The Role of Bridge Programs in the Academic and Social Transition to College of Underrepresented Students

Kori Strother
September 5, 2014
Lampert Fellowship
Introduction

Research shows that under-represented students, such as racial-ethnic minority and low-income students, typically have less positive social and academic experiences at predominantly white, selective colleges in comparison to white students (Aries 2008; Mullens 2010). Although over the last three years the national graduation rate of black students has risen to 42 percent, it is still extremely low compared to the graduation rate of white students (62%). Moreover, the graduation rates of under-represented students at elite colleges and universities vary greatly. For example, the graduation rates for black students at Harvard, Amherst, and Princeton are almost on par with white student rates, but graduation rates at Bates College, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Colby College, and Carleton College are still well below 70 percent for black students (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education 2006). This raises important questions about how institutional culture and how certain programs impact the academic and social experience of under-represented students.

Although differences in academic preparation explain some of the observed gap in graduation rates and retention, research suggests that academic performance and premature student departure from college are linked to the social and academic experiences on college campuses (Tinto, 1987). Tinto presents a model of institutional departure, which revolves around the idea that “an institution’s capacity to retain students is directly related to its ability to reach out and make contact with students and integrate them into the social and intellectual fabric of institutional life” (Tinto 1993: 204-5). Tinto acknowledges that students do enter
these institutions with preconceived commitments and intentions that often factor into students prematurely departing (Tinto 1987; Bowen and Bok 1998). However, he asserts that equal weight ought to be given to the institution’s effort in integrating students, of all backgrounds, because students who do not feel apart of the social sphere, nor persistently supported by faculty and staff of the institution, are often turned off by the institution (Tinto 1987). Ultimately Tinto provides a solid platform for assessing bridge programs, which are major component of social and academic integration efforts geared toward under-represented students at predominantly white and affluent institutions.

To understand institutional campus climate, one must look more closely at how support programs, such as bridge programs, impact students’ experiences. Research shows that under-represented groups often struggle because they tend to feel like outsiders on predominantly white and affluent campuses (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education 2006). Many elite institutions have developed support programs targeted specifically to improve the social and academic experience of under-represented students, such as pre-college academic programs and faculty and peer mentoring programs, but it is important to note the breadth and quality of these programs varies by institution. Ultimately, this research helps to understand what the role of bridge programs is at predominantly white, affluent, small liberal arts institutions. Furthermore, it provides major insights into answering the question of what are the origin and histories of individual bridge programs and what is the logic behind the similarities and differences in the designs and overall functions of these programs?
Why study bridge programs? Through the 2013-14 academic year, I conducted a qualitative longitudinal study of Colgate’s central support program: the Summer Institute Program (OUS). According the OUS website, the aim of this program is to “makes it possible for Colgate to welcome a number of students who have triumphed over educational, socioeconomic, or cultural challenges — and enhance their campus experience” (Colgate University). To understand whether and how participation in the OUS program shaped student experiences, I conducted interviews at two points in time with first year students who were admitted into the OUS program and a demographically matched sample of students. The first round of interviews showed barely any difference in how the two samples perceived their social and academic experiences would be at Colgate: mostly positive. The second round of interviews did show that O.U.S was beneficial academically and socially for the participant; however, this data also showed that the majority of students, regardless of participation in the O.U.S program, were having positive academic and social experiences, mainly because of attending a high school that adequately prepared them for college academically and also exposed them to a similar demographic as Colgate socially. Essentially attending private high schools prepared students academically and for the campus climate socially, which helped them have a relatively positive transition to college. Ultimately, this paper argues that the O.U.S program is effective in strengthening academic confidence and providing academic and social support for participants throughout the school year. However, the social and academic backgrounds of non-traditional students is one of the most important
factors that affects their college experience regardless of participation in this bridge program.

Thus, my past findings, which suggest that there is significant variation in the impact of bridge programs, have motivated me to assess bridge programs at other small liberal arts institutions with similar racial and socio-economic demographic to Colgate University. This study found that most bridge programs are founded broadly to address a need to aid and support underrepresented students in their transition to college. However, overtime bridge programs have been trying to get away from this stigma of being a remedial resource for underrepresented students, arguing that these programs are for scholars from underrepresented backgrounds. Each institution’s bridge program operates under a director who at most institutions is under the Dean of Faculty division. The director is accompanied by faculty who teach in the program and students who mentor and tutor during the program. The longer the program has been around the larger the group of program facilitators is.

One of the main differences between programs is how these institutions chose to select the students who qualify to participate in the program. The different selection approaches include, choosing students who show academic potential but based off of ACT/SAT and grade point averages would not be allowed into the institution, sending out applications to all accepted students of color, sending out a limited amount of applications to a select group of identified underrepresented students, and selecting students who either meet certain state guidelines or through his or her application indicate that he or she can benefit from the program. For half of the institutions involved in this study the students are required to pass the
program to attend. For one of the institutions participation is not optional, but student are not required to attend the institution and then for one program participation is completely voluntary.

The last major differentiation is with the courses and course credits. Two of the programs have a major focus on math, science, and writing preparation. One focuses on exposure to different academic lenses and using the program as a way to help the participants determine which areas of study are best for him or her. While another program aims to expose students to quality professors who will help the students understand what to expect from a liberal arts education and furthermore how to navigate it. In terms of course credit, all accept for one program offers course credit.

