Milestones of TRIO History, Part I

Milestones of TRIO History, Part 1 is the first in a series of TRIO History Short Papers that will trace the evolution of the TRIO Programs. This fascinating history details the stories and struggles that have made TRIO one of the most unique and successful educational opportunity programs in the United States. Part 1 discusses the initial creation of the TRIO Programs in 1964 through the regionalization of TRIO Programs on a national level.

— by John Groutt
Milestones of TRIO History, Part I

JOHN GROUTT

The history of TRIO is a fascinating story of unique Federal Government experiments to address the problems of poverty by providing educational opportunities in higher education. Paralleling that story is the history of the professional educators who worked to become active participants in the design and survival of the TRIO programs. The Milestones of TRIO History, Part I, will review the initial creation of the TRIO Programs, beginning with TRIO Upward Bound in 1964, on through the regionalization of TRIO Programs nationally.

Milestones of TRIO History, Part I is the first in a continuing series of National TRIO Clearinghouse TRIO History Short Papers that will trace the development of TRIO Programs. The purpose of the History Short Papers is to provide an historical framework for the TRIO programs. These Short Papers will be available as reprints and archived in full text under Publications at the National TRIO Clearinghouse website at www.trioprograms.org/clearinghouse.

A Growing Awareness of Poverty

Until the mid 1960’s the Federal government was only minimally involved in the education of America’s youth. With the notable exceptions of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 and the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1945 (“G.I. Bill”), education was considered the domain of state and local governments. However, during this period a new rationale developed to justify Federal involvement in education. Widespread, but hidden, poverty was suddenly recognized as a severe national problem. Michael Harrington’s book, The Other America: Poverty in the United States,1 and a lengthy article by Dwight McDonald in the New Yorker entitled “Our Invisible Poor”2 alerted the public to this issue. These works helped form a national consensus that poverty was a serious problem, afflicting at least one-third of the population in a country that John Kenneth Galbraith had described a few years earlier as the “affluent society.”3 It was now no longer possible to deny the extent and devastating effects of poverty to the nation.

The War on Poverty

In 1961, President Kennedy had appointed Walter Heller, a midwestern populist economist to serve as chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors. The President charged the Council to study the problem of poverty and make recommendations for action.4 Within a few days of Kennedy’s assassination, President Lyndon Johnson summoned Heller to a meeting at which Heller described the plans being considered to combat poverty. Heller reported later that Johnson spontaneously replied, “That’s my kind of program; I’ll find the money for it one way or another.”5 A month later, in his first State of the Union speech, the President declared “an unconditional war on poverty that...we cannot afford to lose.” A few weeks later he appointed Sargent Shriver to head a Task Force on Poverty. Barely six weeks later, the Task Force had prepared legislation, in record time, to begin the attack that the Johnson administration declared would “forever eliminate poverty from the richest nation on earth.”

One of the earliest volleys in that war was The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 that established the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to coordinate and administer the poverty programs. Sargent Shriver was appointed National Director.

One of the more interesting sections of that unusual law established a Demonstration and Research office to fund experimental programs. Shriver was eager to make the agency quickly visible throughout the country. To do so he established “national emphasis”
programs. A program for high school students called “Upward Bound” was one of the first demonstration programs to be developed. Its purpose was to identify secondary school students from low-income backgrounds who were underachieving, and to motivate and prepare them to pursue postsecondary education. Seventeen pilot projects began operation in the summer of 1965 serving 2,061 students.6

Stanley Salett deserves most of the credit for designing Upward Bound.7 A scholar and activist, he brought together ideas from experimental pre-college programs being funded by several colleges, the National Science Foundation, smaller foundations and the giant Rockefeller, Ford and Carnegie Foundations.8 The Upward Bound projects were filled with innovative educational ideas and teaching. Students, instructors and administrators at both the local and national levels were excited over the imaginative materials and methods being tried. Most of the adults involved as teachers and administrators were firm believers in a crusade to eliminate poverty through education. They shared an acute sense of creating something new and exciting, and of challenging the system. One thing that stands out in discussions with persons involved in Upward Bound during its earliest years: everyone, at all levels, describes it as the most exciting period of their professional life.9

