Assessing the Efficacy of the Training Opportunities Program for Undiscovered Potential (TOP UP) Dropout Prevention Program at Western Kentucky University for At-Risk High School Students

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ASSESSING THE EFFICACY OF THE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM FOR UNDISCOVERED POTENTIAL (TOP UP) DROPOUT PREVENTION PROGRAM AT WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY FOR AT-RISK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership Western Kentucky University Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Specialist in Education Degree

by
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August 1994
ASSESSING THE EFFICACY OF THE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES PROGRAM FOR UNDISCOVERED POTENTIAL (TOP UP) DROPOUT PREVENTION PROGRAM AT WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY FOR AT-RISK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Acknowledgements

The writer wishes to acknowledge with sincere gratitude her indebtedness to the chairman of her graduate committee, Dr. Aaron Hughey. Dr. Hughey was a great inspiration to the author throughout the course of the project. Dr. Hughey's knowledge of higher education enabled the author to seek counsel and direction throughout her specialist project. The writer is also grateful to Dr. Vernon Sheeley and Dr. Fred Stickle, both of whom served on her specialist committee. Both were invaluable throughout her entire graduate program.

The writer also would like to thank her husband, Joe, who put up with her during the duration of her project.
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The current study examined the efficacy of the Training Opportunities Program for Undiscovered Potential (TOP UP) at Western Kentucky University. TOP UP at WKU consists of a year-long program addressing the academic, social, and career orientation needs of "at risk" high school students from the ten-county Barren River Area Development District (BRADD). The primary focus of the program revolves around an eight-week, residential work-study phase held on campus and targets sixty "at risk" high school students enrolled in the ninth, tenth, or eleventh grades. The current study included students enrolled in the program during the academic years 1990-91, 1991-92, and 1992-93.

Data for use in the current study were obtained from existing records relevant to participants in the TOP UP program. Individual records were examined by the researcher; data was recorded concerning each participant's age, race, gender, number of years in the TOP UP program, high school attended, and current graduation status.

Descriptive statistics and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation
Coefficients were computed for and between each of the variables considered within the context of the study. A Two Way Analysis of Variance was utilized to determine if the participants differed significantly with respect to their graduation status when grouped according to the different variables examined during the study.

Participants in the TOP UP program at WKU exhibited a high school dropout rate that is qualitatively lower than students who did not participate in the program. Pearson Correlations revealed that the only variable significantly related to graduation status was age. Similarly, Analysis of Variance revealed a significant difference between participants only when they were grouped according to age. Specifically, participants who began the program at an earlier age tended to have a significantly higher probability of graduating than did their counterparts who entered the program at a more advanced age.

Based upon the findings of the study, it was recommended that the TOP UP program be continued with an increased emphasis on involving participants at an earlier age.
Introduction

Background Information

In recent years, educators in the United States have devoted an increasing amount of attention to "dropout" populations. Students who drop out of school have long been viewed as a problem both educationally and socially as well as politically. Youths failing to complete high school are more likely to become economic burdens to society. Education has long been viewed as crucial to American society. Historically, education has been perceived as the key to the success of individuals and to societal progress.

States began passing laws in the mid 1800's to require school attendance for youth until age 16. Americans then and now expect their schools to prepare their youth to become productive members of society. Kominski (1990) indicates that the high school dropout rate has increased substantially over the past 40 years. The number of youths who drop out each year has been estimated at almost 1 million (Kominski, 1990).

The term "dropout" has been used to designate a variety of those who leave school prior to graduation. Clements (1990) defines a "dropout" as follows:

An elementary or secondary school pupil who has been in membership during the regular school term and who
withdraws or is dropped from membership during the regular school term and who withdraws or is dropped from membership for any reason except death or transfer to another school before graduating from secondary school (grade 12) or before completing an equivalent program of studies. (p.34)

Indeed, dropping out of school is considered to be a major problem throughout the Western world. When a student drops out of school and fails in his or her attempt to find a job, both the student and society suffer. When a student fails to take advantage of the educational system this financial return often is lost. Costs to society are not just financial. Depressed self-esteem, dissatisfaction and alienation experienced by dropouts often escalate to disordered, aggressive behaviors.

In the past, students who dropped out were usually absorbed into society as unskilled laborers. Today, however, technological advances have reduced the number of jobs available to unskilled, uneducated youth (Pittman, 1986). Before the 1960s, many students who dropped out were able to enter the job market and support themselves. The improved technology and the increased number of youth and women entering the job market during the 1960s and 1970s, however, brought about a dramatic change in the labor force. This sharp rise in the number of potential workers, combined with a decrease in the number of unskilled and semiskilled
positions, forced high school dropouts to compete with more and more graduates for fewer and fewer entry-level jobs.

Dropouts are everybody's problem. As often happens when this is the case, people tend to take the attitude that nothing can be done because the problem is too complex. Therefore, everybody's problem becomes no one's responsibility (Larsen & Shertzer, 1987). Dropout prevention is emerging as a primary thrust in our efforts to provide our nation's youth with the education they need to function successfully in our society and its economic system.

It has become more and more compelling to find ways to keep disadvantaged and alienated students within our educational system and to assist them in seeing the relevance of education to their lives. In today's world, the future for the high school dropout is gloomy. High school dropouts, no longer able to enter well-paying semi-skilled jobs, must compete with graduates for low paying service jobs. Unable to continue their education and finding no avenues out of their predicament, dropouts are often trapped in poverty. Our current (and future) economy requires a greater degree of skill than was previously required of our labor force. An increasingly advanced technological society makes education less of a privilege and more of a necessity (Brubaker, 1991).
Dropouts generally find it difficult to find employment and to attain a standard of living that will allow them to be happy, productive adults. Employment was not a problem several years ago; anyone who wanted to work could find a job. Individuals who do not complete high school have higher rates of unemployment, are over-represented in correctional institutions and public assistance programs, and generally have lower lifetime earnings than those with high school diplomas. The alarming proportion of at-risk and alienated youth suggests that the future of dropout prevention is not in the isolated programs which grew out of the notions of deficit and remediation (Kratzert & Kratzert, 1991).

Some students are more likely than others to become dropouts. Those who are the least prepared economically and educationally are the most likely to drop out. For example, urban youth are 50% more likely to drop out than youth living in rural areas (Fitzpatrick & Yoels, 1992). Moreover, whites in the South and West are more likely to drop out than those in the Northeast and North Central states. Conversely, blacks are more likely to drop out in the South and West. Minority populations are increasing in public schools and those students have shown higher drop out rates than the white population (Franklin, 1992). Also, 55 to 60% of dropouts are boys. Even in an age of gender equality, it is still the male who is most often the
breadwinner in the family and who needs an education in order to obtain a better job. Yet it is the male who is more likely to drop out of school, possibly because families are often more likely to give independence to males earlier than they do females. Another explanation could be that there are more part-time jobs available for boys than for girls. Availability of part-time employment might lure boys into thinking that they can support themselves with full time work (Zeller, 1966).

Dropout rates vary according to geographical location and composition of student enrollment. Dropout rates are lowest in the Midwest, where student populations tend to be more homogeneous and where the suburban character of many of the schools often means smaller classes. As might be expected, drop out rates are twice as high in large cities as opposed to smaller ones (25 and 13%, respectively) (Dentler & Warshauser, 1965). The largest group of students terminated their schooling at the tenth grade while the next largest group dropped out during the ninth grade. Students who drop out tend to display certain patterns of school, work and attitudes. Students tend to drop out in the months of February and March or in the summer following the 10th grade.

Wells (1990) illustrated the reasons adolescents commonly give for dropping out. Most school-related problems included having poor grades, having discipline
problems, not getting along with teachers, and generally not liking school. Dropouts also identified family related problems, such as getting married, being pregnant, and needing to work, less frequently they mentioned personal problems such as sickness or responding to peer pressure. Adolescent men were much more likely to cite school-related problems (36% had poor grades, 21% could not get along with teachers and 13% were expelled or suspended or decided to work). Adolescent women were more likely to cite marital or parenthood reasons (31 and 23%) for dropping out. However, they also experienced school-related problems (31% stated that school was "not for them" and 30% had poor grades).

