It's about Time: Temporal Dimensions of College Preparation Programs

William G. Tierney, Ronald E. Hallett, and Kristan M. Venegas

Abstract

After-school education programs for at-risk students are often implemented to increase academic performance and college readiness. This article explores the terms "out-of-school" and "after-school" related to college preparation programs and suggests that these programs should consider attendance, participation and intensity to impact a student's success in college. The article concludes with four practical steps to improve the structural design of after-school programs concerned about college preparation.

Students in the K-12 system spend about twenty percent of their time in school and eighty percent of their time engaging in other pursuits. *Critical Hours: Afterschool Programs and Educational Success (2006)* asserts that after-school and out-of-school programs have the potential to maximize part of this eighty percent of available non-school time. As terms, after-school and out-of-school have been used by educational researchers for almost a century to describe a variety of programs that serve students after the regular school day ends (Arbreton, Sheldon, and Herrera 2005; Halpern 2002). Examples of after-school or out-of-school programs include an athletic program in the evenings at the Boys and Girls Club, a homework program at a public school, or an intensive academic program during winter, spring, or summer vacation. Additionally, these programs may be designed to provide daycare for very young children while their parents are at work, social activities for grade school youth to keep them engaged in supervised after-school activities, or offer a chess club run by the community center. Generally defined, after-school or out-of-school programs offer additional social, academic, and extracurricular activities and experiences to supplement the regular school day.

College preparation programs offer activities that are designed to enable youth to prepare for a variety of college-related tasks, including test preparation, academic tutoring, admission essay writing, and assistance with college and financial aid applications. In this light, a softball league for high school girls or Bible study for Catholic teenagers might be worthwhile activities, but they do not have the explicit mission of preparing students for college. Even when one winnows down out-of-school programs and looks at college preparation programs, several conundrums persist. On one hand, timing is an issue; college preparation programs generally begin in high school. On the other hand, the internal temporal framework for these programs does not pertain to what takes place during a typical school day or year. College

discussions may not be part of a student's regular school day experiences, especially in schools with a history of low college-going. In short, college preparation programs generally occur between ninth and twelfth grade and refer to out-of-school activities.

College preparation programs have multiple tasks, goals, and objectives. Who funds them and how they are structured vary from program to program. Most importantly and for the purpose of this paper, how programs structure their temporal frameworks is equally varied. As we elaborate below, one model most likely is not the solution insofar as there are multiple steps that must be taken to prepare youth for college. Yet, it causes concern when one looks at the literature about college preparation programs and discovers no sense of best practice in general, and with regard to timing in particular (Bonous-Hammarth and Allen 2005; Hayward et al. 1997).

Accordingly, we consider a framework for thinking about college preparation programs within the broader rubric of out-of-school programs, delineate how to think about time in college preparation programs, and suggest ways to develop a framework for evaluating the adequacy of a temporal framework. Our purpose is not to put forth a tested model for the temporal effectiveness of these programs. Instead, we seek to clarify the reality that so few models for considering temporal effectiveness exist. Unfortunately, few such evaluations have been done and seem unlikely to occur in the near future. However, based on the current literature, what we are able to put forward is a sense of what kinds of temporal sequencing are more likely to have benefits than others. To do this, we offer a brief definition of after-school programs and then move onto a closer consideration of the timing of college preparation programs.

Defining After-School Programs

Fashola (1998) sorts out-of-school programs into three types of arrangements:

- Daycare: Pre-K through 3rd, recreational/cultural activities, "safe haven," requires licensing
- After-school programs: ages 5-18, academic and non-academic activities, helps student make creative use of time
- School-based academic extended-day programs: directly connect to the school day, mix of academic/recreational/cultural programs, regular school-day teachers or paraprofessionals.

Within these definitions, Fashola delineates age ranges, types of activities, and programmatic goals. For example, within the context of school-based academic extended-day programs, regular school day teachers and other paraprofessionals who are trained in some part of the college preparation process are employed to offer a combination of academic, social, and mentoring programs to college-bound students.

Miller's (2006) review of research on after-school programs has found that "youth benefit from consistent participation in well run, quality after-school programs" (p. 8). She suggests that such programs offer three main advantages to students: (a) an

increased overall engagement in learning; (b) an increase in overall educational equity; and (c) an increase in skills that are necessary for success in today's economy. Such returns may be due to increased instructional time as well as enhanced opportunities for completing difficult college admission and applications processes-such as writing a college admission essay or learning how to read a financial aid letter.

There has been inconsistency and disagreement among scholars concerning the parameters used in defining out-of-school and after-school programs. Frequently using the terms interchangeably, scholars provide little distinction between out-of-school (Chaput, Little, and Weiss 2004; Hofferth and Sandberg 2001; Lind et al. 2006) and after-school time (Fashola 1998; Halpern 1999, 2000, 2002; Hollister 2003) in their evaluation of programs. Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) added the term "youth development programs" to the discussion; however, their research analyzes programs with marked similarities to programs described as out-of-school or after-school.