The first national Upward Bound Program was organized on two levels. A miniscule staff of two persons in the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) set policy. The actual program administration was done by a private contract agency that processed applications, monitored the programs and sent frequent site visitors to check on the programs that were situated in colleges and universities across the country. This arrangement lasted four years until Upward Bound was removed from OEO and transferred to the Office of Education (OE) at the insistence of Congressman Edith Green of Oregon.10

The beginnings of Talent Search, the second of the “TRIO” programs were quite different.11 James Moore, in OE, was responsible for administering the National Defense Student Loans to college students. Samuel Halperin, Assistant Commissioner for Legislation in OE, and also closely aligned with the Johnson White House, was given the assignment to draft educational legislation. These two men helped develop the bill that would become the Higher Education Act of 1965. As a part of that Act, a large amount of money would soon be appropriated to students in the form of new Educational Opportunity Grants (EOG). This was the first time ever that Federal scholarship monies would be distributed based on low-income status.

In the United States, a system of higher education had emerged that primarily served the children of the upper-income families. This educational elitism had been challenged over the years by several programs that progressively opened the doors of higher education to new populations. The GI Bill, passed in 1945, made it economically possible for World War II and the Korean War veterans to attend colleges and universities. The National Defense Education Act of 195812 opened the door a little wider by providing loans for higher education to financially needy students. However, with the exception of the Historically Black Colleges, collegiate education was limited almost exclusively to whites.13 The staff at the Office of Education (OE) reflected the same racial composition.

Moore and Halperin knew that very few low-income students participated in higher education. No one expected them to. Neither high school nor college personnel had experience working with diverse populations of youth in higher education. The two men saw that a large pot of money would go largely untouched due to lack of experience on the part of the students, high school counselors and colleges. Yet both knew there were large numbers of low-income potential college students who needed money if they were to enter and remain in college. They quickly inserted a few lines into the proposed bill. Section 408 of the Higher Education Act set up a new program, Contracts to Encourage the Full
Utilization of Educational Talent (CEFUET, later called Talent Search), as a marketing tool and outreach effort to help disseminate information about the existence of the new money and how to access it.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 was the most inclusive and radical piece of Federal legislation affecting Higher Education ever passed, but it only included a mere 17 lines to describe and serve as a guide for the new marketing program for the Educational Opportunity Grants (EOG). These new CEFUET programs were to be administered from Washington in OE’s Office of Student Financial Aid.

One of the early problems for Upward Bound, Talent Search and the new EOG funds was convincing many directors of these programs that this money was real and meant to help poor youngsters prepare for or pay for college. Site visitors to programs in those early years frequently found that children of faculty, administrators’ and well-to-do professional families were enrolled in the programs and receiving grants and services meant for the disadvantaged. In other schools it was not unusual for EOG monies to remain unawarded, because most colleges were simply not accustomed to enrolling and working with low-income students.14

These two pieces of the legislation, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act of 1965, constitute the first TRIO milestones. Many of the ideas and practices they encompassed were truly revolutionary. Lyndon Johnson believed that he had a short window of opportunity to enact legislation, following the assassination of a popular President, to make dramatic moves in directions that had been blocked for years by Southern conservatives sitting in chairmanships of key congressional committees. He seized this occasion to swiftly draft legislation in areas in which he saw a national need and had a strong personal interest. Things moved so rapidly on the legislative front that most of the country, including the President, Congress and persons drafting the new laws, did not fully comprehend the ramifications of much that was included in the legislation.15 When the programs were implemented, many of the results took the country by surprise. The “maximum feasible participation” of the poor, included in Title II of the Economic Opportunity Act, occasioned the greatest conflict. It empowered persons at the grass roots level to effectively oppose the entrenched local political powers, especially the mayors and their long-standing patronage systems. It caused havoc within the Democratic Party and between local and federal officials.16

The Higher Education Amendments of 1968

The second “milestone” in TRIO history is the Higher Education Amendments of 1968. This Act transferred Upward Bound from Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to the Office of Education (OE) in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare where it joined Talent Search and a newly designed and funded program called Special Services for Disadvantaged Students (SSDS). The first “TRIO” of educational programs to help the disadvantaged enter college was in place.

