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# Understanding the Involvement of Volunteers in Precollege Outreach Programs: An Exploratory Study

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## **Disciplines**

Disability and Equity in Education | Education | Higher Education | Psychology | Social and Cultural Anthropology

# Understanding the Involvement of Volunteers in Precollege Outreach Programs: An Exploratory Study

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## ***Abstract***

*Precollege outreach programs are an important resource for improving college enrollment for groups that have been historically underrepresented in higher education. But the ability of these programs to serve all eligible students is constrained by resource limitations. This study uses data collected from case studies of four precollege outreach programs to understand how precollege outreach programs may expand the reach of their programs through the use of one seemingly free resource: volunteers. To address this overarching purpose, the study frames volunteering as a type of prosocial behavior and explores the following three questions: How and why do precollege outreach programs use volunteers? What motivations explain a volunteer's involvement in a precollege outreach program? How do precollege outreach programs encourage individuals to serve as volunteers? The study concludes with recommendations for program administrators and directions for future research.*

Although college enrollment rates have been increasing for all groups, gaps across groups persist (Baum & Ma, 2007). The share of high school graduates enrolling immediately in postsecondary education increased for those in the lowest family income quintile from about 35% in 1983 to about 50% in 2006. Nonetheless, immediate postsecondary enrollment rates are still about 30

percentage points lower for high school graduates in the lowest income quintile than for those in the highest income quintile—80% versus 50% in 2006 (Baum & Ma, 2007). Similarly, immediate postsecondary enrollment rates increased between 1973 and 2006 from about 40% to 59% for Black high school graduates, and from about 50% to 58% for Hispanic high school graduates. But postsecondary enrollment rates continued to be about 12 percentage points lower for Black and Hispanic high school graduates than for White high school graduates (Baum & Ma, 2007).

Numerous programs across the country are currently working to close these enrollment gaps. Sponsored by the federal government, state governments, private nonprofit organizations, foundations, and colleges and universities, these programs typically focus on improving educational attainment by encouraging low-income, racial/ethnic minority, and potential first-generation students to take the steps required to enter and succeed in postsecondary education (Perna, 2002).

Despite the prevalence of precollege outreach programs, little data or research is available to understand *how* these programs work. Instead, most available research focuses on understanding *whether* programs work (e.g., Bergin, Cooks, & Bergin, 2007; Domina, 2009; Myers, Olsen, Seftor, Young, & Tuttle, 2004; St. John, Fisher, Lee, Daun-Barnett, & Williams, 2008; St. John, Gross, Musoba, & Chung, 2005). Policymakers often consider whether a program works in decisions about future funding (e.g., U. S. Office of Management and Budget, 2003). But, in order to maximize the allocation of scarce resources, policymakers and practitioners also need to know how programs work, including how programs may use particular resources or activities to promote participants' college-related outcomes (Mundel, 2008).

Volunteers are one common resource for delivering program services. According to a national survey of 1,110 precollege outreach programs, nearly half (46%) of all programs targeted toward low-income students, underrepresented minorities, and potential first-generation college students use volunteers in some capacity. For one-fourth of these programs, the volunteers are college students (Perna, 2002).

Although the use of volunteers seems commonplace, little is known about how precollege outreach programs use volunteers or why individuals serve as volunteers. This study uses data collected from case studies of four precollege outreach programs to explore these issues. The results shed light on how precollege outreach programs may encourage and support the use of this potentially valuable resource.

### **Guiding Perspectives**

Precollege outreach programs are typically designed to provide students from historically disadvantaged groups with the academic and social support required to enroll and succeed in college. While some programs target individual students (e.g., the federal TRIO programs including Upward Bound and Talent Search) and other programs target a particular school-based cohort of students (e.g., GEAR UP), all programs focus on delivering a set of labor-intensive activities, such as academic tutoring, mentoring, academic advising, college and financial aid information, and other support services. Limitations on funding inevitably restrict the extent to which these programs may employ staff to provide these services. The Council for Opportunity in Education (2010) claims that, “although 11 million Americans critically need to access the TRIO Programs, federal funding permits fewer than 7 percent of eligible youth to be served” (n.p.).

In this context, volunteers would seem to be an attractive option for precollege outreach programs. Since, by definition, they receive no monetary compensation, volunteers have the potential to stretch finite program resources to serve more eligible students. Moreover, by representing members of the target population’s community, volunteers may also help programs to enroll and better serve the needs of eligible students and their families.

