

College Corps Summer Enrichment Program

PROGRAM EVALUATION

Introduction

The College Corps Summer Enrichment program, under the leadership of Fairfield University's School of Education and Human Development, aimed to provide K-12 students with enriching summer experiences to better prepare for the 2022-2023 school year and prepare undergraduate interns for meaningful service and civic engagement while introducing them to concepts such as social emotional learning, equity, diversity, academic support, and reflective practice. Training modules were developed by Fairfield University faculty and facilitated by the authors themselves or other faculty in the School of Education & Human Development. Each site had its own director responsible for the day to day supervising of college corps interns.

Evaluation Methodology

This program placed **84** undergraduate interns across **83** Connecticut sites from early July through mid-August 2022. A **pre-summer survey** was emailed to all interns, site directors, and facilitators who participated in this program prior to the start of the program and just after the week-long training. A **post-summer survey** similar to that of the previous summer (see Executive Summary for 2021) upon completion of their camp cycle experience. In addition to these survey instruments, a **virtual focus group** was held to gather the perceptions, insights, and feedback data of the trainers and facilitators with a focus on strengths of the process, training needs and supports, and comparative insights from Summer I to Summer II.

Highlights

Overall, multiple lines of evidence indicate that the second year of the College Corps program **replicated the successes that were observed in the first year**. Corps members reported significant **personal and professional development**, and partner sites expressed that the program was positive and helped provide **critical staffing support**.

The members of the College Corps who responded to the pre- and post-summer surveys represented an **impressively diverse group**, with participation across both genders and diverse racial/ethnic groups. (Participant demographics are on p. 3 and 4).

Relative to Summer I, there were **two areas of substantial improvement**. First, the widespread complaints about **logistics and operations** that were seen in Year I disappeared in Summer II, reflecting a remarkable organizational shift in just one implementation cycle. Only one operational issue remained prominent, which was the late timing for matching interns to sites. Solving this issue in the future will require robust collaboration by the state of Connecticut which funds the program and the operational team running the College Corps program. Second, the training team made an intentional effort to increase **attention to issues of inclusion, bias, and equity** during the training. This decision had a noticeable impact, as participants had many positive comments about this aspect of the training, and no negative ones. Importantly, there was no indication that any aspects of program implementation deteriorated from Summer I to Summer II, suggesting that the program is building and improving on a solid foundation.

The program evaluation in Summer II repeated the assessment of the program's ability to meet its overall goals, and **expanded evaluation of the training aspect of the program**. One limitation was that overall post-summer response rates by College Corps were lower than anticipated, which limits some conclusions and should be addressed in future implementations. Aside from this limitation, the expanded evaluation provided evidence that **the training for Corps members is well-constructed, effective, and valuable**.

I. Preparatory Training for College Corps Members

In 2022, as in 2021, a week-long training program was delivered to the Corps members at the beginning of June. The program consisted of ten modules – a morning module and an afternoon module for each day, on the following topics: (1) Self-Care/Mindfulness/SEL; (2) Identity, Belonging, Community, Relationships; (3) Impact of Student Academic Loss, Isolation, & Mental Health; (4) Relationship Building/Team Building; (5) Inclusion, Accommodations, & Modifications; and (6) Assets-Based Community Development;

The effectiveness of the training was evaluated via a pre-summer survey. The survey assessed (1) the effectiveness of each training model; (2) strengths and weaknesses of the training overall; and (3) corps members' sense of *preparation* and *self-efficacy* going into the summer. **26** respondents¹ completed the pre-test measure.

