

Provisional Admission Practices:

Blending Access and Support to Facilitate Student Success

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Executive Summary

This report examines provisional admission as an initiative that can expand four-year college access and success for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Provisional admission policies and programs enable students to enroll at an institution under specific conditions. Students are often required to meet certain academic performance requirements, such as credit hour or GPA thresholds, and participate in academic support services. In this report, a mixed methods approach is used to provide a solid foundational understanding of provisional admission practices.

Findings from our survey suggest that provisional admission may be an overlooked and underutilized initiative at many four-year colleges and universities, particularly public institutions. Fewer than three out of five survey respondents (57%) reported having a provisional admission program. Additionally, these programs were found to help academically underprepared students persist to the second year at equal rates to their peers with stronger academic profiles upon enrollment. Despite being considered academically underprepared upon enrollment, more than seven out of ten students in these programs complete the first year.

The qualitative analysis from the data collected on the institutional site visits revealed that provisional admission programs helped:

- Promote postsecondary access to four-year institutions
- Strengthen students' academic skills
- Develop students' study and time management skills
- Build students' confidence
- Develop relationships between students and their peers and institutional staff and faculty

Additionally, we discovered that three distinct provisional admission models were being used by the colleges and universities we visited. One model involved the use of a cohort-based curricular instruction model that supported students during the first year. Other schools either used a summer bridge experience model or a supplemental tutoring-based model. We found that the provisional admission programs were all quite distinct and tailored to meet both the goals and needs of students and the institution. Although we recommend the use of provisional admission programs, we hesitate to suggest a specific model. Programs should be designed to meet institutional needs and resources. Thus, we offer the following eight elements that provisional admission programs should include and support:

- Academic support
- Clearly outlined policies and requirements
- Faculty involvement
- Early contact with students
- Engagement within the larger student community
- Student performance monitoring
- Extended contact with students
- Program evaluation

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Introduction

This report examines provisional admission practices as promising college access and retention initiatives that can increase the number of young Americans from low-income families attending and graduating from four-year, not-for-profit colleges. At its core, provisional admission enables students to enroll in college under specific conditions. Students who are provisionally admitted are often required to participate in structured academic support initiatives (e.g., tutoring, advising, etc.) and meet certain academic performance requirements, such as credit hour or GPA thresholds. Provisional admission is typically reserved for applicants who show the potential to complete college work successfully but have an academic profile that falls slightly below an institution's preferred admission criteria. Once students satisfy all requirements associated with their enrollment, the provisional status is removed and students are fully admitted. However, students who are unable to meet the conditions required for full admission can be dismissed from the institution.

Our interest in provisional admission largely stems from our belief that these practices can be used as a means to enhance access and success for low-income students. It is no secret that far too many of these students are disadvantaged by ineffective K-12 systems that do not adequately prepare them to excel immediately in higher education. Thus, far too many low-income students complete high school without the academic profile, skills, and knowledge needed to gain admission to competitive four-year institutions. These students possess untapped potential that remains dormant due, in many cases, to simple circumstance and lack of legitimate opportunity. Provisional admission practices can offer a combination of opportunity and support that can help many of these students successfully begin and complete their paths to bachelor's degrees. The sole use of provisional admission will not solve the substantial socioeconomic stratification in college access, especially at four-year institutions, or the large disparities in college completion rates for economically disadvantaged students. However, it can certainly help improve these disappointing trends.

In a previous report by the Pell Institute, *Moving Beyond Access: College Success for Low-income, First-generation Students* (2008), Engle and Tinto concluded that the stark overrepresentation of low-income and first-generation students at two-year public and for-profit institutions coupled with their extremely low transfer rates to four-year institutions was a major contributing factor to the dismal six-year bachelor's degree attainment rates for this demographic. In addition, findings from *Demography Is Not Destiny*, another Pell Institute publication, found that several four-year colleges and universities were using provisional admission programs as a means to increase the enrollments of underrepresented groups, mainly low-income, first-generation, and racial/ethnic minority students. Furthermore, their findings revealed that the support mechanisms built into these programs enabled these students to achieve at rates similar to their peers, despite being considered academically underprepared upon enrollment.

Thus, it seems apparent that provisional admission programs can help students overcome two main educational obstacles. First, by instantly providing access to four-year institutions for students whose college opportunity is often limited to community college enrollment, provisional admission programs can essentially eliminate the burden of the transfer process and potential exposure to the "cooling-out" process (Clark, 1960)¹ that students can experience at community colleges. Second, these programs can provide the much needed structure and support that many academically underprepared students need upon enrolling in college. Given the potential upside of provisional admission at four-year institutions, this study seeks to develop a foundational understanding of provisional admission policies and programs.

¹ In 1960, Burton Clark first used the term "cooling-out" to describe the socialization process at community colleges that causes students to become disengaged from the academic process while lowering their academic aspirations and standards.

Literature Review

As the United States looks to rebound from a recession in which nearly 8.5 million jobs were lost and unemployment soared above 10%, the critical need for more Americans to attain a college credential or degree has become ever more apparent. The personal benefits of attaining a college degree have long been understood. Attaining a college credential can bring, on average, higher wages and more job stability (Baum & Ma, 2007, Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). During the recession, individuals with college experience or degrees were significantly less likely to experience unemployment. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), quarterly unemployment figures for Americans with bachelor's degrees never exceeded 5% (BLS, 2010).

Currently, however, the concern regarding college degree attainment is far less personal in nature and focuses on the nation's long term well-being and global competitiveness. A grim future for the American economy lies ahead unless our education system is able to produce a better qualified and skilled workforce. Projections by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce forecast a shortfall of nearly three million college degrees and credentials needed to fill new jobs by 2018 (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010). As opportunities in the "blue-collar" sector continue to decline, the future strength of the American economy will be directly tied to the nation's ability to create a skilled workforce that is able to meet the demands of jobs requiring some sort of postsecondary credential or degree. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that nearly half of all new jobs will require some type of postsecondary degree (BLS, 2009). Additionally, 14 of the 30 fastest-growing occupations require a bachelor's degree or higher (BLS, 2009).

This daunting need to create a more skilled workforce and increase the number of bachelor degree recipients is both a college access and college retention issue, which has not gone unnoticed by the Obama administration. During the President's first two years in office, education reform has been an integral part of the administration's policy agenda, and unprecedented amounts of federal dollars have been invested in education. The overall goal is to set a foundation that will enable this country to have the highest proportion of college graduates by 2020. Although President Obama's education goal focuses on a collegiate outcome, reaching this objective will require improvement and changes to early childhood, secondary, and higher education. To accomplish such a feat the President has emphasized the need for new strategies and innovations, as well as the expansion and refinement of current practices. If properly utilized, the findings of this report indicate that provisional admission initiatives, by improving college access and completion, can aid in the attainment of the President's 2020 college completion goal and equip

tomorrow's workforce with the skills and credentials required to meet the demands of tomorrow's jobs. In the remainder of this literature review, we describe the equity gaps in four-year college enrollment and degree attainment and discuss how challenges related to the college choice process, ability to pay for college, and academic preparation present barriers that inhibit college access and success. The literature review concludes with a section describing the limited research on provisional admission practices.

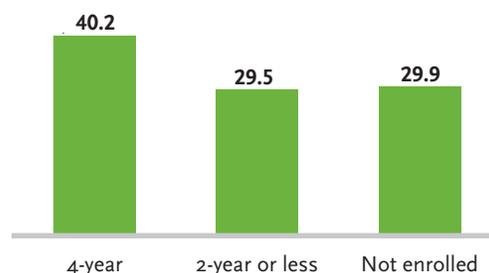
College Access and Success

The appeal of provisional admission at four-year colleges and universities lies in its ability to expand access for disadvantaged students at these institutions while providing support for them upon enrollment. The data below clearly identify a college enrollment and completion landscape that is stratified by parental income and socioeconomic status. The Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002), which tracks the high school sophomore cohort of 2002 through 2006, provides a fairly comprehensive picture of the college access landscape. However, keep in mind that the survey tracks high school sophomores and not ninth grade students. Thus, the data do not include students who drop out prior to reaching the 10th grade, which accounts for roughly one-third of all dropouts (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2007). In high-poverty high schools, freshman loss can approach 40%.

The ELS data show that only 60.3% of a nationally representative cohort of high school sophomores immediately enrolled in college after receiving their high school diploma. By 2006, another 9.8% of that 2002 sophomore cohort had enrolled in some form of higher education, bringing the total college enrollment rate to 70.1%. Of the students from

FIGURE 1

Percentage of 2002 High School Sophomores Enrolling in College by Institutional Level



Source: Bozick, R., and Lauff, E. (2007). Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002): A First Look at the Initial Postsecondary Experiences of the Sophomore Class of 2002 (NCES 2008-308). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

FIGURE 2

Percentage of 2002 High School Sophomores Enrolling in College by Institutional Level and Family Income



Source: Bozick, R., and Lauff, E. (2007). Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002): A First Look at the Initial Postsecondary Experiences of the Sophomore Class of 2002 (NCES 2008-308). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

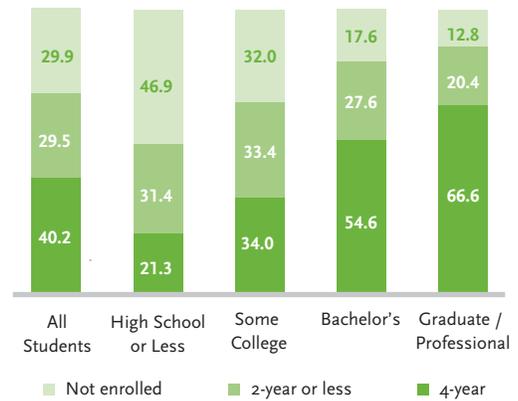
that cohort who enrolled in college, 40.2% enrolled at four-year institutions while 29.5% enrolled in other forms of postsecondary education (see Figure 1). Nearly 30% of cohort members did not enroll in college.

A closer look at the enrollment patterns reveals a higher education system that is highly stratified by family income and parental education. Figure 2 shows a substantial margin in four-year college enrollment between high-income and low-income families. While 69.5% of students from families with incomes that exceeded \$100,000 enrolled in postsecondary education, only 20.8% of students from families with incomes at or below \$20,000 enrolled in college. Moreover, Figure 3 shows that only 21.3% of students from homes where neither parent went to college enrolled in postsecondary education, compared to 54.6% and 66.6% of students whose parents hold bachelor's and graduate/professional degrees, respectively.

While the ELS data show substantial inequities in college access, data from the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Survey (BPS:04/09) show similar discrepancies in college completion. Slightly more than 30% of students who enroll in any form of postsecondary education attain a bachelor's degree, but the attainment rate for students who initially enroll in a four-year institution is 58%. However, despite this increase in graduation rate, there are still significant disparities in attainment based on family income and parental education.

FIGURE 3

Percentage of 2002 High School Sophomores Enrolling in College by Institutional Level and Parental Education



Source: Bozick, R., and Lauff, E. (2007). Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS:2002): A First Look at the Initial Postsecondary Experiences of the Sophomore Class of 2002 (NCES 2008-308). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

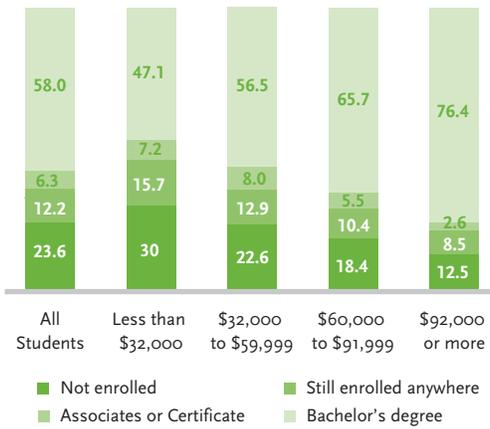
Figure 4 highlights bachelor's degree attainment by family income of student, initially enrolling in 4-year degree-granting institutions. Most noticeable is the positive relationship between family income and bachelor's degree attainment. Essentially, as income increased, so did the chances of attaining a bachelor's degree within six years. Only 47.1% of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds completed a bachelor's degree in six years, compared to 76.4% of high-income students. Further, economically disadvantaged students were more likely to not be enrolled after six years (30.0%) than their peers from high-income families (12.5%).

Similar trends are also reflected in the data examining parental education. Figure 5 shows that 40.4% of first-generation college students attained a bachelor's degree within six years. This is a stark contrast to the 69.3% rate for students from families where parents held bachelor's, graduate, or professional degrees. Additionally, 34.7% of first-generation students left school within six years without attaining a bachelor's degree, compared to only 16.9% of students whose parents held bachelor's or advanced degrees.

The college access and bachelor's degree attainment rates reflect a social and educational system that places students from disadvantaged backgrounds at an unfair disadvantage. The data clearly show socioeconomic stratification. The educational system disproportionately excludes first-generation and

FIGURE 4

Six-Year Attainment and Persistence Rates (2003/04 to 2008/09) for All Postsecondary Students Initially Enrolling in Degree-granting Institutions by Family Income



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2003-04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:04/09)
 *Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

economically disadvantaged students from four-year colleges and universities. Additionally, the few who do enroll at these institutions are substantially more likely to leave the institution without a college degree. There are various explanations for these inequalities in college access and success, but the research literature points to three primary factors which greatly determine who goes to college, where students go to college, and if students complete college. Below we will briefly discuss the impact of the college choice process, ability to pay for college, and academic preparation on college access and success.