Ultimately, this paper argues that bridge programs have essentially all originated out a need for academic and social support for students at predominantly white, affluent, small liberal arts institutions. Yet, each individual institution has developed their own way design and way of running these programs based on what they feel is the ideal way to help students transition to college, mainly with a focus on academics. Moreover, with time bridge programs secure more funding and freedom to assess, redesign, and evolve; straying away from remedial reputations to being a resource for ‘scholarly’ students who are from underrepresented backgrounds.

Data and Methods
To understand what the role of bridge programs is at predominantly white, affluent, small liberal arts institutions is and furthermore, the origin and histories of individual bridge programs and the logic behind the similarities and differences in the designs and overall functions of these programs, I conducted a qualitative comparative study of Colgate University and the following peer institutions: Hamilton College, Williams College, and Haverford College. I selected these institutions based on Princeton Review ratings as well as recent research on colleges that have shown exceptional improvements in the retention of under-represented students (Tyre 2014; Aries 2008). Furthermore, I selected these institutions that have a very similar demographic to Colgate University: small, highly selective, predominantly white, and affluent liberal arts institutions. However, the most important factor in selecting these schools was ensuring that each school had a summer bridge program.

With the financial support provided to me from the Lampert Institute for Civic and Global Affairs, I traveled to Colgate University, Hamilton College, Haverford College, and Williams College and used the qualitative research method to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews with the Directors of each institutions bridge program. In these interviews I sought to understand the origin, design, operation, and outcomes of each program. In addition to those interviews I also conducted one focus group with a group of current students who previously attended the bridge program at their respective institutions. These groups ranged from three to eight participants. In these interviews my goal was to gain an understanding of the students perspective on program in regard to the design,
operation, and ultimately their opinion on how the program helped or hindered their academic and/or social experience transition to college and overall college experience thus far. Due to time constraints, this paper will only address the interviews conducted with the Directors of each bridge program.

In order to attain my sample of schools I first had to determine what qualified as a bridge program. Ultimately, I determined that for the purpose of this research a bridge program is any program administered by an institution of higher education that is conducted in the summer period, post high school and pre-college, with the intention of aiding in predominantly underrepresented students academic and/or social transition to college. Once I established this definition I looked at Colgate University's peer institutions websites in search of programs that qualified as bridge programs as I have defined it. Once I configured a list of these schools I attempted to set up interviews with the Directors of each program via email and phone. The schools that are involved in my study are a reflection of both the institutions that contacted me back and agreed to my visits, as well as the number of institutions that I could visit within the parameters of the funding that I was allotted for travel. Once I was able to get in contact with each individual Director, I coordinated an on campus visit and interview in a confidential and comfortable place. The interviews were conducted during June and July of 2014.

The purpose of taking the qualitative research approach as opposed to a quantitative research approach is to get an in-depth understanding of the social, academic, and economic background of the students so that I could get a better understanding of their individual social and academic expectations and experiences
at Colgate. This method of performing semi-structured in-depth interviews was an ideal avenue for behavioral, perception, and cognitive reasoning analysis (Weiss 1994), because the participants had the freedom to elaborate on their answers and I was able to observe their body language throughout the interview. Ultimately, this data helped me understand how bridge programs operate and function as an intended means of academic and/or social support for underrepresented students at small, highly selective, predominantly white, liberal arts institutions.

For the purpose of this study I will define words in light of my own interpretation. I will define underrepresented students as students who identify in one or more of the following categories: low socio-economic background, racial/ethnic minority, first generation immigrant (student with immigrant parents), and/or first generation college student. As stated earlier bridge program refers is any program administered by an institution of higher education that is conducted in the summer period, post high school and pre-college, with the intention of aiding in predominantly underrepresented students academic and/or social transition to college. Peer Institution will refer to any school that is similar in racial, ethnic, and/or economic demographic, as well as academic rigor to another institution. Economically disadvantaged is defined as not having a comfortable income, which has as a result prevented one from not have equal access to resources. For the purpose of this research academically disadvantaged refers to a student who for whatever reason has not had access to adequate educational resources and preparation for college level work. A student of color is any non-white student. Social satisfaction will be defined as the number of friends, quality of old
and new friendships/relationships, level of social involvement (clubs, parties, hanging out with friends) of an individual, and sense of belonging. I will define *academic satisfaction* as comfort in the classroom, relationship with professors, perceived difficulty with work, sense of adequate college preparation, sense of academic support, and confidence in the classroom. *Academic success* will refer to the overall satisfaction with coursework grades. I will define *happiness* as satisfaction with relationships with family, life, and Colgate. Lastly, *support* refers to level of help and encouragement received from friends, family, faculty, staff, student organizations, and so on.

The interviews lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour and a half to allow each participant a comfortable amount of time to respond thoroughly to each question. To begin the interview I asked the participants to describe the mission and goals of their respective bridge programs, making sure to note at which points in the program’s history that the goals changed and/or evolved. The questions that followed in this section were in regard to origin and set up of the program. I essentially probed for a concrete understanding of each bridge program’s history, philosophy, and overall design. In the next section I asked questions about program effectiveness, assessment, and changes that have been made in response to evaluation and observations made over time. The overall aim of this section was to gain understanding of the programs progress and outcomes. The following section sought to unveil future plans and goals for the program moving forward. The last section broadly sought to address other forms of support on campus. In other words, this sections purpose was to determine whether or not these institutions
have other forms of academic and social support for underrepresented students who do not have the privilege of participating in the program.

