instructors often just write on their papers without giving them personal feedback. I think instructors should have office hours so they can communicate with the students’ one on one. This student-teacher relationship will assist the students in obtaining their academic goals.
M. Size of Program: Students reported that more students should be in the program. Increasing the size of the program would not seem wise yet at this point, as it may become fragmented and lose the feeling of community and high sense of purpose that exist.

CONCLUSION

A summer transition program was implemented as an institutional initiative to facilitate the transition of high school juniors from high school to college. Interview techniques were used to obtain the participants’ perception of how the program is helping them meet their academic goals. The SCOPE program prepared the students academically, mentally, and socially for college. To most students, participating in the program not only led to a better understanding of “what college life is about”, but also prepared the students academically for success in college. Working hard to develop academic skills required by instructors and developing study habits to ensure the completion of course assignments, was a commonly reported attribute of the program.

These findings demonstrate that these students tended to voice concerns and solutions that could possible impact the course of the SCOPE program goals in general. Workable solutions have to come from the source most familiar with their circumstances. Based on the research, students’ goals and the goals of the program are aligned for the most part. As far as meeting the needs of the students in academics, validation, social skills, college processes, and education careers, SCOPE did an excellent job with small divergences. It is clear that most of the current models are working, and that these students’ ideas are solid ones.

A few reasons may account for the success of the program. First, the program allowed for academic exposure. The program mainly focused on academics. Students not only learned about language and technology in an intensive fashion, but also had the opportunity to live in college dormitories. Living in the dorms was particularly beneficial to the students. This research shows quite vividly that the students’ goals are aligned with the program goals.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX I: Interview Protocol

Summer College Opportunity in Education (SCOPE) 2002
Interview Protocol

1. What made you want to come to the SCOPE program?

2. What specifically do you want to get out of the SCOPE program? [Use as a prompt if needed: Please be very specific.]

3. What were the academic goals you had for yourself in the program when you started the program? In other words, what did you want to learn?

4. In what, if any ways, have your goals changed now that you've been in the program.

5. Who is helping you to meet your learning goals?

6. So far, if you could change anything about the program, what would it be?