A current body of research suggests that programs provide services ranging from academic support (Fashola 1998; Halpern 1999, 2000, 2002; Padgette 2003; Roth and Brooks-Gunn 2003) and enrichment (Fashola 1998; Halpern 1999, 2000, 2002) to crime prevention (Chaput, Little, and Weiss 2004; Fashola 1998; Padgette 2003) and a safe environment (Padgette 2003; Roth and Brooks-Gunn 2003). Padgette (2003) suggests out-of-school time programs provide structured activities for students between the ages of five and eighteen. Programs also provide health education (Padgette 2003), socialization (Chaput, Little, and Weiss 2004; Fashola 1998; Roth and Brooks-Gunn 2003) and unstructured time (Halpern 1999, 2000, 2002). Halpern (2000) found that most evening after-school programs have a similar structure: homework, arts/crafts/games, physical activity, expressive arts or cultural activity, tutoring and reading time, and science activity. However, there is less consistency in programs that are working with students during the weekends or school breaks.

It is easy to understand why college preparation programs fit within basic definitions of after-school programs. College Summit is an example of an after-school program that largely occurs during the summer before students enter twelfth grade to help them apply for college. AVID (Advancement via Individual Determination) is a program that takes place either before or after-school on-site to provide college knowledge for students. Many programs such as MESA (Math, Engineering, Science, and Achievement) might be considered "blended" insofar as the club's activities frequently occur at school during lunch or a free period, but the science fairs often occur on a weekend.

However, such varied definitions provide little sense of the program structure or timeframes that exist for one or another activity. Consider, for example, that if one were to ask a student in California, Nebraska, or Maine what he or she did during the day and the response was "I go to high school" that the likelihood is that the school day's structure is more similar than different across the nation. The student will begin school around 7:30 a.m. and conclude by about 2:30 p.m. The school year will start around September and finish in June. Even in overcrowded schools such as in Los

Angeles, if one were to ask a student what track he or she were on, there are only three options-A, B, and C. The track determines when all students in that track are in and out school.

No such commonalities exist with out-of-school programs or college preparation programs. If students say they participate in an after-school college preparation program, they may attend one that occurs in the summer for one month, after school, one day a week, or simply a voluntary meeting about the college application process. Such variation may be warranted, but surely, some frameworks must be more effective than others. Given the varied use of the terms, one way to focus how college preparation programs might be defined is to consider four components of any project and discuss the temporal aspects of these components: (a) program participants; (b) types of services; (c) service providers; and (d) program funders.

Program participants: A review of the literature on college preparation programs generally refers to services for low-income youth (Gándara and Bial 2001; Gullatt and Jan 2003; Weiss et al. 2006). The assumption is that poor youth attend schools that do not adequately prepare them for college. The claim's evidence is based on the relatively low rates of college-going for schools in these areas (Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio 2003). Although college preparation programs exist in high performing schools and/or in upper-income neighborhoods, such programs often buttress what takes place during the school day whereas in low-income schools, these programs are trying to make up what was not learned in school. The quality of programming for students' after-school hours is not equally distributed across socioeconomic groups.

Duffett and Johnson (2004) found that on almost every measure of program adequacy, the parents of low-income and minority students reported a greater level of dissatisfaction with after-school opportunities. Of the parents surveyed, approximately half sought programs with homework support and more than sixty percent were concerned that their children would academically regress during summer months, putting them further behind more advantaged students. The demand for after-school and summer programs in low-income neighborhoods far exceeds the availability of programs nationwide (Padgette 2003). Over seventy-five percent of low-income parents reported limited, affordable options during the summer months and inter-sessions (Duffett and Johnson 2004). As noted above, the vast majority of students who participate in college preparation programs are in high school. Although an increasing amount of literature points out the importance of beginning discussions about college in junior high school or even earlier (National Association for College Admission Counseling, 1999; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1996; U.S. Department of Education, 1999), most programs do not begin until ninth grade (Immerwahr 2003; Noeth and Wimberly 2002). Most programs focus on high school juniors and seniors.

Types of services: Although some programs have more than one goal, virtually all college preparation programs have one of six purposes (Gullatt and Jan 2003): college admission information, assistance to students and families, motivational activities, academic enrichment and support, and counseling and advising programs. The timing and implementation of the services varies widely. The Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI) attempts to increase the academic proficiency of students over a series of years. NAI offers a rare example of a sustained program that begins in junior high school. Students and their families are required to sign a family contract. The agreement reflects a commitment by both students and their families to attend Saturday workshops and study halls as well as other out-of- school events related to college preparation. The assumption of this program is that students need to be academically prepared for college and that only long-term intensive involvement will foster and maintain high learning. Program offerings are most intense in the eleventh and twelfth grades when students take college admission exams and apply for college. During those latter grade levels, test preparation and college search activities-which are least likely to occur throughout the regular school day-become a crucial out-of-school time experience.

Other programs such as SummerTIME or Aggie Texas Summer Institute focus on particular services at specific times in the college preparation process. SummerTIME serves as a writing and college knowledge boot camp for 12th grade students during the summer before they begin college. As one might suspect, a boot camp is a short-term intensive undertaking. The Aggie Texas Summer Institute highlights the selection of a career and the identification of the appropriate types of postsecondary training needed to meet those career goals. Students who participate in this program meet for one or two 2-week sessions and are limited to eleventh or twelfth grade students. SAT preparation generally occurs in the junior or senior year for low-income youth and is a short course over a series of weeks. Finally, some programs focus less on academic activities and more on a love of learning approach that tries to stimulate student excitement in areas such as science, math, and computer science. These programs may take place over a relatively long time (e.g. MESA) or may simply be a summer program such as the math and science programs at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and California Institute of Technology (CalTech).