Proper steps were taken in order to protect the participant’s identities. Each participant was asked to sign the Certificate of Informed Consent form before beginning the interview. The participant was then read all of his or her rights, which included the voluntary refusal to answer any question as well as the ability to conclude the interview at any time. Each Director was then asked to choose a fake name or pseudonym, but all informants agreed to be recognized in all documents as the Director of their respective programs instead. Therefore, throughout the interview and on all documentation involved in this research project the participant is referred to as the Director of their respective programs. These interviews took place in a quiet, area in which the participant’s was comfortable. I collected this data in a face-to-face interview using an audio-recorder on a Mac computer and took field notes during the session. I transcribed and imported the interviews onto MaxQDA. I used this program to code and analyze the data: drawing similarities and differences between bridge programs. The transcript data was stored on my MacBook computer that is password protected. Each interview was deleted after it was transcribed and coded. No other outside observations were included in the data separate to what was recorded during the interview.

Results

*How do bridge program operate?*
I will start off by laying out how bridge programs are set up and furthermore operate, noting the similarities and differences that are present within each individual program.

Origins and Missions

Broadly speaking, my data indicates that most bridge programs originated out of each individual institution identifying and addressing a need to aid and support underrepresented students in their transition to college. However, there are clear differences in how this need was identified by each institution involved in this study.

Colgate University

Colgate University being the oldest of the bridge programs, coming about in 1967, was started because the institution’s demographic was all white outside of nine black students. This glaring racial difference was ultimately what drove Colgate to establish a program which mission according to Colgate’s current director of the Summer Institute, known then as the Special Students program, was “to provide an opportunity for students who were disadvantaged educationally and socioeconomically to attend Colgate.” Because of the racial inequalities and subsequent educationally inequalities largely affecting black people (in terms of both unequal access to quality education and to selective institutions) that was characteristic of the 1960’s, the program consisted of eight out of the nine black students who were attending Colgate during this time. Over the years the mission of this program was reworded a few times, but never really changed its focus. As of
today the mission of the Summer Institute according to the current director is “to support students who have demonstrated intellect, creativity, and fortitude in the face of significant challenges be they educational, economic, social or personal challenges” (Summer Institute Director). This shows that the program, like the other is geared to providing a support program for underrepresented students. However what makes it different is the wording. This mission recognizes that the students are ‘intellects’ which implies that the students are not necessarily unqualified or rather undeserving of attending the institution, but that these students because of their disadvantaged educational, economic, and/or social/personal background are essentially underprepared for Colgate. Therefore it is necessary that they get this academic and social support from the Sumer Institute prior to attending the institution.

_Hamilton College_

Two years after Colgate’s bridge program was founded, Hamilton College established HEOP, more formally known as the Arthur O Eve Higher Education Program. HEOP is a state funded program designed by the New York State Board of Regions. Essentially each school must abide by the guidelines set forth by HEOP and then has the freedom to design a program unique to their institution that must be within the Board of Regions parameters. When asked to explain what exactly the guidelines are, the current director overseeing HEOP at Hamilton said they are roughly as follows:
The institution has to “be able to integrate well within the community”

“Make sure that your students have access to everything that any other student has.”

“Make sure that there’s accountability, evaluation, academic support, support on a personal level maintenance. In other words you’re responsible for anything that may pose an obstacle. Your job is to remove that obstacle. So having that accountability makes sure our students are performing academically.”

“Make sure they understand the courses they are enrolling in and what that means.”

“Make sure that they’re familiar with terminology and to be there as a personal support when they run into walls.”

When asked why this program was needed the director explained,

“Well according to the records that I’ve been able to read, Hamilton at that point wanted to attract a more diverse or a more ethnically diverse student population here so this was a way to do that. And we were a way to do that and we were on the original schools for New York State to do this program. So they did a pilot here and liked what they got and the attention and the support and students thrived so that’s why it happened.”

Similar to Colgate this indicates that during this time in order to help non-white students to thrive at these pretty much all white, selective, and furthermore elitist institutions, a bridge program was thought to be necessary or rather a viable
solution. The difference in Hamilton College’s approach is that the program was not just acknowledged as being an aid for underrepresented students currently at the institution, but rather it’s main purpose was to diversify the institution. For Hamilton College this therefore meant that some form a support system would need to be in place to aid the underrepresented students in their transition.

Due to the fact that HEOP is only a program that accommodates students that are New York State residents, low income, and ’academically disadvantaged’ a sister program called Hamilton College Scholars was founded by the institution in 1972 in order to accommodate “anybody from wherever in the world who are above that income guideline, but who could use the support from the program (Director of HEOP).” Although both programs attract students from different backgrounds, they function as one and were undoubtedly started for the same reason: to continue to increase diversity and access to Hamilton for students who demonstrate that they can benefit from a bridge program.