It is evident that the explanations given by many dropouts are insufficient to fully explain the phenomenon, since other students with the same kinds of problems remain. It may be that a combination of problems, the severity of a single problem, or the unavailability of viable solutions to a problem are the deciding factors in leaving school. The student's explanations show that both school and external factors have a critical effect on whether students remain in and complete high school but how much of a part each factor plays is unclear. Economically disadvantaged youth, unlike their more advantaged peers, lose some of their academic gains over the summer. The role of the family and community in learning and achievement is significant. (Waggoner, 1991). Researchers have also investigated how schools
alienate students. Findings suggest that schools send negative signals to poorly achieving students and those with disciplinary problems—in a sense urging them to leave. Lack of encouragement obviously reduces any desire or ability to remain in school.

The consequences of dropping out are perhaps the most critical reason for our concern as a nation. The social consequences of leaving school early have been identified repeatedly. When a student drops out of school and fails in his or her attempt to find a job, both the student and society suffer. Roderick (1993) suggested that the dropout, who has experienced feelings of failure in school, is greeted by a society that is overtly hostile to dropouts, thus reinforcing his or her feelings of worthlessness. Dropouts usually miss out on the part time, summer, and work study experiences acquired by some high school students. Therefore, they do not develop the requisite attitudes, values, and skills needed for gainful employment later.

Personal problems and deficient working experiences often make the dropout unattractive to employers. Society also loses when many of its potential workers remain unemployed. Police statistics show that the unemployed dropout is 6 to 10 times more likely than an employed person to become involved in crime, an especially poignant revelation given the fact that a year in jail costs three times as much as a year in college (Schreiber, 1968). Along
these lines Perrin (1990) stated that the dropout problem represents a serious threat to our free society and labeled it "social dynamite." It has long been assumed that the dropout problem costs to society are quite large. Stover (1992) argued that the costs of the dropout problem to the nation far exceed the estimated costs of programs to keep youngsters in school. Therefore, it could be considered very cost effective to invest in dropout prevention programs.

Once out of school, youth dropouts have two options. They can complete their education by returning to school or by obtaining their General Education Diploma (GED), or they can try to support themselves through employment or other means. Nardini (1991) indicated that at least half of youth dropouts try to complete their education. Whites are more likely than blacks and Hispanics to return and finish school. Overall, those whose academic and personal backgrounds made them least likely to be dropouts are the ones most likely to return or get their GED.

Dropouts who had higher achievement tests scores, post-high school plans, and families with higher incomes are more likely than other dropouts to return and finish high school. Certainly prior educational gains make it easier for returning dropouts to obtain a GED or complete their education and definitive personal plans are a strong motivation for finishing school. For most youth dropouts,
the lack of a diploma limits employment options and thus future economic and social conditions. Dropouts are more likely not to be in the labor force or, if they are employed, they are more likely to have semiskilled manual jobs and earn less. Again, the disparity is greater among blacks than among whites.

Limited employment options are evident in salary differences and cumulative lifetime earnings. The expected lifetime earnings of high school dropouts is about one third lower than those of high school graduates and half that of college graduates. Current male and female dropouts will lose an average of $266,000 and $199,000, respectively, in earnings over their lifetimes (Waldrop, 1992).

Dropping out is also costly to society. Because of their reduced employment opportunities, dropouts require more welfare, health care, and unemployment subsidies. They are more likely to be involved in criminal activities thus incurring costs for judicial and penal services. Public expenditures for welfare, health care and police that can be attributed to school dropouts are estimated to be between $10 to $29 billion annually. Helping a greater proportion of potential dropouts to complete their education could reduce these costs substantially. Farmer (1992) estimates that when dropouts obtain high school diplomas, the probability of their having out of wedlock births decreases by over 50%; their potential for being arrested decreases by
over 90%. In addition, the likelihood of their being welfare dependent decreases by almost 10% (Horowitz, 1992).

Our society has long recognized the relationship between educational preparation and economic productivity. More supplemental school programs are needed to assist students in keeping up academically. It is also obvious that business and industry need a labor force that is better prepared educationally. Employers are attaching greater importance to educational performance particularly attainment of a high school diploma. When employees are underprepared, industries spend more on training and achieve less productivity. Dropouts will earn $237 billion less during their lifetimes than will high school graduates. State and local government will collect 71 billion less in taxes. Crime prevention will total 6 billion.

In attempting to meet the needs of these students, the prevailing strategy has often been for schools to wait until students have failed and then attempted to identify and fix the "problem." Children spend over half their waking hours in school, a societal institution which tends to play an increasingly significant role in their developmental experiences. School districts around the country have implemented programs for dropout prevention and retention. Effective dropout prevention programs must focus both on keeping students in school and providing them with a genuinely meaningful educational experience.
The special needs of "at risk" high school students are well documented and include the need for academic remediation services, individual and group encouragement, career and vocational awareness, and social interaction and cultural enrichment combined with planned opportunities for success and achievement.

The "TOP UP" Program

A dropout prevention program which attempts to accomplish these goals is The Training Opportunities Program for Undiscovered Potential (TOP UP). The TOP UP Program was an enhancement of the 1986 and 1987 programs which were modeled after a program first implemented in 1972 at St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas, and a statewide program, the Youth Opportunities Unlimited Program, implemented by the Texas governor's office. The program at St. Edward's University was specifically designed for college freshmen from migrant and seasonal farm worker families. This program was so successful in improving the academic achievement of its participants that a similar project was begun in 1975 for high school migrant students. Continuing research and evaluation at St. Edward's University indicated that a high school model could be equally successful with any population of secondary students identified as "at risk." Based on this knowledge, the Governor of Texas directed the Office of Youth Programs and the Texas Department of Community Affairs to develop the
Youth Opportunities Unlimited Program (Y.O.U.). From the original three (3) schools, the program has grown to include eighteen (18) public and private institutions of higher education in the state of Texas.

In 1985, the Kentucky Superintendent of Public Instruction learned about the Y.O.U. Program from the Governor of Texas. Because of Kentucky's high dropout rate, which exceeded 13,000 in 1985, the Superintendent of Public Instruction approached the Northern Kentucky Area Development District's Private Industry Council and the University of Kentucky with a request that they enter into a partnership with the State Department of Education to fund and administer a pilot program in the summer of 1986. The University of Kentucky Program had been very instrumental in the formation of the TOP UP Program. In an attempt to address the educational needs of economically disadvantaged and academically "at risk" youth in the State of Kentucky, the TOP UP Program was implemented in 1990, its purpose being to address Kentucky's historically high dropout rate. Using student programs implemented in Texas and University of Kentucky as models, Western Kentucky University developed a basic educational and work experience program for 16-20 year olds that were economically and academically "at risk" students from the ten county region. Specifically, the goals of TOP UP are to facilitate dropout prevention through (1) behavior modification,
(2) development of career/vocational awareness, (3) establishment or enhancement of basic work skills, (4) provision of opportunities to experience meaningful and productive work and wage earning, (5) enhancement of academic remediation and interpersonal skills, and (6) the development of social awareness and interpersonal skills.

The mission of TOP UP at WKU is to provide an environment, incentives, and encouragement for each individual participant to improve his attitude, behavior and performance at home and in school, and to influence completion of his high school education.

TOP UP consists of a year-long program addressing the academic, social, and career orientation needs of "at risk" high school students from the ten-county Barren River Area Development District. TOP UP is sponsored by WKU's Community College as part of its community service and economic development initiatives. The primary focus of the program revolves around an eight-week, residential work-study phase held on campus. Each year, TOP UP targets sixty 16-18 year-old "at risk" high school students currently enrolled in the 9th, 10th, or 11th grades of the sixteen public high schools located within the Barren River Area Development District (BRADD).

