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*Thus, while our society may not be about to discard the use of tests, we are in no way excused from the obligation to correct the present defects in tests and in their mode of use.*

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**Ernest W. Brewer**  
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# Impact of Educational Talent Search Programs on Disadvantaged Students

**E**ducational Talent Search Programs are federally funded projects designed to serve disadvantaged students possessing the academic potential to successfully complete a postsecondary program of study. According to federal guidelines, students are disadvantaged if they are from low-income families where both parents have a limited educational background. The major goal of the program is to encourage and motivate these students to complete high school, establish career goals, and enroll in an appropriate postsecondary program. Once these

students are identified and enrolled in the program, they are assigned to a Talent Search counselor who assists them with their educational and career plans.

The purpose of this study was to assess whether students enrolled in the Educational Talent Search Program received greater assistance with career, educational, and financial aid counseling compared to a similar group of high school students not enrolled in the program. The study also attempts to identify the project's impact on postsecondary enrollment for this group of students.

In review of literature, no studies have been published identifying the impact of Educational Talent Search Programs on the students they serve.

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## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Students from disadvantaged, low-income, and first generation college backgrounds have special needs for career guidance, assistance with planning their educational careers, and technical help in obtaining

financial aid. Disadvantaged students are often defeated by well-intended high school guidance programs which tend to concentrate their educational counseling efforts on college bound students. In addition, guidance services in the high school are most frequently provided to those students who are motivated to seek out assistance. The Talent Search Program attempts to draw in the disadvantaged student by providing educational and career counseling to each participant on a regular basis regardless of the student's initial educational and vocational plans.

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was restricted to a sample of one hundred and fifty high school seniors from Knoxville City and Knox County High Schools during the 1982-83 school year. The study was further limited to eleven items measured by the Student Survey form developed by the authors. In selecting the control group the researchers attempted to identify a stratified sampling of students most representative of the experimental group. In so doing, judgments concerning family income had to be estimated from information provided on family occupations. Student motivation also had to be subjectively assessed for the controls because each student in the control filled out an initial application for the Talent Search Program but failed to return the financial statement and school record release form signed by their parents which was required for program participation. To control for this motivation factor, the control group was drawn only from those students who had indicated a definite interest on their initial application to participate in the program. Students were further eliminated if their grade point average was reported to be below a 2.0.

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The Educational Talent Search Program was administered in seven city and six county high schools of Knoxville, Tennessee. Talent Search counselors visited the thirteen targeted schools on a weekly basis to counsel with students enrolled in the program. All counseling activities were on an individual basis and took place in the guidance office at each respective school.

### SUBJECTS

Two-thirds of the subjects enrolled in the Educational Talent Search Program (ETS) were students from low income families (as established by federal guidelines for TRIO Program eligibility) where neither parent held a baccalaureate degree. The remaining one-third was comprised of students whose eligibility for program services was based on cultural factors (i.e., disadvantaged backgrounds, minority status,

handicapped conditions, potential high school drop-outs, etc.) rather than family income. All students were high school seniors in the 17 to 18 age bracket.

### INSTRUMENTATION AND DATA COLLECTION

In the spring of the 1982-83 program year seventy-five students enrolled in the Talent Search Program since fall, 1982 were selected using a Table of Random Numbers to comprise the experimental group. These seventy-five students were randomly selected from a total population of 980 participants. A control group of seventy-five students was selected using a Table of Random Numbers from a population of 1,500 students, all of whom had made application to the project, expressed an interest in participation, and would have been eligible for program services had their parents signed and returned the financial statement and school record release forms.

An eleven item questionnaire was devised using a Likert Scale from 1 to 5 to measure students' responses for nine of the eleven items (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was reviewed and modified by a panel of ETS staff and distributed in the spring of the 1982-83 program year to the seventy-five students in the experimental group and the seventy-five students in the control group. Students completed the survey during homeroom or during study hall periods. Of the seventy-five, sixty-one and thirty-nine questionnaires were completed and returned from the experimental and control groups, respectively. Positive and negative responses were tallied on all questionnaires. The positive and negative responses for each question were reported in percentages so that comparisons in response between two groups (control and experimental) could be made.

