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# The business of mirror-making: historical perspectives on three New York state educational opportunity programs

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The Business of Mirror-Making: Historical Perspectives on Three New York State  
Educational Opportunity Programs

by

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Abstract

Support for non-traditional college students in the form of institutionally-backed programming plays a critical role to the success of this demographic in higher education. In this thesis, support is discussed within the context of three case studies of New York state liberal arts colleges: Vassar College, Bard College and SUNY New Paltz. The framework of critical educational historiography is used to seek answers to the questions “What are the historical political roots of each program?” and “if these programs appear different to one another now, why so?” Using inductive analysis, I analyze documents pertaining to the origins of each program, as well as materials about present-day policies. My studies indicate a strong link between overall institutional character and the extent to which they choose to engage in supporting low-income students.

*Keywords:* educational opportunity programs, educational historiography, institutional intentionality

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### Introduction

This paper finds its field in the basis of current affairs: Vassar has been repeatedly lauded over the past few years for its commitment to the acceptance of low-income students. In this thesis, I aim to complicate the notion that to accept non-traditional students is enough by presenting cases of programs created by schools to support this student demographic – comparing and contrasting them so as to understand, given what we see as best practices, how well State University of New York at New Paltz’s Educational, Vassar College’s Transitions and Bard College’s Bard Educational Opportunity Program are serving non-traditional students (a term which is to be defined shortly). I will be arguing that the integration of peer and academic support are most critical to the success of low-income, first generation students. The extent to which schools choose to foster these two elements is indicative of school culture and a wider societal lack of comprehension for the necessity of support.

From the founding of Harvard University in 1636 (Archibald, 2002), the American system of higher education was the definition of privilege. Modeled after the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge in the United Kingdom, the earliest American higher education institutions were founded to educate the wealthiest sons of colonial families, to form the educated elite in American society. Over the next few centuries, the varieties of colleges and universities within the United States expanded greatly, and by the mid-twentieth century, most were accepting women. The demographics of who attended these schools remained largely white and affluent, however. It has only been in the past sixty

years that America has seen a number of landmark policy shifts that have led to the inclusion of a more diverse student population. This began with the G.I. Bill (formally the Servicemen's Readjustment Act) in 1944, which subsidized university tuition for veterans of the Second World War (Brickman, 1972); some 4.4 million veterans used the G.I. Bill funds to attend higher education (Archibald, 2002). What is more, President Truman, who himself had not attended higher education (Hutcheson, 2007) commissioned the President's Commission on Higher Education. This Commission identified, for the first time, the need to make higher education more widely accessible to the American public. Truman's Commission, as it became known, ushered in the Golden Age for American Higher Education (Hutcheson, 2007), and in conjunction with the rise of Affirmative Action in the 1960s and the Civil Rights Movement in general, changed the college landscape forever.

Within this historical landscape and foundation came the rise of Educational Opportunity Programs (EOPs) in New York state, the very same programs that form the point of analysis for this paper. This state's policies regarding EOPs are uniquely flexible; they allow schools to opt in and out of their programs to the extent of their choosing. Thus, we can see an array of differently implemented programs, each bearing the marks of the state it exists in, as well as the institution it originated from.

This thesis will chart the path of New York State EOP programming through the lens of three specific programs. I will first start out by examining the theoretical framework for the functioning of these programs - what scholars say about how best to support non-traditional populations in colleges and

universities. I will then delve into the specifics of each of my three programs, especially focusing on what information is available to the prospective students each school is trying to recruit. This will include an analysis of peer support resources, application materials and the overall feel of the program's website. My final section will focus in on Vassar, looking critically at the ways that the college has chosen to deviate from the traditional path of EOP's in this state and the country, meditating on school culture and institutional motivation.

My study fills a specific niche topic that has not previously been investigated in full. While EOPs in New York state have previously been investigated, looking at them within the context of a liberal arts education and in the context of the Hudson Valley adds a different frame. Furthermore, very little literature exists as to Vassar's unique Transitions program. As a new, innovative initiative, critical research should be done to analyze its functioning so as to allow for its improvement. This paper will help clarify the issue of best practices with regards to the running of an EOP and the choice schools make in opting out of state funded programming. This research is done in the hopes of elucidating the dialogue surrounding Transitions, providing telltale comparison to other programs, while also situating it within the wider context of the history of Higher Education in New York.

