

History of TRiO

Four Decades of Success and Counting...

The first decade, the decade of the sixties, is the decade of the creation of TRiO. TRiO began, not with the Higher Education Act, but with the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the original War on Poverty statute, which created the Upward Bound program.

That was followed by the original Higher Education Act of 1965, which created the Talent Search program. We then had the first reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, of which we've now had six. The first reauthorization was in 1968, at which time Student Support Services was created. By 1968, the original TRiO programs had been created - Upward Bound, Talent Search and Student Support Services. Also in 1968, Upward Bound was transferred out of the Office of Economic Opportunity and into the Higher Education Act.

The second reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1972 created the Educational Opportunity Centers. The 1970s could be called the decade of continued expansion, starting with the creation of the Educational Opportunity Centers in 1972, and then in 1976, with the staff and leadership training authority. By the end of the seventies, most of the programs were in place.

The critical decade for TRiO came in the eighties, which can be characterized as the decade of building permanence of the TRiO programs.

The reauthorization of 1980 was particularly important for the adoption of two key concepts for the TRiO programs: first generation in college and prior performance.

First generation in college is important in defining the eligibility of students for the TRiO programs, because it moved the programs in a more inclusive direction in looking at the origin and the impact of non-financial barriers to access and success in postsecondary education. And politically, it enabled the TRiO program to build a broader coalition in Congress, a coalition not just of poor people, but a coalition of all of those who had not had opportunities, or whose constituents had not had opportunities for postsecondary education.

Prior performance is an even more important core concept of TRiO, both philosophically and politically. From a philosophical point of view, prior performance means that TRiO programs are not demonstration programs. They, in fact, are, and should be, a permanent part of every institution's student aid program.

In the same way that one doesn't close down easily an institution's financial aid program, one would not close down its TRiO program. These two programs are complementary programs aimed at a full range of bar-to-equal opportunity in postsecondary education. And they should be co-equals in terms of their status and in terms of their permanence in higher education.

So prior performance meant from its philosophical point of view that the TRiO programs are an integral part of student aid and that ideally, everywhere that student financial aid exists, so also should the full range of TRiO programs and services exist.

Politically, prior performance has facilitated the development of an extensive cadre of experienced TRiO Professionals. These people, over time, have gained political sophistication and experience that has enabled them to become a nationwide network of people able to protect and expand TRiO, as well as speak to and work for the broader agenda of equal opportunity.

Having a group of professionals across the country who have been able to persevere from year to year, as opposed to having programs uprooted every few years and moved from place to place is politically indispensable.

The 1980 reauthorization was really a watershed, in the sense of having five of the six programs in place and being able to enact the two key philosophical and political tenants of the TRiO program, first generation and prior performance.

More recently, the fifth reauthorization of the TRiO programs was in 1986, at which time the final of the current array of programs was created - the McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program.

Thus, looking back a decade, it's easy to forget that it took 22 years, from 1964 to 1986, to construct the current array of TRiO programs. The most recent reauthorization, in 1992, the sixth reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, added one more, or in effect, put an exclamation point on one more important dimension of the TRiO history, and that is to put the TRiO programs in law rather than leaving them largely to the administrative discretion of the Department of Education.

When Congress passed the reauthorization of 1972, the TRiO programs in the law were one and a half pages long. Today the TRiO programs are 11 pages long in the law. They haven't changed that much in the 20 years between 1972 and 1992. The only real change is to add the McNair program.

What has changed is to increasingly elaborate and to write into the law the administrative conditions and administrative operations of the TRiO programs - that is, to increasingly take out of the discretion of the Department of Education, previously the Office of Education, how TRiO is to operate.

This action has served to shield the TRiO program from the impact of changes of administration, from changes in personnel within the administration and from various new enthusiasms of the administration as time goes by. For example, in 1992, the concept of a base grant was enacted, which stated that there would be a certain base level of stability for programs, that there would be a set aside of funds to hire readers for the TRiO program to ensure that there would be readers from outside of the Department of Education, that there would be a diverse and broad pool of readers selected and that grant applications would be rank-ordered in terms of their assessment.

All of those things would normally be found in regulations, but in the TRiO programs, all of these things are in the law. Therefore, TRiO has, in effect, shielded itself from the discretion and whims of the executive branch.

The twin transformations of the 1980s are, first of all, that TRiO has become an institution. TRiO programs are stable. They are continuous. They are not subject to the whim of either legislators or administrations.

In the second transformation, there was a move from an odd collection of programs that came from different places and different ideas into a very cohesive set of programs that are interlocking in their constituencies, in the services that are offered and in the administrative provisions that apply to all of the programs.

The second transformation of the 1980s is the growth in the political strength of the TRiO programs. TRiO programs have come a long way in terms of their political recognition. They've come a long way in terms of the political respect that they have, in terms of the political stature they have, and fundamentally, in terms of the political power they have. The TRiO programs are on the Washington scene and are not a constituency to be trifled with. They are a source of political power on behalf of their agenda and their programs. This is a tremendous record of success and a proud achievement.