The selection process for TOP UP is very competitive. Guidance Counselors of the participating school districts nominate candidates for consideration with primary emphasis
on students currently certified as Joint Training Partnership Act eligible. TOP UP at WKU representatives meet with nominees at their parent school in March to provide an orientation, answer questions and to receive formal applications. Students not Joint Training Partnership Act certified are provided Department Employment Services forms for JTPA certification. Applications are screened and the names of students believed qualified to participate in TOP UP at WKU are provided to the appropriate DES for screening and certification as JTPA eligible. Once eligibility has been determined by DES, the applicants are notified by TOP UP at WKU as to their status as a principle or alternate candidate or if they have been determined ineligible. An effort is then made to schedule an evening or weekend meeting in each county whereby candidates and their parents/guardians may obtain additional information prior to the camp.

Individual candidates are selected using the following criteria: (1) recommendation of Guidance Counselor; (2) JTPA Certifiable; (3) personal interview by TOP UP staff; (4) nominee desires to participate and parental encouragement; (5) demonstrated need and potential to benefit academically, socially, or behavioral; and (6) enrollment priorities, including students enrolled in 12th grade but not eligible to graduate, students enrolled in 11th grade, graduate of a previous TOP UP summer program
with a "special" need and students enrolled in 10th grade.

Participating schools have many responsibilities in relation to the TOP UP program. High Schools nominating student candidates to TOP UP are expected to (1) develop a pool of candidates to be referred to TOP UP at WKU staff in February and March; (2) provide an academic transcript for each candidate nominated along with appropriate personal background information; (3) provide time and facilities whereby TOP UP at WKU representatives may meet with candidates and graduates at least twice per year; (4) work with DES and TOP UP at WKU representatives to help in developing necessary information and submission of paperwork essential to JTPA certification; (5) agree to award the TOP UP at WKU graduate with one elective credit in Career Development I or II; (6) counselors agree to meet individually, with each TOP UP at WKU graduate at least once per semester for purposes of assessing their performance and providing encouragement and reinforcement; (7) meet each semester with TOP UP at WKU representatives to discuss in school performance of TOP UP graduates and to assess the program; and (8) provide information and access to performance records of students nominated to and not selected for TOP UP and those enrolled who dropped out of the program.

TOP UP representatives also have responsibilities to the schools. These include (1) cooperate with school
representatives in scheduling on site meetings with Counselors, TOP UP graduates, candidates, and parents; (2) provide information early regarding the summer program, requirements for nomination and certification, and new or unusual expectations imposed upon the school; (3) meet with all interested students nominated by the schools to present them with detailed information regarding the program and to answer their questions; (4) provide the school with a copy of pertinent academic materials developed for each student to include pre-and posttest scores, graduation certificate, Kentucky Department of Education authorization letter for award of credit, report of individual awards or honors, data on individual performance/achievement utilizing the Computer Curriculum Consortium program in English and Math; (5) to invite appropriate officials to represent their school and assist during TOP UP at WKU graduation ceremonies; and (6) to advise school counselors of information developed during TOP UP at WKU activities which may be helpful in dealing with a particular student in the home or school environment.

TOP UP at WKU provides its funding agency (the Private Industry Council) with three basic reports each program year. The first report deals with the outcomes of the summer program. The other two reports will deal with the Fall and Spring school visits, including evaluation surveys by counselors and TOP UP graduates during these visits. The major report covering the Summer program includes
assessments from several sources dealing comprehensively with all aspects of the eight week period to. These evaluations include (1) student/faculty evaluation of the academic element; (2) student/supervisor evaluation of the job/work element; (3) student/staff evaluation of the total programs' concept, delivery and outcomes; and (4) assessment of independent evaluation or comment from persons or organizations not directly involved but having some contact with, TOP UP at WKU.

For purposes of the TOP UP program, "at risk" students are identified via a combination of academic, social, and family-related factors. These academic factors include (1) achievement at no more than two grade levels below expectation with demonstrated potential to perform "on level"; (2) little or no participation in school and extracurricular activities; (3) poor relationships with peers, teachers, and administrators; (4) indication of feelings of rejection from school. Social Factors include (1) low self-esteem, (2) lack of motivation to succeed, (3) difficulty with peer adjustment, (4) difficulty with social adjustment including a history of minor school infractions. Family Factors include (1) low level of academic achievement in the family with parents/siblings who were high school dropouts, (2) low family income levels, (3) Parents/guardians do not encourage school attendance or completion, (4) poor communication between home and school,
(5) history of family dysfunction and instability, and (6) frequent family relocation or separation of siblings.

Needs of the "at risk" high school student include academic remediation, individual and group encouragement to stay in school, career and vocational awareness, social interaction and cultural enrichment combined with planned opportunities for success and achievement. The TOP UP at WKU program considers "high risk" students to exhibit (1) poor self image and lack of self confidence; (2) non-involvement in peer group activities or short term interest followed by disillusionment and quitting; (3) short attention span without exceptional effort to attract their interest and maintain their involvement; (4) "crying out" for attention and someone to "care" in a non-threatening, non-judgmental manner; (5) quick reaction to perceived criticism, exercise of excess authority, or disingenuous expressions of interest; and (6) little confidence in social institutions and adult role models.

The special needs of "at risk" students and the unique skills this group manifests are dealt with comprehensively through the intense "immersion therapy" approach of TOP UP at WKU. Success of the TOP UP at WKU student work-study program is related to (1) caring and genuine concern by all adults directly or indirectly involved in the program; (2) a low student-staff ratio thereby allowing maximum opportunity for multiple one-on one interaction; (3) emphasis on
behavior modification through planned and impromptu social
and recreational activities, exposure to new experiences and
opportunities occasioned by cultural orientation activities;
(4) follow-on encouragement through personal communications
between staff and students, home school visitations, and
reinforcement of group process; and (5) maintaining contact
with school counselors to follow up on student progress and
to encourage counselor interest in TOP UP graduates.

The primary focus of TOP UP at WKU is the eight week
Summer work-study experience conducted at the WKU campus.
An effort is made to track all graduates for a period of
three years following completion of the summer phase of the
program.

A secondary initiative entails staff visits to his/her
TOP UP at WKU graduate at his/her home high schools during
the fall and spring grading periods. Students are visited
either as a group, individually, or both as indicated by
discussions with the school counselors prior to meeting the
students. These visits include consultation with school
administrators and counselors to include formal surveys
regarding behavior, attendance, academic performance and
social adjustment. Counselors are encouraged to maintain
close contact with TOP UP graduates and to reinforce
progress made by these students as a result of, or
subsequent to, their TOP UP participation.

The TOP UP graduate is also surveyed during in school
visits to determine current attitudes, behavior, performance, interests, and plans for the future, to relate these issues to the pre-TOP UP experience, and to attempt the measurement of TOP UP residual affect. Parent/guardians are surveyed at least once during the first year after their child attends the summer program. Once the TOP UP graduate completes or otherwise terminates high school participation, efforts are made to maintain contact for the three year period. These efforts are made primarily through surveys which are sent to the graduates and/or parents/guardians.

A third initiative deals with continuing the group process, strengthening synergism and bonding between members of the graduating class and other TOP UP graduating classes and establishing TOP UP networking for possible career or social interaction between TOP UP graduates. To accomplish this initiative, an annual "Reunion" is held each December; all graduates are invited to participate. Graduates are also invited to attend the first social function held by each new class at the beginning of the summer program.

The fourth initiative involves periodic contact with parents or guardians of TOP UP graduates to assess changes in family relations attributable to TOP UP experiences and as an aid in maintaining contact with the TOP UP graduate. This approach seems particularly necessary as TOP UP graduates complete their high school education and move on to vocations or seek additional education and training,
military service, etc.

The fifth initiative involves an attempt to track TOP UP applicants who were not enrolled or those enrollees who terminated the program prior to graduation. By tracking these groups it should be possible to establish a control group for comparison of outcomes. TOP UP at WKU attempts to maintain contact with all graduates for the three year period and document the results of surveys, graduate feedback, and information provided by participating schools, parents, and other interested parties/groups.

