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# EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS OF BASIC EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY GRANT RECIPIENTS COMPARED TO NON-RECIPIENTS

by *M. Betsy Bergen and Donald D. Zielke*

The Basic Educational Opportunity Grant Program (BEOG) which introduced the concept of direct student aid to all financially needy students in all types of higher education was included in the federal Educational Amendments of 1972. For the 1977-78 academic year, the *Student Financial Aid 1977-78 Handbook* estimated that 1,975,000 eligible needy students received 1.673 billion dollars in Basic Educational Opportunity Grants. This appropriation for the BEOG program far exceeded all other federal student financial aid programs, excluding the Veterans' Administration Program.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the BEOG program at a major western university to ascertain whether the program, in its first four years of existence from fall 1973 to spring 1977, had accomplished the intent of the Educational Amendments, i.e., making students from low resource families equal to students from more affluent families in their opportunity to persist, achieve, and graduate from institutions of higher education. Four questions were designed:

1. Do BEOG recipients achieve academically as well as non-BEOG recipients?
2. Do BEOG recipients complete as many credit hours as non-BEOG recipients?
3. Do BEOG recipients persist to graduation as well as non-BEOG recipients?
4. Do BEOG recipients remain enrolled to the same extent as non-BEOG recipients?

From these four questions null hypotheses were formulated and tested.



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### *Subjects*

All subjects in this study were freshman students who entered the University of Wyoming in the academic year 1973-74. The experimental group was composed of 102 BEOG recipients selected from the total BEOG recipient population of 108. (Pair-matching of variables could not be accomplished for six BEOG recipients.) The control group consisted of 102 non-BEOG recipients selected from the total population of 1,140 freshman students who did not receive BEOGs.

Each member of the experimental group was pair-matched manually with a member of the control group on the variables of high school grade-point average, high school class rank, sex, residency, age, year of high school graduation, and/or completion of GED. Statistical analysis of the pair-matching by both t-tests and chi-square tests indicated non-varying matches of the variables at the .05 level of confidence.

### *Findings*

Null Hypothesis 1 stated: There are no significant differences between grade-point averages achieved by BEOG recipients and non-BEOG recipients. This hypothesis was retained as no significant differences were found using the two-tailed non-directional t-test for two related samples. Cumulative mean grade-point averages for each semester revealed that BEOG recipients had a higher mean grade-point average for the first and seventh semesters, while non-BEOG recipients had higher averages for the remaining six semesters. However, a significant difference between the cumulative grade-point average of the two groups did not exist for any of the eight semesters.

The cumulative grade-point averages for both BEOG recipients and non-BEOG recipients progressively improved throughout the eight semesters. BEOG recipients completed the first semester with a mean grade-point average of 2.267 and the eighth semester with 3.031 for an overall improvement of 0.764. Non-BEOG recipients completed the first semester with 2.266 and the eighth semester with 3.088 for an overall improvement of 0.822.

Null Hypothesis 2 stated: There are no significant differences between number of credit hours earned by BEOG recipients and non-BEOG recipients. A significant difference was found at the .05 level between the two groups for the first semester of attendance. BEOG recipients completed a mean of 16 credit hours; non-BEOG recipients, 14 credit hours.

For the remaining seven semesters, there were no significant differences found in means of cumulative credit hours earned between the two groups; although BEOG recipients consistently accumulated more credit hours per semester than did non-BEOG recipients. At the completion of eight semesters, the cumulative mean number of credit hours for the BEOG recipients was 123 credit hours; for the non-BEOG recipients, 116 credit hours.

Null Hypothesis 3 stated: There are no significant differences between graduations of BEOG recipients and non-BEOG recipients. This hypothesis was retained. By the completion of eight semesters, 15 BEOG recipients and 19 non-BEOG recipients had graduated. Eighty-five percent of the BEOG recipients and 81 percent of the non-BEOG recipients had not graduated after eight semesters; 62 percent of the BEOG recipients and 58 percent of the non-BEOG recipients had left the university.

Null Hypothesis 4 stated: There are no significant differences between the number of BEOG recipients and non-BEOG recipients enrolled during any one of the eight semesters of the study. A general trend of reduction of students in both groups enrolled in any semester was prevalent, but there were no significant differences between the experimental and control groups. Of the 102 BEOG recipients, 92 percent were enrolled at the close of the first semester. This percentage lessened to 38 percent at the completion of eight semesters. For non-BEOG recipients, the percentages were 89 and 42, respectively. The null hypothesis was retained.

