

Results of a Survey of Students in the James Irvine Foundation Sponsored Martín-Baró Scholars Program at the University of San Francisco

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In December 2002, the Office of Institutional Research at the University of San Francisco, with the assistance of the Assessment Office, conducted an attitudinal survey of 33 Martín-Baró Scholars who were part of a program sponsored by the James Irvine Foundation. At USF, the overall program was named *Educating for a Just Society*, and the Martín-Baró Scholars component consisted of a learning community of socially involved scholars in the spirit of Ignacio Martín-Baró, one of the Jesuit martyrs killed in El Salvador in 1989. The students in the program engaged in a comprehensive living-learning community during their freshman year; took an integrated course that was specially designed to explore issues of social justice and diversity and that involved students in reflective service learning; and received academic and social support and advising from peer and faculty mentors, to name just some of the features of the program. The living-learning community will continue into the students' sophomore year, and other program components will be added as well. The attitudinal survey was administered at the end of the first semester of the freshman year to the Martín-Baró Scholars, and to a control group of 81 freshmen that were living in the same residence hall as the Martín-Baró Scholars, had similar demographic characteristics, but were not in the program (see Table 31).

The results of the attitudinal survey illustrate the potential impact of the Martín-Baró Scholars Program on the lives of the students in the program. The 30-item survey instrument used, first developed by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980), assesses social integration, academic involvement, persistence, and institutional and goal commitment among college students. The results from our study indicated a relatively higher level of integration and academic involvement among the USF freshmen that were in the Martín-Baró Scholars Program in comparison to the control group. For example, among the respondents in the Martín-Baró Scholars Program, 66.7% strongly agreed with the following statement: "since coming to this university, I have developed close personal relationships with other students." Among the students in the control group, 51.9% strongly agreed with this proposition. Likewise, 57.6% of the Martín-Baró Scholars strongly agreed, "most of the faculty members I have had contact with are interested in helping students grow in more than just academic areas." Among students in the control group, 25.9% strongly agreed with this statement. On another faculty-related item, 60.6% of the Martín-Baró Scholars strongly agreed, "most faculty members I have had contact with are generally interested in teaching." In comparison, 45.7% of the control group strongly agreed with this proposition.

The Pascarella and Terenzini instrument also includes several items that assess attitudes related to college retention and persistence. The responses to those items on the survey also favored the Martín-Baró Scholars. For example, 93.9% of Martín-Baró Scholars strongly agreed, "it is important to me to graduate from college." Among the students in the control group, 79.0% strongly agreed with this statement. Similarly, 51.5% of the Martín-Baró Scholars strongly disagreed with the statement that "it is not important to me to graduate from this university." Among the students in the control group, 37.0% strongly disagreed with this statement. Chi-square analysis revealed that the differential responses between the Martín-Baró Scholars and the control group on this item were

statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence. Given the small number of students surveyed, and the exacting criteria demanded by Chi-square analysis, to achieve statistical significance on any item is telling. For the forthcoming academic year, 78.8% of the Martín-Baró Scholars strongly agreed “it is likely that I will register at USF next fall.” Among the students in the control group, 54.3% strongly agreed with this statement. Finally, on one of the items on institutional commitment, 57.6% of the Martín-Baró Scholars strongly agreed, “I am confident I made the right decision in choosing to attend this university.” For students in the control group, the corresponding figure was 40.7% on this statement. For the complete results of the survey, see Tables 1–30.

Although the Pascarella and Terrenzini survey was completed by the Martín-Baró Scholars and the control group barely three months after the beginning of their first semester, research from other institutions (Pascarella, Terrenzini, 1980, 1983) indicates a positive association between favorable student responses to the survey items during the freshman year and student retention rates in subsequent years. In the final analysis, a significant benefit of the Martín-Baró Scholars Program may be in fostering among students greater social interaction with staff, faculty, and other students; a commitment to academic and career goals; and the development of a sense of belonging to the university community. These factors may loom as important as the acquisition of specific academic skills in helping our students persist in attaining their goals.

References

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