### Literature Review

Research on the problems that first-generation students face once they get into college indicates that entering into elite spaces can oftentimes be an extremely difficult process fraught with many previously unforeseen, multidimensional hurdles (Brooks-Terry, 1988; Engle et al., 2006). Through the literature of hurdles we can find specific issues to be addressed by an EOP.

Statistically speaking, first-generation college students are more likely to be female, of a 'non-traditional' age for college entry, of color, and non-native English speakers. Furthermore, according to the 2010 Census, people who identify as Hispanic would make up 17.3% of the population by July 1, 2014 (U.S. Census, 2010). These issues of difference are compounded in the Latino/a community, an ethnic group becoming increasingly prevalent in American society. Latino/a students, especially recent immigrants, often struggle with English language acquisition on top of other issues (Brilliant, 2000).

These characteristics mean that from the outset, first-generation college students lack the forms of social, economic and cultural capitals needed to succeed in college, or in American society at large (Bourdieu, 1986). Inkelas et al. (2006) found that "first-generation college students enrolled in and earned fewer credit hours, worked more hours, lived off campus, participated less in out of class activities, had fewer non-academic peer interactions, and earned lower grades." In fact, first-generation students are more likely to have worse grades and even drop out than students whose parents completed higher education

(Dennis et al., 2015). Thus, multilateral programming specifically tailored to first-generation students is needed to address the multitude of issues they face.

Research shows that, by virtue of the issues discussed above, many first-generation students have a hard time integrating into the social environment of their college (Brooks-Terry, 1988; Braxton & McClendon, 2001; Terenzini et al., 1996). Chief among the challenges they face is the fact that many students who come from ‘non-traditional’ backgrounds (within the privileged, white norms of American higher education) have a hard time relating to their more privileged peers (Terenzini et al. 1996), especially at predominantly white institutions such as Bard College, Vassar College and SUNY New Paltz. This lack of social engagement can have far-reaching psycho-emotional effects on students, especially as many first-generation college students feel distinct pressure from their families to succeed, and so will ignore the importance of social engagement for psychological health (Pérez et al., 2010; Brilliant, 2000).

Researchers such as Jessica Dennis, Jean Phinney and Lizette Chuateco (2015) argue that “ethnic minority young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often see education as the means to better their lives and avoid the difficult lives of their parents” (Dennis et al., 2015, p. 224). Howard B. London (1989) goes one step further, stating that first-generation students are “given conflicting messages: one to stay at home, the other to achieve in the outside world.” Thus, first-generation college students must navigate college life and social interactions while also bearing the burden of feeling they must succeed for their families. As such, the social component of EOPs becomes very important:

connecting first-generation students with other kids who understand and can help them bear the weight of their issues (Inkelas et al., 2006). Such peer-to-peer support would also help to confront another issue faced by first-generation students: the balance between socializing and academics that marks a successful college experience (Engle et al., 2006).

### Peer-to-Peer Support

Deborah A. Santiago and Sarita E. Brown, authors of the report *What Works for Latino Students* (2004), argue that being surrounded by mentors who reflect their ethnolinguistic identities is one of the greatest factors correlated with student success in the transition to higher education. Their studies support the idea that, for minority students, seeing those who reflect their racial background in leadership positions can have a profound effect on students' abilities to see themselves as capable of achieving highly (Santiago & Brown, 2004). Research suggests that peer mentoring can be doubly beneficial in that it provides the guidance afforded by a traditional mentoring scheme while also incorporating "expertise, equality, and empathy" to both parties (Kram & Isabella, 1985).

Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco (2005) argue "peer support (or lack of needed peer support) is a stronger predictor of college grades and adjustment than support from the family" (p. 234). As previously discussed, research shows that families play a large role in the success of first-generation college students (London, 1989; Brooks-Terry, 1988; Terenzini et al., 1996; Dennis et al., 2015). Thus, the statement that peer support is oftentimes the strongest prediction of

success in college for first-generation college students has strong implications for the way that programs are implemented.

Given the risk of feelings of isolation and disenfranchisement felt by many first-generation students, research suggests that peer support plays a key role in keeping retention rates up and making first-generation college students feel that their narratives and experiences have a place at the colleges and universities they attend (Pérez et al., 2010; Terenzini et al., 1996; Dennis et al., 2015).

### Educational Opportunity Programs

On the whole the ultimate goal for any sort of transitional program is to allow target students to achieve a fulfilling and integrated college life (Braxton & McClendon, 2001): not only academically, but also socially. The literature surrounding the topic of EOPs supports the importance of the *social* aspect of this, especially through peer-to-peer support.

