Project QUEST
11-Year Evaluation Findings

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Project QUEST

• Nonprofit in San Antonio, TX established in 1992 by two community-organizing groups, Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS) and Metro Alliance, to address residents’ need for skills training to secure well-paying jobs in strong sectors of the local economy and employers’ need for skilled workers

• Project QUEST services included:
  • Assistance with college enrollment (testing, program/course selection)
  • Remedial instruction to improve math and reading skills when needed
  • Financial assistance to cover tuition, books, tutoring, uniforms, licensing exam fees, and transportation
  • Support of a counselor: 1:1 and in required weekly group meetings to address personal and academic concerns
  • Job placement assistance
Project QUEST Evaluation Design and Data

• Randomized controlled trial design

• 410 enrolled between April 2006 and October 2008; 207 assigned to the treatment group, 203 to the control group

• Contracted with the Ray Marshall Center at the University of Texas to access and analyze administrative data records

• Employment and earnings findings based on data from the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) on quarterly earnings as reported by employers to the state

• Postsecondary education findings based on data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) on enrollment and completion of certificate and degree programs. NSC data did not capture the medical records coder program
The Study’s Target Population and Programs

• During the study, Project QUEST targeted individuals not attending college, including those who needed remedial math or reading instruction before enrolling and those who did not.

• Most students attended programs at one of two community colleges: St. Philips College and San Antonio College.

• The study focused on individuals seeking training for health-care jobs.

• The programs were expected to take a minimum of one to three years to complete.

Study Participants’ Intended Health-Care Occupations at Program Entry (N=410)

- Licensed vocational nurse 60%
- Registered nurse 7%
- Technician 8%
- Medical records coder 25%
## Study Participants’ Characteristics at the Time of Study Enrollment (N=410)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 18 to 24</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 25 to 64</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had any children under age 18</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had a GED</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated from high school</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had a college degree</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever attended college but did not earn degree</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed at any time in past year</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average annual earnings in past year (in constant 2019 $)</td>
<td>$13,323</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Across the eleven years after study enrollment, Project QUEST participants earned an average of $31,395 more than control group members.
Project QUEST’s annual earnings impact was statistically significant and exceeded $4,000 in six of the last eight years, including the last three.

Notes: Earnings impacts are reported in constant 2019 dollars. Significance levels: ***p<.01, **p<.05, *p<.10
Project QUEST had a large, statistically significant impact on college credential attainment, more than doubling the percent who earned a health-care credential.

Notes: Medical records coder program not captured in NSC data. Statistical significance levels: ***p<.01, **p<.05, *p<.10
Project QUEST's earnings impacts were greatest for participants who were older than traditional college students.

**Statistical significance level:** Within group: **p<.05**
Project QUEST's earnings impacts were also greater for participants who had previously been unsuccessful in school.

**Statistical significance level:** Within group: **p<.05**

![Bar chart showing QUEST's impact on average total earnings over eleven years, by education level at study enrollment. GED (N=70): $40,642, High school diploma (N=137): $352, Some college, no degree (N=183): $55,343.](chart.png)
The earnings gains Project QUEST participants experienced far exceeded the costs of the program and participants’ college attendance.

Comparison of Average Net Earnings Benefits to Net Costs during the 11 Years after Study Enrollment (2019 $)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average net earnings benefit per participant</td>
<td>$31,395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average net cost per participant, including Project QUEST and college costs</td>
<td>$13,979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net earnings benefit minus net Project QUEST and college costs (average per participant)</td>
<td>$17,416</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average cost per participant of Project QUEST during the study was $12,464 (in 2019 $)

- Program staff and other service costs: 41%
- Student supports: 23%
- Tuition: 22%
- Administration and fundraising: 13%
Conclusion

• Project QUEST has achieved the longest sustained earnings impacts ever found in a U.S. workforce development program.

• The results demonstrate the potential value of investing in skills training for low-income job seekers.

• RCT design does not tell us which components were most important but participants credited both the financial assistance and counselor support in helping them persist through academic, family, and financial difficulties.

• Also key was that Project QUEST supported job seekers in earning health-care credentials that were highly valued by employers and required to obtain well-paying jobs in the field.