### *Discussion*

A brief overview of the BEOG program is valuable when interpreting the findings of this study. This program is a federal student financial aid program designed to assist students in the continuation of post-secondary education and training. Student eligibility is based on financial need as determined by a formula developed by the Office of Education and reviewed annually by Congress. Although no scholastic determination is made for initial eligibility, reasonable academic progress as defined by the institution is required for continuation of the grant each school year. The BEOG does not require repayment. Legislation stipulates that no basic grant award can exceed one-half of the costs of education — tuition, fees, room, board, books, supplies, and miscellaneous expenses. Except in certain five-year educational or training programs, a grant recipient is limited by law to eight semesters of eligibility or their equivalent at the undergraduate level.

According to the findings of this study the BEOG recipients at the University of Wyoming achieved as well academically as their non-BEOG recipient counterparts, and both groups progressed on a continuum of gradual increase in cumulative grade-point averages. This finding may be viewed both positively and negatively. Positively, students may experience a gradual increase in cumulative grade-point average as a result of high student motivation and endeavor and/or effective teaching. Negatively, this finding may be an additional attestation of grade inflation, a growing concern among educators, or it may be the reflective result of a high attrition rate (nearly two-thirds) due, in part, to failure to meet students' academic and achievement needs. From either point of view, the reader is cautioned in generalization of this finding to dissimilar institutions in other states.

BEOG recipients consistently accumulated more credit hours per semester, significantly more for the first semester, than non-BEOG recipients. With the non-variability of the pair-matches on high school grade point average, high school rank, age, sex, and residency, one can only speculate as to why the differences per semester and per total credit hours earned. The limit by law of eight semesters of eligibility to receive BEOG funds may have been an incentive to BEOG recipients to complete a bachelor's degree within this time frame. However, only 15 BEOG recipients and 19 non-BEOG recipients graduated within the eight-semester limitation. BEOG recipients who graduated were in disciplines which required an average of 129 credit hours, while non-BEOG recipients were graduated from disciplines requiring an average of 126 credit hours. Other possible explanations for

the difference in cumulative credit hours are (1) BEOG recipients received special counseling concerning their obligations to remain in good standing to receive grant funds, or (2) the effect of gift assistance may have decreased the requirement for employment necessary to remain in school and resulted in increased academic achievement as measured by credit hours earned.

During the first ten days of their initial semester at the University of Wyoming, twice as many non-BEOG recipients as BEOG recipients left the university; however, after the first semester, the BEOG recipients did not remain in school as well as their non-BEOG recipient counterparts, nor did they have the tendency to return to the University of Wyoming once they had dropped out. These differences were slight and nonsignificant. Perhaps a long term goal of persistence to graduation, despite gift assistance, was more difficult to envision than a short-term goal of obtaining full-time employment.

There was no significant difference between the number of BEOG recipients (15) and non-BEOG recipients (19) who persisted to graduation in eight semesters. The finding that 24 BEOG recipients were still enrolled but had not graduated and that ten of these could graduate with nine additional credit hours, three with 15 additional hours, and six with 30 additional hours, suggests perhaps that BEOG funding beyond the general eight-semester eligibility limit should be considered.

### *Conclusions*

The findings of this study suggest that the BEOG program is accomplishing what the Educational Amendments of 1972 intended: making students from low resource families equal to students from more affluent families in their opportunity to persist, achieve, and graduate from institutions of higher education. The BEOG recipients at the University of Wyoming are as capable of academic success as their non-BEOG recipient counterparts. Four-year institutions possessing similar characteristic as the University of Wyoming may infer from the findings that BEOG recipients who come from low resource families and are interested in higher education are achieving as well, graduating as well, and persisting as well as their non-BEOG recipient counterparts who come from more affluent families.

It may be suggested that BEOG recipients achieve, persist, and graduate as well as non-BEOG recipients due to decreased financial worries because they can be fairly sure that if they make reasonable academic progress and if the financial resources of their family remain constant, they will receive grant assistance for at least eight semesters. This factor of entitlement and its effect on recipients needs to be studied on a national basis. Since Congress funds programs of loans, grants, and work-study, research is necessary to determine which programs or combinations of programs are the most effective for the greatest number of individuals, both student recipients and taxpayers, in light of the increasingly large amount of funds involved. Educators, in general, and financial aid officers, specifically, need to keep abreast of this viable and ever-expanding BEOG program and to monitor its impact upon recipients.