Respondents were asked to rate each module on 3 questions: *This module was effective; This module was valuable; This module gave me new information, ideas, and/or tools.* In addition, specific questions

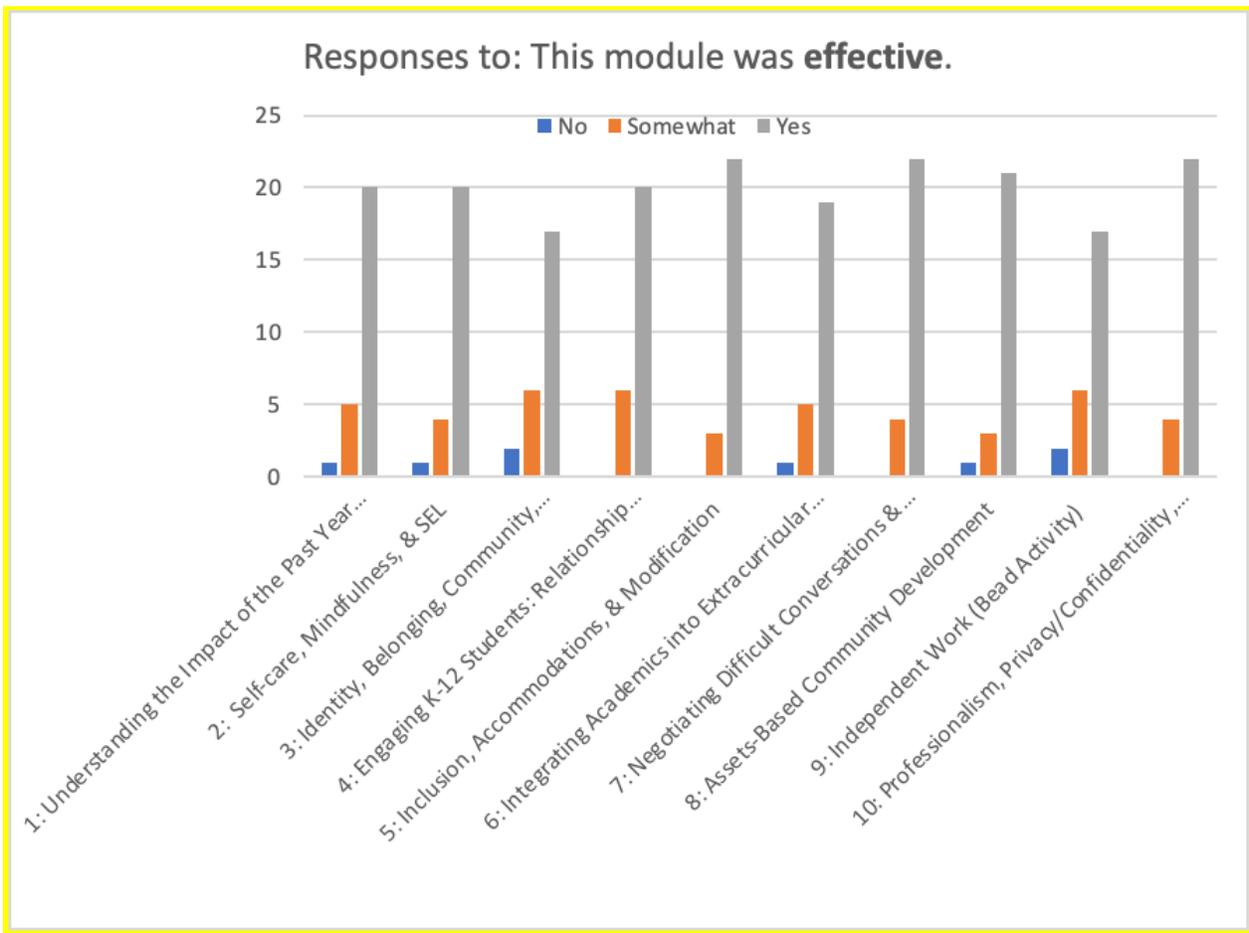
The week-long training was effective and valuable for Corps members. The vast majority – 98% – of responses was “yes” or “somewhat” to the questions for the 10 modules, and 76% of these were “yes” responses. Thus, respondents found the training that was developed and implemented by Fairfield University beneficial.

Open-ended comments suggested that the training provided a solid basis for working with school-aged campers and supplemented members' existing knowledge and skills for working with children. Several respondents conveyed the sentiment that the sessions “put me in the right mindset” for the work. A number responded that the training helped them know what to expect, prepared them to create enriching experiences for children, and encouraged them to consider issues of inclusivity, diversity, and equity. Participants

¹ Self-reported participant demographics were: 7 Male, 18 Female, 1 Other; 9 Black (including African-American, Black African, and Caribbean), 6 Hispanic, 8 White, 1 Biracial, 1 Not specified. An additional 9 participants started the survey but did not respond to any questions about the program.

commented positively on the value of sessions covering diversity, equity, and inclusivity as well as the curriculum on self-care.