Whereas a program’s motivation for using volunteers seems obvious, less is known about why an individual would devote time and energy to serving in this capacity. To understand the involvement of volunteers in precollege outreach programs, this study draws on the growing body of research on prosocial behavior (Penner, Dovidio, Piliavin, & Schroeder, 2005).

Prosocial behaviors are those that are understood “by some significant segment of society and/or one’s social group as generally beneficial to other people” (Penner, et al., 2005, p. 366). Prosocial behaviors include voting, assisting in emergencies, donating money to a nonprofit organization, becoming an organ donor, giving blood, and refraining from harmful acts, as well as helping for a sustained period within a particular organizational setting (i.e., volunteering) (Bénabou & Tirole, 2006; Drezner, 2008; Fetchenhauer, Flache, Buunk, & Lindenberg, 2006; Penner et al., 2005).

An economic perspective assumes that, even though the behavior may produce benefits that spill over to others (i.e., public benefits), an individual’s decision to engage in prosocial behavior is based on a comparison of the benefits and costs of that behavior to him/herself (i.e., the private benefits). Based on the goal of maximizing self-interest, individuals are assumed to engage in prosocial behavior when the expected benefits or rewards—monetary and nonmonetary—of the behavior to the individual exceed the costs (Penner et al., 2005). Although research is inconclusive, volunteering is expected to generate several rewards or benefits to the volunteer, including raising an individual’s social status (Penner et al., 2005). Youth volunteers (including undergraduate students) are also expected to gain improved self-confidence, psychological health, and social and career development, while adult volunteers may realize improved psychological and physical well-being (Penner et al., 2005). A substantial body of research on volunteers assumes that, although the behavior may have public or societal benefits, the decision to volunteer is driven by an individual’s interest in maximizing his or her own well-being (Simpson, Irwin, & Lawrence, 2006). Studies using an economic framework typically conclude that individuals are unlikely to engage in prosocial behavior (e.g., donating money to a nonprofit organization) unless they receive some type of recognition (e.g., thank you gift) in exchange for the act (Simpson et al., 2006).

Whereas a cost-benefit framework may explain when an individual engages in prosocial behavior, other perspectives may explain why an individual engages in this behavior (Penner et al., 2005). For example, Simpson and colleagues (2006) argue that the social-psychological theory of cognitive dissonance may explain an individual’s engagement in prosocial behavior better than self-interest. Dissonance theory predicts that, because people view themselves to be rational

and moral, not engaging in prosocial behavior in the presence of increasing moral and rational reasons for doing so causes dissonance and a motivation to reduce dissonance through prosocial action (Simpson et al., 2006). Along the same lines, Penner and colleagues (2005) also describe the potential role of self-image in understanding why individuals engage in prosocial behavior. Self-image concerns may include the extent to which an individual's actions reflect norms of social responsibility and emotion such as empathy for the misfortune of others.

In their theoretical model, Bénabou and Tirole (2006) argue that prosocial behaviors are determined by the interaction of extrinsic, reputational, and intrinsic motivations, where the relative roles of each type of motivation vary across individuals and situations. In this model, reputational motivation pertains to self-image, including consistency between an individual's perceived identity and actual actions, others' perceptions of their actions, and social norms and expectations for prosocial behavior. This model predicts that extrinsic rewards may reduce the reputational motivation to engage in prosocial behavior as an individual may believe that, in the presence of external rewards, prosocial behavior may signal greed rather than altruism (Bénabou & Tirole, 2006).

Other research shows the importance of both prosocial and intrinsic motivations in promoting prosocial behavior. While some question the existence of pure altruism, Grant (2008) distinguishes between prosocial and intrinsic motivation. Grant defines prosocial motivation as the wish to improve the well-being of others and intrinsic motivation as "the desire to expend effort based on interest in and enjoyment of the work itself" (p. 49). Grant found that, among a sample of 58 firefighters, job persistence (i.e., the number of overtime hours worked) was greatest among those with the highest levels of both prosocial motivation and intrinsic motivation. Along the same lines, job performance (i.e., the number of calls made) and productivity (i.e., the number of dollars raised) were both substantially higher among 140 paid fundraisers with the highest prosocial and intrinsic motivations than for other fundraisers. Additional tests suggest that these relationships cannot be explained by an individual's job satisfaction.