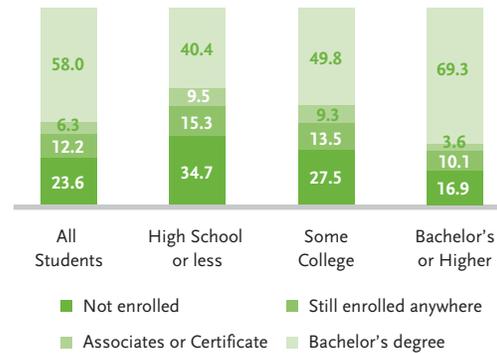
College Choice Process

The Consortium on Chicago School Research (Roderick, Nagaoka, & Allensworth, 2006) found that many Chicago public school students who expect to attain a bachelor's degree never even enroll in college. Although poor high school preparation was certainly responsible for this disconnect between college aspirations and college enrollment (Roderick, Nagaoka, & Allensworth, 2006), the Consortium's research also concluded that:

The social capital gap – the extent to which students have access to norms for college enrollment, information on how to prepare and effectively participate in college search and selection, and effective guidance and support in making decisions about college – shapes student's college access. (Roderick, Nagaoka, Cosa, & Moeller, 2008, p. 98)

FIGURE 5

Six-Year Attainment and Persistence Rates (2003/04 to 2008/09) for All Postsecondary Students Initially Enrolling in Degree-granting Institutions by Parental Education



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center of Education Statistics, 2003-04 Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study, Second Follow-up (BPS:04/09).
 *Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.

This finding was particularly true for students from low-income backgrounds who often encountered obstacles that prevented them from enrolling in four-year colleges and selective institutions.

Identifying and selecting a college can be complex and requires quite a bit of planning. In some cases, students begin thinking about attending college while they are still attending middle school (Nora & Cabrera, 1992). The college choice process is thought to consist of three stages: predispositions, search, and choice (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989). At the predispositions stage, students are developing educational aspirations to continue education beyond high school. Additionally, students are starting to think about potential careers or occupations. During the search stage, students are going through the process of gathering information about potential colleges to develop a choice set – a short list of institutions. In the final stage, the student identifies an institution within the choice set to attend. Although distinct and identifiable, these three stages are believed to influence and interact with one another in a variety of subtle and complex ways (Alexander & Eckland, 1975; Sewell & Shah, 1967; Sewell, Haller, & Portes, 1969). For example, a student's occupational aspirations developed during the predispositions stage may lead a student to only include institutions on his short list that have a specific major.

This three-step college choice model may seem appropriate for traditional college students; however, this three-step process might not accurately depict the college choice process for low-income and potential first-generation students. Unfortunately, the evidence suggests that many low-income and potential first-generation students experience the college choice process much differently. Students from low-income backgrounds are less likely to have their parents play significant roles in the college choice process. For example, Stage and Hossler (1989) found that low-SES (socioeconomic) parents had fewer discussions about college with their children. Because parents and other family members may lack the time, resources, and knowledge, many low-SES students are forced to navigate the college choice process on their own with limited help from high school guidance counselors. Since many low-income students may not receive substantial parental encouragement regarding their educational pursuits, these students may perceive college as optional or a far-fetched reality instead of a mandatory next step in the educational pipeline. This lack of parental encouragement and involvement in the college choice process may, along with other factors, explain why low-income students tend to have lower degree expectations than their peers (Terenzini, Cabrera, & Bernal, 2001). In her research, King (1996) found that only 66% of low-income students planned to attend a four-year college, compared to 80% and 85% of middle- and high-income students, respectively.

Furthermore, the literature shows that the level of sophistication applied to the college choice process is related to the students' socioeconomic status. Students from middle- and high-socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have a more well-informed, systematic approach to the process (McDonough, 1997). For instance, students who are economically advantaged tend to rely on multiple sources for their information; know more about college costs, financial aid, and qualification criteria; and plan and save more for college (Tierney, 1980; Flint, 1991; Olson & Rosenfeld, 1984; McDonough, 1997; Miller, 1997). Additionally, students from advantaged backgrounds are more likely to apply to more selective institutions and consider a geographically diverse set of institutions instead of those located in proximity to their homes (Flint, 1991).

Financial Barriers

For quite some time, it has been fairly well established that the cost of tuition and the availability of financial aid affects students' college enrollment decisions (Heller, 1997; Leslie & Brinkman, 1988; McPherson & Shapiro, 1998). Although the enrollment decisions of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds are slightly more influenced by increases in

tuition, research shows that increases in grant aid for these students have a far greater impact than loans on their enrollment decisions (St. John, 1990). Overall, the research literature supports the notion that grants, not loans, are an effective means of boosting the enrollments of low-income students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000). However, as tuition costs continue to rise, paying for college has become even more problematic as institutions continue to shift away from need-based aid systems and toward merit-based aid systems, which seem to give an advantage to students from high-income backgrounds (Cornwell, Mustard, & Sridhar, 2006; Dynarski, 2000).

Thus, unmet financial need is a major hurdle preventing postsecondary access and success for low-income students. Long and Riley (2007) found that 79% of dependent students from the lowest income quartile have unmet financial need, compared to 13% of their more advantaged peers. The authors also determined that low-income, dependent students at two- and four-year public institutions, on average, experience more unmet need than their more financially advantaged peers (Long & Riley, 2007). As higher education becomes less affordable, unmet need may become an even more significant barrier to college access, particularly for those without the resources to pay for their postsecondary education. College-qualified, low-income students may be pushed toward cheaper, less selective postsecondary alternatives or bypass higher education altogether and enter the labor market.

High tuition also seems to have a negative effect on the persistence of low-income students (Paulsen & St. John, 2002). Research supporting the financial nexus model (Paulsen & St. John, 2002; St. John, Paulsen, & Starkey, 1996) indicates that persistence decisions are also influenced by financial concerns, especially monetary concerns that drive college choice. Evidence suggests that students' decisions to persist in college are influenced by their beliefs about the importance of a low-cost education (i.e., availability of low tuition and high financial aid) and the actual financial realities these students experience while in college. The financial nexus model asserts that college choice decisions, which are strongly informed by financial concerns, may have a strong direct impact on students' persistence decisions, particularly if costs outweigh the perceived benefits of persistence. For low-income students who may be especially concerned with the cost of higher education, the potential effects of inadequate financial aid on persistence may be negative and severe (Paulsen & St. John, 2002; St. John et al., 1996; St. John, Andrieu, Oescher, & Starkey, 1994). Recently, over 50 institutions – many of which have relatively selective admission criteria – have overhauled their financial aid systems hoping to

increase institutional access by decreasing the financial strain on low-income students. Institutions such as Amherst College, Davidson College, Harvard University, Indiana University, University of Michigan, University of Florida, Stanford University, and Yale University have replaced loans with grants in their financial aid packages for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Due to drastic differences in institutional resources, these financial aid plans vary significantly. However, all of the plans are designed to make college more affordable, particularly for students from low-income backgrounds. Because many of these financial aid initiatives are new, the effects of these new plans may have yet to be realized.

These initiatives may not be enough to increase the enrollments of low-income students. In fact, according to a featured piece in the *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, only four of the nation's 30 highest-ranked universities have improved enrollments of Pell Grant recipients from 2004 to 2007, and only six of the nation's 30 leading liberal arts colleges experienced a similar increase ("Disappointing Progress in Enrollments," 2008). These findings hint that solely removing financial barriers may not be an effective way to increase enrollments of low-income students if institutions are unwilling to compromise aspects of their admission criteria (i.e., standardized testing requirements) to achieve economic diversity, aggressively recruit students from urban and rural schools, and create culturally inclusive and welcoming environments ("Disappointing Progress in Enrollments," 2008).

Academic Preparation

The final factor often noted in the research literature that shapes college opportunity is academic preparation. The quality or intensity of a student's high school curriculum is the strongest predictor of college success (Adelman, 2006). Data clearly show that students from low-income families tend to be overrepresented at underperforming high schools that do not adequately prepare students for college (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Moore, & Fox, 2010). These underperforming high schools do not have the resources or experienced and effective teachers that allow them to provide students with the skills needed to graduate high school, much less attend and succeed in college. For the fortunate students who are able to overcome these challenges and complete high school, college opportunity is often found in the community college sector. Although financial considerations play a considerable role, lack of academic preparation is a significant factor.

In their analysis of the National Education Longitudinal Study: 1988, Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) determined that there was a large gap in college qualifications between low-SES and

high-SES students. While only 30.3% of high-SES students did not meet college qualification standards, a strikingly high 71.4% of low-SES students were not college qualified. Additionally, Terenzini, Cabrera, and Bernal (2001) found that students in the lowest income quartiles were overrepresented in the lowest achievement quartiles for reading, math, science, and social studies. The authors also determined there were positive relationships between ACT and SAT scores and student socioeconomic status. Similarly, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress show that 80% of students from low-income families scored below proficient on national exams in 2009 (Balfanz, Bridgeland, Moore, & Fox, 2010).

Making the Case for Provisional Admission Practices

The complexity of the college choice process, financial concerns, and poor academic preparation creates a reality where community college is often the only feasible postsecondary option for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Consequently, many low-income and first-generation students do not enroll at four-year institutions, especially selective colleges and universities. Their dismal bachelor's degree attainment rates are, in part, attributable to these enrollment stratifications. Many of these students start and finish higher education at two-year institutions without ever setting foot on a four-year campus.

Approximately 75% of low-income, first-generation students begin their collegiate coursework at two-year institutions, and only 14% of these students transfer to four-year institutions, compared to 50% of their counterparts (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Moreover, in their review of the literature, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that students who initially enroll in a community college are 15% to 20% less likely to finish their bachelor's degree as similar students who begin their studies at four-year institutions. The decreased likelihood of degree attainment is much more severe for economically disadvantaged students. Engle and Tinto's analysis revealed that low-income, first-generation students beginning their studies at a two-year institution were nearly five times less likely than their economically advantaged peers to eventually attain a bachelor's degree (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Of the low-income students who do initially enroll at four-year institutions, Carnevale and Rose (2004) found that they are more likely to attend less academically competitive four-year institutions (i.e., colleges and universities without selective admission criteria). They determined that only 3% of students at the top 146 highly selective colleges came from families in the bottom SES quartile. Approximately 10% came from the bottom half of the SES scale, and an overwhelming 74% of these students came from homes in the top quartile of the SES distribution.

To tackle these issues, there have been various interventions put in place to enhance college access and success for disadvantaged students. Several states, including New York, New Jersey, California, and Pennsylvania, have developed their own programs designed to help economically disadvantaged students. The Department of Education funds GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) and TRIO programs, which are discretionary Federal grant programs designed to help low-income students prepare for and succeed in college. Additionally, many higher education institutions have developed recruitment and outreach initiatives, high school partnerships (dual enrollment and Early College High School), summer bridge programs, and academic support initiatives to address access and success concerns. The research on these initiatives indicates that each of these Federal, state, and institutional initiatives have worked to varying degrees. However, conspicuously absent from the literature is research on provisional admission programs.

Commonly regarded as a mechanism designed to provide access for the children of alumni and potential students with special talents (e.g., music, theatre, and athletic ability), colleges and universities could use provisional admission policies and programs as a means to increase access and diversity, particularly for students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. In most instances, provisional admission practices allow students to enroll for a trial period under the condition that they meet certain academic performance requirements. Provisional admission can be granted if students do not meet standard or preferred academic qualifications but show promise and potential. To gain full admission status, provisional admission students are often required to maintain a certain grade point average, utilize support services, take specific courses, or live on campus. In some instances, these students may be asked to participate in special orientation programs or other institutional initiatives designed to assist underprepared students.

Our interest in provisional admission programs stems from the belief that they can circumvent the “cooling out” effect of community colleges (Clark, 1960) by allowing students to bypass the transfer process and enroll in a four-year institution. Additionally, the support that is coupled with enrollment can provide students with the tools they need to persist in the first year, when most students drop out. In the Pell Institute’s study, *Demography Is Not Destiny*, provisional admission was cited as a promising practice. Engle and O’Brien (2006) determined that provisional admission was used by some institutions to help increase economic and racial diversity. At one institution in the study, nearly 20% of all students and 50% of all minority students were admitted through the conditional/provisional admission program. Engle and O’Brien (2006) also found that provisional admission students had similar or higher persistence rates as the overall student population based on

institutional evaluation data. The programs that seemed exemplary provided extensive academic and social support, such as intrusive advising, tutoring, and mentoring.

Beyond *Demography Is Not Destiny*, the research on this subject is otherwise sparse. Very little is known about the usage and effectiveness of provisional admission policies in higher education. One of the few studies examining the use of provisional admission practices was conducted by the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC). As part of its 2006 Admission Trends Survey, NACAC polled four-year colleges on the use of provisional admission policies. The findings revealed that nearly 50% of the colleges and universities used provisional admission in some fashion. The data also indicated that provisional admission was least likely to be used by selective colleges and universities – institutions that admitted fewer than 50% of applicants. For institutions that offered provisional admission, roughly 85% of provisional admission policies were institution specific, as opposed to state or system policies. Finally, the students likely to be admitted under these policies reflected a wide range of at-risk groups, mainly the economically disadvantaged and racial/ethnic minorities.

Although these findings provide some insight into provisional admission, a more comprehensive and in-depth study is needed. Little is known about the structure of these programs and admission conditions students are often required to meet for provisional enrollment. Additionally, more information is needed to determine who is benefitting from these programs and what tangible benefits provisional admission can offer.

This information could be helpful for college and university admission officers, academic support providers, and faculty thinking of developing or altering provisional admission policies on their campuses.

