Student Support Services
(CFDA No. 84.042)

I. Legislation

Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965, as amended, Title IV, Part A (20 U.S.C. 1070a-11 and 1070a-14) (expires September 30, 1997).

II. Funding History

Fiscal Year	Appropriation 1/	Fiscal Year	Appropriation 1/
1970	$10,000,000	1988	$90,809,664
1975	23,000,000	1989	85,390,077
1980	60,000,000	1990	90,898,662
1981	63,885,326	1991	115,233,304
1982	60,702,406	1992	127,144,000
1983	60,555,892	1993	131,300,000
1984	67,294,974	1994	140,153,000
1985	70,083,664	1995	143,543,694
1986	67,070,000	1996	143,342,084
1987	70,070,000		

1/ The allocations represent the amount allocated administratively by the Department of Education from funds appropriated jointly for all six federal TRIO programs: Upward Bound, Talent Search, Educational Opportunity Centers, Student Support Services, Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program, and the Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs.

III. Analysis of Program Performance

A. Goals and Objectives

The goal of Student Support Services is to increase the college retention and graduation rates of its participants and facilitate the process of transition from one level of higher education to the next.

B. Strategies to Achieve the Goals

Services Supported

Program participation is directed toward low-income (below 150 percent of the poverty line), first-generation, and disabled college students who need support to successfully pursue programs of postsecondary education. In any project, two-thirds of the participants must be both low-income and first-generation college students or individuals with disabilities. One-third of the disabled participants must also be from low-income families.

A recent Department evaluation of Student Support Services (V.6) reports that:

- 57 percent of the institutions receiving Student Support Service (SSS) grants were four-year institutions (two-thirds of which were public), 41 percent were community colleges, and 2 percent were two-year private colleges;

- 83 percent of project participants attended public institutions; 15.5 percent attended four-year private schools, and 1.5 percent attended two-year private schools;

- 61 percent of project participants were from low-income and first-generation backgrounds, 7 percent were disabled, 7 percent were low-income only, 18 percent were first-generation only, and 6 percent were disabled and low-income;

- 64 percent of project participants were female and 36 percent were male;

- 46 percent of project participants were white, 28 percent were black, 17 percent were Hispanic, 3 percent were Asian, and 6 percent were American Indian/Alaskan Native.

The more than 700 projects currently funded under the SSS program serve over 165,000 postsecondary students across the country. Services provided by SSS programs are academic and nonacademic supplemental services, such as tutoring; academic, career, financial, and personal counseling; instruction in basic skills; services for students with limited English proficiency; cultural enrichment activities; and mentoring.

Table 1

Student Support Services

	FY 1995	**FY 1996**
Number of continuation projects	706	705
Average award	$203,320	$203,322
Number of persons served	165,561	165,326
Average federal cost per participant	$867	$867

Results from Education Department's evaluation (V.5) show the percentage of student participants who received different types of services. Because the range of services offered varies extensively across projects, different mixes of services are available to SSS participants. Thus, the relatively small percentages of participants shown in Table 2 to be receiving many of the services below may result from the unavailability of those services in some projects. Nevertheless, sizable proportions of the SSS participant population use the two most frequently accessed services, professional counseling and peer tutoring (77 and 47 percent, respectively).

Table 2

Proportion of Student Support Services (SSS) Students Receiving Each Type of Service: 1991-92

Type of Service [1]	SSS Participants
Instructional courses	21.7%
Tutoring (professional)	15.2%
Tutoring (peer)	47.2%
Counseling (professional)	77.5%
Counseling (peer)	11.9%
Labs	13.4%
Workshops	21.9%
Cultural events	7.4%
Services to disabled [2]	2.5%
Sample Size:	4,746

[1]Each student may receive more than one type of service.
[2]Only services specifically designed for disabled students were included in this category. Other services received by students with disabilities were classified under the applicable type of service.

SSS programs may be sponsored only by institutions of higher education or by combinations of institutions of higher education. Each applying institution must assure that each participant will be offered sufficient financial aid to meet her or his full financial need. Competitions for SSS funding are held every fourth year. During the grant period, continuing funding is based on approval of a noncompetitive continuation application.

Grant applicants that have conducted an SSS project during the three years preceding the date of application earn prior experience points. Up to 15 points can be awarded according to the applicant's prior program performance in service delivery. In 1993, 88 percent of current grantees were successful when they recompeted.