Research also suggests that prosocial behaviors may be more common when members of one's own group may benefit, especially members of one's own

family or individuals who may someday reciprocate the “helping” behavior, a conclusion which may be of particular relevance to precollege outreach programs (Penner et al., 2005). Nonetheless, research also suggests that volunteering to assist a charitable organization is less often spurred by a sense of obligation to a friend or family member than are other types of prosocial behaviors, such as providing assistance in an emergency (Penner et al., 2005). Little is known about the extent to which individuals who are beneficiaries of a program (including a precollege outreach program) are more or less likely to serve as program volunteers.

In summary, the decision to serve as a volunteer in a precollege outreach program may be driven by a number of motivations. Yet, no known study has explored these motivations. Reflecting the assumption made by others (e.g., Drezner, 2008), that organizations can play a role in developing, encouraging, and supporting prosocial behaviors and that precollege outreach programs may benefit from the involvement of volunteers, this study seeks to fill knowledge gap.

## **Research Method**

This study uses data collected from descriptive case study analyses to understand how precollege outreach programs involve volunteers. To address this overarching purpose, the study explores the following three questions: How and why do precollege outreach programs use volunteers? What motivations explain a volunteer’s involvement in a precollege outreach program? How do precollege outreach programs recognize these motivations in order to encourage individuals to serve as volunteers?

## **Case Study Analysis**

Data collected from descriptive case studies of four precollege outreach programs are used to address the research questions. Case study methodology is appropriate for understanding how various forces and contextual conditions shape the involvement of volunteers in precollege outreach programs (Yin, 2003b). While originally designed to explore the ways that parents of students who participate in precollege outreach programs may benefit in terms of their own educational attainment, the case studies produced a number of insights about the involvement of volunteers in these programs.



To control for differences in the context for college enrollment, we purposively selected programs in one state: Indiana. Scholars and other observers have noted the efforts Indiana has made to improve the educational attainment of its population (e.g., Erisman & Del Rios, 2008). Indiana is also home to a typical number of youth-oriented precollege outreach programs. The National College Access Program Directory lists 25 precollege outreach programs in Indiana and 1,157 in the United States as a whole.

Indiana has a need for the services that are commonly delivered by precollege outreach programs. The state-by-state report card *Measuring Up 2008* shows that Indiana lags behind a number of other states, particularly in terms of students' academic readiness for college and college enrollment rates (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2008). The state also has substantial gaps between Whites and Blacks in measures of college preparation, college enrollment, and educational attainment (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2008).

Within Indiana, we purposively selected four organizations that are based in the state's largest city (Indianapolis) and that offer precollege outreach programs targeting different populations. El Pilar (or The Pillar) targets Latino elementary, middle, and high school students and focuses on English as a Second Language, college preparation, academic preparation for high school, and academic enrichment. Future Leaders seeks to promote academic preparation for high school and college, career exploration, leadership skills, and community service among African American middle and high school students. College Guides partners students attending low-income elementary schools with undergraduates attending a nearby college for after-school activities on the college campus. The program seeks to improve educational achievement by providing students with early information and mentors. Twenty-First Century Scholars (TFCS) is designed to eliminate financial barriers to college enrollment for students from Indiana's low- and middle-income families.<sup>1</sup> Established in 1990, the program promises to pay the last dollar price of tuition and fees at the state's public colleges and universities for low-income middle school students who graduate from high school with a grade point average of 2.0 or higher and enroll full

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<sup>1</sup>To protect the privacy of participants, the names of the first three organizations are pseudonyms. We did not change the name of TFCS because of the size and reach of the program and because of the substantial amount of research that has already been conducted on this program (e.g., St. John et al., 2005; St. John et al., 2008).

time in a postsecondary educational institution within two years of graduating from high school. With support from the federal GEAR UP program, TFCS also provides support services to students and parents (e.g., tutoring, mentoring, college visits, and parental activities) through 16 regional service centers.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Reflecting Yin's (2003a) emphasis on the role of theory in guiding case study research, we developed data collection protocols based on our review of what is known from the literature about college enrollment and precollege access programs. The use of these protocols helps ensure comparability of data collection procedures across the selected programs (Yin, 2003a).