Another set of college preparation activities is related to mentoring and counseling. Although these services may offer students more guidance related to the structural processes of applying to college, the more common focus is socio-emotional support than enables students to believe in themselves and their ability to go to college. These sorts of programs frequently last over a long tenure and begin in high school. The problem, however, is the maintenance of the specific mentor-mentee relationship. As Grossman and Rhodes (2002) note, "half of all youth mentoring relationships dissolve after only a few months, often as the volunteers [feel] overwhelmed, burned out, or unappreciated" (p. 200). Their findings suggest that a mentoring relationship must last a minimum of six months for a student to benefit and that a short tenure relationship can actually have negative emotional effects on astudent.

The final service offered by many college preparation programs is focused on the mechanics of applying to college. Individuals work with students on the college application process-how to pay for college, how to locate alternative sources of funding, and how to get started at college (e.g. selecting a dorm room, choosing courses). On occasion, these programs also offer financial resources to help defray the costs of college. Although some programs may begin earlier, the bulk of activity takes place in the twelfth grade.

Researchers and practitioners have stressed the value of college preparation programs as a means of providing early information for college and financial aid (Gandara and Bial 2001; Swail 2001; Tierney, Colyar, and Corwin 2003). College preparation programs generally have at least one of three foci: (a) academic enrichment, (b) college knowledge, and (c) cultural/social enrichment. Programs in the first category increase learning outputs, programs in the second category provide social capital to students who know very little about college, and programs in the third category enable students to have experiences that students in more affluent neighborhoods have (e.g. visits to Washington D.C., a museum, etc.). As noted, college preparation programs can offer services during class time, though many programs offer services before or after school as well as on Saturdays. Much of what happens in college preparation programs takes place outside of school time (Tierney, Colyar, and Corwin 2003),

Service providers: Although out-of-school programs frequently take place at schools, the providers are usually not school staff members. Colleges and universities serve as significant providers of college preparation programs. Some providers are stand-alone non-profit agencies such as I Have A Dream (IHAD) or the Posse Foundation, and others are attached to a community or public service agency such as GEAR UP. The temporal nature of a provider's engagement can be deceiving. A university, for example, may say that they have been involved with a set number of schools over a relatively long time period, but the nature of the engagement and the specific personnel involved may change considerably from year to year. Similarly, some programs such as Upward Bound have existed for a generation, but other providers have programs that come and go. These programs end, not because of any particular weakness, but usually due to a lack of funding or leadership. Once the individual who has been the impetus for the program has left, the program may die. College preparation programs, like out-of-school programs in general, also rely heavily on volunteer support. The nature of volunteerism is that individuals drop in and out of a program based on their own needs and demands. Although providers may stay relatively stable, those who actually implement the programs vary a great deal.

Program funders: The federal and state governments are the primary funding agents of college preparation programs. Foundation and private donations also provide significant support for individual programs. Virtually no college preparation program has the luxury of long-term support. Indeed, the vast majority of projects live on soft funding from year to year.

The lack of a stable funding base creates multiple problems and very few opportunities. In general, these programs are understaffed and under resourced. With soft funding, program directors generally must locate funding every year. Financial instability makes long-term planning virtually impossible. Staff members become anxious, believing that their positions may not be permanent or the project could dissolve. As a result, good individuals will leave once they have found a job with a more stable funding base, and others may be attracted to the goals of the program but be unwilling to commit because the funding is not permanent. A valid and reliable evaluation schema is often difficult in a project that needs to prove itself every year. The push is frequently to show the funder that the project has been incredible, even when the evaluation does not support such a claim.

Our purpose here has been to outline the varied nature of out-of-school programs and to point out how no one model exists with regard to the structure and pace of these programs. While it is unreasonable to expect that every program should function in the same way, little sense exists among those who undertake the work about whether one approach is better than another. Imagine if the medical profession proceeded in such a fashion with regard to a cure for a major disease. Individuals would be encouraged to start treatments at varying times and intensities and for different purposes. In what follows, we turn to these issues with regard to the temporal structures of college preparation programs.

Structure and Time in College Preparation Programs

The potential strengths of college preparation programs are well known. As the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) has succinctly noted:

> Youths' constructive use of their out-of-school time is a protective factor that has been associated with: (1) academic achievement (higher grades and grade point average), recovery from low academic performance, and an interest in furthering their education; (2) a stronger self image; (3) positive social development; (4) reductions in risk-taking behavior; and (5) better school behavior and fewer absences (Chaput, Little, and Weiss 2004, 1).
>
> All of these potential benefits have weak results and end up being ineffective if the program's temporal aspects are ill-conceived, poorly thought out, or developed for reasons other than those based on program outcomes. We recommend four practical areas of improvement to the structural design of after-school programs concerned about college preparation: attendance, participation, duration and intensity. Increased attention to these aspects of the programs will help them reach their goal of college attendance.

