

Effects of the YMCA High School Youth
Institute on Grades and Attendance
(2013 – 2014)

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Introduction

The YMCA of Greater Long Beach High School Youth Institute is a comprehensive out-of-school 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. The goals of the Youth Institute are to: (a) improve the technology, career, leadership and decision-making skills of these youth to promote readiness for higher education or career entry after graduation, (b) improve academic achievement and stimulate interest in higher education among low-income, culturally-diverse, urban high school youth, and (c) promote bonding to pro-social adults and community attachment among urban youth to ensure that they remain engaged in their schools and communities. Classes enter each summer with an intensive eight-week program. Upon graduation from the summer program, participants become “Youth Institute Alumni,” who are then able to voluntarily participate in a wide range of year-round programs throughout their high school years. Year-round involvement opportunities include, but are not limited to, digital art labs, homework assistance, academic advising, personal/home advising, community service, field trips, college readiness, paid technology and mentoring assignments, community leadership positions and social work support. The program has been in operation since June, 2001. This is the eighth year in which the program effects on grades, attendance, and test scores have been explored.

Methods

Data Collection

To be included in the grade evaluation, both youth and their parents signed an informed consent allowing researchers to collect their grades, attendance and test scores

from the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD). This information was collected 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 (YI) sample based on gender, ethnicity and year in school. Approximately four comparison students were matched for each YI participant. The district provided academic grade point average (GPA), total GPA, cumulative academic GPA, cumulative total GPA, absences and truancies for 2013-2014 academic year. The pre-test measures for these analyses were taken from the end of the 2012-13 academic year, or beginning of 2013-2014 academic year for 9th graders, and the post-test measures were taken at the end of the 2013-14 academic year.

Sample Description

One-hundred, forty-eight (78%) of the YI participants who finished the program between summers 2010 - 2013 had both consents, and some useable data for the 2013-14 academic year. One-hundred, thirteen (76%) were considered active (attended at least one YI activity during the 2013-14 academic year). Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of the YI sample ($N = 113$), and their matched, comparison sample ($N = 503$). There were no significant demographic differences among the two groups.

Table 1
Sample Demographics for the 2013 – 2014 Academic Year

	YI Participants (N = 113)		Comparison Students (N = 503)	
	%	N	%	N
Gender				
Female	50%	57	50%	253
Male	50%	56	50%	250
Ethnicity				
Latino	64.5%	73	65%	327
Asian-American/Pacific Islander	16%	18	16%	82
African-American	14%	16	15%	73
European-American	4.5%	5	4%	21
Multicultural	1%	1	0%	0
Grade				
9 th Grade	18%	21	17%	86
10 th Grade	31%	35	32%	163
11 th Grade	33%	37	33%	164
12 th Grade	18%	20	18%	90

****Significant at the .05 level**

Analysis

Multivariate analysis of co-variance (MANCOVA) was used to compare outcome differences between YI and comparison students on all of the academic measures while controlling for baseline measures.

Academic Comparisons between Active Youth Institute Participants and Comparison Students for 2013-14

As shown in Table 2, YI participants had significantly fewer truancies, $F(1, 612) = 4.19, p < .05$, than comparison students.

Table 2
Academic Comparisons between YI Participants and Comparison Students for 2013-14

Measure	YI Participants		Comparison Students		F-Value
	Adjusted Mean	N	Adjusted Mean	N	
Academic GPA	2.46	107	2.41	485	.37
Total GPA	2.55	108	2.53	484	.07
Cumulative Academic GPA	2.54	88	2.54	399	.00
Cumulative Total GPA	2.65	88	2.66	398	.12
Absences	6.86	113	8.85	502	2.54
Truancies	2.77	113	5.05	502	4.19**

** Significant at the .05 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 and attendance. YI youth had significantly lower truancies for the 2013-14 academic year than comparison students, however, there were no differences on the academic performance indicators. Prior YI evaluations 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 most prior YI findings, although last year, no significant academic performance differences were found either. However, it should be noted that there were fewer academic measures available this year given the district moratorium on test scores. Regardless, the findings here suggest it may prove beneficial for YI staff to consider whether there have been structural program changes over the last two years that may have contributed to the lack of academic findings, or if some youth or youth cohorts may need additional academic and/or personal supports to be more successful educationally. It may be that more structured tutoring or close monitoring of homework and grades may be needed if the program is to meet its goals related to academic achievement.

References

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