Williams College

In the mid 1980’s faculty in the sciences at Williams College started a bridge program known as the Summer Science program. According to the director of the program the program was originally founded to achieve two goals:

"to help students from underrepresented groups stay in science majors because the school was noticing that there...were a greater number students indicating an
interest in majoring in the sciences than were actually majoring in sciences from underrepresented groups" and "to spark students interest in research careers in the sciences with the hopes that many of them would go on to graduate school in the sciences"

It is clear that this bridge program like the others that I have investigated still was started to for one cater to helping underrepresented students who were indicating having some sort of academic disadvantage in comparison to the majority of students at the institution. But at Williams this program also was started to help underrepresented students excel in science, whereas others schools focus on a broader range of areas of study. Due to the success of the summer science program in 2000 this institution decided that it was important to create a program for students interested in other areas of study. Thus a sister bridge program known as the Summer Humanities and Social Sciences program was started. The current director of the Summer Humanities and Social Sciences program explained that the mission of the program is,

"to give student[s] the ideal liberal arts experience in the summer...so that when they started their first year they could really hit the ground running and ya know feel very comfortable participating in class, going to professors office hours, and taking advantage of all of the opportunities a school like this has to offer"
It is clear that the Summer Humanities and Social Sciences is more of a generalized program that although does have an emphasis on those two particular areas of study, also, like the other schools involved in the study, takes into consideration the importance of making students feel comfortable navigating academics. In other words students are taught to maximize their resources at the institution as well as get a feel for what type of work is expected of them on a collegiate level, which should help them thrive academically. What makes this program a little different than the others is that there is also a focus on exposing students to research in hopes “to spark an interest in the intellectual life of the college in research in particular.”

_Haverford College_

4 or 5 years ago Haverford College was being reaccredited by the middle state organization. The institution’s self study report indicated that Haverford was not “doing a great [job] for students [who] were first in their families to go to college. And we also weren’t doing a great job for...certain underrepresented group (Chesick Scholars Director).” In response to these findings “several faculty members and Deans went to visit programs like the ones we (Haverford) wanted to build (Chesick Scholars Director).” The schools included: Amherst, Skidmore, and the University of Maryland-Baltimore. The Chesick Scholars Committee, which consists of the Dean of Admission, Provost of the College, and several faculty members spent a few years testing out different ideas and getting feedback from several brownbag lunches with faculty. Like Williams Haverford’s initial program was targeted at underrepresented students who were interested in the sciences, but
needed academic support and exposure prior to attending the institution. This program was entitled the Summer Science Institute. One of the most important differences in this program and the program that Haverford has now is that students can earn course credit for the courses that they are taking over the summer within the bridge program. This was implemented, because the absence of course credits “didn’t really attract the best students. And students...weren't really serious about...their work. And it also didn't get the faculty really serious about their work either (Chesick Scholars Director).”

Ultimately, 2 years ago Haverford did away with the Summer Science Program and founded the Chesick Scholars program. The mission of this program is a couple different things. For one, the Chesick Scholars program’s mission is to “to recognize and to mentor...high achieving students who are first generation or students of color (Chesick Scholars Program Director).” The second part of the mission according to the director of the program is “to inculcate in these students the ability to become academic and social leaders at the college.” It is important to notice the emphasis on the ‘scholars’ within the name of the program as well as the fact that the mission stresses that the program participants are ‘high achieving’. It is clear that by doing this Haverford, like Hamilton and Williams Colleges, is trying to emphasis that this is not a remedial program, but actually a program for academic scholars. On the other hand, just like all the schools included in this research, Haverford puts a lot of importance on the academic aspect of the program.
Another key difference is what part of underrepresented students transitions to college each institution has chosen to focus: academic, social, or both.

**Program Set Up**

Based on the interviews with the program directors it seems that a typical bridge program is a program that operates over the summer and last between 4 and 5 weeks. The number of the participants is largely and some may even say solely dependent upon the amount of funding that the institution has to put into the program. Hamilton College has the most participants; averaging around 42 participants per summer. Second to Hamilton College is Williams College, which has around 18 students for the Summer Humanities and Social Sciences Program and then between 21 and 24 students in the Summer Sciences program. This meaning that on average each summer the program has a minimum of 39 participants. Colgate has 36 participants this summer and most likely will have around that same number moving forward because of funding and slots granted to the program by the admissions office. 3 out of the 4 programs, Hamilton College, Colgate University, and Haverford College, are situated under the Dean of the Faculty and as a result have a faculty member who serves both as the director of the program as also teachers within the program. Williams College operates under the dean of the Dean of the College and the director of the program does not have the duel position of director and professor.
The following sections will look at each individual schools staff composition, looking more specifically at the faculty, staff, student, etc. selection process and roles. I will conclude this section by comparing and contrasting the findings.

Hamilton College

At Hamilton College the Opportunity Programs Office, which administers HEOP, is connected with pretty much every office on Hamilton’s campus. However, more directly the staff consists of the director, faculty, student interns, and writing guides. Although I do not have details on how the director is chosen, it is important to note that the director does not have a limit on the amount years that he or she can hold the position. In terms of the role of the director, he or she is in charge of setting up and running the program, which is unique to Hamilton, but is still consistent with the state guidelines. The director also teaches a course during the program, as well as serves as a mentor for the program participants. There are 8 faculty members who are required to teach courses in the program and also serve as mentors for the students. The faculty members that are chosen to be involved in the program are professors who are “vested in the institution, vested in the program, and who are available to...[the] students for they’re 4 years” (Director of HEOP). These faculty members are also all tenured and as the director of the program puts it, they are “able to understand the background of the student.” In regard to the student interns, these students can either be current rising sophomores, juniors, or seniors or they can be students who are of the same year, but also had the privilege of previously participating in the HEOP program. However, according to the current director of
the program, HEOP prefers to recruit students who are previous participants, because “it helps the newer students facilitate, see someone who had benefited from it (the HEOP program), likes it, and understands it.” As interns the students are required to facilitate tutorials: tutoring sessions that corresponding with the courses being taught in the program. These interns are also responsible for being student mentors for the students and helping to guide them through the program.