Participants had overwhelmingly positive responses to the multimodal delivery/instructional style blending independent reading, presentations, and group discussions. The mixed format delivery was endorsed by respondents as highly conducive to learning. 70-90% of respondents reported having learned “a lot” to a “great deal” on the following: ability to support campers; intellectual/academic growth; the ability to forge relationships with campers; the ability to stimulate creativity in children; the ability to create a fun and engaging program; and an increased awareness in assessing bias and promoting inclusivity.



II. Post-Summer Program Survey

The *post-test* survey assessed the perceptions of all stakeholders for outcomes related to learning and growth as considerations for future replications of the program. The survey yielded **41 respondents** including **19 interns** (22% response rate), **22 site directors** (27% response rate), and **0 trainers/facilitators**.² Findings were analyzed by respondent category as well as themes emerging across all stakeholders, and supplemented with interviews with key personnel.

Posttest findings evidence several key outcomes related to program strengths:

There was overwhelming support for Corps members and the desire to have College Corps members on site in the future. On the whole, the post-test survey revealed a positive experience for corps members and placements sites. Site directors expressed significant support for the value and presence of College Corps Members by the site directors. 85% of respondents noted that their interns added value to their program site and would enjoy having them in the future. Further, 72% of site directors reported having had all the information they needed about the College Corps Members in advance, a critical improvement from the organizational and communication issues noted in Summer I. Corps members were described as kind, professional, mature, and willing to help children and knowledgeable. Notably, none of the site directors indicated that they felt the College Corps Members required any additional training than what Fairfield University had provided.

College Corps members felt sufficiently trained for and supported in their roles, and they gained critical professional and life skills, impactful personal development, and preparation for future careers. Reflecting on their preparation after concluding the

² For the College Corps interns, self-reported demographics were: 3 Male, 15 Female, 1 Other; 7 Black (including African-American, Black African, and Caribbean), 3 Hispanic/Latine, 7 White, 2 Multiracial, 1 Native, 1 Not specified. An additional 3 participants started the survey but did not respond to any questions about the program.

For the Site Directors, self-reported demographics were: 4 Male, 18 Female; 3 Black (African-American), 22 White, 0 Hispanic/Latine, 0 Asian. An additional 2 participants started the survey but did not respond to any questions about the program.

program, participants felt well prepared, trained, and ready to create an enriching, engaging, and inclusive program for children and to forge positive relationships. The week-long training and site-specific support and coaching, combined with participants' past experiences, were sufficient to help College Corps members carry out their roles across a variety of site placements. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. College Corps' members responses to questions about preparation and training.

Statement (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)	Mean	Std Dev
I felt trained to create a fun and engaging program for children and/or youth.	4.5	0.5
I felt trained to forge relationships/connections with student/campers.	4.4	0.8
I felt trained to stimulate the curiosity of children and/or youth.	4.5	0.5
I felt trained to support campers' academic/intellectual growth.	4.3	1.1
I felt trained to support campers' social emotional learning.	4.5	1.0
My placement site provided beneficial training and preparation for the work they needed me to do.	3.9	1.2
My weekly meeting with the mentor helped prepare me for working with my placement site.	3.4	1.2
The week-long training in June helped prepare me for working with my placement site.	3.7	1.3

Furthermore, students reported self-efficacy in key areas of working with children, while also building awareness about what they *didn't* know and would like to further develop. (See Table 2.)

College Corps members overwhelmingly reported that this experience made them more reflective about and comfortable with their interactions with children and with mentors, as well as about issues of bias and inclusivity. Nearly all participants endorsed statements about these critical 21st century skills (selected "agree" or "strongly agree"). Participants' responses indicate that the College Corps experience robustly increases these skills, and

suggests that the benefit might transfer to future professional and personal settings well beyond the summer experience. Consistent open-ended comments across participants noted that the program increased their *creative problem-solving, communication skills, and ability to de-escalate difficult situations.*

Table 2. College Corps members’ responses to questions about self-efficacy and skills.