Overview Of The Research Design

A mixed methods approach was used to investigate provisional admission policies and programs at four-year institutions. The quantitative portion of the research project consisted of a 17-item survey that was sent to admission offices at four-year institutions around the country. The survey primarily focused on learning about: 1) the prevalence of provisional admission practices, 2) the basic structure and characteristics of provisional admission programs, and 3) the practice of evaluating the success of provisional admission programs. The qualitative method was comprised of comprehensive institutional site visits to five four-year colleges and universities with provisional admission programs. These data were collected to supplement the survey data and provide a more in-depth, comprehensive understanding of how some provisional admission policies and programs function and serve students.

Quantitative Method: Survey of Provisional Admission Practices

Survey Administration

A 17-item survey was sent to 1,263 admission offices at four-year institutions that are members of the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC). Using NACAC's member database, the survey was administered electronically during the fall of 2010 to all NACAC member four-year colleges with valid e-mail addresses on file. Most NACAC member survey contacts are directors of Admission or hold high-level positions within their admission/enrollment management office. The provisional admission survey items were administered as part of NACAC's annual Admission Trends Survey, using the Survey-

Monkey online survey software. NACAC members received the first survey notification on October 21st with an initial deadline of December 10th. Two follow-up reminders were sent on November 8th and 19th. On December 1st, a third reminder was sent that also extended the deadline through December 17th, in an effort to increase the number of responses. The final two reminders were sent on December 8th and 14th. A total of 258 institutions responded to the section of the survey related to provisional admission practices, resulting in a response rate of 20%.

Survey Sample Characteristics

As shown in Table 1, the survey sample was slightly over-representative of private colleges—with 73% of private respondents, compared to only 66% nationally. Colleges in the survey

Table 1: Sample Characteristics Compared to All U.S. Four-year Institutions

	Survey sample	All colleges	Survey sample - publics	All public colleges	Survey sample - privates	All private colleges
All Institutions	100%	100%	27.3%	33.6%	72.7%	66.4%
Enrollment						
Fewer than 3,000 students	61.7%	68.8%	13.6%	33.1%	78.4%	87.0%
3,000 to 6,999	18.3%	16.3%	18.6%	28.4%	18.1%	10.2%
7,000 or more	20.0%	14.8%	67.8%	38.6%	3.5%	2.8%
Mean enrollment	5,019	3,696	12,326	7,667	2,497	1,680
Median enrollment	2,102	1,657	9,991	5,230	1,624	1,129
Region						
New England	10.9%	8.7%	4.5%	6.4%	13.1%	9.9%
Middle States	22.1%	20.1%	14.9%	17.1%	24.6%	21.6%
South	18.2%	24.4%	25.4%	27.8%	15.7%	22.7%
Midwest	29.5%	26.4%	34.3%	22.3%	27.7%	28.4%
Southwest	3.5%	7.1%	4.5%	11.0%	3.1%	5.2%
West	15.9%	13.3%	16.4%	15.4%	15.7%	12.2%
Admission acceptance rate						
Fewer than 50% accepted	18.9%	19.8%	10.7%	16.2%	21.5%	21.6%
50% to 70%	27.5%	37.1%	33.9%	36.2%	25.4%	37.5%
71% to 85%	34.3%	28.4%	37.5%	30.2%	33.3%	27.5%
More than 85%	19.3%	14.8%	17.9%	17.5%	19.8%	13.4%
Mean acceptance rate	67.9	65.5	70.1	67.7	67.3	64.3
Median acceptance rate	71.8	67.0	72.1	69.0	71.8	67.0

NOTE: New England: Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island; Middle States: New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, District of Columbia; South: Kentucky, Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Arkansas; Midwest: Ohio, West Virginia, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas; Southwest: Arizona, Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico; West: Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Utah, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado

NOTE: Data for all colleges are for 2010–11. The list of colleges was drawn from the U.S. Department of Education's 2009–10 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). Institutions were selected using the following criteria: U.S. location, four-year, not-for-profit, baccalaureate degree-granting, and Title IV-participating. Of the 1,950 total institutions, 1,571 (81 percent) provided admission acceptance rate data for fall 2010.

Table 2: Sample Size by Selected Institutional Characteristics for the Full Survey Sample and the Group of Survey Respondents with Provisional Admission Programs

	Full survey sample	Colleges with provisional admission programs
Total	258	148
Control		
Public	67	33
Private	191	115
Enrollment		
Fewer than 3,000 students	142	84
3,000 to 6,999	42	25
7,000 or more	46	22
Percentage of Pell Grant-eligible undergraduates		
0% to 25%	83	33
26% to 40%	47	30
More than 40%	58	40
Admission acceptance rate		
Fewer than 50% accepted	44	15
51% to 70%	64	34
71% to 85%	80	52
More than 85%	45	32

NOTE: Not all categories will add to totals due to some unreported data for the selected institutional characteristics.

sample also tended to be larger, on average, than all four-year colleges, with a greater proportion of medium and large colleges represented. This discrepancy was particularly true for public colleges, and was due in large part to an over-representation of large publics. The survey sample was largely representative by geographical region, although there was slight over-representation of public colleges in the Midwest, as well as a slight under-representation of colleges in the South (particularly privates) and publics located in the Southwest. The average admission acceptance rates align fairly closely, with average rates being a few percentage points higher for the survey sample in comparison to all colleges.

Table 3: Percentage of Four-year Colleges That Have Provisional Admission Programs, by Selected Institutional Characteristics

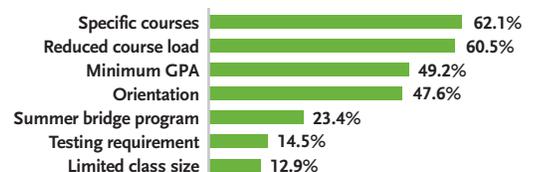
	Percent with provisional admission programs
Total	57.4
Percentage of Pell-eligible undergraduates	
0% to 25%	39.8%
26% to 40%	63.8%
More than 40%	69.0%
Admission acceptance rate	
Fewer than 50% accepted	34.1%
50% to 70%	53.1%
71% to 85%	65.0%
More than 85%	71.1%

Survey Analysis

A descriptive analysis of the survey results is provided, including frequencies for each survey question using the valid percentages, which account for missing responses. Crosstabs, correlational, and mean comparison analyses also were conducted, using significance testing with Pearson Chi-squares, Pearson Correlation Coefficients, and One-Way ANOVA F-tests to determine if any of the provisional admission program components differed by selected institutional characteristics. The institutional characteristics that were examined include control (i.e. public/private), undergraduate enrollment, percentage of undergraduates that are Pell Grant-eligible, and admission acceptance rate (defined here as the percentage of all full-time, first-year, degree-seeking applicants who are admitted to the institution). All institutional characteristics are based on data provided as part of NACAC’s 2010 Admission Trends Survey and represent fall 2010.

FIGURE 8

Percentage of Provisional Admission Programs with Selected Components to Aid Student Success



To allow for crosstabular and mean comparison analyses, categorical variables were created for enrollment size, percentage of Pell Grant-eligible undergraduates, and admission acceptance rate. Three enrollment categories were created, defining small institutions (fewer than 3,000 students), medium institutions (3,000 to 6,999 students), and large institutions (7,000 or more students). The percentage of Pell Grant-eligible undergraduates also was recoded into three categories to represent the proportion of low-income students—low (0% to 25%), medium (26% to 40%), and high (more than 40%). The admission acceptance rate was recoded into four categories—fewer than 50% accepted, 50% to 70% accepted, 71% to 85% accepted, and more than 85% accepted—to delineate institutions with different levels of admission “selectivity.” Institutions that have “lower acceptance rates” are also referred to as being “more selective,” and both phrases are used interchangeably throughout the survey results section. For research purposes, we have defined “most selective” colleges as those that accept fewer than 50% of applicants. Prior NACAC research indicates that these institutions differ from schools with higher acceptance rates in many factors related to the admission process.

Caution should be used in interpreting some survey findings due to limited sample size. The total survey sample size was only 258, and the pool of colleges with provisional admission policies was only 148. Additionally, some unreported data describing institutional characteristics of interest also contributed to low sample size for some categories (particularly for medium and large colleges and “most selective” colleges). Please see Table 2 for further details regarding the sample size for comparisons by institutional characteristics.

Survey Findings

Prevalence and Scope of Provisional Admission Programs

The definition of provisional admission provided to respondents was as follows:

A provisional admission practice allows colleges and universities to enroll students who show potential to succeed in college but may not meet standard or preferred academic qualifications. Provisionally admitted students are asked to satisfy requirements beyond what is expected of regularly admitted students. Provisionally admitted students are often asked to meet certain academic performance requirements, take specific classes or a reduced course load, and/or utilize special student services (e.g., tutoring, mentoring, orientation, summer bridge program). Please note that provisional admission practices also are referred to by other names, such as “conditional admission.”

More than half (57%) of survey respondents indicated that they have provisional admission practices based on this definition. However, given the limited sample size, this figure should be interpreted cautiously as an estimate of the prevalence of provisional admission programs at four-year colleges nationwide. The data show that institutions with higher percentages of Pell-Grant eligible students are more likely to have provisional admission policies and programs, as are those with higher acceptance rates for first-year admission (see Table 3). Of those institutions that have provisional admission practices, almost all (95%) report that their policies/programs were developed at the institutional level. Only 5% of all colleges (7% of publics) with provisional admission reported state-wide programs. Three percent of publics and no privates reported system-wide programs. Survey respondents also indicated that most programs are well-established. Sixty percent of survey respondents reported that their provisional admission programs had been in place for 10 or more years, 20% for more than five but less than 10 years, 15% for two to five years, and only 6% for fewer than two years.²

Survey respondents were also asked to report on the number of students who were provisionally admitted for both fall 2009 and fall 2010, in order to get a sense of the size of the programs. However, not all provisionally-admitted students would accept the offer to enroll under the provisional conditions. Consequently, these data will somewhat over-estimate the number of students who are actually served by the programs. As expected, survey results show that a relatively small number of students are provisionally admitted. Survey respondents reported an average of 104 provisional admits for fall 2009 (median = 49) and 107 for fall 2010 (median = 50). However, the number of provisional admits ranged as high as 690 for fall 2009 and 769 for fall 2010. As expected, there was a strong linear relationship between the enrollment size of the institution and the average number of provisional admits (i.e., larger colleges admitted more provisional students). Public colleges also reported a larger average number of provisional admits in comparison to private colleges (see Table 4).³

To provide additional information about the relative size of provisional admission programs, the number of students provisionally admitted for fall 2010 was compared to all first-time, full-time admits for the fall 2010 cycle. On average, provisionally admitted students represented only 5 percent of all admitted students for fall 2010. Our analysis revealed a positive linear relation-

² Correlations with having provisional admission policy and percentage of Pell grant-eligible undergraduates (.250), acceptance rate (.282), $p < .01$; Crosstabular analyses also produced Chi-squares significant at the .01 level

³ Correlation with mean number of provisional admits and enrollment size: fall 2009 (.430), fall 2010 (.444), $p < .01$; One-way ANOVA for control and mean number of provisional admits: fall 2009 ($F = 11.8$), fall 2010 ($F = 13.5$), $p < .01$; One-way ANOVA for enrollment categories and mean number of provisional admits: fall 2009 ($F = 16.1$), fall 2010 ($F = 16.9$), $p < .01$

Table 4: Mean Number of Students Who Were Provisionally Admitted for fall 2009 and fall 2010, by Selected Institutional Characteristics

	Mean number of provisionally-admitted students	
	fall 2009	fall 2010
Total	104	107
Control		
Public	189	200
Private	80	81
Full-time undergraduate enrollment		
Fewer than 3,000 students	61	60
3,000 to 6,999	135	146
7,000 or more	259	267

ship between the percentage of Pell Grant-eligible undergraduates and the percentage of provisional admits. Simply put, institutions that enrolled higher percentages of Pell Grant-eligible undergraduates also tended to admit a higher percentage of students on a provisional basis.⁴

Targeted Populations and Outreach

A large majority (79%) of institutions with provisional admission policies reported that they do not target any specific populations for those programs. Fewer than 10% of colleges indicated that they target each of the other populations identified on the survey (see Figure 6). Public colleges were somewhat more likely than private institutions to target student athletes (11% versus 1%). Survey results also indicated a small positive relationship between enrollment size and the likelihood of targeting based on race/ethnicity and first-generation status. Colleges with lower acceptance rates also were more likely to target each of these populations in their provisional admission programs, except for students with disabilities.⁵

Only 18% of colleges with provisional admission programs indicated that they conducted specific outreach activities to identify students for the program, and a small negative linear relationship was found between admission acceptance rate and likelihood of conducting specific outreach activities, meaning

colleges that are more selective were more likely to conduct outreach.⁶ Of those institutions that conducted specific outreach for provisional admission, secondary school visits (63%) and relationships with secondary school counselors (54%) were the most common activities, followed by access organization events, relationships with other college advisors outside of the secondary school system, and print materials. Only one institution in the sample reported promoting provisional admission programs through radio or television campaigns (4%) (see Figure 7). Because of the small number of colleges in the sample that conducted outreach activities for provisional admission, comparisons could not be made by institutional characteristics.

Program Components, Requirements, and Support Services

The survey also collected information on the program components and support services that are in place to help provisionally-admitted students succeed. The most common structural components of provisional admission programs were specific course requirements for provisionally-admitted students and a reduced course load compared to other admits (i.e., a credit hour limit). These elements were present in 62% and 61% of provisional admission programs, respectively. Nearly half of colleges offered separate orientation for provisionally-admitted students. Smaller proportions of programs had summer bridge programs and limited class sizes for provisional students (see Figure 8). Survey respondents also reported testing requirements (present at 15% of colleges) and minimum GPA requirements (held by nearly half of colleges). Although these final two components are not directly related to supporting student success, they can help colleges to target academic support, place students in appropriate courses and monitor student progress.