Williams College

At Williams College there is a director for both the Summer Humanities and Social Sciences and the Summer Sciences programs. For the purpose of this research I will focus on solely the Humanities and Social Sciences program. The Summer Humanities and Social Sciences program staff is composed of the Director of the program, four faculty members, and an average of 3 resident mentors. The faculty Director is responsible for every bit of the planning and implementing the program. The selection process for the Director is not one that is extensive; "we (the institution) select someone who has some experience with the program and has shown an interest and it’s usually the case that they’re sort of the one logical person” (Summer Humanities and Social Sciences Director). According to the Director of the Summer Humanities and Social Sciences program the faculty members chosen are tenured faculty “because it’s taking up a lot of their precious summer time” (Summer Humanities and Social Sciences Director). These four faculty members are each responsible for teaching one course during the program.
In regard to the Resident Mentors their role is to mentor the program participants and live with them for the duration of the summer. The mentors are also responsible for attending two classes and "they're expected to be kind of TA's for that class. They're expected to be model students to do all the work but also be available to help student with their work for that class" (Summer Humanities and Social Sciences Director). Similar to Colgate’s Summer Institute Program for the Resident Mentors there is an application process in which "We (the institution) look for [rising] sophomores and [rising] juniors especially" and "our preference is to take students who are at least sophomores [rising juniors], because we find...that works better to have slightly older students" (Summer Humanities and Social Sciences Director). Also all students are open to apply for this role, however there is preference given to students who have previously participated in the program.

_Haverford_

Haverford’s Chesick's Scholars program has a program Director, faculty members responsible for teaching one course each, and two Resident Assistants. The role of the director is arrange for all of the students transportation to Haverford and overall planning of the program, as well as teach a class and mentor within the program. There is no concrete procedure for appointing the Director due to the fact that the program is only in its third year and has only had one person fill this role since is began. The Chesick's Scholars faculty members are not just responsible for teaching a class during the summer, but Haverford and the Chesick’s Scholars Committee find it very important that the faculty also serve as mentors for the
program participants both during the program and during the students four years at
the institution. During the summer and for the duration of the students college
career each faculty member is responsible for advising an average of three program
participant’s in regard to “course work, social issues...getting to know...[each
student] as people...We get to share the great stuff and not so great stuff. (Chesick
Scholars Director).” The Resident Assistant’s, on the other hand, are appointed and
like the other programs that are a part of this research, they students who are
previous Chesick participants are preferred. At Williams College the RA’s are
expected to not just live with the students, but also be role models and provide
academic assistance to the program participants. The RA’s are also responsible for
helping to “help organize Friday afternoon outings and participating, as well as
outings on Saturdays (Chesick Scholars Director).”

There are also five student tutors who are writing center student employees during
the school year and are a huge resource for the program participants during the
summer.

Colgate University

According to the Director of the Colgate University’s Summer Institute
program, the program is composed of a Director, Senior Associate Director,
Coordinator of the O.U.S (Office of Undergraduate Studies), six faculty members, six
RAC’s (Residential Academic Coach), and the RCC (Residential Coach Coordinator).
Although I do not have information on the logistics of how the Director and the
Senior Associate Director of the Summer Institute, as described by the current
Director of the program, together these two positions are responsible for determining:

"the mission of the program, what’s our goals/objectives, what are we doing programming wise with each of the class years, coordinating that, doing all of the logistics for that meeting with all of our students. We make sure we have contact with every single student at least once a month. Working with alumni, working with campus partners to plan things."

In addition to these responsibilities the Director and the Senior Associate Director are responsible for “fundraising with institutional advancement and alumni relations, [as well as] coordinating food (Summer Institute Director).” In regard to the six faculty members the Director seeks to hire three ‘experienced faculty’ (faculty who have taught previously in the program), alongside three new faculty members. The faculty members teaching in the program are compensated for the equivalent of teaching one course at Colgate and the courses are variations of courses that are taught during the Fall and Spring semesters. According to the current Director of the program the faculty has to have the following characteristics:

- “Academically diverse faculty who get it. (Summer Institute Director)” In this case, ‘it’ is basically referring to the Summer Institute’s students diverse background and how that will affect their lives both in and outside of the classroom.
- Faculty who are "really good in the classroom [verses faculty] who thinks they’re really good in the classroom (Summer Institute Director)."
“Really high standards (Summer Institute Director)"

Ability to model “to the students what liberal arts education is (Summer Institute Director)."

“Knowledgeable people...who are helping to correct misconceptions, [and] who are passionate about the work that we're doing in the program (Summer Institute Director)."

The Resident Academic Coach Coordinator and the Resident Academic Coaches must undergo an application and interview process in order to attain the position. The role of RACC is to oversee the RAC’s, while the RAC’s are responsible for not just living with the students, but being their academic and social mentors. The mentor responsibilities extend to throughout the academic year (Summer Institute Director).