A number of federally funded programs provide potential molds for promoting peer to peer support and mentoring. These programs have created drastic increases in retention of low-income, first-generation students (Girves et al., 2005; Contreras, 2011; Bearman et al., 2007; Hamilton & Parker, 2011). Founded in 1989, the Posse Foundation creates ‘posses’ of bright, underrepresented youth during high school and provides them with services and opportunities in order to help them transition into college (Contreras, 2011). Chief among the benefits of the Posse Foundation, according to Contreras (2011) and Bearman et al. (2007) is the social inclusion and peer to peer support that Posse members receive from one another, especially as the program is enacted

starting before students even begin higher education. The Posse Foundation also encourages peer mentoring, a practice which could yield manifold benefits to students, as it combines peer to peer support with mental health support (Bearman et al., 2007), thereby addressing multiple needs of the first-generation student. A number of programs, including the McNair Scholars Program (Girves et al., 2005) and the Meyerhoff Scholars Program (Hamilton & Parker, 2011) also provide further evidence as to the important and efficacy of peer-to-peer support in higher education.

The Meyerhoff Scholars Program at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County in particular sheds light on the importance of peer mentoring on a campus-specific basis, in its focus on supporting Students of Color pursuing graduate degrees in the STEM field. While their program provides a number of services to its students, at its core the program is “helping to establish peer networks to diminish the feeling of isolation, building a community of high-ability African American students” (Hamilton & Parker, 2011). This thereby implies that the program addresses the for need affirmation of the self raised by Santiago & Brown (2004).

Inkelas, Daver, Vogt and Leonard (2006) propose a more radical approach to creating supportive bonds between first-generation college students upon their arrival in secondary education. Their article, “Living-Learning Programs and the First-Generation College Students’ Academic and Social Transition to College”, posits that the integration of students’ academic, residential and social aspects of a student’s life improves all three areas. The authors state that as “L/L [Living-

Learning] programs are committed to the academic and social integration of their residents and may consequently be particularly beneficial to first-generation college students,” addressing issues addressed by Brooks-Terry (1982) and Terenzini et al. (1996), for instance. Their model contextualizes peer mentoring in the residential living context, as they state “for first-generation college students in L/L programs, use of residence hall resources,” including “peer counselors,” “were significantly associated with a smooth academic and social transition” (Inkelas et al., 2006). Pasque & Murphy (2005) concur as to the efficacy of the Living-Learning community as a means to support students who’s social and cultural capital deviate from the norm, and apply the model not only to first-generation students but also to LGBTQ students, thereby implying that this model may be effective in supporting the intersecting identities of first-generation college students.

In conclusion, the literature greatly supports the necessity of peer-to-peer support for first-generation college students given the challenges they face, the proven benefits of such mentoring, and the existent programs that provide insights into the implementation of this theory.

### Methodology

Pursuant of an understanding of the interaction between the history of educational support programs their present day functioning, I have utilized a critical educational historiography methodology as the foundation for this paper (Villaverde et al., 2006). Thus, I have set in context the initiatives and policies I am exploring, so as to better narrativize the singular history of each program. My research finds its purpose within the worth of historical research as a whole; as stated by Villaverde et al. (2006), “the purpose of historical research is knowledge production, learning that is politically situated and made useful for the transformation of culture and society.”

Within this choice to employ historiography, I viewed my findings through the lens of affirmative positivism. This stands in opposition to the negativism employed by historians in other fields, in which the prevailing view is that one must view historical events without the framing of present discourse. In the context of educational historiography, however, affirmative positivism “understands that the present always affords the past with meaning” (Villaverde et al., 2006) thereby allowing the contextualization of past events in terms of present day meanings. When pertaining to educational historiography, this element is particularly important as a means to imbue present day policy implementations with meanings derived from their past.

Furthermore, I engaged specifically in critical educational historiography, so as to situate and frame my research in such a way as to be “favorably disposed to the critique of oppressive social practices” (Gale, 2010). When conducting

research about a topic as inherently politicized and social justice-oriented as that pertaining to higher education, applying a critical lens to the functioning of institutions of power and education is of the utmost importance.

A key aspect of my research focus pertained to institutional intentionality, and as such, in my research I sought to look not only at what educational opportunity programs are trying to do but also what they are *saying* that they are trying to do. As such, I engaged in three case studies, in an attempt to “examine a bounded system of a program, an institution or a population” (Marshall & Rossman, 2014, p.44).