Attendance: Program benefits are not fully realized if the students do not consistently participate in program meetings, events, and other activities. Unfortunately, low attendance and attrition plague many college preparation programs, so it is difficult to identify the full impact of these modules (Chaput, Little, and Weiss 2004). Distinct problems exist for programs with differential temporal frameworks. Districts that are organized on a year-round academic calendar must plan in ways that differ from the options available to those who operate on a traditional year calendar.

There are also choices to be made in determining whether to design and support a long or short-term program. Short-term programs often have specific goals such as SAT preparation, organized college tours, or career development workshops. Although students may well gain something from such projects if they attend for a few days, these sorts of programs should have clear evaluative benchmarks and a sense of how long it will take to measure the success of those benchmarks.

If a project wishes to raise reading levels by a grade level, for example, and those who develop the pedagogy have designed the curricula with the knowledge that such a project will take five days a week for one month, then that is the temporal timeframe. If a student attends for a week or two and drops out, then the goal is not achieved and the project might be considered a failure. Of course, indirect gains will be made by youth when they attend a program, but we are working from the perspective that college preparation programs need to have clear and measurable goals that are inextricably linked to the temporal timeframe. To be sure, a small group of students might be quick learners and cover the material in a shorter timeframe than the majority of their peers. However, these students are exceptions to the norm, and programs should be built around norms that enable the highest possible success rate.

In contrast, some programs exist over a significant time period. A project, for example, may begin in the seventh grade and conclude with high school graduation. The time-related assumption in this program design is that the activities the cohort of seventh graders experience along the way will lead to a higher rate level of college preparation. Programs organized in this manner lend themselves to a traditional experimental design. A cohort of seventh graders takes a "treatment"-the college preparation program. Another group is the "control"-comparable students who are not in the program-where they carry on with their schooling as usual. The test is to determine how much the treatment impacts college going. For such a test to be valid and reliable, several conditions must be met. Foremost among them is that the treatment remains pure. Unfortunately, rigorous evaluations are rarely done of college preparation programs and, just as rarely, are such basic requirements met that ensure that the treatment group remains pure. Since many college preparation programs take place in low-college going areas, there are also ethical issues related to precluding some students from benefiting from services as the result of being part of a "control" group.

Programs that offer services over time usually require a student and family commitment beginning in the seventh grade. Attrition factors including school transfer, changes in academic performance or lack of attendance hinder all students from completing these long-term obligations. It is not unusual to find that only a minority of seventh graders who begin a program still participate in the twelfth grade. Assume, for example, that 300 students start a college preparation program when they enter the seventh grade. By the eighth grade, sixty students either have moved away from the school where the program is offered (a common occurrence among low-income families), left the program because they found it uninteresting, or have not been invited back. In this situation the program lost twenty percent of its population. Such an attrition rate might not be cause for alarm if this were a one-year program. If the program loses twenty percent each year, however, upon graduation few students will actually still be in the program. Unfortunately, such attrition rates for long-term college preparation programs are quite common.

Further, the norm for such programs is that they exist by substitution. That is, the program has stated that they will have 300 students each year. If sixty students leave by the start of the eighth grade, then they will simply add an additional sixty students from the general population so that the start of the school year begins with 300 students-240 who are carryovers from the seventh grade and sixty new students. In actuality, two cohorts exist, but they are being treated as if they were one. In ninth grade the same problem arises and is compounded. Three cohorts now exist. The end result will be that 300 students are likely to be in the program upon graduation from high school, but the temporal impact has been negated. As with the short-term program, if program designers begin a project by suggesting that the treatment needs six years to take effect, then what is actually happening if a student enters in grades eight or nine or in grades eleven or twelve? To claim that the program has had an impact is virtually impossible, if not absurd. Aside from multiple other issues that arise-such as contamination from other related programs-the project designers have created a very expensive long-term program that can claim no standard goal or success rate.

Attendance is foundational. However elegant a pedagogical design may be, or clever and insightful the teaching staff is, if students do not attend the program, then one cannot claim the program had any impact. If a program suggests that what occurred for a handful of students in one year is equivalent to six years, then obviously the program should be cut down to one year. If a program is not clear about its temporal framework, then whatever else follows is moot.

The reasons for attrition are manifold. Students frequently need to work to earn income for the family or themselves, or they simply want a bit of free time. Sometimes adults forget how busy students are. They attend school and have family and/or work obligations and a variety of additional out-of-school activities that they view as necessary. If the college preparation program is just one commitment among many, then it may fall by the wayside when other obligations come to the fore.

Programs also may be ineffectively structured to engage students over time. Additionally, when college preparation programs are voluntary, students are not obligated to attend. First generation (and most other) students know that when adults ask about their post high school plans, the correct answer is "I want to go to college." However the reality of college, the amount of commitment for preparation and its benefits are a mystery to individuals who have few college role models to look to and who do not understand the intangible benefits of what seems to be a far-off undertaking. The possible result is that attendance at college preparation programs is sporadic, may compete with other immediate interests, and may help to explain why attrition is a significant factor.