In the late 1960s the population of economically poor and high-risk academic students entering the colleges was growing rapidly. Further pressures came from the requirement in the 1965 Higher Education Act that schools participating in the Educational Opportunity Grants (EOG) program must seek to identify and enroll students in financial need. Yet few had programs to help support and remediate academic deficiencies.17 Clearly such programs were needed to fill the gap between inadequately prepared students and the expectations of college outcomes. Outlines for such a program were designed and written into the 1968 Amendments. The first 121 Services for Disadvantaged Students (SSDS) programs were funded to begin in 1970 and they included a new category of student to be served, in addition to the economically disadvantaged included in the other two TRIO programs. A set-aside provision required that ten percent of this new program’s funds be used for services for “physically disabled students.”
This was the first time this particular population of students had been recognized for special consideration in an education law.

The transfer of Upward Bound was not a smooth process. The Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) did not want to relinquish Upward Bound, one of its best-known, though maverick and at times controversial, success stories. The OEO and contract agency staff reacted to the transition with a passive-aggressive approach. Many in the Office of Education (OE) did not really want what they considered a program accustomed to too much freedom in OEO, and they were not entirely ready to incorporate the program into their existing management structure. Others in OE, more sympathetic to Upward Bound, opposed the transfer because they feared it would be far too restricted in its new agency. Also, key positions went unfilled in the OE for almost a year during the Presidential transition, with indecision on the part of the outgoing Johnson administration and an initial delay of the incoming Nixon administration in appointing key officials. Only a few of the persons working with Upward Bound in OEO or the contract agency transferred to the new structure in the Office of Education. Thus the first year of “TRIO” in the Office of Education operated with considerable confusion and anxiety.

Regionalization of TRIO

When Richard Nixon was elected President in 1969 it was widely believed that he intended to wipe out OEO and its programs. Surprisingly he did not do this and his enduring legacy to the TRIO programs is one that could never have been predicted.

President Nixon believed government administration would be improved by decentralization. His administration directed that TRIO programs be administered from ten regional centers, not from Washington. The Congressional appropriations for the programs were divided among the regions, based on poverty populations in their area. Ten Regional Commissioners were given full authority to fund, defund, and administer programs in their area. Applications for grants were sent annually to the ten regional offices. There they were read and evaluated by a panel of readers appointed by the regional officials. The regional personnel made the final determination for program funding and the amount, with no appeal to Washington. Regional staff was the final judge and jury.

One Project Director describes what resulted as the “balkanization of TRIO.” It encouraged widely varying subcultures to develop in the TRIO programs located in different parts of the country. Each of the ten Commissioners was allowed to define their own priorities and to fund TRIO programs accordingly. A reflection of this was what occurred when program personnel began to form professional associations. In 1972 the southwestern states of Texas, Oklahoma, Arizona, New Mexico, Louisiana and Arkansas formed a regional association, the Southwest Association of Student Assistance Programs (SWASAP) and adopted an agenda centered on the sharing of information and professional development. On the surface it was a quiet group, threatening no one. It was supported by the regional representative, Walter Mason and received the tacit blessing of officials in Washington.

The midwestern region began to evolve differently. Peter Mousolite was the regional Commissioner in Region V, based in Chicago. He frequently likened himself to his ancestors in ancient Greece who believed strongly that the citizens should wield real political power. With the autonomy allowed him in regionalization, he could influence programs. The Chicago Region funded fewer, but larger TRIO projects and located them at strong universities and colleges with comparatively generous grants.

Mousolite urged his regional representative, Clark Chipman, to encourage project directors in the six states of Region V to begin thinking how they might organize themselves and work for improving the programs. First state associations, then a regional association emerged. Some of these professionals began to consider dealing directly with their elected representatives.

In November of 1974, three persons from the Midwest traveled to Washington, DC on what they called “a fact finding mission.” Arnold Mitchem, recently elected president of the Mid-America Association of Educational Opportunity Program Personnel (MAEOPP), the Region V association, Rozell Boyd, Director of Student
Services at the University of Indiana and James Hamilton, Assistant Provost at Michigan State University made the trip to Washington. They traveled at their own expense, and this trip signaled the beginning of an ongoing dialog and relationship between TRIO professionals and Members of Congress and their staff.