Analysis revealed that enrollment size was negatively associated with requiring a reduced course load, meaning smaller colleges were more likely to have this requirement. A positive linear association was also found between the percentage of Pell Grant-eligible undergraduates and three components, suggesting that colleges serving higher proportions of low-income students were more likely to provide limited class sizes to provisionally admitted students, require a reduced course load, and have a testing requirement.⁷

Among colleges with reduced course loads, the average maximum number of credits allowed was 13, and responses ranged from nine to 16. The average minimum GPA require-

4 Correlation between percentage of Pell grant-eligible undergraduates and percentage of all admits that were provisional for fall 2010 (.225), $p < .05$

5 Chi-square for control and targeting student athletes (7.0), $p < .05$; Correlation for undergraduate enrollment size and targeting racial/ethnic minorities (.213), first-generation (.199), $p < .05$; Correlation for acceptance rate and targeting specific populations: economically/socially disadvantaged (-.323), race/ethnicity (-.296), first-generation (-.341), international (-.249), limited English proficiency (-.254), $p < .01$; athlete (-.219), $p < .05$

6 Correlation for admission acceptance rate and conducting outreach for provisional admission program (-.179), $p < .05$

7 Correlation for undergraduate enrollment and reduced course load (-.304), $p < .01$; Correlation for percentage of Pell grant-eligible undergraduates and limited class size (.239), reduced course load (.247), testing requirement (.252), $p < .05$

ment needed to continue in the program was 2.1, with a range of 1.5 to 3.0. No differences were found in average maximum credits or minimum GPA based on the selected institutional characteristics studied.

Institutions also were asked to identify the support services that students are required to utilize. Academic advising appears to be a critical component of most provisional admission programs, as 88% of colleges required provisionally-admitted students to attend regular meetings with an academic advisor. More than two-thirds (67%) required tutoring, and 36% required peer mentoring. A positive linear relationship was found between the percentage of Pell Grant-eligible undergraduates and the peer mentoring requirement, meaning that colleges serving larger proportions of low-income students were more likely to include peer mentoring in their provisional admission programs.⁸

Additionally, nearly two-thirds (63%) of colleges required that provisionally admitted students maintain full-time status, though this appears to be a function of institutional control. Seventy percent of private colleges required full-time status, compared to only 33% of public colleges. Colleges that serve higher percentages of low-income students were less likely to require full-time status for provisional admits. Only 18% of colleges with provisional admission programs had financial support or assistance that was allocated specifically for this group of students, though more selective colleges (those with lower acceptance rates) were more likely to report providing this assistance.⁹

Program Evaluation and Student Success

Seventy-two percent of colleges with provisional admission programs indicated that they evaluate the success of provisionally admitted students by comparing them with regular admits. Among those that evaluate success, most colleges examine first-year GPAs and first-to-second year retention rates (84% and 82%, respectively). More than half look at cumulative GPAs and four-year graduation rates (58% and 51%, respectively), and 42% compare six-year graduation rates. Examining six-year graduation rates as a means to evaluate the success of provisionally admitted students was a function of the control of the institution. Sixty-seven percent of public institutions used this evaluation criterion, compared to only 34% of private colleges. There also was a positive linear association between the proportion of Pell Grant-eligible undergraduates and use of the six-year graduation

rate as an evaluation criterion.¹⁰ As shown earlier, both public colleges and those with higher proportions of Pell Grant-eligible undergraduates were more likely to allow provisionally admitted students to enroll part-time, which would result in extended time to obtain a baccalaureate degree.

Survey respondents reported that an average of 72% of provisionally admitted students entering in fall 2009 successfully completed the first year of college. Although survey respondents were not asked to report how many of these students returned for the second year, a comparison to national retention rates can still provide some context for these survey results. The most recent data collected through the Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) show that first-to-second year retention rates for all full-time students compare favorably. The 2008-09 IPEDS first-to-second year student retention rate was 76% for the group of institutions in our sample (n=62) that provided first-year completion data for provisionally-admitted students. Also, the IPEDS first-to-second year student retention rate was 73% for all four-year, not-for-profit, baccalaureate degree-granting institutions for the 2008-09 timeframe. Additionally, data compiled by ACT through its Institutional Data Questionnaire for 2010 found similar rates for four-year colleges—74% for public and 72% for private colleges.

FIGURE 6

Percentage of All Four-Year Colleges with Provisional Admission Programs That Target Selected Populations for Those Programs

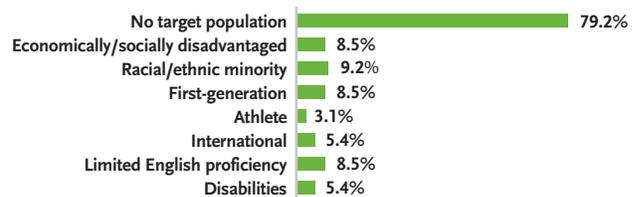
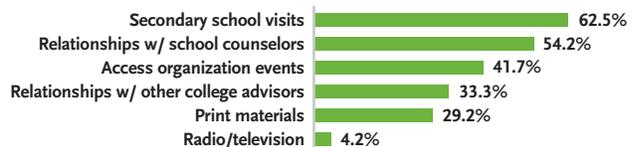


FIGURE 7

Percentage of Four-Year Colleges That Engage in Selected Outreach Activities for Provisional Admission Programs (Among Those That Do Outreach)



8 Correlation for percentage of Pell Grant-eligible undergraduates and peer mentoring (.223), $p < .05$

9 Chi-square for control and requiring full-time status (10.9), $p < .01$; Correlation for percentage of Pell grant-eligible undergraduates and require full-time status (-.263), $p < .05$; Correlation for admission acceptance rate and allocate financial assistance specifically for provisional admits (-.216), $p < .05$

10 Chi-square for control and using six-year graduation rate as evaluation criterion (7.0), $p < .01$; Correlation for percentage of Pell Grant-eligible undergraduates and using six-year graduation rate as evaluation criteria (.237), $p < .05$

Admission Trends Survey results also showed a moderate negative relationship between the percentage of Pell Grant-eligible undergraduates and the percentage of provisionally admitted students who successfully completed the first year.¹¹ However, even among colleges with more than 40% of Pell Grant-eligible undergraduates, an average of 63% of provisionally admitted students successfully completed the first year.

Summary and Discussion of Survey Findings

With only 57% of survey respondents indicating the use of provisional admission practices, these initiatives are a potentially overlooked college access and success tool for increasing the number of students enrolling at four-year institutions and completing bachelor's degrees. Although existing programs are relatively few, 72% of provisionally admitted students successfully complete the first year, despite entering college with weaker academic profiles than other admits. This figure is comparable to the first-to-second year retention data for all students reported by IPEDS and ACT.

Although most colleges (79%) do not target specific populations, provisional admission programs are more common among colleges that serve larger proportions of low-income students who are more likely to have educational backgrounds that leave them underprepared for college. Thus, it seems reasonable to assume that many provisional admission programs are, albeit sometimes unintentionally, serving as access and retention initiatives for low-income students. Furthermore, the vast majority of colleges with these programs do not conduct specific outreach activities to identify prospective students, which potentially limits students' knowledge about opportunities to attend colleges they might otherwise assume were inaccessible.

Not surprisingly, the most common components of the support services provided to provisionally admitted students focus on strengthening academic preparation, through mandatory advising and tutoring, as well as specific required courses. While these services contribute to the success rate of provisionally-admitted students, they require additional resources from institutions that may serve as a disincentive to expand the size of the programs.

Qualitative Method: Site Visits Examining Five Provisional Admission Programs

Institutional Selection Criteria

To develop a more in-depth, comprehensive understanding of how different provisional admission policies and programs function, we visited five campuses with provisional admission programs. Our primary goal was to identify a diverse set of provisional admission policies and programs that were fundamentally different in purpose and structure. Additionally, we only wanted to study provisional admission programs at institutions that had a quantifiable commitment to serving low-income students (i.e., high numbers of Pell Grant recipients). Thus, we used the criteria to identify colleges and universities from a database of institutions constructed using publicly available data from the U.S. Department of Education on Pell Grant recipients and institutional enrollment characteristics. The eligibility criteria for study participation were:

- The institution must be a four-year, bachelor degree-granting institution within the United States that receives Title IV funds.
- The institution must exceed its respective sector's percent increase between 1998-99 and 2007-08 in Pell Grant recipients. The threshold was a 26.5 percent increase for public institutions and 28.9 percent increase for private institutions.¹²

Table 5: Institutional Selectivity Criteria and Pell Grant Data

Institution	Percentage of Enrollment Receiving Pell Grants (2007-08)	Percentage Increase of Pell Grant Recipients (1998-99 to 2007-08)
CSU - Stanislaus	40%	37%
Fayetteville State University	55%	87%
Notre Dame College	34%	154%
Pine Manor College	65%	169%
Winthrop University	31%	28%
Public Institutions		27%
Private Institutions		29%
All 4-Year Institutions		27%
All Pell Grant Recipients		44%

¹¹ Correlation for percentage of Pell-eligible undergraduates and percentage of fall 2009 provisional admits completing first year (-.433), $p < .01$

¹² We wanted to examine Pell recipient growth over a decade. When the calculations were conducted, the 2007-08 data were the most recent available.

Table 6: Institutional Enrollment Characteristics

Institution	State	Sector	Total Enrollment (fall 2009)	Undergraduate Enrollment (fall 2009)	Percent of Applicants Admitted (fall 2009)	Percent of Undergraduates Receiving Pell Grants (2008-09)
CSU - Stanislaus	CA	Public	8,586	7,086	66	42
Fayetteville State	NC	Public	6,283	5,586	65	56
Notre Dame College	OH	Private	1,872	1,651	50	23
Pine Manor College	MA	Private	484	452	63	63
Winthrop University	SC	Public	6,241	5,097	71	28

Table 7: Percent Distribution of Institutional Racial / Ethnic Demography (fall 2009)

Institution	Asian	Black	Latino / Hispanic	White	Unknown	Other	Total
CSU-Stanislaus	11	3	32	38	13	3	100
Fayetteville State	1	74	4	14	6	1	100
Notre Dame College	0	18	2	58	19	3	100
Pine Manor College	4	52	17	13	8	6	100
Winthrop University	2	27	2	67	0	2	100

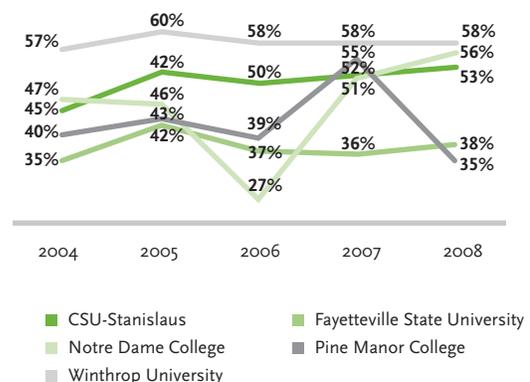
- The institution’s percentage of undergraduates receiving Pell Grants must exceed its respective sector’s representation of all Pell Grant recipients in 07-08. The threshold was 30.3% for public institutions and 13.6% for private institutions.
- The institution must have a broad academic focus. Schools were removed if they had a specific focus (e.g., bible colleges, medical, art, etc.)

The initial database consisted of 1,534 four-year institutions (1,051 private and 483 public). After eliminating institutions based on the above criteria, a final list of 214 schools was created (144 private and 70 public). Institutions on the list that were NACAC members, hosted TRIO programs, and/or indicated having a provisional admission policy or program in NACAC’s 2006 Admission Trends Survey were given highest priority. In addition, a short six-question screening survey was issued electronically to NACAC members on the targeted list to determine if they had provisional admission programs, whether the programs included student support, and whether they collected evaluation data. We also visited institutional websites and contacted admission offices to identify additional provisional admission programs and confirm the inclusion of robust student support services. Only provisional admission policies and programs that included an academic support component to support students upon enrollment were selected to participate. Additionally, we wanted to identify provisional admission programs that were different in mission and structure.

Invitations to participate in our study were extended to 13 institutions with provisional admission policies and programs. Several institutions did not respond to the invitation and others declined to participate. Eight institutions agreed to participate in the study; however we were only able to arrange visits to five schools due, in part, to scheduling logistics. The five schools visited were Pine Manor College (MA), California State University-Stanislaus (CA), Fayetteville State University (NC), Winthrop University (SC), and Notre Dame College (OH). See Table 5 for a summary of institutional selection criteria and Appendix B for institutional Pell Grant enrollment from 1998–99 to 2007–08.

FIGURE 9

Six-Year Institutional Graduation Rates



Institutional Characteristics

The five institutions in the study were quite diverse on a number of different characteristics. Two of the institutions we visited were private colleges and three were public universities. With respect to geography, institutions were represented from the West (1), North-east (1), Midwest (1), and South (2). Institutional size was also fairly diverse, with total enrollment ranging from 484 to 8,586. However, no doctorate-granting institutions were represented (i.e., schools that award more than 20 research doctorates a year). These institutional characteristics are depicted in Table 6.

The student demographic at these institutions was also quite diverse. Included among the five institutions was a women's college (Pine Manor College), a Hispanic-Serving Institution (California State University-Stanislaus), and a Historically Black College and University (Fayetteville State University). One of the predominantly White institutions was a Catholic institution (Notre Dame College), while the other (Winthrop University) had a 27% Black population. See Table 7 for the racial/ethnic demography of each institution.