Strategic Initiatives

In FY 1991, a program initiative to emphasize transfers from two-year to four-year colleges was implemented . Initially, a total of 221 two-year institutions participated in the initiative, though now this emphasis is a part of the regular grant for all two-and four-year institutions. In July 1996 the Department published a revised set of regulations designed to increase accountability for federal funds while allowing SSS grantees to exercise greater discretion and flexibility to make project decisions.

C. Program Performance—Indicators of Impact and Effectiveness

Please see TRIO Programs Performance Measures displayed in Chapter 508. See also Office-Wide Performance Indicators for the Office of Postsecondary Education displayed in the Overview (OPS) to the postsecondary education programs.

As already stated, the primary goal of the SSS program is to increase the participation and completion rates of disadvantaged persons in postsecondary education programs. Findings from Education Department's recently completed evaluation (V.6) indicate that:

- SSS has a positive and statistically significant effect on three separate student outcomes: grade point average, credits earned, and retention. The effects, although modest, usually persist over three years.

- Students' grade point averages were increased by a mean of 0.15 in the first year, 0.11 in the second year, and 0.11 in the first three years combined.

- The number of credits earned was increased by a mean of 1.25 in the first year, 0.79 in the second year, 0.71 in the third year, and 2.25 in the first three years combined.

- Retention at the same institution to the second year was increased by seven percentage points, and by nine percentage points for retention to the third year. Retention to the third year at any higher education institution was increased by three percentage points.

- The impact of the SSS program varied according to the students' level of participation in SSS. Student who participated the most in the program experienced the greatest improvement in outcomes. Nine percent of students had only one service contact in their freshman year; the mean number of hours of services received in the first year was 32, and the median was 14. The mean for upperclassmen was 15 hours, and the median was 6.

- Certain categories of services--peer tutoring, cultural events, workshops, and instructional courses for SSS participants--were particularly effective for improving the three outcome measures.

- The way in which SSS programs were organized was related to student outcomes. Must successful were home-based programs, which offered a center on campus serving a range of student needs, and blended programs, which integrated SSS and other services.

The Department's evaluation found that outcome measures used by projects to evaluate their own performance, and measures used by the federal government, vary considerably by type of outcome (e.g., grades, passing a course, retention, graduation) and degree of difficulty. No project considers the intensity of services provided to participants.

Continuing assessment and improvement of program management and implementation is a significant goal of all Education Department programs. Findings from the Department's evaluation (V.5) focused on program implementation indicate:

- SSS grants are well targeted. SSS institutions are more likely then other institutions to have predominant minority enrolment, and to admit students with relatively low SAT scores. SSS participants are more likely to come from poor families, have parents who have not completed high school or college, be African American or Hispanic, be older, and have relatively low high school grades and SAT scores.

- SSS schools and other schools show no discernible difference in institutional climate regarding minority relations, at-risk students, or students with disabilities. In general, the SSS project does not appear to be located high enough in the institution's governance structure to affect basic policies.

- Although one objective is for SSS institutions to meet the full financial need of SSS participants, many institutions are unable to do so. Also, many SSS participants do not always receive the best financial aid package available to other students with similar needs.

These findings suggest that stronger links should be established between federal SSS grants and other broad institutional efforts to improve performance and retention of disadvantaged students.

IV. Planned Studies

The Department’s evaluation of the Student Support Services program is an ongoing study. Future reports will assess long-term effects of SSS participation on college graduation by following students in the longitudinal study for six years after they entered college, and identify program improvement strategies through in-depth study of the most effective projects. The final report will be available in spring 1999.

V. Sources of Information

1. Program files.

2. Office of the Inspector General, "Results of OIG's Limited Review of the Special Programs for Disadvantaged Students" (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, l985).

3. Follow-up Evaluation of the Special Services for Disadvantaged Students Program (Santa Monica, CA: Systems Development Corporation, 1983).

4. David Myers, "The Effects of Upward Bound and Supplemental Service Programs: Findings for Extant Data" (Rockville, MD: Westat, Inc., 1991).

5. Interim Report on Evaluation of the Student Support Services Program(Rockville, MD: Westat, Inc., 1994).

6. National Study of Student Support Services: Third-Year Longitudinal Study Results and Program Implementation Update (Rockville, MD: Westat, Inc., 1997)

VI. Contacts for Further Information

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