The case studies draw on several data sources, including documents describing program activities that are distributed to students and parents, existing data describing program outcomes, observations of program activities, and individual and group interviews with program administrators and parents of participating students. Members of the research team spent two to three days visiting each program, with the visits timed to coincide with scheduled activities for participating students' parents. An administrator at each program served as the liaison between the research team and the program and assisted with the identification and scheduling of interviewees. Interviewees included paid program administrators, unpaid adult volunteers, unpaid undergraduate mentors, and parents of participating students. Parents of participating students volunteered to participate in focus group interviews during an already scheduled program event. Between 5 and 24 people at each program (a total of 53) participated in the individual and group interviews. Interviews and focus groups lasted between 30 and 120 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed. The interview questions probed program components and modes of delivering program services, as well as participants' perceptions of the benefits of the program and the forces that restrict and promote program delivery and effectiveness.

To analyze the data, we created a case study database that included transcriptions from the focus groups and interviews as well as data from the observations, documents, and internal evaluations (Yin, 2003b). Employing qualitative data analysis methods, we developed a preliminary list of codes based on

prior research and also allowed additional codes to emerge (Merriam, 1998). Preliminary codes included the role of volunteers in delivering program services, responsibilities of volunteers, challenges associated with using volunteers, program strategies for encouraging the use of volunteers, and benefits associated with the use of volunteers. We employed HyperResearch® software to assist in the coding and compiling of data into categories. Multiple members of the research team participated in the data coding and analysis and regularly convened to determine emerging themes and central findings.

We used several strategies to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings and conclusions (Yin, 2003b). To ensure construct validity, we collected information from multiple sources. We also produced a draft case study report for each program and asked the primary contact at each program to review the report and provide feedback. The use of the case study protocol and case study database also helped ensure reliability (Yin, 2003b).

## **Findings**

The findings show that the four selected programs vary in their use of volunteers. While various forces limit their involvement, the involvement of volunteers in these programs appears to be explained primarily by intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. The selected programs also appear to be using several strategies that may recognize volunteers' motivations and subsequently encourage and support their involvement.

### **Use of Volunteers by Selected Precollege Outreach Programs**

The use of volunteers varies across the four programs selected for this study. One of the four programs, El Pilar, does not use volunteers in any systematic way. For the other three programs, the use of volunteers extends program capacity.

### ***Future Leaders***

For Future Leaders, a program designed to build academic preparation for high school and college, career exploration, leadership skills, and community service among African American middle and high school students, volunteers assist with program orientation, graduation, and fundraising and also serve as meeting facilitators. The program distributes flyers encouraging parents to volunteer

and has a “parent volunteer committee” to facilitate these efforts. Others in the community (i.e., adults without children in the program) have also reached out to Future Leaders to volunteer to be program facilitators. Facilitators deliver information to students and parents about such topics as college admission policies and procedures, financial aid, financial literacy, time management, and more. A Future Leaders administrator affirmed the program’s reliance on volunteers as well as its desire for more when describing the ideal number of volunteers for each program class: “that would be wonderful—utopia with three. But typically we’ll have two.”

### *Twenty-First Century Scholars*

For TFCS, a program designed to raise the educational aspirations of and reduce the financial barriers to college attendance for Indiana’s low-income students, volunteers come largely from the population of parents of participating students. TFCS administrators report that these parents are an important resource for supporting program activities, extending the capacity of an organization that has relatively few paid staff to provide a variety of services (e.g., tutoring, mentoring, college visits, and parental activities) to the entire state. TFCS has a very intentional view toward volunteers, seeking to systematically increase the parent volunteers’ level of involvement and responsibility as they become ready. Parent volunteers may initially become involved by assisting TFCS with basic office tasks (e.g., phone calls, filing). Volunteers may then take on additional responsibilities, including assisting with recruitment and enrollment of students and parents into the program, chaperoning student trips, and planning program meetings. Some parent volunteers transition into paid positions, such as a TFCS regional parent coordinator. A TFCS administrator underscored the importance of parent volunteers to this program by stating, “I do know that we’re always looking for more of our volunteer parents, and what we do find is when we have large events—we’re constantly asking parents to become involved.”

TFCS administrators believe that volunteers help this statewide program provide a decentralized approach that recognizes local needs. One TFCS administrator articulated the value that volunteers add in terms of creating a physical presence throughout the state: “We need someone from each of those counties [throughout the state] to assist us with reaching those parents.” Another TFCS administrator indicated the ways that volunteers help the program to understand

the local context by stating, “What works in one area might not work in the next area...What works for Vincennes [a rural area of the state] might not work for Gary [an urban area].”

