

Effects of YMCA High School Youth
Institute on Grades, Attendance and ELA
Content Standard Test Scores
(2008 – 2009)

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Introduction

The YMCA of Greater Long Beach High School Youth Institute is an innovative program that uses technology as an integral mechanism for promoting positive youth development and enhancing the academic success and career readiness of low-income, culturally-diverse high school students. Classes enter each summer with an intensive eight-week program. Upon graduation from the summer program, participants become “High School Youth Institute Alumni,” who are then able to voluntarily participate in a wide range of year-round programs throughout their high school, and sometimes, even their college years. Year-round involvement opportunities include, but are not limited to, digital art labs, homework assistance, academic advising, personal/home advising, community service, equipment check-out, field trips, dance clubs, paid technology and mentoring assignments, community leadership positions and social work support. The program has been in operation since June, 2001. This is the third year in which the effects of the program on grades has been explored.

Methods

Data Collection

In order to be included in the grade evaluation, both the student and their parent signed an informed consent allowing researchers to collect their grades, attendance and test scores from the school district. This information was collected from the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) using only school district identification numbers. Research staff from LBUSD then randomly selected a comparison sample of high school students who were matched to the Youth Institute sample based on gender, ethnicity and year in school. Approximately four comparison students were matched for each Youth Institute participant, however, the district did not provide comparison students for 9th

graders this year. The district provided academic grade point average (GPA), cumulative academic GPA, trancies and English Language Arts (ELA) content standard test scores for the 2008–2009 academic year. The district also provided Math content standard test scores, but because the Math content standard scores varied greatly depending on the type of test administered each year, these scores were not included in the analyses. The pre-test measures for these analyses were taken from the end of the 2007-08 academic year, and the post-test measures were taken at the end of the 2008-09 academic year.

Sample Description for Active HSYI Participants, Non-Active HSYI Participants and Comparison Students

Ninety-nine (74%) of the High School Youth Institute participants who finished the program in the summers of 2006, 2007 and 2008, had both parent and child informed consents, and had some useable data for the 2008-09 academic year, are included in these analyses. Seventy-five (76%) of these 99 HSYI participants were considered active (attended 10 or more activities) at the HSYI during the 2008-09 academic year. For the purposes of these analyses, YI youth were divided into the “Active,” and “Non-Active” groups. Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of the active HSYI sample ($N = 75$), the matched, comparison sample ($N = 306$), and the non-active HSYI sample ($N = 24$). There were no significant gender or ethnic differences between active HSYI participants and the comparison sample or the active HSYI and non-active HSYI participants.

Table 1
Demographics of YMCA HSYI Active Participants, HSYI Non-Active Participants and
Comparison Students for the 2008 – 2009 Academic Year

	Active HSYI Participants (N = 75)		Non-Active HSYI Participants (N = 24)		Comparison Students (N =306)	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Gender						
Female	56%	42	50%	12	58%	177
Male	44%	33	50%	12	42%	129
Ethnicity						
Latino	52%	39	50%	12	51%	155
Asian-American/Pacific Islander	25%	19	33%	4	29%	89
African-American	16%	12	17%	8	18%	55
European-American	4%	3	0%	0	0%	0
Mixed Ethnicity	3%	2	0%	0	0%	0
Unknown	0%	0	0%	0	2%	7

Analysis

Multivariate analysis of co-variance (MANCOVA) was used to compare outcome differences between High School Youth Institute and comparison students and between “Active,” and “Non-Active” youth on cumulative academic grade point average (GPA), truancies (absences without valid excuse) and ELA content standard test scores while controlling for baseline measures. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the small sample sizes of the HSYI groups, differences are reported at the .10 level.

Comparisons between Active HSYI Participants and Comparison Students on Grades, Truancies and ELA Content Standard Test Scores for the 2008-09 Academic Year

As shown in Table 2, YMCA Active High School Youth Institute participants had somewhat fewer truancies than comparison students after intervention, $F(1, 378) = 3.08$, $p < .10$.

Table 2

Comparisons of Grades, Truancy and ELA Content Standard Test Scores between Active HSYI Participants and Comparison Students for the 2008-09 Academic Year

Measure	Active HSYI Participants		Comparison Students		F-Value
	Adjusted Mean	N	Adjusted Mean	N	
Academic GPA	2.48	55	2.33	256	1.86
Cumulative Academic GPA	2.52	74	2.53	304	.03
Truancies	2.60	75	4.46	306	3.08*
Content Standards					
English Language Arts	343.26	64	336.41	220	2.49

** Significant at the .05 level

* Approaching significance at the .10 level.

Comparisons between Active and Non-Active HSYI Youth on Grades, Truancies and ELA Content Standard Test Scores for the 2008-09 Academic Year

As shown in Table 3, Active HSYI participants had significantly higher English Language Arts (ELA) test scores than Non-Active HSYI participants after intervention, $F(1, 80) = 4.58$, $p < .05$. Active HSYI participants also had somewhat higher academic GPAs than Non-Active HSYI participants, $F(1, 69) = 3.23$, $p < .10$.

Table 3
Comparisons of Grades, Truancies and ELA Content Standard Test Scores between
Active and Non-Active HSYI Participants for the 2008-09 Academic Year

Measure	Active HSYI Participants		Non-Active HSYI Participants		F-Value
	Adjusted Mean	N	Adjusted Mean	N	
Academic GPA	2.57	55	2.25	17	3.23*
Cumulative Academic GPA	2.61	74	2.63	24	.04
Truancies	2.68	75	2.46	24	.04
Content Standards					
English Language Arts	346.71	64	330.95	19	4.58**

** Significant at the .05 level

* Approaching significance at the .10 level.

Conclusions

One of the primary goals of the YMCA Youth Institute is to help promote better academic success for low-income, culturally-diverse youth. In the current study, Youth Institute participants were compared with a random, matched comparison group of high school students to determine the effects of the Youth Institute on grades, attendance and test scores. Youth Institute participants had somewhat lower truancies for the 2008 – 2009 academic year, however, there were no differences on the academic performance indicators in relation to the comparison group. Prior evaluations of the project have also found positive effects on school attendance, which is encouraging given the link between attendance, grades and high school completion (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; National Education Goals Panel, 1994; Roby, 2004; Shutt, 2000). The lack of differences between the two groups on academic performance is a departure from prior findings, since in both of the last two years, YI students demonstrated higher cumulative GPAs than the

comparison group. It appears that staff should continue to provide academic guidance and homework support to youth in order to continue meeting the academic goals of the project.

The findings here do suggest that continued involvement in the YI after the intensive summer program may indeed help YI youth to do better academically since “Active” participants evidenced significantly higher test scores and somewhat higher Academic GPA than “Non-Active” YI youth at the end of the school year. This suggests that ongoing efforts to encourage youth to stay involved in the program throughout the school year should prove beneficial. Overall, these findings, combined with those of past years do provide some evidence to suggest that YI participation promotes better school attendance, and, quite possibly academic achievement.

References

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