Participants in the TOP UP program earn an hourly wage of $4.25 per hour to attend 20 hours of classroom work and 20 hours of career orientation job placements each week. Graduates of the eight week work-study phase (1) earn one elective high school credit recognized by the Kentucky Department of Education; (2) have the potential to earn wages of $1,326.00; (3) have the opportunity to improve academic knowledge and performance; (4) obtain job/work experience in a structured and controlled environment under competent and caring supervisors; (5) have benefit of extensive career, vocational and academic advisement plus personal counseling regarding individual interests, problems, or concerns; and (6) become a member of the select group known as TOP UP at WKU graduates.

The TOP UP summer program is divided into two components, both of which involve work-study elements. The
first component lasts six weeks and includes four hours of traditional classroom work each morning, 5 days a week. Participants are also assigned on-campus work sites where they typically spend four hours each afternoon. During this initial period, all students are required to participate in a 16-hour block of instruction presented during the evening and dealing with issues of current interest. The last two weeks of the summer program feature nontraditional academic studies and a continuation of the afternoon work program. During this time, morning hours are devoted to subjects of interest to the students.

The program also features selected guest speakers, audio-visual presentations, and visits to places of special interest such as factories, vocational schools and the High Tech Center. Students have a major role in identifying the subjects, places, and speakers in which they have an interest or need.

The academic element of the TOP UP at WKU work-study program includes four hours of daily instruction each Monday through Friday morning during the major component phase. Daily subject matter instruction includes one hour periods in each of the following subjects: Math, English/Reading, Computer Literacy, and Life Skills and Career Awareness. Furthermore, all students are required to participate in an evening seminar, "Cultural Literacy." The seminar is presented Monday through Thursday over a two week period and
deals with subjects of current interest, history, social studies, government, political science, economics, business, sociology, etc. Remediation and enhancement of basic study skills is addressed within each curriculum subject and with a particular emphasis during instruction on Lifeskills and Career Awareness.

The basic format provides 29 hours of instruction in each primary subject area plus 16 hours of seminar instruction for 132 instructional hours of traditional academic study. Twenty-four (24) additional instructional hours are achieved during the ten day minor component academic period. Total academic instruction includes 156 hours. Subjects taught during the minor academic component period include, but are not limited to, Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Certification, Parenting Skills, Dressing for Success, Sexual Responsibility, and Interpersonal Relationships. Evening elective choices also include academically oriented opportunities, including Word Processing, Desk Top Publishing, Videographic/Photographic Production, Journalism/Yearbook Production and Art.

A tutored study hall is held each Sunday morning for those students not attending church services. Other study halls are scheduled as needed. Individual tutoring for students is also available. All TOP UP instructors are certified secondary level teachers or experienced instructors from the University or Community College.
Finally academic achievement is measured through administration of the California Achievement Test (CAT) at the beginning and end of the major instructional component.

In addition to the 29 formal instructional hours in Life Skills and Career Awareness, each student is placed in a job assignment. Each student is required to perform 156 hours of meaningful and productive work with supervisors selected from university faculty and staff. Job assignments are matched, as closely as possible, according to student interests, experience and ability. The work experience provides insight into work ethics and employee responsibility, offers opportunity for hands on and performance oriented success, provides additional opportunities for one-on-one adult student interaction, and introduces the student to the real world of work. Each student earns wages and accumulates savings as the result of individual initiative. Students are administered a Career/Vocational Interest Inventory and provided with group and individual career counseling and guidance. Work performance is evaluated twice during the eight week period using a formal performance appraisal. More frequent work performance counseling is provided by the supervisor and is typically reinforced by the staff counselor if problems arise. TOP UP participants are paid employees of the program and are expected to perform as responsible workers. The DES coordinator and TOP UP work site coordinators
conduct periodic site visits to assure compliance with contractual obligations by the student worker, supervisor, and TOP UP management.

Most of the behavior modification efforts are implemented during social events and informal or unplanned activities within the residence hall. Counselors, Program Assistants and Program Aides live in the residence hall and are immediately available to each student as needed. TOP UP residential staff are available for the participants 24 hours per day during the full eight weeks. A low student/staff ratio is needed in order to facilitate cohesiveness and group problem-solving/decision-making processes. Students and staff participate in varied and frequent social, recreational and cultural activities which further enhance both career interests and social skills.

Each weekend includes a Friday night social activity, an all day activity on Saturday and religious activities, housekeeping duties, and/or study halls on Sunday. Sunday afternoons consists of additional recreational or cultural activities. At least two hours on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday evenings are dedicated to personal enrichment activities. These elective activities include academic or recreational choices such as swimming, weight lifting, word processing, aerobics, racquetball, and computer graphics. Each Wednesday evening a group recreational event is provided. Activities include arts and crafts, volleyball,
and softball. These programs provide a recreational outlet and opportunity for personal development which many of the students seldom get to experience. These activities also serve to develop teamwork and social skills in addition to reinforcing other TOP UP program goals such as improving self-image and interpersonal relations.

Based upon the success of the first year TOP UP Program, the second year was funded for 30 additional scholarships and 6 new participating schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the TOP UP program in terms of dropout reduction by comparing the high school completion rate of TOP UP graduates to that of comparable students who did not participate in the program. The efficacy of the TOP UP program will be assessed in relation to its ability to enhance high school student retention and graduation rates. As such, this study should provide information which will be helpful as educators continue to develop educational programs aimed at increasing retention rates.

Statement of the Problem

As more students continue to drop out of school each year, greater effort needs to be directed toward understanding the reasons behind this behavior. Effective countermeasures must be developed. Given the extent of the problem, there exists an urgent need to evaluate prevailing
efforts to develop more effective schools, motivate marginal
students, and implement programs that assist adolescents who
are at risk. The TOP UP program consists of a coherent plan
designed to address all of these needs. Therefore, it is
imperative that its effectiveness be stringently evaluated.

Rationale for Study

A tremendous amount of importance is placed on the role
of education in our society. In the not-too-distant future,
those who are currently teenagers will be leaders in the
global economy. The information age needs people who are
strong in decision making, problem solving, and other
cognitive skills. A wide range of new teaching and learning
strategies are needed to increase students' interests and to
better reflect the relevancy of school to the workplace.
Needed are dropout prevention programs that motivate and
enhance students' self esteem. Programs should also
compliment and reinforce the traditional learning
environment. If the basic characteristics of dropouts and
the process of dropping out can be accurately identified,
then the problem can be dealt with in a more direct and
effective manner using systematic approaches such as
behavior modification.
Review of the Literature

Researchers have attempted to further identify who is dropping out, why, and what the essential ingredients are of programs that have demonstrated varying degrees of success. Most of the early indicators of potential dropouts can be grouped into four major categories: Family-related, School-related (including cognitive and affective characteristics), Student-related, and Community-related. Perhaps the most thorough analysis of the characteristics of dropouts was carried out by Nunn & Parish (1992). The characteristics that tend to identify which students are at risk have been described extensively, but it is still impossible to predict with 100% accuracy which students will drop out or which will complete school. The process of becoming a dropout is long and complex. Failure of students, families, schools, and society all contribute to the accumulations of concrete problems which eventually result in dropping out.

Ryan (1991) found that 17% of the 1980 high school sophomores who were from low socioeconomic status (SES) families dropped out, as compared to 9 and 5% for students from middle and high SES families. Dropouts more often come from families of low SES. Families of dropouts tend to be large. Educational attainment and support for educational
goals in these families are typically very low. In general, these students tend to have parents and older siblings who have dropped out of school, and their homes do not provide a supportive educational environment. The home often fails to provide the love, affection, understanding, and the emotional security necessary for the normal development of young people. There tends to be a lack of learning materials and opportunities in the home (Herbert, 1990). Additional family-related barriers to school are child abuse and neglect, divorce and separation, parental apathy, family crisis and poverty, poor communication between home and school, racial or ethnic minority, non-English speaking family, frequent moves, and changing schools. Children feel insecure when parent/child relationships are disturbed. Disturbed relationships lead to feelings of alienation, which can create difficulty in a child's ability to pay attention in school (Pittman, 1986).