The use of volunteers also helps TFCS address one of its key challenges: enrolling all eligible low-income students and their families. Participants believe that enlisting volunteers who have personal connections to and shared backgrounds with prospective participants may be an especially fruitful approach to addressing this challenge. A TFCS administrator suggested that a parent volunteer may help not only by increasing the number of personal invitations issued to potential participants but also by signaling the merits of the program to similarly situated parents. Another administrator explained:

I think if this was [*sic*] a thing where they mailed you an application from some unknown area and sent it to the homes, people would toss it in the trash and would never send it back. It never works. You have to have the connection. And when you get that parent [volunteer], that parent will call another parent and say you ought to come to one of these meetings, or you ought to come to this workshop, or you ought to come to this conference thing they're having.

### ***College Guides***

Volunteers are also essential to College Guides, a program that provides elementary school children with a local undergraduate student mentor. The undergraduate mentor and the elementary school child participate in weekly activities designed to orient the child to college. Like the other three programs, College Guides operates with a small number of paid administrative staff. This program matches volunteer undergraduate students attending a particular college or university with students attending a local elementary school. This program relies on volunteers in each chapter to deliver all on-site program components. In addition to serving as mentors, participating undergraduate students may also volunteer to assume a leadership position for their campus chapter. In this capacity, undergraduate volunteers take responsibility for recruiting other undergraduate student mentors, organizing activities for the mentors and mentees, and planning the year-end celebration banquet for

mentors, mentees, and mentees' families. Although this study does not examine program effectiveness, other research indicates that undergraduate students may be effective mentors to younger students because of their ability to serve as positive examples of the benefits of college attendance and persistence (Lauland, 1998).

### ***Challenges Associated with Using Volunteers***

In addition to the programmatic benefits of using volunteers, administrators at the three programs also noted related challenges. While Future Leaders and TFCS administrators mentioned the desire for greater numbers of volunteers (as described previously), TFCS administrators also noted that the use of parents as volunteers was limited by parents' employment and other obligations, logistics related to transportation and childcare, fear of being unable to perform required duties (especially for those with low levels of education), and cultural and language differences. College Guides administrators described the forces that limit the development of long-term relationships between undergraduates and elementary school mentees. These forces include not only the relatively short duration of their enrollment in college, but also college students' class schedules and their participation in off-campus activities, including study abroad, internships, and other activities.

All three programs also noted the programmatic challenges that are associated with having no mechanism for ensuring accountability vis-à-vis volunteers' quantity and quality of efforts. A TFCS administrator succinctly summarized this challenge by stating,

I mean, knowing they're volunteers, but knowing that, if you say you're going to volunteer, we want to kind of hold them accountable, but not like it's their job, but you know, some kind of commitment.

### **Reasons that Individuals Serve as Program Volunteers**

Given the personal challenges and the lack of monetary compensation, why do some individuals serve as volunteers in these programs? Data from the case studies suggest the roles of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in explaining the involvement of volunteers. Intrinsic motivation views engagement in

the behavior in and of itself as interesting and desirable, whereas extrinsic motivation reflects an interest in maximizing self-interest and realizing other private rewards (Grant, 2008).

For the adult volunteers in Future Leaders and TFCS, intrinsic motivation was articulated in terms of providing benefits to—or giving back to—one's own community (Drezner, 2008; Penner et al., 2005). This view is best articulated by a TFCS parent coordinator and former volunteer:

Once I found out more about the program and, due to the fact that I knew our family, we didn't have money, but I had time as a parent, I made it my commitment that I would give back to the program whatever I could in my time, very similar to what PTO [parent-teacher organization] parents might do.

Along the same lines, another TFCS administrator and former volunteer described a motivation to volunteer in order to help others, stating:

I didn't have a scholar myself. But my stepdaughter, she was a scholar and I heard about this program. And I said, "Wow, something like that going on in Indiana," you know and the opportunity came up for me to get on—and I said, "Yes, I want to do this. I want to see how much of an impact I can make on other families in our region to help them get their kids to college."