There are many similarities and differences in the ways in which the programs are designed and run in regard to the staff, faculty, students etc. involved in each individual program. One of the largest or rather most obvious similarities, a stated previously, is the presence of a program Director for each program. However, this role is shaped differently at each institution. The program Director for Hamilton College, Williams College, and Haverford is in charge of all of the logistics of setting up and running the program, whereas, at Colgate the University these responsibilities are shared by the Director and the Senior Associate Director. It is important to note that Colgate University’s Summer Institute is the oldest program out of four programs involved in this
study and the addition of the position if the Senior Associate Director has not been in place for the majority of the time that the program has been in experience. That being said, it could be a combination of time, experience, and accumulation of funding that has allowed this institution to both notice that the responsibly of designing and running a bridge program has the potential to be more equally and effectively split between two individuals as opposed to one.

Another difference worth noting in regard to the Director’s of each program is the length of their term. I do not have information on the length of the terms of the Directors at Williams College and Haverford College. I attribute this to the fact that these programs are newer in comparison to Colgate’s and Hamilton’s and therefore may not have yet established specific term lengths.

Also Williams College’s program is under the Dean of College division as opposed to Dean of the Faculty. I make that point to say that by being under the Dean of College as opposed to the Dean of Faculty the Director does not have to carry the additional responsibility of teaching. With that being said, Hamilton College does not have a specified term length for the Director and as a result the current director has been in place for many years. Colgate University’s Summer Institute on the other hand only, allots only three years per faculty director. A longer term allows Hamilton College Program to grow from working with a very experienced and committed Director, while Colgate’s program is continually renewed with a fresh perspective every three years.
Based on the results, Hamilton, Williams, and Haverford are all adamant about only hiring tenured faculty to teach in their programs, because they are more experienced and can handle the load of teaching a course over the summer. Colgate on the other hand, desires experienced faculty who do not necessarily have to be tenure, but who are of high quality and able to understand and work with students from underrepresented groups and backgrounds. It is important to note that although Hamilton College only seeks to hire tenured faculty, like Colgate, they too only hire faculty that who do not just desire to teach the students, but are also truly invested in the students: being also to understand the students backgrounds and how that effects their academic and social lives at the institution. Another important factor in regard to the faculty members is the number of faculty teaching in the program. Hamilton College has eight faculty members, Colgate has six, Williams has four, and Haverford has four (?). It seems that the variation in the number of faculty members teaching in the program is directly related to the amount of funding available to pay for these positions. I think that this observation extends to all the positions that are held within the program, because the more money that is invested the larger number of staff that can hired and subsequently the more students that can be offered the opportunity to participate in the program.

Courses and Credits

Hamilton College
One of the most important aspects of any bridge program is the curriculum. According to the HEOP Director at Hamilton College, the program participants are each required to take a total of nine courses during the five weeks that the program is in session. More specifically, out of the nine courses that the participants must take, the students are required to take the following courses: math, writing, fitness, science with lab, and a course, which is focused on public speaking and learning. Furthermore a nightly tutorial session accompanies each of these courses to allow the students a chance to ask questions and have the course material reinforced (HEOP Director). Students transcripts are evaluated by the director of the program to determine which areas of the curriculum each individual participant could benefit from: “I'm placing them in sections so that I can better assess what they're needs are going to be and at the end of the summer be able to give them a personalized plan of action for them to pursue (HEOP Director).” Students who participate in the program have to opportunity to earn 1 credit to go towards the 32 credits that are needed in order to graduate from Hamilton College. According to the current Director of the HEOP program this credit can be earned if students demonstrate that he/she,

“can manage their time and make smart decisions. Hard work is one thing, smart work is something else. So we want to have smart work. So that a person can really enjoy their experience and not be so overwhelmed and learning is a living process. So we give it to them in in life doses. This is how things happen period. So I get the opportunity along with my staff to see how people adjust, to see how they can handle demands, to see whether they can handle a night class. Because we want to
address the shift that we know is going to occur, from high school into college (HEOP Director).”

Essentially a student does not necessarily have to excel at a course in terms of grades in order to earn the course credit. What the HEOP Director is looking for is genuine effort and a clear indication that a student is prepared to handle college level work and schedule, but not necessarily be a master of every subject. However, students must pass the program in order to go on to attend the institution.

Williams College

According to program Director at Williams College students who are participants in the Summer Humanities and Social Sciences program at Williams College are required to take a total of four courses during the duration of the program. Three of these courses have a distinct emphasis on writing and reading, while the fourth class is focus on the quantitative. More specifically the courses offered are Intro to Comparative Lit, History/Africana Studies, Politic Science, and Economics (Summer Humanities and Social Sciences). Essentially, with these courses the goal is to

“try to simulate the work that a student might have during a regular semester at Williams...They assign ya know the same amount of work and the same type of work they would assign in a five week period of the semester (Summer Humanities and Social Sciences Director)."
Basically, the Williams program is designed to simulate the course load and academic expectations and overall environment that they will face during the semester. In this respect the courses being taught during the program are the same length as courses that are taught during the academic year and they are “versions of classes that are taught during the semester (Summer Humanities and Social Sciences Director).” In terms of grades the Director explained that the program participants receive grades on their individual assignments with the purpose of giving them the opportunity to see what kind of grade that they each would be receiving during the academic year. In other words, the Summer Humanities and Social Sciences program is not credit bearing. As the current Director of the program says, “it’s (the bridge program) just to help prepare them.”