Participation: A great deal of research from the past decade has pointed out that regardless of whether students are in junior high or college, male or female, African American or Latino, they do better in classrooms where they are actively engaged (Mark, 2000; Weimer 2002). Again, the temporal aspect of such an observation for college preparation is a critical point. Simply stating that students had a "four-week" program or that they had "thirty hours" of writing instruction in a program does not guarantee that the student learned. We place this element after attendance because obviously one needs to have students attend a program. If the seminar is four weeks or the writing instruction is for thirty hours, then the first step is to have students meet the overall temporal framework. Once that foundation is set, the concept of time remains important, but becomes a bit more difficult to evaluate. Rather than assume that hours spent in a program naturally leads to learning outcomes, the challenge is to evaluate how those hours are spent. The more time students spend actively engaged in learning activities, the more likely learning will occur. Conversely, the more time that is spent where students are passive and disengaged from the material indicates that learning outcomes are likely to be less impressive.

Participation also may be looked at with regard to familial involvement in a program. Parents' involvement in their child's education leads to positive outcomes (Auerbach 2004; Lareau 2003). Thus college preparation programs where parents have the ability to participate by spending time in some aspect of the program are beneficial. If *attendance* assumes that students need to put in their time to achieve outcomes, *participation* turns that notion on its head. Participation asks how students spend time and if the activities in which they are engaged provide opportunities to learn.

Duration: As with attendance, a project's duration should be connected to learning activities. Often a program exists for a set period of time because of the availability of resources and personnel, rather than achieving learning outcomes. Programs that survive on soft funding create proposals geared toward funding the personnel who are employed, rather than a testable model that says that students need "X" number of weeks or months to learn a particular activity. As noted above, college preparation programs have diffuse goals that are largely not evaluated. If an evaluation were to be completed, one key question is if the work of the program could be done more efficiently in a shorter time frame, or conversely, if the project were extended if the

students would experience increased learning outcomes. Such questions are rarely asked and the temporal timeframe is simply developed with an eye to what can be accomplished with the funds that have been provided.

The focus of a particular program also helps define how long it should last. For example, one can predict whether a high school senior will be able to attend an institution in the University of California (UC) system. Students need to have completed a specific set of courses by the time they graduate from high school. If they have not started down that path by sophomore year, then they most likely will not meet the admissions criteria for UC. Thus a program aimed at increasing access to college for all youth in a group of high schools that starts in the twelfth grade will not have a long enough time span to affect the largest body of students. Conversely, the actual steps required for applying to college occurs primarily at the end of eleventh grade and throughout senior year. A project that starts the formal process before that time will not be using its resources wisely. Students need usable knowledge. Yet information about FAFSA forms in the ninth grade seems abstract and is forgotten by the time it is needed. The point here is that information and learning go hand in hand with the temporal framework for the particular program. If program designers ignore temporality, then the use of information and the goals for learning are likely to be ineffective.

Intensity: First generation low-income students in low performing schools face multiple obstacles en route to applying to college. Students frequently are not reading at grade level, and they lack the college knowledge to navigate the process on their own without adult support. College preparation programs in low-income neighborhoods largely exist because the schools are not preparing students adequately. Enrichment programs for the wealthy are simply that-enrichment on what has been learned in the classroom. In low performing schools, college preparation programs are not developed with an eye toward enrichment. Instead, they are designed to augment what has not been learned in school and is needed for college. Since this student population is not immersed in a college going environment, there is a particular need to access out-of-class learning activities that are intense and occur over a significant period of time. It is not necessarily a truism that the more students are involved in a project the more they are likely to learn. As we noted above, passive participants in a project will not gain as much from their time in the program as those students who are active.

The intensity of the learning experience makes a difference. For example, some directors believe that junior high school is a particularly difficult time for youth and develop a college preparation program that is intensive in the junior high years and less so throughout high school. Such a program might be compared to an inoculation, where students receive the equivalent of an academic vaccine in junior high school that is supposed to maintain their academic health to graduation. This thinking is imprudent. Poor students in low performing schools need constant, intensive support from junior high school through graduation.

Learning gains are temporary if they are not constantly supported. Students that increase their math and reading proficiency by one grade level as a result of a summer program will regress if they do not have similar learning opportunities throughout the school year. Similarly, an increase in counseling for junior high youth will have negligible effects if similar services are not provided throughout high school. Money and effort are wasted if the time is spent on an inoculation in junior high that will not have lasting effects.

Similarly, students should be exposed to different kinds of college going information at different times along the college preparation pathway. For example, junior high school students need to know that going to college is a doable goal to which they should aspire. As they move through high school, students need more specific information and preparation. For example, SAT preparation is useful in the tenth grade and much less so in the twelfth. A great deal of college preparation needs to occur throughout the high school years for low-income youth. Consider that in high performing schools and in wealthy areas, discussions and preparations about college are regular, ongoing, and supported by the school and family. By the time a student applies to college in the twelfth grade, she or he will have had a wealth of activities and interactions that do not take place in a high school in a low-income neighborhood. Insofar as a college preparation program's goal is not to change the school but instead to provide absent experiences, it should include intense and longstanding activities occurring from the seventh through twelfth grades.