Statement (1=not at all, 2=alittle, 3=a moderate amount, 4=a lot, 5=a great deal)	Mean	Std Dev
I am able to support campers’ social emotional learning.	3.9	1.1
I am able to support campers’ academic/intellectual growth.	4.0	1.2
I am able to forge relationships/connections with student/campers.	4.2	0.8
I am able to stimulate the curiosity of children and/or youth.	3.9	1.1
I am able to create a fun and engaging program for children and/or youth.	4.2	0.7
I am knowledgeable about child development and behavior.	3.7	1.0
I am knowledgeable about creating enriching experiences for children.	4.0	1.0
I am aware of and ready to address bias in myself and others.	4.2	0.9
I am able to promote equity and inclusion at my site placement.	4.4	0.8

Table 3. College Corps members’ responses to questions about reflective practice.

Statement (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)	Mean	Std Dev
As a result of this experience, I became more reflective in how I interact with children and youth.	4.9	0.4
As a result of this experience, I became more reflective in how I interact with mentors and facilitators.	4.6	0.6
As a result of this experience, I am more comfortable working with children and youth.	4.7	0.8
As a result of this experience, I am more comfortable promoting equity and supporting diverse individuals in youth-oriented settings.	4.5	0.8

The program supports students' awareness of teaching and child oriented careers. Of the 14 College Corps members who answered this question, 7 responded that the program increased their interest in teaching. Those who had an interest in teaching prior to the program commented on some of the challenges and commented on areas where they would seek more training, such as dealing with difficult behaviors. Others noted that while they were not exploring a teaching career specifically, they were interested in mental health professions (e.g., social work, school counselor) and that the experience was valuable for better understanding children and families. Overall, the program may provide an effective window into child and youth oriented careers for college students, and help scaffold a deeper awareness about the skills and knowledge base that would be beneficial in those careers.

College Corps members suggested more training about managing site and coworker relationships. One representative comment stated: "There was so much information about how to interact with the children, but not enough information on how to interact with co-workers to ensure a proper and smooth transition." This would be a useful addition to the training program and would help Corps members develop transferable skills.

Finally, although the campers and other youth served by College Corps sites were not directly assessed in this program evaluation, Corps members were asked to reflect on where they saw growth in their campers. Common themes included children's increasing comfort in the new situation, independence, emotion regulation, ability to listen and follow instructions, and engagement with new ideas.

III. Trainer Focus Groups

Findings of the 2022 **trainer/facilitator focus group** suggest the following trends across respondents:

Program Strengths

Respondents stated that the ability to collaborate and co-plan curriculum and modules is an inherent strength of the model. Interdisciplinary collaborations were also valuable. Further, the ability to draw upon trainer expertise and background allowed for the rein to create and tweak modules in a relevant, content-rich way. Also, a content outline from Dr. Smith provided a structure and guidepost for content development. Further, the knowledge of what to expect the second time around helped with training efficiency and organization. Lastly, all respondents noted that an increased focus and emphasis on DEISJ helped enrich and deepen the delivery from Summer I to Summer II.

Expressed Needs & Additional Supports

The desire for targeted feedback on the applicability learning outcomes of training sessions, learning gaps, and trainee application of training knowledge was expressed by all respondents. The group described a desire to use feedback from members to inform the following iteration of training as well as survey them for self-identified gaps in the learning process. This feedback loop would further enhance the trainer's ability to request resources needed to meet instructional needs. Also, the opportunity to have a sense of the site specifics, including aims and demographics served at each site, was also identified as key to improving training content. Likewise, the need for increased collaboration between the author of the module and the facilitator of the module was noted. Finally, trainers mentioned specific guidance from the state as to more structured vision for module targets/outcomes could further help with content development.

Limitations and Considerations

Several areas emerged as needing further attention and development:

Communication between Trainers & Content Developers. Training modules in some cases were developed by one professional and delivered by another. The need to create opportunity and space for developers and implementers to collaborate will further support the outcomes of training effectiveness. This was explicitly noted in the focus group data.