As indicated earlier, each institution had a strong commitment to serving Pell Grant recipients. Three institutions' undergraduate enrollments were comprised of 40% Pell Grant recipients. Pine Manor College had the highest percentage of Pell Grant recipients at 63%. None of the institutions were terribly selective with regard to admission, but that was to be expected given each institution's commitment to admitting and serving a non-traditional demographic (see Table 6). Moreover, this commitment to expanding college opportunity is also reflected in the six-year graduation rates at these institutions (see Figure 9). More descriptive information for each institution is presented prior to the discussion of the provisional admission program at each institution.

Data Collection and Analysis

Prior to each visit, we worked with contacts at each campus to arrange the site visit. An informational questionnaire was sent in advance to the primary program administrator to gather information that would aid in preparation. At each campus we conducted site visits over the course of one to two days. The research team consisted of four individuals (three from the Pell Institute and one from NACAC), and two researchers visited each campus. The lead author attended each site visit to maintain coherence and consistency across site visits. Each visit consisted of a combination of focus groups, interviews, and observations with campus administrators, faculty, and students who had been provisionally admitted. We spoke with senior administrators, admission personnel, financial aid professionals, and program administrators to develop a better understand-

ing of the program's history, mission, goals, structure, benefits, and administrative complexities. They also provided insight into each institution's culture, present challenges, and objectives.

Overall, a total of 31 focus group discussions and interviews were conducted for this study. Twenty-one tape recorded sessions were held with faculty and administrators and 10 with students. Each session lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours. A semi-structured facilitation technique along with a question bank was used in interviews and focus groups. This allowed for flexibility and natural participant engagement while providing a semblance of structure.

Our analytic techniques used in this study were informed by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Moustakas (1994). Analysis for this project began by revisiting notes from each session taken by both researchers. This was followed by a thorough, verbatim reading of interview and focus group transcripts. During the reading of the transcripts, reflective notes about participants' comments were taken in the margins on the printed copies. Next, textual summaries of each transcript were prepared, documenting the significant details and experiences shared by participants. We then uploaded our electronic files of each transcript into the NVivo Qualitative Research Software program and coded the transcripts. Our coding method involved labeling specific words, sentences, and passages with code terms that would later be used to decipher common experiences and themes that repeatedly emerged during the site visits.

Site Visit Findings

Our purpose in visiting these schools was not to critique the individual provisional admission practices and programs that were in place at each of the five institutions. Instead, the site visits were conducted to help develop a more in-depth, comprehensive understanding of the benefits and functionality of provisional admission policies and programs. Thus, we sought to learn about the purpose, structure, and inner-workings of each provisional admission program and develop a contextual understanding of the environment in which each program operates. Below are narratives describing each of the provisional admission programs at the five colleges and universities. Before each narrative, we present a brief institutional profile that provides the reader with information that can help place the provisional admission program in its proper context. These narratives are followed by a section describing the benefits provisional admission programs offer and a discussion of the provisional admission programmatic models and institutional fit.

Program Narratives

California State University-Stanislaus

INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

California State University-Stanislaus (CSU-Stanislaus) is a four-year public university located in Turlock, CA, which is 80 miles south of Sacramento, CA. The institution is one of the 23 institutions within the California State University (CSU) system, one component of California's three-tier structure of public higher education. The 10-campus University of California (UC) system and the 109-campus California Community College (CCC) system comprise the other two tiers of public higher education in California. As spelled out in its 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education, the UC system can admit the top 12.5% of the California high school graduating class while the CSU system can serve students who fall within the top 33%. The CCC system offers open admission.

The total undergraduate enrollment at CSU-Stanislaus in 2009 was 7,086, most of whom live off campus and commute. An additional 1,500 graduate students also attend the institution. Approximately 42% of all undergraduates receive Pell Grants. Overall, beginning full-time students received an average of \$6,108 in grants and scholarships bringing the average net price to approximately \$6,782. Nearly 70% of undergraduate students attended full time in fall 2009. About 65% of all undergraduates were women, and the institution is fairly diverse with respect to race/ethnicity. In fall 2009, 38% of students were White, 32% Latino/Hispanic, 11% Asian, and 3% Black. In fall 2008, the institution accepted 66% of the 4,751 applications for admission. Thirty-one percent of students offered admission enrolled at the institution. For fall 2008, the six-year graduation rate for entering first-year students was 53%, which ranks fifth among all CSU campuses.

It is important to note that throughout our visit a deep concern about the state's ongoing budget crisis and its impact on the CSU budget surfaced repeatedly from students, staff, faculty, and senior administrators. Students expressed concern over rising tuition, and staff often discussed the impact of these cuts on outreach and retention services. They also expressed considerable concern for what was yet to come, which has become a stark reality. Jerry Brown, California's new governor, had drafted a budget that spelled out another \$500 million in cuts to the CSU system budget, totaling \$1.2 billion in cuts since 2004.

PROVISIONAL ADMISSION

The provisional admission program at CSU-Stanislaus is a three-week summer bridge component of the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), an academic support program located

on 22 CSU campuses. At CSU-Stanislaus, EOP is housed under Retention and Advising Services. The program's interim director is Lee Renner, senior director for Retention and Advising Services. The primary purpose of EOP is to provide admission, academic, and financial assistance to students from low-income and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. The program serves students who show potential to be successful at the university but may need extra support due to their economic and educational backgrounds. At CSU-Stanislaus, EOP's summer bridge component is reserved strictly for students who show extremely high academic need. Students participating in the summer bridge program are special admits to the university, and their full admission to CSU-Stanislaus is contingent upon their participation in the three-week summer bridge program. Although EOP serves several hundred students throughout the academic year, roughly 50 students participate in the summer bridge program each year.

The summer bridge program assists students with the academic and social transition from high school to college. However, another primary function of the program is to help students with the remediation process. All students accepted to CSU are required to take the Entry Level Math Exam (ELM) and the English Placement Test (EPT), which determine whether a student needs remediation and to what extent developmental coursework is required. Students who performed well in high school and on standardized admission tests (i.e., ACT and SAT) are exempt from taking ELM and EPT and are not required to take developmental coursework. Students taking ELM and EPT must reach a certain threshold on each test to be exempt from developmental coursework in English and math. Students who need remediation must complete all developmental coursework within 12 months of initial enrollment. Those who are unable to do so are administratively disqualified from the university.

Both EOP and the summer bridge program are free for students, but there is an application process. Students cannot directly apply for the summer bridge program but can apply for EOP. To apply for EOP, applicants must first apply to CSU. There is one application for all CSU institutions, and students determine to which specific campuses they would like to send their application materials. Students are also able to indicate if they intend to apply to EOP at a specific institution, which is the second step in the application process. Like the CSU application, the EOP application is not institution specific; however, students must send the application to the correct contact person at the institution of interest. The EOP application asks for basic demographic information and includes open-ended questions about extracurricular involvement, college goals, academic preparation, and challenging experiences due to socioeconomic

hardship. The application also includes two recommendation forms that must be completed. Although the application asks for family financial information, students are required to submit a FAFSA in order to be considered eligible for EOP. California residents from low-income family backgrounds are eligible to participate in the EOP program. Income limits adjust with family size, but the maximum income for a family of four is roughly \$44,300.

At CSU-Stanislaus, all EOP and summer bridge program admission decisions are made by EOP staff. To determine whether a student would benefit from EOP and summer bridge admission, staff evaluate applicants' placement test scores, high school grades, high school curriculum, and standardized test scores. Since a primary goal of the summer bridge program is to assist students in meeting remediation requirements, students' scores on the ELM and EPT are heavily considered. Additionally, since the program is designed to serve low-income and educationally disadvantaged students, these factors are also seriously considered.

Throughout the summer bridge program, participants receive instruction in both English and math. Students are enrolled in a developmental English course (ENGL 1000) taught by CSU-Stanislaus faculty. Successful completion of the course satisfies all English development coursework requirements. Credit earned also counts towards a degree. The math instruction students receive during the summer bridge program is in the form of daily workshops taught by CSU-Stanislaus faculty. This daily instruction is designed to help prepare students to retake the ELM exam at the end of the three weeks and decrease students' need for developmental coursework. This is not a formal course, so no degree credit is earned.

The daily schedule of summer bridge students is extremely busy. After breakfast, administrative duties are handled and representatives from various campus offices (e.g., student affairs, financial aid, public safety, career services, academic advising, health center, counseling, etc.) visit with students at the beginning of each weekday. Students then attend their English course for three hours. After a lunch break, students attend math instruction for two hours. After receiving English and math instruction, students are required to attend math tutoring and a computer lab session in the afternoon and a tutoring session in the evening. Additionally, students meet with academic advisors to discuss various topics, including remediation, general education, graduation, and major/minor requirements. Students do receive some free time throughout the day in addition to breaks for lunch and dinner. Weekends primarily consist of free time. Some students elect to go home but must return by Sunday night.

At the end of the summer bridge program, students are required to retake the ELM exam, but retaking the EPT is optional since passing ENGL 1000 satisfies developmental coursework in English. Many students, however, will retake the EPT to assess their own growth. During summer 2010, 77% and 33% of students decreased their need for remediation in English and math, respectively (i.e., reduced the number of remediation courses needed). After completion of the summer bridge program, students are granted full admission to the university and are eligible to begin receiving EOP academic support services during the academic year. Each student is assigned an advisor with whom they must meet each semester to select courses and register. Students must also consult advisors before adding or dropping courses. First-year students are required to meet with their advisors once a month during their first year but only once a semester in subsequent years. Additionally, EOP students are eligible to receive grants up to \$2,000 each year, but the average award is \$850 due to limited program funding. At CSU-Stanislaus, most of the financial grants are reserved for lower-division students and early applicants.

Fayetteville State University

INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

Fayetteville State University is a public, historically Black institution in Fayetteville, North Carolina. The university is a constituent campus of the University of North Carolina and the second oldest institution of higher education in the state. Like most HBCUs, Fayetteville State is committed to providing college access to students, particularly Blacks, who have been historically denied educational opportunity in higher education. Since 2008, the institution has placed an emphasis on increasing enrollment while simultaneously improving academic standards.

In fall 2009, the university enrolled 5,586 undergraduates and only 697 graduate students. On average, students received \$6,140 in grants and scholarships in 2008-09, bringing the average net price of Fayetteville State to \$6,344. About 56% of all Fayetteville State University students are Pell Grant recipients. Women comprise nearly two-thirds (65%) of all undergraduates, and over three-quarters (76%) of students enroll full time. Seventy-four percent of students are Black, 14% White, and 4% Latino/Hispanic. Of the 2,361 applicants in 2008, 65% were admitted, and 38% of accepted applicants enrolled. The 2008 six-year graduation rate for Fayetteville State University was 38%. Recognizing the need to improve graduation and retention, President James A. Anderson, who joined the university in 2008, has made improving graduation and retention the institution's top priority. The current strategic plan calls for the university to achieve a six-year graduation rate of 50% by 2014.

PROVISIONAL ADMISSION

The CHEER Scholars Program is the name of the provisional admission program at Fayetteville State University. The program coordinator is Dr. Beth Bir, Assistant Professor of English. CHEER is an acronym that stands for Creating Higher Expectations for Educational Readiness. At its core, the program is a five-week summer bridge program that includes courses in math and English, academic support services, and programs that promote personal development. During the program, students take one math and one English course while living on campus in a residence facility. In order to gain unconditional admission to the university as a first-year student, CHEER students are required to earn a C or better in each class. Each course is worth four total credits – three credit hours for traditional classroom instruction and one credit hour for attending a tutoring lab supervised by the course instructor. Thus, if students successfully complete each course with a C or better, they earn eight credits toward graduation prior to enrolling in the fall of the first year. This past year (2010), 147 students participated in CHEER, and all but three students were granted unconditional admission to the university following the program.

The program is provided to students free of cost. Students do not pay tuition for classes and no fees are associated with campus housing. Additionally, the university pays for all meals and required books for all courses. For students who complete the CHEER program and continue their studies, they have the potential of earning \$1,500. Students are awarded \$500 each year when they return, starting their sophomore year, provided they earned a 2.5 GPA and 30 credits the prior year. This incentive is offered to help promote continued academic achievement, persistence, and timely degree completion.

There is no application specifically for the CHEER program. Students are identified through the Fayetteville State University application process. The applications of students who do not meet the institution's criteria for admission consideration (i.e., 2.4 high school GPA and 800 SAT) are sent to an exemption committee for review. The exemption committee evaluates each applicant's writing (essay), high school curriculum, and grades to determine if the student can be admitted into the CHEER Scholars program. If a student's grades from the first semester of their senior year are not included, the application is held for consideration until those grades are received. When making admission decisions, the exemption committee emphasizes GPA since institutional data has revealed that the students who struggle the most are those with lower high school GPAs.

Students who are accepted are mailed an informational packet from the admission office explaining the conditions of

acceptance and the purpose of the program. Students are asked to return the letter via mail if they accept the admission offer. In addition, the program coordinator also sends students a congratulatory letter to establish initial contact with potential CHEER scholars. Students who agree to participate in the provisional admission program are asked to sign a form that specifies the conditions and expectations of CHEER participation. The form covers topics such as required academic performance to earn unconditional admission, attendance requirements, appropriate behavior, program start and end dates, required paperwork, etc. While in CHEER, students are not allowed to work or bring their car to campus. Additionally, students cannot miss program activities without a doctor's note or leave campus without permission.

Prior to attending CHEER, students are required to attend one of Fayetteville State's first-year student orientations, entitled First Steps, where students take placement tests, meet with advisors, and register for courses. This process helps determine which English and math courses CHEER students will take during the summer bridge program. During orientation, CHEER students also meet together as a group to discuss the program with college staff and receive additional information.