Haverford College

According to the Director of the Chesick Scholars Program during the five weeks of the bridge program at Haverford College the program participants take two classes that each meet for two hours Monday through Friday. These courses include math, chemistry, lab, and a discussion based course. Additionally, each student is required to attend forty five minute writing center meetings with the writing tutors as way to reiterate the material covered in their courses. In regard to grades the students involved in the program have the opportunity to earn course credit in this program. In order to receive this course credit the participants must receive a C average or higher in that course. Essentially, as the current Director of the Chesick Scholars program puts it,
"We have a college rule that any academic course that you take, if it's an AP course, if it's a college course, any course you take before matriculation, before you start your first semester you can get credit, college credit for but you don’t, the grade doesn’t show up or is not part of your GPA. (Chesick Scholars Director)."

Essentially, Chesick program participants can receive course credit, but just like an AP course the grade will not appear on the student’s college transcript.

*Colgate University*

In the Summer Institute program at Colgate University, according to the current Director, the students take a total of two courses out of the six courses being taught during the program. Each course that is offered to the students fulfills one of the distributions at Colgate. Distributions include Humanities Division, Social Sciences Division, and the Natural Sciences and Mathematics Division. Students are placed in courses so that they take a course from two different divisions. It is important to note that which division these students are placed in is strictly based on having the students take two courses in different divisions, rather than framing it as the students need to take specific classes in order to gain experience in writing and math for example. The way that the current Director phrases it is that when he is setting up the program he is thinking of “the faculty first and the courses second (Summer Institute Director).” Essentially the courses being taught are a reflection of the faculty chosen for the program that given year. For example, as the Director describes it,
“We’re not teaching history because we think the students need history. We’re teaching history because I want [a specific professor] to be involved. And then he happen to take history. That’s how is works (Summer Institute Director).”

This meaning there is a wide range of subjects that could be taught on any given year. However, it is important to note that these courses are in no way similar and are not covering the same subjects. There is a effort to make sure that there are a diversity of courses being taught because, the goal is to model “to [through these courses] the students what liberal arts education is (Summer Institute Director).” Essentially that it the whole point of the students taking a course from two different divisions; that’s what a liberal arts education is. In terms of grades the student’s individual assignments are graded and they must pass each course in order to receive the two course credits. Also their participation in the program is required in order for them to attend the institution.

**Selection Process**

*Hamilton College*

When trying to understand how participants are chosen for Hamilton Colleges bridge program one must look at it in two parts, because the program itself is divided into two parts. Essentially, the HEOP students and the students who are technically Hamilton College Scholars are chosen based on relatively different standards. According to the current Director of the HEOP program the state funding allows Hamilton College to offer 14 spots to HEOP qualifying students. HEOP
students are students that are New York State residents, low income, and 'academically disadvantaged.' According to the director of the program 'academically disadvantaged,'

"doesn't mean that you're ignorant or stupid. What it means is that you have gone to a school that may not have money, doesn't have access to all these things, doesn't offer a whole lot of AP classes or honors classes, to no fault of your own...but you demonstrate that you have the ability to compete academically at this particular institution (HEOP Director)."

The Hamilton College Scholars, who are referred to as HEOP students even though they are technically not, are ultimately "any student from wherever in the world who are above that income guideline, but who could use the support from the program. So they are people who have gone, they may have gone to private schools, they may be full pay, they may be on scholarship at a private school. They all have in common that they can benefit from the supports that we offer (HEOP Director)."

Essentially, these are qualifications that students must have in order to be considered for the program. It is important to note that students are both flagged during the admissions process by the Opportunity Programs Office and students can also seek out the program themselves. In the words of the current Director of the program, this program is open to students that “for whatever reason...are deemed for requiring support that we offer (HEOP Director).”

*Williams College*
For Williams College’s Summer Humanities and Social Sciences program around 18 students are chosen for the program. According to the current Director of the program, how this works is after students are accepted to William’s, the bridge program sends out invitations to “all students who are according to the admissions office are first generation in their families to go to college [and] all students who self identify as African American, Latino, Latina, or Native American [students of color]...so first gen and/or from an underrepresented group (Summer Humanities and Social Sciences Director).” After this students who “want to be considered for this we hold a lottery and let us know, send us an email back saying yes put me in the lottery and then we literally draw names out of a hat. We do balance for gender (Summer Humanities and Social Sciences Director).” So overall William’s selection process is relatively straightforward.

_Haverford College_

The Director of Chesick Scholars Program at Haverford College explain that the first step of the Chesick Scholars selection process is as follows:

"After students decide that they want to come to Haverford we then look at the students that are in the entering class and pick the ones that meet the criteria: first generation, first in their family to go to college, and/or underrepresented students who are the most highly academically qualified."

Of the students who meet the requirements, 45 are then invited to apply to the program. As the Director emphasized the application is not extensive but just
requires answering a few short questions. According to the Director this year around 27 students applied, but due to the funding only 15 students were invited to attend the program. The Chesick Scholars committee is looking for the

“strongest students in our pool…but really everybody we send, we invite to apply is in fact qualified for the program. So it’s more a question of picking almost at random from the 27 applications 15 that balance the cohort. Because we want to make sure that we don’t have too many students in one class…we try to balance science and non-science (Chesick Scholars Director).”

In addition to this the Chesick Scholars Committee looks for students who are not “narrow and just focused on themselves” (Chesick Scholars Director).