Two very different visions of how the TRIO programs would interact with the Federal government were developing and beginning to conflict. Most of the higher officials in OE envisioned the administrative structure to be hierarchical, with OE placed at the pinnacle of the organizational chart. Little credence was given to the ideal of sharing power with the people who actually ran the programs. The directors working in the programs in the field, on the other hand, were beginning to question what they considered a patronizing point of view and to search for ways to restructure the relationship. They believed they too had legitimate insights that needed to be heard directly, on a level playing field, without the fear of retaliation.\(^\text{21}\)

The scene was set for a tumultuous period. The genie was already out of the bottle by the time officials in Washington got wind of what was happening in Region V and tried frantically to stop it. Orders and calls went out to discontinue their meetings and directors were forbidden to travel to Washington to talk with Members of Congress. OE officials argued that they were the designated channels to the Congress. Direct contact with Members of Congress was contrary to the Hatch Act that forbade government employees to lobby. Because Peter Mousolite believed so strongly in true democracy, he worked to buffer the threats to persons organizing in his region, including the behind the scenes work of his Regional Representative. Chipman continued his quiet work and TRIO staff continued to organize themselves in the midwestern states and region. OE program officers working in several other regions were also lending quiet support to regional associations which were forming and becoming active in states under their supervision. Often this was done under the cover of the “Regional Advisory Boards” which were encouraged by OE officials in Washington. The emphasis however from Washington was on advising, while the focus of many regional persons was turning to the political and the sharing of power.

The TRIO programs in Region V had been well funded and were very strong, many in large universities that often added institutional financial support. This was not the case in all regions. In the Southeast, centered in Atlanta, federal dollars had been spread thinly over many programs in many poor colleges. The result was numerous small programs, weak from under-funding. The regional Commissioner in the Southeast appears to have had reservations about what his counterpart was doing in Chicago. He too appears to have been influenced by his regional atmosphere, and to have administered his region like a fiefdom where all were beholden to him for funding and continuation. Some Project Directors who lead the organizing in the regions administered from Atlanta and Kansas City found their projects defunded and themselves without a job.\(^\text{22}\) There was no appeal, because the “court of appeals” would have been OE in Washington. One could hardly expect sympathy from that quarter.

Clearly, these educational programs for the poor, designed under Lyndon Johnson, could no longer expect active support from the White House of Republican Richard Nixon. When program personnel looked for support within the governmental framework, the only place that seemed possible to turn was to the Congress. Fortunately for the programs, many key members of the Democratically controlled Congress, and their staff, welcomed this new contact with persons actually working in the programs. In spite of the objections from some of the OE bureaucrats, Members of Congress began to listen attentively to TRIO personnel from the field. Individual TRIO personnel came with their ideas on how the legislation might be changed to make the programs more effective. The situation on Capitol Hill was most accommodating to what was
occurring within the states and regions of the TRIO community.

Another force for change was the thousands of veterans returning from Vietnam. There was growing concern among legislators for their plight and the many readjustment problems they were facing. Education appeared as one possible solution. The Second Supplemental Appropriations Act of 1972 included $5.8 million for a one-year “Talent Search/Upward Bound Program” to help returning Vietnam veterans enter college. Since almost none of the then current Upward Bound regulations were designed for adults, and the Veteran’s Upward Bound was to last only one year, this program was initiated without any regulations. Thus a new “temporary” TRIO program began as a specialized adjunct to Upward Bound. It still continues, after so many years, to meet the unusual college preparatory needs of veterans in imaginative ways, and adding another program to the TRIO community.