Throughout their five weeks on campus, CHEER students are engaged in a demanding schedule of classes, programs, and activities. Students are essentially engaged in academic coursework for 12 hours a day. Each day the students attend English class for two hours, math class for two hours, English lab for 80 minutes, and math lab for 80 minutes. In addition, the students attend a two-hour academic support session each evening from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. with peer tutors. All tutors are trained students who have not only taken the course previously but also attend each course session during the five-week summer bridge program. These evening sessions are held Sunday night through Thursday night. Students have Friday nights free, but attend Wise Choices from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Saturday. Wise Choices is a program that focuses on personal development. Topics run the gamut of academic and social issues that would typically be discussed in first-year student seminars. After Wise Choices is completed on Saturday night, students are provided with free time until Sunday at 7 p.m. when they are required to attend academic support activities.

Notre Dame College

INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

Notre Dame College is a private Catholic institution located in South Euclid, Ohio, a suburb of Cleveland. Founded in 1922 by the Sisters of Notre Dame as a liberal arts institution for women, Notre Dame became a coeducational institution in

2001. Under the leadership of President Andrew P. Roth, enrollments have dramatically increased and new academic and athletic programs have been added during the last decade. Despite the fairly recent changes, Notre Dame College remains true to its Catholic heritage and identity by providing a values-based, liberal arts education to students who may not have historically had access to such an undergraduate education. The college does offer several graduate degrees, but undergraduate education is the primary focus of the institution. Notre Dame offers bachelor's degrees in 29 academic majors.

The campus provides a residential atmosphere for students. First-year students and sophomores, who do not qualify for a housing exemption, are required to live on campus. The total enrollment in fall 2009 was 1,872, with 1,651 of those students enrolled as undergraduates. In 2008-09, beginning full-time students received \$14,511 in grants and scholarships, bringing average net price to \$18,283. Moreover, 23% of all undergraduates at the college are Pell Grant recipients. Notre Dame College's student body is predominantly White (58%), but 18% of their students identify as Black. Sixty-seven percent of students attend full time, and 57% are female. Of the 2,386 applicants in fall 2009, 50% were accepted, and 30% of accepted applicants enrolled in fall of 2009. In fall 2008, the institution had a six-year graduation rate of 51% for full-time, first-time students.

PROVISIONAL ADMISSION

The provisional admission policy at Notre Dame College allows the institution to offer applicants provisional admission if minimum requirements are not met. The admission requirements for the College are a 2.5 high school GPA, SAT of 900, and ACT of 19. Each year, between 10% and 15% of an incoming class can be accepted provisionally. Provisional admits are selected by the Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, Beth Ford, based upon the recommendations of the admissions counselors who review the student applications. Students who are offered provisional admission are limited to four courses during their first semester, excluding the one-hour first-year seminar. They are also required to spend a minimum of four hours per week in the Dwyer Learning Center (DLC), the college's free tutoring service for all students.

Jeanne Christian, director of the DLC and adjunct English professor, and her staff are responsible for initially contacting and monitoring the academic progress of provisionally admitted students once they arrive on campus. After receiving a list of all provisionally admitted students from the Admissions Office, DLC staff contact them and arrange times for them to meet with DLC staff. During these meetings, DLC staff evaluate students' learning styles, needs, and schedules for tutoring

services. Additionally, DLC staff monitor students' midterm grades, uploaded by faculty through the course management system, to ensure that students maintain a C level or above in all courses. Students who are underperforming are typically contacted via email or phone or asked to come into the DLC to speak with staff, depending on the particular circumstance.

The Dwyer Learning Center uses faculty-recommended peer tutors. Each semester faculty are asked to recommend students who have excelled in their courses and would be excellent tutors for students needing academic support. After tutors are identified, interviewed, and hired, the tutors schedule blocks of time to meet with students at the Dwyer Learning Center. A schedule is posted online indicating the tutors availability and content area, so students will know when the assistance they need will be available. Students do not need appointments and are encouraged to come in at any time that is convenient. Provisional students must sign in to receive credit for attending tutoring, and the peer tutors are also instructed to keep records of services provided. Peer tutors are available until 9:00 p.m. on most evenings.

Students who perform above a 2.0 during the first semester of their first year will earn full admission to the college. These students have no credit hour enrollment restrictions and are no longer required to attend the DLC for tutoring. They are, however, placed on an academic watch list, and their academic performance is monitored by DLC staff. Provisionally admitted students who are not able to achieve a 2.0 or above are placed on academic probation. Probation requires that students must continue receiving DLC services and not exceed 12 credit hours. Students who do not raise their cumulative GPA above a 2.0 in the second semester are dismissed from the institution.

Pine Manor College

INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

Pine Manor College is a small, primarily residential, private women's college located in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, a Boston suburb. The college was initially founded as a junior college but became a four-year institution in 1977. Traditionally the college was attended by young women who were primarily White and affluent, but the college has undergone a significant transformation since 1996 under the leadership of President Gloria Nemerowicz. The college has increased its enrollment nearly 70%, mostly in response to a reduction in tuition by nearly 35% and commitment to serving a diverse student population, both economically and racially. Today, the college prides itself on providing a small interactive classroom environment and an emphasis on inclusive leadership and social responsibility.

Although the school does offer one graduate degree, Pine Manor's primary focus is undergraduate education. The total enrollment is 484, and undergraduates comprise the vast majority of students (452). Of the 611 applicants, 63% were admitted, and 42% of accepted applicants enrolled in fall 2009. Approximately 63% of undergraduates in 2008-09 received Pell Grants. In 2008-09, beginning full-time students, on average, received \$13,094 in grants and scholarships, bringing the average net price to \$17,777. As previously mentioned, Pine Manor's student body is extremely diverse. Fifty-two percent of students are Black, 17% Latino/Hispanic, 13% White, and 4% Asian. In 2008, the college had a six-year graduation rate of 35%, down from 55% one year prior.

PROVISIONAL ADMISSION

The Enhanced Foundational Program (EFP) at Pine Manor is a one-year initiative that provides intensive English instruction to young women with limited English proficiency during their first year in college. EFP participants are enrolled in Pine Manor based upon an agreement to participate in the special program. Typical students are domestic, first-generation, non-native English speakers with the potential to succeed in college with additional assistance in writing and grammar. Pine Manor's admission counselors identify potential program participants through the general admission process. Students cannot apply directly for EFP, but students who are eligible often apply to the college because they are familiar with the program. Pine Manor's admission counselors have established relationships with counselors within Boston Public Schools and directors of college access and opportunity programs in the area who often encourage their students to apply to Pine Manor if they need English skill strengthening.

Admission counselors identify good candidates for EFP through the evaluation of an applicant's standardized test scores, high school GPA, writing sample, and letters of recommendation. Potential EFP students are also interviewed and asked to take a writing assessment examination that is similar to the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language). The assessment helps determine their need for the program and serves as a baseline score to measure participants' improvement.

During EFP participants' first year at Pine Manor, they are supplied with additional academic support, which focuses heavily on improving the foundational language skills that will enable them to succeed during subsequent years at the institution. EFP is directed by Pam Palmer, who developed the program using her 25 years of experience in ESL instruction.¹³ The program is housed

under the Academic Affairs unit and strongly supported by Dr. Nia Lane Chester, vice president for Academic Affairs and dean of the College.

The program serves a small cohort of roughly 30 students each year, who are closely advised and mentored by Palmer. During the first semester of the program, students are limited to four courses. Two of these courses must focus on strengthening English proficiency in writing and reading. The reading course, entitled Reading in the Disciplines, uses short stories and essays to help students develop their reading comprehension and critical thinking skills. The writing course, entitled Introduction to Academic Writing, focuses on improving students' grammar and technical writing skills. This course, which is taught by Palmer, also includes a writing lab. Both the reading and writing courses offer four-credits that count toward a Pine Manor degree. In addition to these two courses, students must pick one first-year seminar and an elective.

At the end of the first semester, all students take a paper-based English proficiency assessment similar to the TOEFL. Students who exceed 500 on the paper based test move out of EFP and engage the Pine Manor curriculum like a student who was not provisionally admitted. EFP students who do not exceed the targeted score continue the EFP reading and writing curriculum in their second semester. In most cases, students need the second semester to develop adequate English proficiency. In 2009-10, only two students tested out of EFP after the first semester. Students are tested again at the end of the first year, and in most cases students are able to engage the Pine Manor curriculum without further reading and writing skill enhancement. In severe cases, a student may take an intensive summer course, but this has rarely been necessary. Overall, the program has a first-to-second year retention rate of 85%.

Winthrop University

INSTITUTIONAL PROFILE

Winthrop University is a primarily residential, public institution in Rock Hill, South Carolina, which is about 20 minutes south of Charlotte, North Carolina. The institution is largely a residential campus and prides itself on providing a quality undergraduate education through top-notch teaching. Although faculty members are expected to engage in research activities, professors take their teaching responsibilities and their commitment to holistic student development at Winthrop quite seriously.

The university enrolled 5,097 undergraduates and 1,144 graduate students in fall 2009. The vast majority of students attend the institution full time (88%), and roughly 68% of all students are women. With regard to racial/ethnic representation, the

¹³ The Pine Manor Community lost a beloved teacher, friend and colleague when Pam Palmer died on December 1, 2011...At a campus gathering in her memory...students for whom English is not their first language eloquently explained how Pam's belief in their ability to master the skills of English made it possible for them to express themselves, tell their stories, and pursue their dreams...(http://www.pmc.edu/in-memoriam).

institution is predominantly White (67%), but 27% of Winthrop students are Black. Additionally, approximately 28% of undergraduate students at the institution are Pell Grant recipients. In fall 2008, the institution accepted 71% of the 4,065 applications received. Thirty-seven percent of accepted applicants enrolled at the college. Winthrop draws 18% of students from outside the state of South Carolina. On average, full-time beginning students received \$8,175 in grants and scholarships in 2008, bringing the average net price to \$14,065. The institution's 2008 six-year graduation rate was 60%.

PROVISIONAL ADMISSION

The provisional admission program at Winthrop University is entitled Learning Excellent Academic Practices (LEAP). The program is an academic support program designed to identify, support, and evaluate students before and during their first year at Winthrop University. There is a program fee of \$450 for LEAP participants to help cover the costs of the program. The program is directed by Dr. Frank Pullano, associate professor of Mathematics, and housed within University College. University College is a branch of the university that seeks to increase and enhance student achievement, responsibility, and engagement by coordinating and supporting programs in both academic and student affairs that enable faculty and staff to work collaboratively to ensure students have a strong academic foundation and commitment to lifelong learning, leadership, and service. University College is headed by Dean Gloria Jones.

During the 2010-11 academic year, 92 students participated in the LEAP program. Specifically, LEAP participants are required to satisfy five main criteria. First, students must attend one of two specified Winthrop orientation sessions. At orientation, students and their parents attend the regular orientation activities, but also meet collectively with the LEAP staff and are reintroduced to the program logistics, requirements, and expectations. Additionally, students also have an initial academic advising session with Dr. Pullano to review general education core requirements and determine schedules. Second, students must attend the Early Launch component of LEAP. For Early Launch, students move into the residence hall two days prior to all other first-year students. During those two days, the students participate in programming designed to help LEAP students prepare for the rigors of college work (e.g., time management skills, study habits and skills, etc.). Students are also brought together early so they can begin building social relationships with their peers.

Third, students must attend all classes and study sessions. Study sessions are three times a week during their fall semester and twice a week during the spring semester. Students who earn above a 3.0 during the first semester are exempt, with ap-

proval from Dr. Pullano, from attending spring study sessions. At study sessions, LEAP participants have access to tutors in various subjects (e.g., English, math, psychology, Spanish, history, biology, etc.). Tutors are typically Winthrop faculty and instructors. Graduate students and upper-division undergraduates are used less frequently depending upon need. The study sessions are two-hour nightly sessions from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Each room is designated for tutoring assistance in a particular subject, and Winthrop faculty and instructors monitor the study sessions and provide tutoring. Students attend based upon their particular needs. At any time, 15 to 20 students will be receiving instruction in eight to ten rooms. Dr. Pullano rotates from room to room offering assistance and making announcements. Absences from class or study sessions are not permitted without prior approval from Dr. Pullano.

Fourth, LEAP students must enroll in and actively participate in one of the LEAP designated sections of Principles of the Learning Academy (ACAD 101) during the fall of their first year. ACAD 101 is a first-year seminar that helps students: 1) understand their responsibilities within the classroom and at the university, 2) understand support services and learning opportunities, 3) develop a sense of community and connection to the university, 4) develop successful academic skills and attitudes, and 5) connect personal and social responsibility to their own academic efforts. The LEAP sections of ACAD 101 place an added emphasis on ensuring that students are not falling behind in their coursework. Students are required to prepare reading summaries and present class notes to ACAD faculty, who also work with LEAP students during study sessions. Twenty percent of students' ACAD 101 grades are based on their attendance and engagement in study sessions.

The fifth and final requirement is that a student must complete 24 total credits during the first year (attempting between 12 and 15 total credits each semester). This ensures that students are making satisfactory progress toward a degree. Students who do not comply with these five requirements may not receive a recommendation for full admission to the institution from the LEAP director. At the end of the first year, all students who have fully satisfied all program requirements are granted full admission to Winthrop.

LEAP students are picked by Winthrop's director of Admission. Students who may have lower than preferred or marginal standardized test scores and GPAs are considered for the program. Particular attention is paid to large, unusual discrepancies between GPAs and test scores. Additionally, the quality of a student's high school may also be considered. Students who are offered provisional admission are sent a letter indicating the

conditions of their acceptance to the university. Each year, 170 to 210 students may be offered provisional admission, but since limited spots are available, the first 90 to 100 respondents are actually admitted.