One of the major characteristics of these students and of their parents is the need for immediate gratification. These people are not willing to defer their gratifications until a later time. They want to enjoy themselves, and they want to do it now. It is difficult for them to realize that the rewards will be greater in the future if they prepare themselves better now. In an attempt to gratify their present desires, however, they often leave school without completing their education.
School-related factors tend to be more visible to the public and gain considerable attention. Acting out is a good example. Others may be recognized. These include poor interpersonal relationships. They also contribute to the dropout problem. Two major visible school-related factors are poor academic achievement and behavior problems in school. Poor academic achievement can be measured by grades, test scores, and grade retention. Typical attitudinal, behavioral and affective characteristics of potential dropouts can be recognized as early as third grade (Rogus & Wildenhaus 1991). Students typically have lower grade point averages and show lower verbal and math averages. They also exhibit lower verbal and math achievement as measured by standardized test scores. Dropouts tend to fall in the bottom quartiles on nationally administered reading and math tests, and students who score low on such achievement tests are six times as likely to drop out as those whose scores are high (Greene, 1966).

Research also shows that dropouts are held back five times more often than graduates. Neill (1979) found that less proficient students who fail either of the first two grades have only a 20 percent chance of graduating. Student failure at the eight or ninth grade is also a critical factor in a student's decision to drop out. According to Weis & Farrar (1989), being held back in school may be the best single predictor of dropping out. Evidence shows that
many dropouts have been retained in a grade at least once during their school career. In a real sense, the student who is retained in grade faces some serious problems. Retention tends to adversely affect self-concept. The retained student may be less willing to try very hard the second time around.

Many of the young people who have difficulty in school have an unhealthy self concept. Many see themselves as dumb, stupid, and incompetent in school work. But they also see themselves as being fairly successful out of school. This is especially true of students who are retained at the junior or senior high school level. Retention may be viewed as a form of punishment inflicted by a spiteful teacher. These students, as a means of ego defense, may reject the teacher, other classmates and school altogether. The intelligence and academic ability of most dropouts does not appear to be very different from students who graduate but do not attend college. Other cognitive characteristics of youth at risk include failure in one or more schools, lack of basic skills, and verbal deficiency.

Affective characteristics of students associated with dropping out are feelings of alienation and behavior problems including absenteeism, truancy and discipline problems (Bond & Beer, 1990). Students who cut classes, are usually seen by administration for disciplinary problems, have been suspended and/or in trouble with police
are also more likely to drop out. Most of these problems are visible from elementary school. Lack of attention in school should therefore be seen as a warning signal that a student may be at-risk. Truancy is perhaps the first sign that something is wrong. The potential dropout will find all sorts of excuses for not attending school. Bond & Beer (1990) indicated the dropout reveals a marked regression in attendance from elementary to secondary school. Students who are overage tend to display behavior problems and are more likely to drop out.

Dropouts report feeling alienated from schools, teachers, peers, homes, neighborhoods, and or society in general. They tend to perceive little interest, caring or acceptance on the part of teachers and are discouraged by the school's constant signal to them about their academic failures. Dropouts tend to be resentful of authority and feel that the school's disciplinary system is unfair and ineffective (Uroff & Greene, 1991).

Schools can also influence students' decisions to dropout, although to date there is little evidence to support this idea. Dropouts indicate dissatisfaction with school, do not think they can get along with teachers, and report an inability to deal with school's structure. The inflexibility of schools and school systems may contribute to student academic failure and poor performance. All students are expected to learn and retain information at the
same pace or be left behind by their peers. Schools eliminate those who perform or behave in contrast to the norm. Many potential dropouts attend schools with very poor facilities, inadequate teaching staffs, and inadequate materials. Negative school environment or school climate may contribute to dropping out.

Myll (1988) cited such school-related contributors to dropping out as lack of positive, cooperative relationships between and among students, staff, parents, and administrators, inadequate discipline procedures and or policies, lack of alternative schools/programs to meet the needs of at risk groups, and lack of collaborative teamwork among school and community professionals. Kershner and Connolly (1991) added that, in the process of becoming a dropout, the act of rejecting the educational institution must be accompanied by the belief that the institution has rejected the person. The process is cumulative and begins with negative messages from the school concerning academic or discipline problems. Schools may also contribute to high dropout rates by treating students as children who have no responsibility.

Dropouts have lower levels of self concept and self-esteem and indicate that they feel they have less overall control over their lives than do other students. At an early age, some youth develop a poor self-concept and a high level of insecurity about their ability to learn easily or
do well in school. They exhibit poor attitudes about school and have low educational and occupation aspirations (Wehlage & Rutter, 1989). Dropouts often exhibit immaturity, frequent health problems, inability to identify with other people, drug and alcohol abuse, pregnancy, lack of motivation, lack of social adjustment, and court related problems.

Dropouts report family problems, work responsibilities, and conflict with other students as reasons for leaving school. Students who work 15 or more hours per week while attending school are at least 50 percent more likely to dropout than those who work less or not at all. Dropouts are less likely to feel that they are popular with other students, and tend to feel that other students see them as "not as good." Dropouts may feel that other students see them as troublemakers.

Students who participate in extracurricular activities (particularly athletics), are less likely to drop out. Often, these students do not attend athletic activities at the school or become involved in its social activities. Potential dropouts may not feel that they belong. Their social relationships with other students are poor and their friends are more likely to be out of school or in another school. They lack a sense of identification with their school which causes them to feel alienated from school and school personnel.
Economic factors are reported by dropouts as influential in the decision to leave school. About 20% of dropouts reported they left school because they felt they had to help support their families. Many dropouts report leaving school to get married or because they are pregnant. One factor may be the actual cost of attending school. In this respect, it is not the overt or outright costs of books and fees, but the more subtle costs which are involved. These include the cost of extracurricular activities such as attendance at football games, basketball games, and dances, as well as the costs of transportation to and from school activities, clothes, and money for the school cafeteria.

Community factors present an equally complex set of characteristics leading to the decision of students to eventually drop out. Barriers include a lack of responsive community support services, linkages between school and community services, preventive mental health programs which address drug and alcohol problems, family counseling and community support for schools, neighborhood schools, adequate transportation, and the ability to deal with the high incidence of criminal activity.

Identifying reasons why students drop out has tremendous value in helping communities to develop and maintain successful treatment programs for potential dropouts. The primary reasons Natriello (1986) found for leaving school prior to graduation include preferred work to
school, not interested in school work, could not learn and was discouraged, was failing and did not want to repeat the grade, disliked a certain teacher, disliked a certain subject, and could learn more out of school than in school. Almost 70% of the dropouts fell into this category and listed dissatisfaction with school as the primary reason for leaving.

While poor academic performance and a low income background may make a student more likely to leave school, they are not the primary causes of dropping out. Poor academic performance and poverty encompass many personal and social pressures that have long been known to be impedient to educational achievement (LeCompte & Dworkin, 1991).

Currently, a void exists in the literature with respect to the assessment of dropout prevention programs.

Kammoun (1991) noted that practical approaches to the high school dropout problem are needed. They recommend remediation programs, summer schools, and extended school calendars as a means of providing additional opportunities for students to acquire what they have previously failed to attain. It has also been pointed out, however, that not enough is known about dropping out to design effective intervention strategies (Lacey, 1991).