What the research does not demonstrate is how to define intensity. At present, the definition of the term is a bit like Justice Stewart's comment about pornography-he knew it when he saw it. Anyone who studies college preparation programs is likely to agree that a monthly four-hour writing class offered during the school year without any significant intermediate follow-up activities between classes is unlikely to yield meaningful results. Similarly, a mentoring program where a mentor meets with a student for one hour a month will probably not yield tangible accomplishments. Such interactions may be pleasant and they may have indirect effects, but if the goal of the program is to increase college-going, then the project will not reach its goals without intensive interactions.

Spending Time: Where Do We Go From Here?

This discussion demonstrates how much is unknown about out-of-school programs from an empirical perspective. Little evidence exists that will satisfy the researcher concerned about scientific proof. There is the greatest paucity of literature with regard to the costs of such programs. As Lind and others (2006) note, "Researchers and practitioners do not have a standard methodology for estimating the full costs of out-of-school time programs" (p. 1). Temporal decisions are made almost entirely based on what a program director can do with limited funds that shift from year to year, rather than proven strategies that accomplish what a program has set out to do.

Some program directors resist evaluation, which is lamentable insofar as they have no basis on which to judge whether the project is successful. The more common norm is that evaluation seems like a luxury when a project is understaffed and under funded. The result is that when we look at the out-of-school time landscape even similar programs with similar objectives have widely varying temporal structures. Some programs assume that intense involvement with junior high youth will carry them to college, and other projects maintain a constant interaction with students from year to year. Some projects assume that seat time is the guiding factor, and others recognize that such a point is irrelevant if students are not learning anything but program administrators are unsure how to assess what is taking place. If asked how they have developed their program relative to cost, most programs will respond logically that they do what they can afford.

Although research that adheres to strict guidelines demanded of experimental design studies is largely absent, some conclusions may still be drawn. We are not suggesting that the literature provides no clues about how such programs should spend their time. In particular, we offer four suggestions that pertain to the temporal dimensions of college preparation programs. These suggestions are framed by two assumptions.

First, we concur with Robert Halpern's (2000) assertion that "low-income children, as all children, need times and places in their lives where the adult agenda is modest, if not held at bay; where the emotional temperature is low, and acceptance is generous; where learning is self-directed, experiential, and structured to be enjoyable. . .After-school programs are well-suited to meeting these needs. Yet as the societal spotlight turns to after-school programs, they are increasingly being asked to take on the very different role of academic remediation (p. 186). Halpern's point is well-founded. College preparation programs should be parsimonious rather than expansive. They should adhere to clear goals so that not every second of every day is taken up by schoolwork.

Nevertheless, our second assumption is that dramatic change in public schools is not going to come overnight. A need will exist for college preparation programs for the foreseeable future. We acknowledge that almost half of the hours in a school day are not utilized for academic purposes (Marshall 1993; Smith 1998). Such observations underscore the fact that too many low-income students graduate from high school without adequate college preparation and either do not go to college or do not complete their college degree. We also know that "there are fairly consistent results...that after-school programs promote greater parental involvement in school, greater student engagement, and greater student commitment to homework" (Kane 2004, 5). Programs for college preparation should improve how they structure the time students spend in them. The basic need for their services will continue in the foreseeable future. If these points are correct, then what guidelines might a program call upon when thinking about the temporal dimensions of their programs?

Clarify Goals: Far too many programs have generic goals that defy evaluation and do not point individuals toward a specific outcome. "Love of learning" or "to increase access" are admirable mission statements, but they do not explain how to determine if the program is successful. College preparation programs need to get students ready for college. The underlying assumption has to be that if this program did not exist, then a specific cadre of students would not only be less prepared for college, but presumably, they would not go to college. Obviously, programs work with different clienteles-students who are urban, rural, high achieving, underachieving, among others-and they have diverse curricular foci-reading, math, science, etc. However, unless a program specifies what its goals are, the temporal framework that should be built will be simply a guess.

How time is spent must be hinged to a program's goals. Goals should be specific, real, and achievable. Currently, a vicious cycle exists where funders expect programs to demonstrate significant goals. So programs state they will achieve high goals, and even though they are not proven, the programs will return the following year with claims of remarkable success. As Granger and Kane (2004) point out, "We need to be more realistic about what it takes to create discernible effects on achievement test scores" (p. 52). They go on to point out how difficult it is to raise reading scores. The expectation that a revolution in reading scores will occur is impractical when an after-school program has students for a few hours a week. We agree. Yet it is possible for college preparation programs to set realistic goals that reflect what they want to accomplish and that, in turn, will define how they structure their time.

Develop a timeframe that meets the program's goals: We have outlined above what we have defined as temporal elements. Attendance, participation, duration and intensity all revolve around the kind of goals that the program desires and the curricula and pedagogy that will be developed. If students are to attend a program that will require a great deal of time, then discussions need to occur with students and their families about how to manage time. Those individuals who develop the curricula and pedagogy should be informed intellectuals who have some background in curriculum development and what amount of time they will need to accomplish the goals that have been outlined.