In that same year the Education Amendments of 1972 added a fourth program to the “TRIO” programs, the Educational Opportunity Centers (EOC). Jacob Javits, Republican Senator from New York, and a member of the Senate Subcommittee on Education sponsored the fourth “TRIO” program. He was familiar with programs in his home state, located in areas of concentrated low-income families, designed to recruit and help disadvantaged persons enter college. This new program appeared to many in the TRIO community to be very similar to an expanded Talent Search Program. It differed, in that the EOCs were allowed to serve all persons, of any age, interested in entering higher education who lived in an identified geographic area with a concentration of high poverty. Another major difference was that each of the EOC projects received a much greater level of funding than the Talent Search Programs to support their work with students. It provided a few additional services, but like Talent Search, its principal purpose was to provide help with college selection, financial aid, college applications, career counseling, and tutoring. Twelve EOCs began as pilot programs in 1974 with funding of three million dollars to serve 30,000 students.

This concludes Part I of Milestones of TRIO History. Milestones of TRIO History, Part II, will be published in the Spring issue of Opportunity Outlook. Part II will follow the TRIO Professional movement to a national level, and the addition of new TRIO programs.

This paper is an outgrowth of a session with the same title presented at the Annual Conference of the Council for Opportunity in Education by John Groutt and David Johnson, Chicago, September 2001.

The National TRIO Clearinghouse, an Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Opportunity affiliated with the ERIC Higher Education Clearinghouse, collects and disseminates information, program materials, resources and research focused on TRIO programs and students. Housed in the Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education, Council for Opportunity in Education, the National TRIO Clearinghouse is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education Federal TRIO Programs. For additional information, contact Andrea Reeve, Director, Educational Opportunity Clearinghouses, 1025 Vermont Avenue, NW, Suite 1020, Washington, DC 20005, Phone: 202-639-2887, email: clearing-house@hqcoe.org, website: www.trioprograms.org/clearinghouse.

Notes
4 Evidently it had been discussed in the last Cabinet meeting just prior to Kennedy’s departure for Dallas. After that meeting, notes, which had been scrawled by the President, were gathered up. On one sheet was the word “poverty”, written large and circled several times. The President’s brother Bobby had the paper framed and it hung in his office until he too died from an assassin’s bullet five years later. These ideas would provide the opening for a whole new series of Federal initiatives, part of which involved education.
5 Heller reports that he had a lengthy discussion with President Kennedy on November 19th about a poverty program. Since he had made a significant staff commitment to it he wanted the President’s guidance for further action. Walter Heller, Oral History Interview by David McComb, 20 February 1970. AC 83-9, 19-20, LBJ Library.
8 John Groutt, “The Rockefeller Programs for the Disadvantaged and Federal Educational Programs,” Research Reports from the Rockefeller Archive Center (Fall 2002) : 4 - 10.
9 This statement is based on the author’s conversations with numerous persons who were intimately involved with Upward Bound and OEO in its first four years.
12 This Act was passed in reaction to the Soviet Union’s launch of Sputnik, the first artificial satellite sent into space. This event created a panic in the U.S. which feared the Soviet’s technology for use with ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons. One response was this legislation that included federal loans to college students.
13 In 1954, when Brown versus Board of Education ended de jure segregation in the public schools it did not end a racially exclusive, whites-only system of higher education in the South or the nearly all-white systems of higher education in the north. Historically Black Colleges were producing more than 90 percent of all black baccalaureates. Testimony of Dr. Henry Ponder, at the Hearing before the Subcommittee on Select Education of the Committee on Education and the Workforce, House of Representatives, held in Oklahoma City, 23 April 2001. Bowen and Bok extract data for twenty-eight major white academically selective institutions from a study entitled “College and Beyond.” In 1951, the range of black students entering the nineteen “College and Beyond” schools, for which adequate records are available, ranged from zero at four schools, to a high of three percent at Oberlin (a school which had worked to attract black students since 1835). The overall average of entering black students for the schools was 0.8 percent. By the mid-1960s the numbers remained small, estimated by one scholar to be only one percent of the enrollment of selective New England colleges.
15 In 1963, in connection with a Princeton effort to design and offer pre-college preparatory summer programs for minorities, a dean noted, “in recent years increasing numbers of Negroes have been
coming to Princeton.” In 1964 he estimated the total number of “Negroes” at Princeton at 20 (out of a total undergraduate enrolment of 3,166) and one to three graduates per year (with 755 baccalaureates awarded in 1964).