Orr (1987) observed that many potentially viable solutions have been identified as means of dealing with students who are at risk of dropping out. These include in-
school counseling services, mentorships, social services, remediations, school/business collaborations, financial rewards, alternative schools, and parent/community involvement. All of these programs are designed to help students become motivated and achieve in school. Similarly, Peck and Law (1989) reported that the severity of the "at risk" problem has led to the development of a variety of preventive and remedial program approaches at the secondary school level. Myll (1988) added that the increasing alarm over the dropout rate and its implications for the nation's well-being has pressed school administrators nationwide to implement dropout intervention and recovery programs. Lakebrink (1989) seemed to concur when they observe that more and more educational resources are being directed toward at-risk students. It appears that providing alternative educational programs for students who have not succeeded in a traditional high school environment is becoming more of a priority for many educators.

Wells (1990) noted that there are many reasons why students drop out of school; therefore, they tend to respond to intervention programs inconsistently. Schreiber and Kaplan (1964) have found that classroom teachers often achieve positive results when they attempt to work with the "total child." Such efforts are designed to facilitate the development of the child into a productive member of society. Myll (1988) described a model program that schools
can use to retain at risk high school students. The model consists of elements in four categories: (1) administration and organization, (2) teacher culture, (3) student culture, and (4) curriculum.

Wehlage and Rutter (1989) described awareness, attendance, achievement, attitude, atmosphere, adaptation, alternatives, and advocacy as target areas where schools can make a difference with the at-risk population. Myll (1988) further outlined what school administrators can do to increase their understanding of local dropout programs and to decrease dropping out. Orr (1987) added that early intervention is recognized as crucial to limiting the perpetuation of at-risk students in later years. Kammoun (1991) also reported that dropout prevention programs are often very successful in helping students from many different ethnic, gender, cultural, geographic, and value orientations achieve their academic and personal goals.

Kammoun (1991) asserted that the focus of many dropout prevention programs should be remediation and behavior modification in order to encourage and support high school graduation. Blyth (1991) also contends that there is an urgent need to support these programs at all levels. Neill (1979) adds that since the primary function of schools is to promote learning by teaching students how to transfer what they learn in the classroom to future situations, information about successful strategies for at risk students
Orr (1987) observed that there are some common characteristics of the more successful drop-out prevention programs. These include (1) smaller classes with a low student-teacher ratio; (2) individualized attention to student needs; (3) a vocational, work related or community service component; (4) remedial instruction or tutoring in basic skills; (5) immediate feedback and rewarding of student achievement; (6) an emphasis on developing "special" teacher and student cultures, and the development of pride in the program as being something special; (7) removing potential dropouts from the regular school and placed in special programs; (8) teachers communicating expectations of success combined with a high degree of commitment and caring for the students; (9) teachers expanding their roles to include counseling, advocacy, networking, and organizing other outside resources; (10) a supportive peer culture among students providing a family caring atmosphere; (11) curriculum and instruction are individualized; (12) course work is emphasized as practical, real-world problem solving; (13) programs that are student-centered, where students are looked at as individuals with unique needs, and goals, and where activities are designed around students' needs rather than forcing students to "fit" into programs; (14) counseling to develop positive self-concept; (15) emphasizing work-study programs; and (16) academics are
relevant to vocational/career goals.

Dentler and Warshauser (1965) reported that Project Achieve, New York City's dropout prevention program, is likely to benefit from the experiences of the city's earlier Dropout Prevention Initiative, which fell far short of improving graduation rates for at risk students. Peck & Law (1989) observed that in order for dropout programs to be successful, they should contain elements which address the personal affective aspects of the student's life as well as emphasizing academics. Myll (1988) adds that schools with high dropout rates need to take a hard look at themselves and identify appropriate strategies for at risk youth. Finding effective ways to reach these students and to help them to remain in school is critical to achieving their purpose as societal institutions.

Orr (1987) found that dropout prevention programs require the utilization and coordination of school system and community resources matched with student needs. Myll (1988) notes that planning dropout prevention programs involves important decisions regarding school facilities, human resources, instructional approaches, and maintaining program support.

According to Neill (1979), a central aspect of many successful dropout prevention programs has been the opportunity for students to go out in the world, i.e., to contribute or do something useful for people or
organizations in their community. Blyth (1991) added that prevention programs must focus on the needs of identified at risk students only after serious problems have arisen. The knowledge gained from successful dropout prevention programs must translate into awareness of the need for specific intervention programs as well as the need for systematic school-wide changes and community participation in the educational processes of youth.

Herbert (1990) argued the need for school systems, social agencies and communities to assess the requirements and resources available for dropout prevention and service programs. States and local areas are also allotting new funds for attendance and dropout prevention. Kammoun (1991) indicated that dropout prevention is now emerging as the newest issue in providing youth the education they need to function successfully in our society and economic system, while Herbert (1990) emphasized that the key to a successful program is not only a high level of enthusiasm and expectation among staff but also their openness and willingness to learn from others. Many model programs and research efforts are now being implemented nationally. A major component of most dropout prevention programs involves counseling and the coordination of a wide range of support services in and out of school.

Peck and Law (1989) asserted the real key to dropout prevention seems to be a revitalization of our educational
system that involves genuine caring for students and an understanding of the optimal climate for learning. A new agenda for dropout prevention involving substantially rethinking, redesigning, and restructuring educational delivery systems in a way that accommodates the needs of all students is desperately needed.

Pittman (1986) suggested that a student's family can be an important partner in dropout prevention and service programs. The dropout problem requires a school-wide effort, something more than programs that deal with the problem student by isolating him or her.
Methods, Results and Discussion

The ability to accurately identify potential high school dropouts and to intervene with them in such a way as to insure their eventual academic and personal success is of paramount importance. The TOP UP program at WKU is designed to accomplish both of these tasks in a comprehensive and caring manner. It was originally implemented as a frontline means of dropout prevention.

Educators, parents, taxpayers in general, and especially the student involved in the program need demonstrated evidence of TOP UP's value. Hopefully, careful analysis of the data obtained during the current study provides an important part of this evidence.

This study represents an attempt to assess the efficacy of the TOP UP program at WKU. Participants in the study consisted of high school students who were enrolled at one of the sixteen area high schools in the Barren River Area Development District during the academic years 1990-91, 1991-92, and 1992-93.

Research Hypotheses

The primary hypothesis tested during the study was as follows:
Hypothesis: Students who complete the Training Opportunities for Undiscovered Potential (TOP UP) program at Western Kentucky University exhibit a high school drop out rate which is significantly lower than that of comparable students who do not participate in the program.

Conversely, the null hypothesis tested during the course of the study was as follows:

Null Hypothesis: Students who participate in the Training Opportunities Program for Undiscovered Potential (TOP UP) at Western Kentucky University will exhibit a high school drop out rate which is not significantly different from those who do not participate in the program.

Data Collection

Data for use in the current study were obtained from existing records relevant to participants in the TOP UP program. Specifically, individual records were examined by the researcher and information was noted regarding each participant's age, race, gender, number of years in the TOP UP program, high school attended, and current graduation status. Where data was missing, contact was made with the particular participant's high school guidance counselor for the purpose of determining the unavailable data. Appendix A contains a copy of the contact letter mailed to the high school guidance counselors. In a few cases, contact also had to made by telephone in an attempt to obtain the requested information.
All data collected were maintained anonymously, i.e., personally identifiable records were not kept. This approach helped to protect participants' right to privacy and confidentiality regarding any findings of the study which may eventually be made public.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were generated for each variable considered during the study. Pearson Product-Moment Correlations Coefficients were then computed between each of the variables examined within the study. Finally, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed in an effort to determine if the sample group varied significantly according to the study variables considered. The level of statistical significance utilized for the current study is .05.

Results of the Study

After consulting with guidance counselors from the 16 area high school schools, graduation status was determined for qualified participants in the TOP UP Program. Over the past three years, TOP UP at WKU has enrolled 150 participants and graduated 127, constituting a completion rate of 85%. The 127 TOP UP graduates include 7 students who participated during two years. For our records, subjects actually worked with during this study included 120 individuals completing the program. Twenty-three of the participants (15%) withdrew from the program prior to completion. Reasons for withdrawing from the program
included "homesickness" and failure to follow the program rules.