Student Benefits of Provisional Admission

During the focus groups and interviews we conducted at the five campuses, the various ways students benefit from provisional admission programs was routinely discussed. These benefits were numerous, and in some cases quite personal. However, we were able to identify five benefits that were repeatedly mentioned by focus group and interview participants during our site visits. These benefits helped promote college opportunity, academic success, and relationship building. Each is introduced and explained below.

Provisional admission programs provide postsecondary opportunity.

Our interest in provisional admission programs was, in part, hinged upon the fact that these programs provide students with increased access to four-year institutions. Through provisional admission programs, students who may have otherwise attended a community college are able to attend at a four-year college and provided with the necessary academic support and skills to remain enrolled. At each campus we visited, students repeatedly expressed appreciation for the opportunity to enroll through the provisional admission program. A former student who participated in Summer Bridge and EOP at CSU-Stanislaus said the following:

I can honestly say I owe much of my professional success to the people who opened the door to the university and that was the EOP program. I can say with all certainty that if I'd never got in here, I wouldn't be anywhere near where I am now. I'd probably be dead on a curb somewhere.

Additionally, some students told stories about how excited they were to hear of their provisional acceptance since they had been denied an opportunity to attend some of their first choice institutions. Although most students shared this excitement, others did admit that they were initially disappointed that they were not unconditionally admitted to the institution. Students stated they felt less capable initially, but that the feeling quickly passed once they looked at the bigger picture and developed a better understanding of the program's purpose. Overall, it was clear that students were pleased with the provisional admission opportunity.

One Pine Manor College student shared a story about her college choice process. Although she was solely interested in attending a four-year institution, her high school counselors and

teachers were trying to steer her toward a community college because of her limited English proficiency. Despite needed skill strengthening in English, she felt confident in her ability to do college work in other areas, and was skeptical about the community college's ability to provide her with the necessary reading and writing skills she needed. She indicated that EFP provided her with an alternative that prevented her from having to initially attend a two-year institution.

Provisional admission programs strengthen academic skills.

In our discussions with faculty, instructors, and tutors who work with provisionally admitted students, it was clear that many of the students begin the program with significant academic deficits in writing and math and weak critical thinking skills. Despite these challenges, the faculty, instructors, and tutors indicated that they witnessed considerable improvement in students' abilities throughout the course of their respective programs. In their comments, the students confirmed the faculty's perception that the academic support helped enhance their abilities. At each institution, students indicated that the academic support was quite helpful. A student at CSU-Stanislaus attributed her ability to pass the California math placement test directly to her participation in the EOP Summer Bridge program. She explained the impact of the program by saying:

I think it helped me a lot because we had our study hours and tutoring. I went and took the test again, and I passed it with a 61 (50 was needed to test out of remedial math instruction). So I think that the whole thing, the whole process and the program helped me pass the test.

Similarly, students in the EFP program overwhelmingly indicated that the program's emphasis on increasing English proficiency helped them develop the necessary reading and writing skills to be successful throughout college. A young female student from Pine Manor College said the EFP program "helped me improve my writing and my grammar, and vocabulary." Another student in the focus group also said, "Now I'm so good at writing. It makes me feel like I'm now able to teach a class. That's how I feel." This same student also added, "I feel so proud when American students come to me and ask me to help them do this paper...I've only been here [in the United States] for four years and I'm helping others. This is what the program did." Overall, the students indicated EFP was useful because it provided them with a safe place to learn without fearing ridicule or judgment when making mistakes since all the students were in a similar situation.

The students who received academic support through supplemental tutoring indicated the assistance they received was extremely helpful. One Winthrop University student said, "We

have top-of-the-line tutors who are available during study hours. We have really good tutors.” Another Winthrop student added, “They actually teach us. It’s not just helping us when we need help. It’s actually taking the time to make us understand it.” This student understood the value of tutors who help students learn by teaching them how to solve problems and understand concepts instead of simply helping students complete assignments.

Provisionally admitted students at Notre Dame similarly discussed the usefulness of tutoring. One particular student indicated, “We have tutors who work with you. If you have a weakness in a subject area, they will have a tutor for that subject that will sit down with you and work out how to best perform in the class.” He later added, “Yeah, it benefits us! It helps! You can’t even say it’s not helping because it really does....I can’t find anything to say wrong about it.” This Notre Dame student also commented on the benefits of peer tutoring versus seeking faculty assistance. The student said,

Sometimes it’s actually better to go to a student. It just depends on you as a person because sometimes it’s good to go to the teacher but then sometimes a student might show you an easier way to do it, so you might want to go to them.

Provisional admission programs develop study and time management skills.

At each campus, students in provisional admission programs discussed how these programs helped them cultivate good study and time management skills. Students attributed the development of these skills to the required tutoring, study halls, and advising that were mandated as a provision of their admission. Because the students believed the improved study and time management skills were a contributing factor to their academic success, they continued many of the practices they learned in their provisional admission programs throughout their college careers.

In our visits to the institutions that used the summer bridge programs, we found that students felt the rigid structure and intense nature of such a short program forced them to stay “on top” of their studies. Because tutoring and study time were built into the structure of the program, students felt like it was almost impossible to fall behind on coursework. One of the students in the CHEER scholars program at Fayetteville State University discussed how the structure of the program forced him to complete assignments and avoid procrastination. He said:

It helped out a lot. You got all your work done. You didn’t have to worry about an assignment being due and you not doing it. It was all done and then you had your free time so you didn’t have to worry about work.

Overall, most students agreed that the constant engagement and structure kept them focused, but some did complain about the rigid structure of the summer bridge programs. Several students voiced concerns about the provisional admission programs at several schools being too structured and an unrealistic portrayal of true college life. Criticism primarily emphasized that once students left the program, they would not have a structure in place that ensured they were doing their work. We found this criticism valid; however, many of the students we spoke with admitted continuing many of the practices and habits that were required of them while they were provisionally admitted students. Students talked vividly about how the structure of the programs, particularly at CSU-Stanislaus, Winthrop, and Fayetteville State University, taught them how to study and helped them learn how to efficiently manage their time. One Winthrop University student discussed how he would approach studying in the future by saying:

I think I’m going to actually designate a time...at least two hours, maybe three times or four times [a week] to study. LEAP basically set a foundation of how you build your study habits for the rest of your time at Winthrop.

Similar comments were made by most of the students at all the campuses we visited. It seemed quite apparent that the lessons and habits learned in the provisional admission programs had a long-term influence on students’ habits as they continued their studies at the institution.

Provisional admission programs build confidence.

The term “confidence” repeatedly surfaced in our discussions. Program faculty and staff at all campuses identified confidence as a primary challenge facing these students. One instructor said students are:

Coming in a bit apprehensive, because they are in college, not knowing what to expect, so a bit apprehensive about that, uncertain of their skills for the most part, often times thinking they are not up to the challenge.

The students we spoke with corroborated this assertion. They revealed that they were unsure about their ability to be successful in college when they first arrived on campus. Students expressed concerns about their test scores, provisional admission to the institution, and a lack of well-defined expectations as some potential stressors. Yet, we repeatedly found that students reported leaving their provisional admission programs with more confidence in their academic ability. This was particularly evident for students who attended the summer bridge programs. One student stated, “Four weeks of intense writing, essays, math, and getting into the routine of studying and how

to study...all of that really helped me feel confident that I could do it and survive at the university.” When asked what changes were observed in students, one instructor offered:

The difference between coming in and going out is, I think, confidence in themselves, recognizing that, yes, there are some things, some weaknesses that I have, I still have some challenges, but there’s some things that I do well, and I have grown, I can reflect on where I was when I came in and I recognize the growth that I have achieved while I’ve been here.

Provisional admission programs help students develop relationships with peers, staff, and faculty.

It was also evident that the provisional admission programs at each of the five schools helped students establish critical relationships with others at the institution. Students spoke about establishing relationships with faculty, staff, and peers. The students who were involved in programs that included a cohort experience (e.g., Pine Manor, Fayetteville State University) discussed feeling like a member of a community. No matter which provisional admission structure was used by the institution, students at each campus spoke about a specific person related to the provisional admission program whom they could rely upon for support and assistance.

The students who participated in the summer bridge programs relayed the importance of being able to come to campus early and meet other students. A student at CSU-Stanislaus, who lived over seven hours away, mentioned the importance of this opportunity:

I was coming from Southern California and I was nervous about coming all the way up here. I didn’t know if I’d know anyone. It was cool just being on campus before school started and meeting some people that I could bond with.

All of the students who participated in summer bridge experiences shared this sentiment, but they were also grateful that they were able to develop relationships with their advisors and meet different representatives from important campus offices prior to their first semester. Students spoke about knowing whom to contact and feeling comfortable asking specific staff members for assistance.

Other students spoke of their relationships with faculty at their institutions. One student from Winthrop shared how her experience in LEAP allowed her to overcome her stereotypes of faculty. She said, “I just thought they [faculty] were going to be the most evil people ever. I didn’t feel like they were going to be sensitive to anything that I had to say.” The student’s experi-

ence with the LEAP program helped her overcome these fears and become more comfortable interacting with faculty members. The provisional admission experience also enabled these students to develop relationships with faculty who could benefit them in the future. One CHEER student said:

The one thing about that was the professors that I had during CHEER for English and math, I got to have them again for the regular fall and spring semester, so I felt that I had that one-on-one connection with my professors like I did over the summer.

More students also shared similar experiences and stories about purposely trying to register for courses with faculty members they had developed relationships with during their provisional admission programs.

Perhaps one of the most important findings about the benefits of provisional admission initiatives is that these programs enabled students to develop at least one solid, personal relationship with an adult at the college or university. These were people who not only held students accountable and asked difficult questions, but also took a vested interest in their students’ lives. These individuals would go above and beyond the responsibilities stated in their job descriptions in order to help their students succeed. At CSU-Stanislaus, provisionally admitted students relied upon their EOP academic advisors for support. One CSU-Stanislaus student stated that his advising relationship helped him “feel safe in an environment that you might not feel quite comfortable in yet.” Another student explained the importance of her relationship with her advisor as follows:

They are there for you one on one...and you know their first name and they also know you. You e-mail them if you have a question as well and they reply back to you as soon as possible, whenever they can. But it’s good to have a person who actually cares about your academic achievement and then to be one on one with them, not in a group or seminar or something like that.

At Pine Manor, all the students mentioned Pam Palmer as being the person they could rely upon for support, advice, and mentorship. In fact, one student stated, “Pam isn’t a teacher, she is a mother.” Palmer is extremely involved in her students’ lives and develops close relationships with many of her students. At Winthrop University, this person was Frank Pullano. All the students talked about his tough love mentality and unique sense of humor. One student shared:

Dr. Pullano, just his personality was a big plus. At first, nobody really could understand why he acted the way he did,

but you need somebody to guide you and tell you what you need to do. He was that person. If you needed anything, he was there. You always knew that you had Dr. Pullano. He was going to help.

At Notre Dame College, Jeanne Christian, director of the Dwyer Learning Center (DLC), was the primary mentoring figure for most students. With only the support of a few graduate assistants, Jeanne maintained a vibrant learning center that was clearly engrained in the culture of the college. After a few hours on the campus, it was clear that the DLC was a place where students felt welcome and supported. The Notre Dame students spoke highly of Jeanne's commitment to getting students the academic support they need.

For students, establishing these relationships on campus is absolutely critical. Nearly every provisional admission student we spoke with indicated that there was someone they felt comfortable asking for help or approaching when problems surfaced. Students indicated that these relationships were vital to helping them feel supported and valued in an environment that was somewhat foreign.

Three Provisional Admission Models

Three distinct programmatic models emerged that provided academic support for provisional admission students (see Figure 10). CSU-Stanislaus and Fayetteville State University (FSU) used a *summer bridge experience model* to support provisionally admitted students while Winthrop University and Notre Dame College utilized a *supplemental tutoring model*. Pine Manor utilized a *cohort-based curricular instruction model* to support provisionally admitted students in their first year. Although each of these three models was identified as structurally unique, a significant amount of diversity was found among the programs representing each model. We found that each provisional admission initiative was specifically tailored to meet both the needs of the institution and the students being served. Moreover, the programs were administratively designed to maximize each institution's strengths and available resources, both financial and human.

The two institutions that utilized the summer bridge experience model for their provisional admission initiatives provided students with support via summer instruction before the first year of college. However, the focus of each program was quite different. FSU's CHEER program emphasized providing students with the opportunity to begin college work in a controlled environment and become acclimated with college life. Students were introduced to campus resources, exposed to peer support networks, and instructed on effective time management and study skills. In contrast, the provisional admission program at

CSU-Stanislaus focused on helping students meet remediation requirements. Although the program did partly focus on many of the services offered in CHEER, the primary emphasis was placed on remediation. CSU-Stanislaus thought their resources would be better served assisting the economically disadvantaged students disproportionately represented among the 50% of all students admitted to the institution who require remediation.¹⁴

Differences were also evident between the two provisional admission initiatives that used the supplemental tutoring model. Although Winthrop University and Notre Dame College both required students to participate in supplemental tutoring outside of the classroom, the manner in which the tutoring was delivered was strikingly different. Winthrop University's provisional admission program was perhaps the most comprehensive and structured program we examined. Whereas Winthrop's program has mandatory, scheduled study hours for six hours a week, the provisionally-admitted students at Notre Dame College were only required to spend four hours per week, based on their own schedules, receiving tutoring in the Dwyer Learning Center (DLC). Winthrop's program may seem quite demanding and regimented in comparison to Notre Dame's provisional admission program. However, Notre Dame's program makes logical sense when the institutional context is considered. The students we spoke with at Notre Dame College indicated that they appreciated the flexibility and usually spent more than the required amount of hours with tutors in the DLC. They insinuated that attending the DLC was a cultural norm at the college and that faculty really promote the DLC. Additionally, students indicated that the small class sizes and faculty-to-student ratio allowed for more one-on-one attention from faculty. Therefore, the students appreciated having peer tutors since faculty support and assistance were readily accessible. Given this contextual understanding, the provisional admission policy seems nicely tailored to student needs and the institutional norms of the college.