Colgate University

Students who are recruited to participate in Colgate’s Summer Institute program are students who the director of the program refers to as the ‘number lie’ students. Essentially the ‘numbers lie’ students are students who come from

"probably not a great school system, not rich…because maybe their not rich, maybe they have their working a lot, or there are a bunch of…like socio-economic correlates in their environment, probably more likely because of that to be urban than rural although not exclusively. More likely to be female than male, more likely to not be white, than be white."
In addition to this these numbers lie students who because of those factors mentioned above do not have competitive ACT and/or SAT scores, nor GPA’s. These students are identified by a committee consisting of the Dean of Admission, the Director of O.U.S, and some faculty members. So ultimately the committee does the following:

"read[s] 100 of applications and...get together and talk about them...And then we try to figure who do we think has really demonstrated intellect and creativity passed the numbers (Summer Institute Director).”

Additionally, as the Director conveys that,

"the only thing I'm looking for on the transcript is that somebody's challenging themselves. I don't care if they got a C in some upper level English course. I just care that they took the upper level English course. I'm looking at the essay of course being the professor, their statement, their essay and asking myself in response to this prompt, which some years is good and some years is awful, are they telling a story? Are there clear ideas in there right? What what's the narrative? What are they putting together? Is this like cookie cutter BS application or is there some real thought. What can you gain from that? And I'm also looking really hard at the letters of recommendation (Summer Institute Director).”

So essentially for Colgate admission into the program is not about what someone’s transcript or test score, but about their experiences in high school, recommendation
letters, writing, and whatever else indicates that they are just as qualified as any other student to attend the institution.

This data indicates that all four of the programs are essentially recruiting students who are from underrepresented groups. The difference is the approach to identifying these students. For Hamilton College students are identified based off what appears to be academic disadvantage and/or students who could simply benefit form the program; while students from Williams College are identified based solely off of being a student of color or a student from an underrepresented group. Similar to Williams, Haverford and Colgate are looking for students who are academically qualified, but could use academic preparation and experience that the program offers. Colgate takes this a step farther by looking at students who are academically qualified, but based off of their ACT and/or SAT scores and GPA’s may not appear in the regular admission process as being qualified. However, there is this important emphasis at Williams, Haverford, and Colgate that the program participants are scholars, meaning that their participation in the program does not mean that they are not academically qualified to attend the institution, but it fact it means in the exact opposite.

Discussion/Conclusion

This study looked at the role of bridge programs in the social and academic transition to college of underrepresented students. More specifically this paper focused on the similarities and differences in how bridge programs are designed and ultimately function. My finding suggest that older bridge programs like the
programs found at Colgate and Hamilton College have a considerable amount of
more experience with strategies for social and academic integration for
underrepresented students. In a way, this time and experience is a major benefit
because these schools have had the privilege of working with countless classes of
students, faculty, and staff and therefore have had time to design and
redesign/evolve their programs over time. However, on the other hand there is
problem of having a program exist for so long that it is still running not because it is
beneficial to students anymore, but because it just seem normal to not have it. In
addition, it is known to be hard for anyone or institution rather to let go of
something that is so deeply rooted in the make up of the school.

Another question that I raise is the question of why have a bridge program at
all? Hamilton has always made it clear that there program is to aid in the social and
academic transition to college of underrepresented students, with an emphasis on
students who are academically disadvantaged. However schools like Williams,
Haverford, and Colgate are adamant about getting away from this idea of the
students who are involved in the program as being academically underprepared.
Rather they are pushing the idea that these students are scholars, who need no
remedial academic attention prior to entering their first year in a highly selective
and rigorous institution. This is not in any way to say that that is what Hamilton
College is doing. Instead what I am wondering is whether this eagerness to get away
from the idea that underrepresented studies, because of their disadvantaged
backgrounds need extra help in order to be prepared has fostered programs that are
not helping students who do fall into that category. If they are scholars do they need
the academic and social support of a bridge program that comes at such a major expense to the institution. Also what is so wrong with a school explicitly saying that they have a program for students who are academically and socially underprepared?

Then there is the issue of program effectiveness and how many students are able to reap the benefits of such programs. There is no denying that these types of programs are costless. So how does one judge whether or not the cost are relative or on the other hand outweighing the benefits? The programs assessed in this study range from having 15 to 40 participants. These are indeed small liberal arts institutions, but for the cost should these institution be proud of only being able to provide this academic and social support program for such a small population of students? Is it really worth it?

One of the most important critiques that I have about bridge programs is their length. How much can truly be gained in five weeks. Also do these five weeks have the potential to prepare students for the inevitable culture shock, stereotype threat, and so on that plague nearly every underrepresented student during their first year of college?

There are many limitations to this work and clearly much more research needs to be done. There is considerably more detail in some of data for each school in study, which indicates that follow up interviews need to be conducted with the Directors of these programs in order to close these gaps. Also the perspective is very narrow. Without the perspective of the students who are the ones participating in these
programs no real conclusions can be drawn. But I want to end by suggesting that maybe this entire time I have been asking the wrong question. Maybe the question is not what the role of bridge programs is, but rather what is the most effective way to aid underrepresented students in their social and academic transition to a predominantly white, affluent, small, and high academically competitive liberal arts institution?
Bibliography


(http://www.jbhe.com/features/50_blackstudent_gradrates.html)

Colgate University. “Summer Institute.” Retrieved February 14, 2014


(http://www.fandm.edu/special-opportunities)


Chicago: University of Chicago Press.