### Hypotheses

The study attempts to address the following issues related to the impact of project services on students participating in the Educational Talent Search Program:

- Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the amount of assistance provided in career and educational counseling.
- Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the amount of technical assistance provided in applying for college admission and financial aid.
- Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the rate at which students choose four-year institutions as their educational objective.

### Method of Data Analysis

For questions 1, 2, and 3, a Likert Scale response of a 3, 4, or 5 was identified as a positive response (see Appendix A). For questions 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10, a Likert Scale response of 4 or 5 was considered positive. The

number of positive responses was reported in percentages for the purpose of comparing responses between the control and the experimental group. Z scores were determined by applying a statistical test comparing two independent proportions.

## RESULTS

Data related to the nine items on the questionnaire are summarized in Table 1. The statistical test used to compare two independent proportions indicates a significant difference exists at the .01 level for question 1 which is related to career counseling, and at the .01 level for question 2 which is related to educational counseling. Both questions address hypothesis 1 which states there exists no significant differences in the amount of assistance provided in career and educational counseling. Therefore, statistical data for questions 1 and 2 reject null hypothesis 1. Questions 3, 4, 5, and 6 address hypothesis 2 which states there is no significant difference in the amount of technical assistance provided in applying for college admission and financial aid. Three of the four questions reported significant differences. A significant difference at the .05 level was reported for question 4 relating to providing information on admission requirements at schools of interest and for question 5, relating to assistance with securing and completing college admission applications. The level of significance for question 6, relating to assistance with applying for financial aid was reported at the .01 level. The only question not reported statistically significant was question 3, relating to assistance with registering for and/or taking the ACT exam. Therefore, hypothesis 2 can only be partly rejected. Question 7 reports on the percent of students actually applying for financial aid. Here it should be noted that the numbers of students applying for financial aid (47%) greatly outpaced those in the control (12%). The difference in response was reported to be significant at the .01 level. Question eight relating to percent of students reporting plans to enroll at four-year institutions addresses hypothesis 3 which states there is no significant difference in the rate at which students choose four-year institutions as their educational objective. Question eight was found to be significantly different at the .01 level, thus rejecting hypothesis 3. Question nine, relating to percent of students choosing no postsecondary option were reported 11.5% for the experimental and 26% for the controls, although the difference in response showed no statistical significance.

## DISCUSSION

The results of the survey indicate that Educational Talent Search (ETS) has a positive impact on increasing and improving guidance services to low-income and culturally disadvantaged students. The results

indicate that ETS students not only received more career and educational counseling with respect to their postsecondary plans, but also took more action as a result of this counseling, as measured by an increase in application to postsecondary institutions and an increase in applications for financial aid. Helping students to prepare for the ACT exam was one of the items where no significant difference was reported, although ETS students did respond to this questions more positively than the control. The percent response for assistance with ACT registration closely matches the percent of students planning to enroll at four-year institutions, therefore, the researchers can assume that adequate assistance was likely provided to college bound ETS students.

Of particular importance was the wide spread between the experimental and control groups in their response to applying for financial aid. The ETS counselors had access to information on family income and therefore were in a better position than the high school guidance counselors to seek out those students likely to be eligible for federal and state financial aid programs. The financial aid process is not well understood by most students, and it is particularly difficult for low-income families to complete lengthy applications without technical assistance from counselors. Rather than seeking out technical assistance, students either do not apply for financial aid at all, or apply for it late, which results in seriously undermining the student's real chance to enroll at the selected postsecondary institution.

Within our schools there exists a group of students possessing academic potential to be successful in a postsecondary program but choose for a variety of reasons not to pursue their education beyond high school. Most commonly, these students pursue a vocational track in high school, lack motivation for academic success, and are usually candidates for dropping out of school. This type of student presents a real challenge to the ETS counselor because even if students do become motivated to pursue their education beyond high school, their secondary school preparation is often inadequate for a technical or liberal arts education. A great deal of time and effort must be devoted to helping these students identify a school or program suited to their particular needs and academic background. Our survey showed that twenty-six percent (26%) of students in the control group chose not to pursue their education beyond high school, compared to only eleven and a half percent (11.5%) of the ETS students. Although the difference is statistically insignificant, the researchers do feel that the smaller percent of students with no educational plans was the result of frequent, intensive one-on-one counseling sessions with the students.