The provisional admission initiative at Pine Manor College is a good example of how a program is tailored to meet the goals and needs of the students and institution. Instead of using a

FIGURE 10

Provisional Admission Models

Summer Bridge Experience Model	Supplemental Tutoring Model	Cohort-Based Curricular Instruction Model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fayetteville State University • CSU-Stanislaus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notre Dame College • Winthrop University 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pine Manor College

¹⁴ More than 60% of all students admitted to the CSU system require remediation.

summer bridge experience or supplemental tutoring model, administrators at Pine Manor determined a cohort-based curricular instruction model within the traditional academic term was the best fit. Considering the English proficiency needs of the students, this model was a better alternative because it afforded a more structured, curriculum-driven approach specifically dedicated to focusing on and improving reading and writing skills. Since English proficiency was the primary source of concern, the administrators elected to focus the bulk of their efforts in this domain while allowing students to rely on Pine Manor's Learning Resource Center for assistance in other coursework. Also, Pine Manor administrators determined that this model would be more cost effective than a summer bridge experience model. By providing instruction during the traditional academic year, the college is able to circumvent the additional costs associated with housing and providing for students during a summer session. Finally, Pine Manor determined that all Enhanced Foundational Program coursework should apply towards a degree since the majority of their students come from low-income backgrounds and may be hesitant to pay for courses that do not count toward a degree.

Summary of Site Visit Findings

The site visits revealed that each of the provisional admission programs we visited yielded tangible benefits. Specifically, we found that these programs enhanced access to four-year institutions for students; promoted academic success by refining academic skills and cultivating study and time management skills; supported confidence-building among students, thus reducing anxieties about the transition to college; and fostered meaningful relationships between provisionally admitted students and supportive peers, faculty, and staff within the university. The site visits also highlighted the diversity of provisional admission programs. Although three distinct programmatic models emerged (i.e., summer bridge experience, supplemental tutoring, and cohort-based curricular instruction), the observations and discussions with faculty, staff, and students during each site visit enabled us to see how each program was tailored to fit the needs, cultural norms, and structure at each institution. Additionally, what we learned about the history and background of the programs allowed us to see how the programs had changed over time in response to changes in staff, resources, institutional policy, and student needs. Thus, we will not recommend a standard model that provisional admission programs should follow since a successful program should be customized to accommodate institutional goals, needs, and resources. Instead, our findings from both the survey and site visits have allowed us to create eight recommendations or key elements that practitioners should consider when developing or revamping provisional admission programs.

Recommendations

When selecting a model to implement, it is critical to conduct a needs assessment to determine what the program goals should seek to accomplish. As the findings from this study indicate, provisional admission programs could look quite different depending on the mission or purpose of the program. Also, provisional admission programs must be tailored to fit institutional resources. For example, the resources needed to adequately administer a summer bridge experience might not be feasible for all institutions, or it may not make sense to use a summer bridge model if the campus is primarily a commuter institution.

Given our research findings, we suggest that provisional admission policies and practices must...

Provide academic support

Although we recommend the expansion of provisional admission practices, we must stress that we only advocate the use of provisional admission in conjunction with mandatory participation in academic support services (e.g., academic advising, tutoring, counseling, specialized curriculum). Simply admitting students without providing proper support services is not providing true educational opportunity. In addition to providing support for these students, institutions must be prudent about whom they choose to provisionally admit. This is particularly important for private schools whose cost of attendance could leave unsuccessful students in financial distress. Given these concerns, admission personnel must undertake a candid assessment of which students their institutions can adequately serve given the support structures in place. Consulting individuals intimately involved in providing academic support to provisional admission students is recommended.

Clearly outline policies and requirements

Institutions must clearly outline and express to students the conditions of their enrollment. Admission personnel and staff at all of the campuses indicated that most students did not quite understand the terms of their admission to the institutions. Additionally, students indicated they were confused after reading their admission letters. Thus staff at each campus made great efforts to ensure that provisional admission policies clearly stated what was required of students, such as maintaining a certain GPA or participation in specific activities, and what ramifications were possible if requirements were not met. Campus staff often found themselves revisiting and reworking these policies from time to time to ensure clarity. Additionally, staff ensured that these policies and requirements were repeatedly articulated to students, both in person-to-person communication and in writing, from multiple sources. For example, individuals accepted to CHEER at Fayetteville State University receive detailed

program correspondence in writing from both the admission office and the program director. Additionally, information about policies and procedures are posted on the program's website and discussed with students at program orientation where students sign contracts noting that they are aware of the terms of their conditional enrollment.

Involve faculty

As most successful administrators know, a successful academic program typically has the support of faculty. Faculty must believe that a program is worthwhile and congruent with the mission and goals of the institution. At each institution we visited, faculty were intimately involved in either the administrative or instructional aspects of the provisional admission programs. In fact, the primary administrator for four of the five programs was either a tenure-track faculty member or an adjunct professor. In our discussions with staff and faculty, each attributed part of the program's success to the involvement and support of the faculty. They intimated that their programs would likely not be successful without faculty benefactors, who were willing to publicly support and invest in the program.

Establish early contact

All of the provisional admission programs that we examined had some form of personal contact with students prior to the beginning of the academic year. Several studies (Ackermann, 1991; Buck, 1985; Evans, 1999; Garcia, 1991; Walpole, Simmerman, Mack, Mills, Scales, & Albano, 2008) have identified the benefits of summer bridge programs, but these programs are typically resource intensive and only serve a few students. Some less expensive alternatives include bringing students to campus a few days early or scheduling a program orientation. This time can be spent reviewing the terms of their provisional admission, discussing campus resources, introducing students to important staff and faculty, and allowing students to meet and bond with their peers. Students indicated that these "early contact" experiences helped them feel more comfortable and eased their transition to college.

Encourage engagement

Provisional admission programs should encourage students to become engaged in the broader institutional community. This is particularly important for highly-structured programs and programmatic models that include a cohort experience. Staff and faculty indicated that the students can become insulated from the larger institution because they spend so much time with their peer cohorts. Therefore, students were often pushed to join social and academic student organizations on campus. To com-

bat this problem, Pine Manor College is piloting an experiential learning course, in conjunction with a community service organization (HERvoices), which pairs EFP (provisionally admitted students) with non-EFP students in a service learning project. The program's goal is to engage and empower EFP students by placing these students in an academic learning experience where their bilingual skills become an asset to their groups. Another concern often raised was students' sole reliance on provisional admission tutors for assistance. Thus, students were often encouraged to use campus writing and learning centers, math labs, and peer study groups. Additionally, students were advised to seek assistance and guidance from faculty members after class and during office hours. Although provisional admission tutors and faculty were always willing to help, they believed encouraging students to use other campus resources would help establish habits that would be beneficial in the future.

Monitor student performance

Provisional admission programs must have a means of monitoring student performance. It is important that students who are struggling are identified early so intervention is possible. The programs we visited were able to do this in various ways. One program required provisionally-admitted students to check in monthly with their academic advisors. A few programs used automated early-alert systems connected to electronic grade books that were continuously updated by faculty members. Other programs required students to manually obtain progress report updates from faculty and present them to their academic advisors. Additionally, some of the smaller institutions held staff meetings with faculty and instructors who taught courses with first-year students to discuss potential concerns with student performance and behavior. Ultimately, the best strategy is to use a combination of approaches to monitor student performance.

Maintain contact

Once students are no longer considered provisional admits, it is important that someone maintains contact with these students and monitors their performance. Faculty and staff warned that students may develop a false sense of self due to their early success and discontinue the use of support services. This concern seems valid even though students frequently maintained their commitment to the support services, study habits, and time management techniques that were learned (or required) in their provisional admission programs. Given this concern, it is important that these students are occasionally contacted by staff and reminded of and encouraged to use the academic support services at their institutions.

Evaluate

Track the performance, persistence, and attainment of provisionally admitted students once they leave the program. At Notre Dame College provisional admits were placed on an “academic watch” list and their performance was monitored closely by Dwyer Learning Center staff. If a student’s performance was a concern, the student was contacted and an intervention ensued. Additionally, tracking students is beneficial for program evaluation. If students are not maintaining an acceptable level of success and degree progress, program adjustments can be made after specific problem areas are identified.

Directions for Future Research

This project provides some foundational information on provisional admission, which has been largely unexplored in the college access and success research. The findings from the survey and site visits provide practitioners with key insights that can inform their thinking about provisional admission programming. However, there were several interesting topics that surfaced while conducting this research project that deserve further discussion and exploration.

Our data revealed that many provisional admission programs do not advertise or recruit for their programs. This was in part due to the excessive number of under-qualified applicants who applied to the institutions each year. Most admission personnel indicated that it was not difficult to identify students to admit provisionally. This rationale for not advertising made sense, but we wonder if the lack of advertising and recruiting prevented students who could benefit from provisional admission from applying to the institution.

Another concern was the notion of stigma. Advertising and making the program publicly known could potentially create a negative stigma around the program. Other students might perceive provisional admission programs as affirmative action initiatives that bias particular populations. In the minds of some students, this could call into question provisionally admitted students’ “right” to be on campus. This was particularly of concern because we noticed that the majority of the students we had the chance to speak with during the site visits were racial/ethnic minorities. During our visits we did probe students to gauge the presence of any negative stigma around the program, but were unable to discern if this was an issue worth noting. Some students indicated initial and lingering reservations regarding their provisional admission while others simply paid it no mind. Further exploration in this area is certainly warranted.

One more interesting finding was that colleges that serve high percentages of Pell Grant-eligible students were less likely to require provisionally admitted students to enroll full time. We suppose this is to accommodate students who need to work or have other responsibilities that prevent them from attending full time. However, we also had concerns for how these students would fare academically without a sustained, full-time focus on their studies, particularly since these students were academically underprepared according to enrollment standards. Additionally, degree completion data indicate that students who attend full time are much more likely to attain a degree. However, these data are also a function of traditional measures that only track students over six-year periods, which may not be sufficient time for part-time students to complete degrees. Because we did not examine a program that allowed provisional admission students to enroll on a part-time basis, we were unable to reach any solid conclusions.

Conclusion

If the United States is going to achieve President Obama’s ambitious 2020 goal of having the highest proportion of college graduates worldwide, it is clear that the proverbial status quo cannot be maintained. Estimates indicate that meeting the President’s goal will require increasing the college degree attainment rate from 40% to 60% and producing roughly 11 million college graduates over the course of this decade. At our current pace, given current degree completion rates and population growth predictions, the country is on pace to produce only three million college graduates, falling short of the goal by eight million college graduates. Clearly, accomplishing the President’s goal means educators must rethink current approaches and develop new ideas and practices that can enhance both college access and completion.

No matter the method, policies should be adopted that increase access to college and provide students with the necessary support services they will need to be successful. Provisional admission initiatives are desirable because they provide both access and support in one programmatic intervention. It is inadequate to simply provide access to higher education without equipping students with the tools needed to persist through degree completion. Each of the programs we examined provided provisionally admitted students with support services that would increase their likelihood of success in college. Given the findings presented in this report, we recommend that four-year institutions explore provisional admission as a means of enhancing college opportunity and bolstering student success.

The results from our research suggest that provisional admission programs can be effective access and retention initiatives. These programs expanded college access at four-year institutions and provided academic support that helped underprepared students persist at rates comparable to their peers who, on average, possessed stronger academic profiles upon enrollment. However, only 57% of the schools in our sample indicated having provisional admission programs. Therefore, we advocate the expansion of provisional admission programs at four-year colleges and universities, particularly at public institutions. We emphasize public institutions because this study's findings revealed that provisional admission programs were underrepresented at these institutions. Additionally, public institutions generally offer a more affordable education in comparison to their private counterparts. This is particularly important if provisional admission programs are serving students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who have greater concerns about borrowing money to finance their education.

Appendix A:

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Appendix B:

Institutional Pell Grant Data

Institution	Number of Pell Grant Recipients									
	07-08	06-07	05-06	04-05	03-04	02-03	01-02	00-01	99-00	98-99
Pine Manor College	288	302	228	275	260	211	183	149	111	107
Notre Dame College of Ohio	437	368	314	282	201	201	196	185	154	172
Cal State University, Stanislaus	3,166	2,845	2,885	2,831	2,815	2,713	2,660	2,480	2,300	2,315
Winthrop University	1,552	1,577	1,548	1,619	1,576	1,514	1,351	1,222	1,203	1,208
Fayetteville State University	3,607	3,442	3,174	2,943	2,842	2,578	2,250	1,890	1,903	1,932
4-Year Public Institutions	1,680,160	1,600,293	1,600,706	1,656,289	1,625,128	1,464,261	1,329,257	1,245,363	1,224,269	1,328,273
4-Year Private Institutions	755,461	726,425	729,837	758,432	751,365	664,217	619,130	575,082	567,062	585,992
All 4-Year Institutions	2,435,621	2,326,718	2,330,543	2,414,721	2,376,493	2,128,478	1,948,387	1,820,445	1,791,331	1,914,265
Total Pell Grant Recipients	5,542,893	5,164,959	5,167,979	5,308,433	5,139,638	4,778,507	4,340,879	3,899,433	3,763,710	3,855,180