Along the same lines, several undergraduate volunteers in College Guides articulated an intrinsic motivation to improve the lives of their elementary school mentees. In a representative comment, one College Guides volunteer stated,

You know that you're actually changing some kid's life. And, like, that's probably one of the biggest things for me, is to know that every week, that their life changes a little bit because of the program that we have here.

The undergraduate student volunteers in College Guides also articulated a number of other intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for serving as volunteers. In terms of intrinsic motivation, participating College Guides volunteers

consistently referred to their involvement with their mentees as “fun.” This view was best articulated in the words of one College Guides volunteer:

It’s just awesome that every day, for every week, like, they [the mentees] come off the bus and they’re looking for you and they have this huge smile. They run up to you and give you a big hug. Like, if that’s not reward in itself.

Other College Guides volunteers described what may be an extrinsic motivation, namely the diversion their involvement creates from schoolwork and other demands. This view is typified by the following comment:

And it’s like my getaway every week. Because it’s like, when you’re full of tasks and drama and everything else that’s going on at school, like you see them and it’s like they don’t care about anything; they’re just so like they want to run around and play and have fun. And it just makes you like feel so much better about your week.

Another benefit or reward that may accrue to the undergraduate College Guides volunteers is the cross-cultural learning that results from interacting with a mentee and the mentee’s family. One College Guides volunteer explained that at the year-end celebration for mentors, mentees, and mentees’ families, “It was like a bilingual table going on.... They [the mentee and her family] were giving me the names of different food and everything on their plate ... and then we would say it like for what it was in English.”

College Guides undergraduates who take on extra volunteer responsibilities by assuming leadership positions with the organization may realize other extrinsic rewards. One such undergraduate articulated the perceived personal benefits of serving in this capacity by stating:

It’s a great leadership opportunity for whatever you want to do in the future. To be able to work with that many volunteers and that many kids, and that prepares you for I would say anything, any sort of management you would encounter in the future.



## **Program Strategies that May Capitalize on an Individual's Motivations for Volunteering**

The data also suggest the ways that programs may be capitalizing on underlying motivations to promote the involvement of volunteers. Although no volunteer articulated the effectiveness of this type of effort for sustaining their involvement, both TFCS and College Guides use strategies designed to recognize volunteers' reputational or extrinsic motivations. For example, TFCS administrators consistently articulated the belief that volunteers want to be recognized, if only in a small way, for their efforts. As one TFCS administrator explained,

They need to know that they have value, that whatever it is that they're going to do for you, it's valuable and we do let them know, whether it's making a phone call, you know filing a piece of paper, whatever. This is truly valuable. You are truly valuable to us.

Another TFCS administrator explained the perceived value of recognizing volunteers' need for recognition by stating,

We do a volunteer parent appreciation dinner or activity at the end and we did one starting the program year. And we want to try and have maybe some incentive, some little things that they can build up to, like if they contribute/volunteer for so many hours, they get this and you know. And for some parents, that's a big thing.

Similarly, while ostensibly designed to recognize the involvement of mentees and to connect mentees' families to the mentors, the end-of-year celebration at each College Guides site also formally serves to recognize the involvement of the undergraduate student volunteers in the program.

Other strategies may recognize the importance of intrinsic motivation by giving volunteers tasks that they are comfortable and confident in performing—thereby increasing the likelihood that individuals enjoy the volunteer experience. For example, both Future Leaders and TFCS ask volunteers to lead program sessions related to their areas of expertise. As a TFCS administrator explains,

One parent, she was really good with scholarships. She has two boys and the last one just graduated. And she got her master's last year. And she did

a workshop on how to collect scholarships. She had a notebook and she went through it with the parents, and it was really, you know, beneficial.

TFCS's efforts to provide training for, and increasingly challenging tasks to, volunteers may not only build volunteers' enjoyment of the activity (by appealing to their intrinsic motivation) but also produce personal development and growth (by appealing to their extrinsic motivation). TFCS staff members first assign parent volunteers basic tasks and then train them to take on additional responsibilities. Program administrators stress the perceived importance of easing parent volunteers into their activities while also providing opportunities for parent volunteers to develop and grow. One ATFCS administrator expressed the perceived value of this approach this way:

I know what we're noticing is, the more that we share with them the types of activities, the types of things that we need help with, the more comfortable, the more parents are starting to feel that we're not asking them for something beyond their capability because we say we will take whatever you can do for us.