The curriculum should be reviewed not only with an eye toward the goals, but also with a sense of how students are to be engaged in the program. Given what has been proven about the importance of student involvement in their own learning, one key objective of a program should be how to enable students to participate and make good use of their time. The duration and intensity of the program cannot be determined with precision, and such an attempt would be absurd. No one will be able to predict that 16.5 hours is the correct time to allot, for example, rather than 18 hours. However, a trained external observer can point out whether an approach will achieve its goals and whether a project's timing and pace will enable its set objectives to be realized.

Enable students and parents to understand the importance of attendance and participation: A three-fold challenge exists with regard to student attendance and participation. First, college-educated adults may think that college access is of critical importance, but first generation low-income students and families do not necessarily believe that spending time outside of school is of high priority. Second, programs often make attendance difficult because they have not taken into account student and family needs. Holding a seminar for students on an evening when students regularly attend a church service is undoubtedly going to create a conflict where students and families have to choose one event over another. Third, most students-especially those for whom these programs are developed-do not look at their high school classes as fun or exciting. Consequently, offering an out-of-school class does not sound like a particularly enjoyable way to spend time.

Such problems are not insurmountable, but they do require dialogue. Students and parents need to be made aware of the program's payoff and frequently that payoff must be described in monetary terms. Those seminars across the country that point out how much a student will earn over a lifetime if he or she goes to college are simple and effective messages about the importance of attending. Once that message has sunk in, then the program requirements need to be clear. The implications of missing classes or tardiness should be outlined and enforced. The vast majority of students and their families want to succeed, but what success means and what they must do to succeed is not always clear.

Curricula should be developed so that it is not in obvious conflict with other activities. If football is a major event at a high school, then scheduling classes on a Saturday may not be the best way to excite students, but a Tuesday afternoon may be fine. We know that out-of-school options are jammed and that choices always need to be made. However, far too often out-of-school offerings are developed in isolation from schools, communities and churches. A successful out-of-school program will work in consort with these groups.

Those who teach should be culturally engaged professionals who know how to make learning exciting and fun. As the Harvard Family Research Project (Chaput, Little, and Weiss 2004) has observed, "When youth are happy with their OST [out-of-school time] program, they describe it as a family. They develop a trusting relationship with the OST staff members and feel that they care about them" (p. 8). The crucial point here is to make explicit choices about who will teach and staff these programs accordingly rather than simply choose individuals based on convenience.

Develop an evaluation schema that investigates temporal dimensions: One theme running throughout this article has been the importance of evaluation. Evaluation might be thought of as a continuum where on one end no evaluation is done and on the other are studies that meet rigorous scientific criteria. Although we have previously written about evaluation (Tierney 2002), very little has changed. Our purpose here is

not to delve into why evaluations are not done, but rather to urge that some form of evaluation exists that is beyond the domain of a program director's year-end ho-hum summary to the funder.

The temporal dimensions of a program need not be steadfast. As program goals change, so too might the timeframe developed to carry out the program. The only way to gain a sense of whether one timeframe is working as opposed to another is to gauge what takes place by way of various forms of evaluation. Feedback mechanisms also are likely to occur. If a program's administrators develop ambitious goals and an evaluation points out that only with a significant increase in the program's intensity will they be able to achieve them, then the preliminary aims of the program may need to be revised. A high performing program is one in which the various components are in sync with one another and out-of-school time is spent in a manner that supports the goals that the program participants have set for themselves.

References

Arbreton, A. J. A., J. Sheldon, and C. Herrera. 2006. *Beyond safe havens: A synthesis of 20 years of research on the Boys & Girls Clubs.* Public/Private Ventures. http://www.ppv.org/ppv/publications/assets/186_publication.pdf (accessed August 15, 2006).

Auerbach, S. 2004. Engaging Latino parents in supporting college pathways: Lessons from a college access program. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 3(2): 125-145.

Bonous-Hammarth, M., and W. R. Allen. 2005. A dream deferred: The critical factor of timing in college preparation and outreach. In *Preparing for college: Nine elements of effective outreach*, eds. W. G. Tierney, Z. B. Corwin, and J. E. Colyar. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Chaput, S. S., P. Little, and H. Weiss. 2004. *Understanding and measuring attendance in out-of-school time programs.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project. http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/issuebrief7.html (accessed August 15, 2006).

Duffett, A., and J. Johnson. 2004. *All work and no play? Listening to what kids and parents really want from out-of-school time.* NY: Public Agenda. http://www.wallacefoundation.org/NR/rdonlyres/2E8E2E8F-7EE9-4E57-9534-B7D8671E1FFD/0/AllWorkandNoPlay.pdf (accessed August 15, 2006).

Fashola, O. S. 1998. *Review of extended-day and after-school programs and their effectiveness.* Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk, John Hopkins University.

Gándara, P., and D. Bial. 2001. *Paving the way to postsecondary education: K-12 intervention programs for underrepresented youth.* Washington, DC: National Postsecondary Education Cooperative Working Group on Access to Postsecondary Education. http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/index.asp (accessed June 14, 2004).

Grossman, J., and J. Rhodes. 2002. The test of time: Predictors and effects of duration in youth mentoring relationships. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 30 (2): 199-219.

Granger, R. C., and T. Kane. 2004. Improving the quality of after-school programs. *Education Week* 23 (23): 52, 76.