LKD (Leland DeVinney) interview notes from a meeting with John M. Knapp, Jeremiah Finch and Parker Coddington at Princeton University, 11 November 1963, folder 683, box 80, series 200, RG 1.2, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, RAC.

The number of total graduates was provided to the author in a personal communication from a Princeton University archivist.

Neither Tribal Colleges nor predominantly Hispanic Serving Colleges were yet functioning. Thus African Americans were the only significant minority group with institutions of higher education focused to address their particular educational needs.

This information is based on interviews with David Johnson, January 10, 2001, first Chief of the Branch administering the Talent Search Program, with John Rison Jones, May 16, 2000, who worked in both the contract agency administering Upward Bound in OEO and later in the Division of Special Student Services in the OE and ED, and on the author’s personal knowledge of an Upward Bound Program which lost its funding in the late 1960s for adamantly refusing to certify the income eligibility of many of its participants.

Hearings on the Economic Opportunity Act in the House took place over twenty days with seventy-nine witnesses; seventy of them were in favor of the bill. Republicans complained, but were helpless to prevent it, due to their status as a minority in both houses. No one in either house or party appears to have understood the explosive potential contained in the concept contained in Title II, calling for “maximum feasible participation” of the poor.


Upward Bound was developed based on authorization contained in the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Title II-A, which establishes the Community Action Program (CAP). Initially Upward Bound was to function in close relationship with the local Community Action Agencies (CAA), and proposals were to be developed in coordination with, approved by, and funds charmed through the local CAA. In practice this appears to have functioned more in a token manner, unlike most other CAP programs. However, in deference to the concept of “maximum feasible participation of the poor”, all Upward Bound projects were required to have three functioning advisory boards: Public Advisory Committee, Parent Advisory Board, Academic Advisory Group. On occasion these boards at a particular project could not agree, and OEO staff from Washington had to act as moderators. The intense conflict between local government officials and some other CAP programs never occurred between the Upward Bound Projects and local politicians.

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19 Walter Mason, the regional representative in the Southwest, was quietly encouraging regional professionals to begin to think about methods to influence policy. Other regional representatives were also quietly stirring the waters of political thought, although no overt political activities were initiated in these regions.


21 This is based on conversations with numerous project directors as well as persons working in the Office of Education at the time these events were occurring.

22 This is based on interviews by the author with persons who were project directors in those regions at that time. One was a project director at one of the 1964, Title II-A, which establishes the Community Action Program (CAP). Initially Upward Bound was to function in close relationship with the local Community Action Agencies (CAA), and proposals were to be developed in coordination with, approved by, and funds charmed through the local CAA. In practice this appears to have functioned more in a token manner, unlike most other CAP programs. However, in deference to the concept of “maximum feasible participation of the poor”, all Upward Bound projects were required to have three functioning advisory boards: Public Advisory Committee, Parent Advisory Board, Academic Advisory Group. On occasion these boards at a particular project could not agree, and OEO staff from Washington had to act as moderators. The intense conflict between local government officials and some other CAP programs never occurred between the Upward Bound Projects and local politicians.

Gladieux and Wolanin characterize the omnibus Education Amendments of 1972 as a “basic charter” for higher education (223 ff.), and “the most significant higher education law since the land-grant college legislation of more than a century (earlier).” In that it signaled a basic shift in the role played by the federal government in education, they argue that it was an historical breakthrough comparable to the Social Security Act, Medicare and the civil rights laws of the 1960s (xi).

25 Ibid., 94.

John Groutt is currently working on research for a book on the history of the TRIO programs. He served as Director of the Upward Bound Program at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore for 27 years and coordinator of the La Jolla Science Project or the Harvey Mudd Upward Bound Program during the summers 1999-2001. He has written articles and made presentations based on his research which includes locating and identifying TRIO archival materials and an oral history component including taping interviews with key figures in TRIO history. He has received grants-in-aid from the Council in Opportunity in Education, the Rockefeller Foundation, the LBJ Presidential Library and an individual TRIO professional to support this research. Dr. Groutt received his Ph.D. from Temple University.