Need for an Evaluative Feedback Loop. Findings that were consistent across trainers indicate that they were not given evaluative feedback about trainees' perception of the training experience, its quality and applied impact, and what the members desired to be embedded into their training experience. This data can be collected directly and rapidly as "course evaluation" data as an exit activity at the end of each module, and then supplemented with a few items in the post survey. Further, sites can also benefit from the sharing of evaluation data to help guide their efforts and reception of corps members. Trainers may also wish to collaborate with sites about needs and content areas that may further enhance member training.

Participation in Program Evaluation Measures. Significantly fewer respondents participated in the program evaluation efforts this iteration. This year's assessment included an additional pretest measure, and this might have lessened commitment or created survey-invitation fatigue. The issue of response rate needs to be explored and addressed to improve data quality.

Conclusion

Integrated results from Summer 2021 and Summer 2022 evidenced consistent and overwhelming improvement in the areas highlighted in the prior program evaluation for the following areas: centralizing communication; improving relationships between members and sites, and increased dedication, professionalism, and preparedness. Likewise, administrative issues related to compensation structures, hiring, and timely placement assignments were ironed out in Summer II. The vast majority of respondents felt well trained, well prepared, and committed, and this impression was further validated by the site directors.

The College Corps Summer Enrichment Program demonstrated increased effectiveness in both mechanics of implementation and the quality of services provided to members, sites, and campers. Internally, communication of feedback and program evaluation data to

trainers and content developers will only continue to improve the delivery of an already successful offering for the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The program met its goals. Members and site directors were overwhelmingly positive about the experience for the second year in a row. Therefore, **the first and strongest recommendation is to continue the College Corps program in future years.** The program serves multiple constituencies all at once: corps members benefit from an enriching experience, site directors receive support and staffing for their enrichment programs, and children benefit from the participation of well-trained young adults. Furthermore, there were noticeable improvements between Summer I (2021) and Summer II (2022): the program made significant progress in its provision to provide training emphasizing EDISJ and matters of inclusivity, and achieved a dramatic reduction in complaints about logistics, communication, and payment that hampered the success in the first year. These improvements indicate a well-functioning “learning system” in which participants can successfully implement a cycle of continuous improvement.

Future iterations of the program can and should continuously build on its strong foundation by incorporating feedback from prior years. Specific recommendations for improvement for the next iteration include:

Provide or strengthen feedback to trainers. A notable finding that was consistently voiced across trainers in the virtual focus group was the need for trainers to receive ongoing feedback as to how their modules are meeting the needs of trainees as well as sites and campers. This can be accomplished via a needs assessment outreach to sites prior to the start of the summer program.

Continue deepening the relationship between Corps members and sites. The most prominent strength of the program was the positive and synergistic experiences of interns

and sites. Future iterations of the program should build on this strength. For example, it would be helpful to solicit guidance from sites about which topics to include in the week-long training; to match interns to sites in time for interns to participate in site-specific staff training; to prevent problematic placements from the outset when possible (e.g., distant commutes); and to create a rapid response protocol to address any problems that arise. This recommendation remains prominent across both implementation years.

Enhance College Corps members' training about child development. While many aspects of the week-long training and hands-on site experience are invaluable for increasing Corps members' knowledge and understanding about child development, this was an area of weakness relative to other topics like equity and inclusion, self-care, and professionalism. Corps members and site directors alike commented on a desire for more coaching on this topic. Increased developmental content could be added to the existing training modules, replace a less-effective training module (e.g., the beading activity), and/or be incorporated as an ongoing aspect of coaching during the weekly group sessions with facilitators.

Preparing constituents for program evaluation & consolidating assessment. Gathering representative samples for survey research is a challenge across the field of education. The ability to gather swift, concise sampling of outcome data is critical for program improvement. This message may need to be included in the training sessions and/or contracts for members and sites, and members may need to understand the rationale for the collection of this data and its purpose in sustaining and improving the camp and College Corps experience. Likewise, training evaluation data can also be collected on site in session, following each module via a short exit survey or course evaluation. Methods for consolidating data requests should be considered in future planning efforts.

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