Gullatt, Y., and W. Jan. 2003. *How do pre-collegiate academic outreach programs impact college-going among underrepresented students?* Boston, MA: Pathways to College Network.

Halpern, R. 1999. After-school programs for low-income children: Promise and challenges. In *The future of children: When school is out*, ed. R. Behrman. Washington, DC: The David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

Halpern, R. 2000. The promise of after-school programs for low-income children. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 15 (2): 185-214.

Halpern, R. 2002. A different kind of child development institution: The history of after-school programs for low-income children. *Teachers College Record* 104:178-211.

Hayward, G. C., B. G. Brandes, M. W. Kirst, and C. Mazzeo. 1997. Higher education outreach programs: A synthesis of evaluations. Sacramento, CA: Policy Analysis for California Education. http://www.ucop.edu/sas/publish/pace/index.html.

Hofferth, S., and J. Sandberg. 2001. How American children spend their time. *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63 (2): 295-309.

Hollister, R. G. 2003. *The growth in after-school programs and their impact.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Immerwahr, J. 2003. *With diploma in hand: Hispanic high school seniors talk about their future.* San Jose, CA: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and Public Agenda.

Kane, T. J. 2004. The impact of after-school programs: Interpreting the results of four recent evaluations. A working paper of the William T. Grant Foundation. Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles.

Lareau, A. 2003. *Unequal childhoods: Class, race and family life.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Lind, C., N. Relave, S. Deich, J. Grossman, and A. Gersick. 2006. *The costs of out-of-school time programs: A review of the available evidence.* Washington, DC: The Finance Project.

Marks, H. M. 2000. Student engagement in instructional activity: Patterns in elementary, middle and high school years. *American Educational Research Journal* 37 (1): 153-184.

Marshall, K. 1993. Teachers and schools-what makes a difference: A principal's perspective. *Daedalus* 122 (1): 209-242.

Miller, B. M. 2006. Critical hours: Afterschool programs and educational success. Washington, DC: Nellie Mae Foundation. www.nelliemae.org (accessed August 10, 2006).

National Association of Secondary School Principals. 1996. *Breaking ranks: Changing an American institution.* Reston, VA.

National Association for College Admission Counseling. 1999. PACT: Parents and Counselors Together program. Alexandria, VA.

Noeth, R. J., and G. L. Wimberly. 2002. *Creating seamless educational transitions for urban African American and Hispanic students.* Iowa City, IA: ACT.

Padgette, H. C. 2003. *Finding funding: A guide to federal sources for out-of-school time and community school initiatives.* Washington, DC: The Finance Project.

Perna, L. W., and S. W. Swail. 2001. Pre-college outreach and early intervention: An approach to achieving equal educational opportunity. *Thought and Action* 17 (1): 99-110.

Roth, J. L., and J. Brooks-Gunn. 2003. Youth development programs: Risk, prevention, and policy. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 32:170-183.

Smith, B. 1998. *It's about time: Opportunities to learn in Chicago's elementary schools.* Chicago: Consortium for Chicago School Research.

Swail, S. W. 2001. *Outreach program handbook.* Washington, DC: Educational Policy Institute.

Tierney, W. G., J. E. Colyar, and Z. B. Corwin. 2003. Preparing for college: Building expectations, changing realities. Los Angeles, CA: University of Southern California, Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis.

Tierney, W. G. 2002. Reflective evaluation: Improving practice in college preparation programs. In *Increasing access to college: Extending possibilities for all students*, eds. W. G. Tierney and L. S. Hagedorn. Albany: State University Press of New York.

Venezia, A., M. W. Kirst, and A. L. Antonio. 2003. *Betraying the college dream: How disconnected K-12 and postsecondary education systems undermine student aspirations.* Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University.

Weimer, M. E. 2002. *Learner centered teaching: Five key changes to practice.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Weiss, H., P. M. D. Little, C. Wimer, S. M. Bouffard, P. Caronongan, E. Dearing, and S. Simpkins 2006. *What are kids getting into these days?: Demographic differences in youth out-of-school time participation.* Cambridge: Harvard Family Research Project.

U.S. Department of Education. 1999. *Getting ready for college early: A handbook for parents of students in the middle and junior high school years.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

———. 2006. *Getting ready for college early: A handbook for parents of students in the middle and junior high school years.* Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Author Information

William G. Tierney is University Professor and Wilbur-Kieffer Professor of Higher Education and Director of the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis at the University of Southern California.

Ronald E. Hallett is a research assistant at the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis in the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California.

Kristan M. Venegas is an Assistant Professor and Program Director of Masters Programs in the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California.

William G. Tierney
Rossier School of Education
WPH 701
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA 90089-4037
E-mail: wgtiern@usc.edu
Telephone: 213-740-7218
Fax: 213-740-3889

Ronald E. Hallett
Rossier School of Education
WPH 701
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA 90089-4037
E-mail: rehallet@usc.edu
Telephone: 213-740-7218
Fax: 213-740-3889

Kristan M. Venegas
Rossier School of Education
WPH 701
University of Southern California
Los Angeles, CA 90089-4037
E-mail: kristanv@usc.edu
Telephone: 213-740-7218
Fax: 213-740-3889