Program Participation

Gender. During 1990, 16 males were enrolled in the TOP UP Program. Of the 16 males enrolled, 13 (81%) successfully completed the TOP UP program. Eighteen females were enrolled in the TOP UP program, all of whom successfully completed the TOP UP program.

During 1991, 41 males were enrolled in the TOP UP program. Of the 41 males enrolled, 35 (85%) successfully completed the program. Fifteen females were enrolled in the TOP UP program during 1991. Of the 15 females enrolled, 13 (87%) successfully completed the program.

During 1992, 31 males were enrolled in the TOP UP program. Twenty (66%) successfully completed the program. Twenty-nine females were enrolled in the TOP UP program. Twenty-eight (97%) successfully completed the program.

Altogether, 65 males completed the three-year TOP UP program for an overall male completion rate of 54%. Three males participated in the TOP UP program for more than one consecutive year. There were 55 females who completed the three TOP UP program for an overall female completion rate of 46%. Four females participated in the program for more than one consecutive year.

Race. In 1990, 11 white males were enrolled in the TOP UP program. Of the 11 white males, nine (82%) successfully
completed the program. Five black males were enrolled in
the TOP UP program, four of whom (80%) successfully
completed the program. Sixteen white females were enrolled
in the TOP UP program, all of whom successfully completed
the program. Two black females were enrolled in the
program, both of whom successfully completed the program.

In 1991, 37 white males were enrolled in the TOP UP
program, 31 (84%) successfully completed the program. Four
black males also successfully completed the program. Ten
white females were enrolled in the TOP UP program. Of these
10 white females enrolled, eight (80%) successfully
completed the program. Five black females were enrolled in
the TOP UP program, all of whom successfully completed the
program.

In 1992, 25 white males were enrolled in the TOP UP
program—whereas, 17 (68%) successfully completed the
program. Six black males were enrolled in the TOP UP
program; however, only three (50%) of the six black males
successfully completed the program. Nineteen white females
were enrolled in the TOP UP program, 18 (95%) of whom
successfully completed the program. Ten black females were
enrolled in the TOP UP program, all of whom successfully
completed the program.

Altogether, there were 54 white males enrolled in the
three year TOP UP program, reporting an overall white male
completion rate of 83%. Three white males enrolled in the
program for more than one consecutive year. Eleven black males were enrolled in the three year TOP UP program, representing an overall black male completion rate of 17%. Thirty-nine white females enrolled in the three year TOP UP program, representing an overall white female completion rate of 71%. Three white females were enrolled in the program for more than one consecutive year. Sixteen black females enrolled in the three year TOP UP program, representing an overall black female completion rate of 29%. One black female enrolled in the program for more than one or more consecutive year.

Ninety-three white male and females completed the three year TOP UP program, representing an overall white completion rate of 77.5%. Twenty-seven black male and females completed the three year TOP UP program, representing an overall black completion rate of only 22.5%.

Years In Program. In 1990, 27 individuals were enrolled in the TOP UP program. Of these 27 total individuals, 24 successfully completed the program. In 1991, 61 individuals were enrolled in the TOP UP program. Of these 61 individuals, 53 successfully completed the three year program. In 1992, 61 individuals were enrolled in the TOP UP program. Of these 61 individuals, 50 total individuals completed the three year program. The total comes to 127 due to the fact that 7 individuals were in the program for more than one consecutive years.
Age. All participants were required to be at least 14 years of age to enter the program. Also, TOP UP participants could not be older than 19 years of age. The average age for TOP UP participants was 16.5 (SD=.97) years of age.

Graduation Status

Of the 120 total participants, 82 (68%) participants successfully completed high school. Eighteen (15%) participants did not graduate and/or dropped out of high school. Nine (8%) participants were lost contacts or unknowns. Eight (8%) participants were still enrolled in high school at the time of the study. Two (2%) participants received General Education Diplomas (GEDs). One (1%) participant died before completing high school.

The 1990, 1991, and 1992 TOP UP participants eligible to graduate high school have done so at a rate of 68%. This figure compares favorably to the 1990-1992 Kentucky average of 66.55% of beginning 9th graders who complete high school. In other words, TOP UP graduates had a high school drop out rate of 32% compared to the Kentucky rate of 33.4%. In the entire United States, 65.3% of the labor force is 16 years and over. Of this 65.3%, 11.2% are high school drop outs. The state of Nevada has the highest drop out rate at 15.2% of the population. Kentucky is ranked 8th in the nation for projected high school dropouts. North Dakota had the
lowest drop out rate (4.6%) (Kominski, 1990).

It should be noted that the TOP UP program's graduation rate was 86% among total participants. This percentage rate tends to support the notion that TOP UP is an effective dropout prevention program (See Table 1).

Table 1
Graduation Rates for TOP UP Program and Kentucky

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Number Graduated</th>
<th>Percentages Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOP UP Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did Not Graduate</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown Status</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still Enrolled</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received GED</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky Average</td>
<td></td>
<td>66.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender. Eighty-two of the 120 individuals enrolled in the program have graduated. Of the 65 males enrolled in the program, 45 (67%) successfully graduated high school. Of the 55 total females enrolled in the program, 37 (67%) successfully graduated high school. There were 93 total white participants, 57 (61%) of whom successfully graduated high school. There were 27 total black participants, 25 (93%) of whom graduated high school. As statistics indicate blacks were more successful at completing the TOP UP Program than whites.
Age. TOP UP participants ranged from 14 to 19 years of age. Over the past three years, TOP UP has enrolled one participant who was 14 years of age at the beginning of the program. The one participant did not graduate because he was killed in a car accident months after he left the program. There were 15 participants during the program who were age 15 at the beginning of the program. Of the 15 participants, 10 (67%) successfully completed high school. There was one participant who was 16.5 years of age at the beginning of the program. This participant did not finish high school. There were 42 participants who were 17 years of age at the beginning of the program. Of these 42 participants, 29 (68%) participants successfully completed high school. There were two participants who were 17.5 years of age enrolled at the beginning of the program. Both of these participants, successfully completed high school. There were 17 participants who were 18 years of age at the beginning of the program. Of these 17 participants, 14 (82%) successfully completed high school. There were two participants who were 19 years of age at the beginning of the program. One of the participants successfully completed high school.

Years in the Program. In 1990, 23 participants completed the TOP UP Program. Of the 23 participants, 20 (87%) completed high school. In 1991, 46 participants completed the TOP UP Program. Of the 46 participants, 28
(61%) completed high school. In 1992, 44 participants completed the TOP UP Program. Of the 44 participants, 30 (68%) completed high school. Seven participants were enrolled in the TOP UP program more than one year. In 1990 and 1991, One participant was enrolled for both years. This participant did graduate high school. In 1991 and 1992, six participants were enrolled both years. Of the six participants, five (83%) successfully completed high school (See Table 2).

High School Attended. There were 16 area high schools that participated in the TOP UP program. Caverna High School had the highest total number of students who participated. Logan County High School and Edmonson County High School had the second highest total number of students represented in the TOP UP program. Warren East High School had the least number of high school students represented. Allen County High School had the second smallest number of high school students represented.

Caverna had 19 students enrolled in the program. Of these 19 total students enrolled, 15 (79%) successfully completed high school. Bowling Green High School had a total of six students enrolled in the program. Of these 6 total students, four (67%) successfully completed high school. Logan County High School had 13 students enrolled in the program, Of these 13 students enrolled, nine (69%) successfully completed high school.
Table 2

Graduation Rates by Variable for Participants in the TOP Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Number Graduated</th>
<th>Percentage Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.5</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years in Program</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990 and 1991</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991 and 1992</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>120</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Barren County High School had seven students enrolled in the program. Of the seven students enrolled in the program, four (57%) successfully completed high school. Russellville High School had six students enrolled in the program. Of these 6 total students enrolled, four (67%) successfully completed high school. Edmonson County High School had 13 students enrolled in the program. Of the 13 students enrolled, nine (69%) successfully completed high school.

