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Sent:7 Apr 2014 11:16:01 -0400

To:info@whatworks.ed.gov

Subject:IES WWC Website: Contact Us: Other, Reference ID Number: 2086160509

info@whatworks.ed.gov, this email was automatically sent through the Contact link on the WWC website.

From: margaret.cahalan@pellinstitute.org

Message: David Goodwin and I, Margaret Cahalan have prepared a detailed formal request for a Quality Review of WWC ratings of the 2004 and 2009 Mathematica reports from the National Evaluation of Upward Bound.

I am requesting the email address to which I should attach the material pertaining to this case.

Attachment A: Excerpt of UB Study Conclusions from the Executive Summary of the 2009 Mathematica Final Report

Executive Summary conclusions excerpted from the report: Seftor, N. S., Mamun, A., & Schirm, A. (2009). *The impacts of regular Upward Bound on postsecondary outcomes 7–9 years after scheduled high school graduation*. Princeton, NJ: Mathematica Policy Research.

“By comparing the study’s treatment group to its control group, this evaluation estimates the value-added effect of the opportunity to participate in Upward Bound—an unusually intensive precollege program—for the students who seek that opportunity and are eligible to participate in the program. The main finding are:

- ***Upward Bound had no detectable effect on the rate of overall postsecondary enrollment or the type or selectivity of postsecondary institution attended for the average eligible applicant.*** About four-fifths of both treatment group members and control group members attended some type of postsecondary institution, including four-year institutions, two-year colleges, and vocational schools, and the estimated impact is an increase of less than 2 percentage points in the rate of enrollment (effect size = 4 percent). For enrollment at four-year colleges and universities, the estimated impact is 1 percentage point (effect size = 3 percent). These effects are not statistically significant.
- ***Upward Bound had no detectable effect on the likelihood of applying for financial aid, or, the likelihood of receiving a Pell Grant.*** The 1 and 2 percentage point increases in the rates of financial aid application and Pell Grant receipt (effect sizes = 3 and 5 percent) are not statistically significant.
- ***Upward Bound increased the likelihood of earning a postsecondary certificate or license from a vocational school. It had no detectable effect on the likelihood of earning a bachelor’s degree or the likelihood of earning an associate degree.*** While about 4 percent of control group members received a vocational certificate or license, nearly 9 percent of treatment group members did, implying an impact of 5 percentage points (effect size = 23 percent). The impacts on receiving any postsecondary credential and receiving a bachelor’s degree are 2 and 0 percentage points (effect size = 5 and 0 percent), respectively, and are not statistically significant.
- ***Upward Bound increased postsecondary enrollment or completion rates for some subgroups of students.*** For the subgroup of students with lower educational expectations at baseline—that is, the students who did not expect to complete a bachelor’s degree—Upward Bound increased the rate of postsecondary enrollment and the likelihood of receiving a degree, license, or certificate by 6 and 12

percentage points, respectively, raising the overall postsecondary completion rate to about the level observed for students with higher expectations. Because targeting on the basis of lower educational expectations might be challenging if it creates an incentive for applicants to understate their expectations, further analyses were conducted to examine the effects of Upward Bound on subgroups that might be more readily targeted. According to these exploratory analyses, Upward Bound increased postsecondary enrollment rates for students who were in tenth grade or above at the time of application, students who took a mathematics course below algebra in ninth grade, and students with a ninth grade GPA above 2.5. The estimated impacts were 3, 7, and 3 percentage points, respectively. Additional analyses suggest that Upward Bound also had positive impacts on postsecondary outcomes for some other subgroups defined by student- and project-level characteristics.

- **Longer participation in Upward Bound was associated with higher rates of postsecondary enrollment and completion.** An additional year of Upward Bound participation was associated with a 9 percentage point increase in the rate of enrollment at four-year institutions and a 5 percentage point increase in the likelihood of receiving a bachelor's degree. Completing the Upward Bound program was associated with increases of 27 and 21 percentage points, respectively. These findings are based on nonexperimental methods, and the validity of causal inferences based on these estimates depends on the validity of strong assumptions. “

Attachment B: Documentation of Key Standards Violations in the Mathematica Reports from the National Evaluation of Upward Bound

Submitted in Support of the Request for Rescinding of the WWC Rating of the Mathematica Reports as “Meets Evidence Standards, Without Reservations”

by Margaret Cahalan and David Goodwin

To document the summary material presented in our letter, below we present a brief background concerning the unusual context of this issue followed by a detailed description of the major research standards violations manifest in the Mathematica reports. Attachment C provides additional documentation.

How Did PPSS Staff First Become Concerned--Context and Background?

PPSS concerns first began in 2005 when the Mathematica lead analyst for the fourth follow-up of the long running study sent PPSS tabulations that showed that the “no impact” results were sensitive to only one of the 67 sampled projects.¹ This staff person revealed for the first time to ED that this one project (known as project 69) was carrying fully 26 percent of the total student weights and this meant that students from project 69 had weights that were 40 times those of the lowest project weighted sample members. The staff person was concerned that this project for unknown reasons had large significant negative impacts on college outcomes and given the sample members large weights the results and conclusions of “no impact” for Upward Bound were being driven by this project. Without this project UB clearly demonstrated statistically significant and educationally meaningful positive impacts in the analyses. PPSS staff asked the Mathematica UB project staff to investigate the issue further both in terms of the substantive reasons for the large negative impacts in project 69 and in terms of the unequal weighting issues. PPSS wished to understand what project 69 was doing wrong such that the project was seemingly decreasing rather than fostering college attendance and degree attainment. Given that this project was supposedly representative of the largest number of 4-year BA and above degree granting UB projects—these results could not be ignored. PPSS also wished to understand the role that the uneven weighting issue was playing in the estimates, having observed that the sub-group estimates were unstable and sensitive to issues of differential survey non-response and coverage issues. A few months later, without having gotten a response from Mathematica concerning these issues, the lead analyst working on the fourth follow-up report, left Mathematica. The fourth follow-up report was never revised to address PPSS internal reviewers concerns or put into review for publication².

¹ Details on memo’s and emails concerning PPSS concerns can be found in the COE Request for Correction, submitted to ED in 2012 and available on the COE website *The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) Request for Correction* is available at http://www.coenet.us/files/pubs_reports-COE_Request_for_Correction_011712.pdf

² The PPSS review of the fourth follow-up draft raised a number of issues some of which were similar to those of concern raised to the fifth follow up report. However, Mathematica reported they did not have resources to revise the fourth follow up report and also prepare the fifth follow up report. PPSS agreed to Mathematica’s concentration on completing the fifth follow up report with remaining contract funds.