A program administrator who first became involved with the program as a parent volunteer noted the benefits of using personal development as an extrinsic reward for parent volunteers:

And I have to honestly say that if somebody had told me seven years ago I would stand up in front of 200 people and talk, I would have told them they were out of their mind. Because even though I had gone back to school, I was not going to do that. So as [another administrator] said, I think all of us have grown ourselves in the capacities that we work in and we're seeing the same thing in our parents.

## **Discussion**

Although our nation requires more college-educated individuals, the availability of additional resources to meet this need is limited. Thus, the effectiveness of existing resources to accomplish this goal must be maximized. This study explores the ways that volunteers may be viewed as a resource for meeting both this national goal and individual program goals. More specifically, this study explores the use of one resource (volunteers) in selected precollege outreach

programs, the motivations explaining volunteers' involvement, and the ways that programs may be recognizing these motivations to encourage volunteers' involvement.

*The findings from this study suggest that volunteers may be a viable mechanism for promoting the delivery of program services, and thus a mechanism for expanding program reach and effectiveness.*

For administrators of precollege outreach programs, the findings from this study suggest that volunteers may be a viable mechanism for promoting the delivery of program services, and thus a mechanism for expanding program reach and

effectiveness. Three of the four case study organizations examined in this study (Future Leaders, College Guides, and TFCS) use volunteers. These programs use volunteers in a range of capacities, as one program relies on parent volunteers to recruit new program participants and assist with administrative components of the program (TFCS), a second relies on undergraduate student volunteers to serve as mentors and provide on-site program leadership (College Guides), and a third uses parents and others with few direct connections with the program to lead program meetings (Future Leaders). In addition to expanding the reach and capacity of these programs, the use of volunteers appears to have other programmatic benefits. For example, TFCS administrators believe that, with the use of volunteers, the program is able to adapt services to recognize local needs and preferences and provide participants with a more personal connection to the program, a connection that may increase potential participants' trust and willingness to enroll in the program.

While producing many benefits, the three programs also described challenges associated with the involvement of volunteers. As in other research (Grossman & Tierney, 1998; McLearn, Colasanto, Schoen, & Shapiro, 1999), the findings indicate that volunteer involvement is often limited by lack of time, experience, and confidence. The involvement of undergraduate volunteers may be further constrained by students' other academic priorities and commitments. The findings also suggest that effectively involving volunteers may require an infrastructure that ensures that volunteers benefit from their involvement, for example through personal development, a finding that is consistent with

other research suggesting the importance of training and supporting volunteers (McLearn et al., 1999; Grossman & Tierney, 1998). Creating an effective volunteer recruitment, training, and support infrastructure would seem particularly important in organizations where volunteers are integral to the service delivery model, such as TFCS and College Guides.

Although challenges limit the involvement of both undergraduate and adult volunteers, the findings from this study also suggest that individuals may be motivated to engage in this type of effort for intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. The results show that some volunteers are motivated by an interest in improving the lives of others (a form of intrinsic or prosocial motivation), while others engage in volunteer activities because they enjoy the work and are confident in their ability to perform assigned tasks (another form of intrinsic motivation). Other data suggest that volunteers realize benefits from their involvement (e.g., in terms of cross-cultural learning and personal development), a finding that suggests the role of extrinsic motivation. Consistent with research on prosocial behavior in the fundraising literature (e.g., Drezner, 2008), the findings from this study suggest that motivations for prosocial behavior in the form of volunteering may change as an individual ages. While the undergraduates in this study were motivated by their enjoyment of the volunteer experience and the opportunity to gain leadership experience, the adult volunteers were more commonly motivated by their interest in “giving back” to their families and communities and opportunities for personal growth.

Although prosocial behaviors may be influenced to some extent by uncontrollable forces such as temperament and personality (Penner et al., 2005), the selected programs also suggest that programs may promote the involvement of volunteers by recognizing the motivations that explain a volunteer’s involvement. For example, TFCS and College Guides may be recognizing extrinsic or reputational motivation through efforts to formally acknowledge volunteers’ involvement. By providing training that builds volunteers’ skills and confidence, TFCS may be building volunteers’ enjoyment of—and success with—the experience (i.e., appealing to their intrinsic motivation) and fostering personal development and growth (i.e., creating extrinsic motivation). Using training to improve an individual’s self-efficacy for volunteering may be especially important, as individuals with prior positive mentoring experiences

have been found to be more likely than other individuals to serve as mentors in the future (Grossman & Tierney, 1998). Grossman and Tierney (1998) also assert that, independent of program model, a strong training system is needed to solicit volunteers. Along the same lines, Lauland (1998) argues that peer-training, regular feedback, and ongoing professional development will improve the retention of mentors. Identifying ways to retain volunteers may be especially important, as research suggests that mentoring is most effective when completed as part of a long-term arrangement (McLearn et al., 1999).