Warren Central High School had three students enrolled in the program, all of whom successfully completed high school. Hart County High School had 10 students enrolled in the program. Of these 10 students enrolled, six (60%) successfully completed high school. Butler County High School had eight total students enrolled in the program. Of the eight students enrolled, five (63%) successfully completed the program. Franklin Simpson High School had ten students enrolled in the program. Of the 10 students enrolled, seven (70%) successfully completed high school. Glasgow High School had five students enrolled in the program. Of the five students, three (60%) successfully completed high school. Allen County High School had 3 total students enrolled in the program. Of the three students, only one (33%) successfully completed high school.

Metcalfe County High School had five students enrolled in the program. Of the five students, three (60%)
successfully completed high school. Monroe County High School had four students enrolled in the program. All of the four students successfully completed high school. Greenwood High School had eight students enrolled in the program. Of the eight students enrolled, five (63%) successfully completed high school. These data are summarized in Table 3.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlations

As noted previously, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients were computed between each of the variables considered within the context of the current study. The results of these correlations are found in Table 4.

As noted, the only variable found to be significantly related to graduation status at the .05 level was age. Specifically, participants who began the program at an earlier age had a significantly higher probability of graduating than did their counterparts who entered the program at a more advanced age. However, -.23 is a relatively small correlation coefficient, meaning that the relationship is not very strong. None of the other variables correlate significantly at the .05 level with graduation status.
### Table 3

**Graduation Rates by High Schools for participants in TOP Program**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High Schools</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Graduated</th>
<th>Percentage Graduated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caverna</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowling Green</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logan County</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barren County</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russellville</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmonson County</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren Central</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hart County</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler County</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin Simpson</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen County</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metcalfe County</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monroe County</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenwood</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren East</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
Results of Pearson Product-Moment Correlations for Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Graduation Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>r</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Program</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Attended</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two Way Analysis of Variance

Table 5 contains the results of the Two Way Analysis of Variance utilized to determine if the participants differed significantly with respect to their graduation status when grouped according to the various factors examined during the study. As shown in Table 5, a significant difference was demonstrated only when "age" was used as the defining characteristic ($F = 4.240; df=5$). None of the other variables demonstrated significant differences. This finding further reinforces what was observed when the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficients were computed. Participants who enter the program at an earlier age do tend to have a greater probability of graduating from high school. Based on these results, it is possible to
reject the null hypothesis and conclude that participants in
the TOP UP program at WKU do exhibit a high school dropout
rate that is qualitatively lower than students who do not
participate in the program.

Table 5

Results of Two-Way Analysis of Variance for Graduation
Status
Exhibited by Participants Grouped According to Study
Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.739</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>.130</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.719</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>4.240</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>SIG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years In Program</td>
<td>1.286</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.280</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Attended</td>
<td>1.035</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>.425</td>
<td>NS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions and Future Plans

A major philosophical tenet of the TOP UP program is that "not all students learn in the same way, and although many students are turned off by traditional education they are not turned off to learning." The TOP UP program is built on the premise that it has the capability to turn potential dropouts back to school. It is important that its ability to achieve this goal be substantively demonstrated. The current study has helped to provide some support in that it demonstrated that TOP UP participants do tend to graduate at a higher rate than other Kentucky students who do not participate in the program.

A common expression concerning students in the population from which we recruit is "They don't care what you know until they know that you care." It must be made absolutely clear, TOP UP is not a remedial program but rather behavior modification and enrichment intervention which achieves its greatest success through intangible and hard to measure development of a sense of community and commitment to the TOP UP group and self-awareness. This is not to say classroom learning and academic achievement are not important, for they provide significant enhancement of self-esteem through measurable intellectual accomplishment.
Some of these kids go through more drama before 8:00 AM than some of us go through our whole lives.

Investing in children is no longer a luxury but a national imperative. Operating a program such as TOP UP is expensive in terms of cash outlay but is relatively cheap as an investment in the future of our nation's youth or as a transfer payment in lieu of welfare health care and penal costs.

The TOP UP Program has received considerable attention from several different educational entities and was recognized to be achieving remarkable results by utilizing concepts mandated by the Kentucky Education Reform Act. There is no doubt in the mind of students, staff, or faculty that TOP UP at WKU is a valid, reliable, and worthy endeavor which must be continued.

Although further research on the factors that contribute to "dropping out" behavior is warranted before substantive conclusions regarding the efficacy of programs such as TOP UP can be drawn, the current study clearly demonstrated the need for additional inquiry along these and similar lines. The TOP UP program does seem to have a positive effect on participants' probability of eventual success in graduating from high school. Therefore, it is highly recommended that it be continued. Moreover, a significant relationship was found between age and graduation. Specifically, the younger a participate enters
the program, the more likely it is that he/she will eventually graduate from high school. The study further reinforces the extreme importance of early intervention in the drop-out prevention process.

Planning is in process to establish future Training System Programs that will grow out of the concept of TOP UP and T3. Topper Threshold Training Systems was established to serve the needs of educational institutions within the University service region and with special emphasis upon the fourteen public school systems within the Barren River Area Development District. The Training Opportunities Program for Independence and Nurturing (TOP-IN at WKU) is a program based on the TOP UP at WKU program. TOP-IN at WKU is similar to TOP UP except it will target 14 and 15 year old "at risk" youth upon completion of the eighth grade and before they begin high school. As shown within this study, intervention is crucial at a young age. The objective of TOP-IN at WKU is to motivate the students for the high school experience and to acquaint them with opportunities which will be available to them. There will be parental involvement with this program. The TOP-IN program was approved but funding was not available.

Another program in the developmental stages is to establish the Training Opportunities Program for Developing Our Graduates. TOP-DOG at WKU is slated to be a year round and summer support program for young adults who have
completed one or more of the other "T3" programs and who are enrolled in post secondary education or training programs. The objective will be to reinforce the motivation to continue education and exercise civic responsibility by assisting younger students while serving as peer counselors and role models.

Another TOP UP "spinoff" in the planning stages is The Training Opportunities Program for Habilitating and Tutoring (TOP-HAT at WKU), an in-school program to equip and train selected individuals who will serve as tutors for primary grade children requiring assistance in building academic skills in math, reading, spelling, and other basic subjects. Lastly, Training Opportunities Program for Occupational Utilization Tactics. (TOP-OUT) at WKU will be an in-school and summer residential program during the senior year and immediately following graduation to prepare and place work bound "at risk" students in productive employment situations. Over 33% of TOP UP graduates have gone on to pursue post secondary educational opportunities programs.

TOP UP at WKU has met or exceeded all program goals and objectives. As reinforced through the current study, TOP UP at WKU has proven its value to school personnel and in achieving results with disadvantaged but deserving youth.
April 13, 1994

Mrs. Sharon Proffitt
High School Guidance Counselor
Monroe County High School
775 Old Mulkey Road
Tompkinsville, KY 42167

Dear Mrs. Profitt:

I am writing to you to request information about participants who were enrolled in the TOP UP at WKU Program. Over the past three years, Mr. Fulton and I have been affiliated with this wonderful dropout prevention program aimed at reducing high school dropouts. Our program was discontinued in May 1993 due to the unavailability of JTPA funds.

Presently, we are trying to track out past graduates to see if each of them completed high school. I hope we are able to obtain this information from you and your staff. We understand the confidentiality of your records. We will hold this information in strict confidence. We are requesting this information for statistical purposes only.

Enclosed you will find names and birthdates or social security numbers for the individuals who were enrolled in our program during 1990, 1991, and 1992. We hope you are able to assist us with this important endeavor. If you are unable to track a particular student please indicate whether the student has transferred to another school or dropped out of school. If you know the name of the high school transferred to please indicate name where applicable. Again we appreciate your assistance in this important manner. Please mail this information to Kaye Foust, 740 East 13th Avenue, Apt. B, Bowling Green, KY 42101.

Respectfully,

Kaye Lafferty Foust
Assistant Director and Counselor

Appendix 1
References