TABLE I  
COMPARISON OF THE EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUPS

Questions	Percent Positive Response		Z Score
	Experimental	Control	
1) Received assistance to help establish or prepare for a career goal.	.92	.77	2.09*
2) Provided brochures, catalogs, and applications on schools of interest.	.82	.47	3.63**
3) Received information on registering for and/or taking the ACT exam.	.69	.51	1.78
4) Received information on admission requirements at schools of interest.	.72	.50	2.20*
5) Received assistance in securing and/or completing college admission applications.	.61	.35	2.50
6) Received assistance in completing financial aid applications.	.65	.30	3.63**
7) Percent reporting they had actually applied for financial aid.	.47	.12	3.58**
8) Percent reporting plans to enroll at a four-year institution.	.54	.22	2.66**
9) Percent reporting no postsecondary plans.	.115	.26	1.86

\* = Significant at .05 level  
\*\* = Significant at .01 level

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Educational Talent Search Program has attempted to bridge the gap between the guidance services available to traditional college-bound students and those offered to the non-traditional student who is economically disadvantaged or otherwise culturally different. This results in major differences in service delivery. The first difference in service delivery is that ETS counselors take active steps to reach out to students by creating a counseling environment conducive to the needs of the nontraditional student. This atmosphere is fostered by aggressively seeking out and encouraging students to think beyond their current vocational and academic ambitions. ETS students are helped to recognize options and goals previously unthought of

or perceived to be unattainable. Further, students are helped to realistically assess their career interests and academic strengths as useful and important tools to choosing an appropriate postsecondary program. Once students have identified a postsecondary school and perceive that school to be well-suited to their academic or vocational interests, students are more likely to enroll. The second major difference in service delivery is once students have identified suitable educational options, the ETS program helps students through the technical aspects of the admissions and financial aid process vital to ensuring postsecondary enrollment for that student. Providing students necessary information on admission requirements, securing catalogs, applications and financial aid forms communicates a sense of caring on the part of the ETS counselor and serves to further motivate students to take action.

In summary, Educational Talent Search programs which actively seek out students and provide them with the information and assistance necessary to identify and enroll in suitable postsecondary programs are likely to experience success. The degree to which students are encouraged and helped through the process of transition from high school to postsecondary education is the extent to which positive

results are likely to occur. As indicated by the results of this study, if counselors take active steps to ensure that disadvantaged students know how to plan for their educational pursuits and help them to believe in their abilities to succeed in their chosen career, disadvantaged students will likely respond positively to counseling and follow through with their educational plans.

Appendix A

Student Survey Form  
Educational Talent Search Program  
The University of Tennessee

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ SCHOOL \_\_\_\_\_

DIRECTIONS: Using the scale from 1 to 5, please circle the number which most closely matches your response to the following questions:

1. How much assistance did you receive from the counselor to help you establish or prepare for a career goal?  

1	2	3	4	5
None	Very Little	Some	Much	Very Much
2. How much effort have you put forth in planning for your future after high school?  

1	2	3	4	5
None	Very Little	Some	Much	Very Much
3. Did the counselor provide you with encouragement and motivation to consider attending some type of school after high school graduation?  

1	2	3	4	5
None	Very Little	Some	Much	Very Much
4. Did the counselor provide you catalogs, applications, or brochures on schools in which you were interested?  

1	2	3	4	5
Does Not Apply	None	Very Little	Some	Very Much
5. How much information were you given on registering for and/or taking the ACT exam?  

1	2	3	4	5
Does Not Apply	None	Very Little	Some	Very Much
6. How much information were you provided on the admission requirements at the school(s) you were considering attending?  

1	2	3	4	5
Does Not Apply	None	Very Little	Some	Very Much
7. How much assistance did you receive in securing and/or completing college admissions applications?  

1	2	3	4	5
Does Not Apply	None	Very Little	Some	Very Much
8. How much assistance were you given with how to complete a financial aid application?  

1	2	3	4	5
Does Not Apply	None	Very Little	Some	Very Much
9. What are your current plans?  

1	2	3	4	5
No Plans	Employment	Vocational School/ Military	2-yr. College/ Technical School	4-yr. College
10. How satisfied are you with your selection?  

1	2	3	4	5
Very Unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
11. What is your status concerning financial aid?  

1	2	3	4	5
Didn't know about	Didn't Apply	Need to Apply	Applied	Applied and Received Acknowledgment

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