### **Directions for Future Research**

While providing a framework for understanding the engagement of volunteers in precollege outreach programs, the results of this exploratory study suggest several areas for further research. First, while this exploratory study indicates the utility of theories of motivation for understanding the engagement of volunteers in precollege outreach programs, additional research should test these theories using a larger and more representative sample of programs and volunteers.

Second, future research should examine the extent to which motivations for volunteering vary across individuals. The theoretical model presented by Bénabou and Tirole (2006) assumes variations based on gender and other individual characteristics in the perceived importance of prosocial behavior and self-image concerns. Available research also suggests that, compared to nonvolunteers, individuals who volunteer have average higher levels of education and income and tend to be more actively engaged in their communities (Grossman & Tierney, 1998; Penner et al., 2005; Wilson, 2000). Some find that individuals are motivated to volunteer because of strong religious faith (Ozorak, 2003; Penner et al., 2005), while others (e.g., Thoits & Hewitt, 2001) credit the initiation and persistence of volunteer activities to an individual's desire to feel needed or wanted by others. Other research suggests positive relationships among the level of resources a volunteer brings to the work, the level of a volunteer's attachment to the position, and the rewards that are derived from the work (Wilson & Musick, 1999).

Third, while this study suggests that volunteers may realize a number of benefits from their involvement in precollege outreach programs, future research should further explore the personal benefits to both undergraduate and adult

volunteers from this type of engagement (Penner et al., 2005). In the short term, volunteering may enhance undergraduates' academic development as well as promote the development of leadership skills, self confidence, conflict resolution skills, racial understanding, and social values (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Good, Halpin, & Halpin, 2000). Perhaps reflecting self-selection, most mentors report mentoring to be worthwhile (McLearn, et al., 1999). While reporting that they became mentors to help young people and make a positive contribution, most mentors believed that they gained increased patience, friendship, and feelings of self-efficacy from the experience (McLearn et al., 1999). A better understanding of the benefits realized by volunteers may suggest additional ways that programs may encourage individuals to serve in this capacity.

Fourth, although the results of this study suggest the benefits to programs of using volunteers, additional research is required to understand the magnitude of these benefits (Center for Higher Education Postsecondary Analysis, 2005; Jacobi, 1991) and whether the benefits vary based on volunteers' and/or program participants' demographic characteristics. For instance, some research suggests the benefits of matching mentors and students based on common gender, ethnicity or race (Gandara & Mejorado, 2005), while other research suggests this type of matching is not necessary (Wallace, Abel, & Ropers-Huilman, 2000). According to Laland (1998), "good" mentors are able to reach out to children and fulfill a child's need for personal attention, regardless of the mentor's age. Additional research is also required to understand if the benefits of volunteers to programs outweigh the costs. Even when unpaid, volunteers are not "free" to programs, as many programs have intensive selection, screening, and monitoring processes that require time and funding (Gandara & Mejorado, 2005). Other studies (e.g., McLearn et al., 1999; Grossman & Tierney, 1998) suggest the importance of an infrastructure for training and supporting volunteers.

Further research should also consider how the benefits to program participants vary based on whether the services are provided by volunteers or paid staff. For example, while College Guides uses volunteer undergraduates to serve as mentors to elementary-school children, other programs with similar goals (e.g., the National College Advising Corps) pay a salary, health benefits, housing allowance, and assistance repaying loans to recent college graduates who serve as college advisers to students attending low-resource high schools.

Finally, additional research should consider the societal benefits that may accrue when undergraduate and adults serve as volunteers in precollege outreach and other programs. Undergraduate students who volunteer may be more likely to engage in future charitable behavior, particularly alumni giving and community involvement (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Drezner, 2008). Parents who serve as volunteers in precollege outreach programs may also encourage such behavior in their children by signaling this behavior's importance (Drezner, 2008).

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