I chose to focus my research on three Liberal Arts Colleges within the Hudson Valley area: Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson and the State University of New York at New Paltz (referred to henceforth as New Paltz). The similarity in location, relative size – Bard has 2,000 undergraduate students (“Bard at a Glance,” Bard College); Vassar has 2,450 (“Vassar Admissions,” Vassar College) and New Paltz (“Admissions,” State University of New York – New Paltz) has 6,582 undergraduates– and educational focus allowed me a closer basis for direct comparison of the three schools’ educational opportunity programs.

Furthermore, New York State has a unique legislative history when it comes to supporting non-traditional students. Considering I applied a historical lens to my viewing of the policy choices within each case study, a distinct locus was necessary. My choice of New York State, and specifically the Hudson Valley, as my geographical focus, gave each case study a common narrative – each school’s

policy implementation is inherently a reaction to the politic environment created by the New York State Education Department.

In this thesis, each college has its own unique chapter, constituting a case study for each school. I chose to form three case studies (Stake, 1995) of three Hudson Valley colleges as a way of finding meaning and quantifiable comparison in the myriad of information available about first-generation and low-income students in American higher education. My choice to engage in qualitative analysis proved appropriate given the evaluative, as opposed to empirical, focus of my research questions. Throughout my research I have been “[delving] in depth into complexities and processes” (Marshall & Rossman, 2014, p. 46) of the educational opportunity programs in each case study. I focused specifically on the roots and current policies of each school individually, meaning that I was able to look closely at each school’s program, lending a richness and depth to my study. This richness was only possible in through the specificity of a case study.

I had to trace back to the origins of each of these programs, attempting to answer the questions “What are the historical political roots of each program?” and “if these programs appear different to one another now, why so?”

My choice of the Hudson Valley as the locus in which my thesis exists has a further resonance beyond practical convenience and comparability. Focusing on New York State has given me a particular lens through which to view the policies enacted at all three universities. My research led me to analyze in detail the development of the State University of New York (as well as the City University of New York) as a whole, and to analyze the goals inherent in its creation. Through analysis of policy, I also came into the knowledge of the roots

of the push for educational equality, starting as far back as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954).

As my main sources of evidence, I first used scholarly articles pertaining to the support of students as a means to creating the basis for my study. To answer my research question about the historical roots of each program, I analyzed pertinent policy documents. For the formation of HEOP/EOP, I found the earliest available annual review of the policies, for the years 1970-1971, entitled “Higher education opportunity program, 1970-71: Interim report” (New York State Education Department Higher Education Division, 1971). I used this as a historical basis for my research; a common foundation for all three programs. For Vassar's Transitions, I thankfully had access to the original whitepaper report, entitled “Addressing the needs of non-traditional students: Adopting a suitable pre-matriculation program at Vassar College” (Butler et al., 2009).

In order to perform inductive data analysis (Thomas, 2006) on the data I had collected, I created definitive categories of data to be collected. The first of these was information pertaining to applications processes; the second pertained to information about the incorporation of peer and academic support; the third and final piece was the overall interface of the webpage and ease of access to information. The information available about Vassar's Transitions proved somewhat scarce, as it does not have its own webpage; thus, articles and newsletters were also used to glean information pertaining to the three categories listed above. Upon gathering together my data to be analyzed, I performed inductive qualitative data analysis. Therefore, the data I compiled led the way for me to developing theories.

To answer the question “what are the historical political roots of each program?” I collected and analyzed policy documents related to the implementation and creation of each program. For Bard and New Paltz, these documents were published largely by the NYS Education Department. I was grateful to have access to the white paper for the founding of Transitions, as it shed light on the unique history of this unique program.

To answer my second research question, “if these programs appear different to one another now, why so?” I started from the same basis an incoming student might: the information available online.

In an attempt to counter the promotional information provided by colleges, I also sought out articles published in the media about these programs. This proved specifically salient in the context of Vassar College, as Transitions does not have a website of its own, nor is it often mentioned in Vassar’s publications; therefore one of the only ways to find out about it was through the collection of articles published by news outlets.

I intended to visit each campus to gain insight into the ways that each school’s educational opportunity program was represented on each campus. I had perceived that the *physical* presence of each program would be critical to my work: whether or not it had an office, student space or perhaps building dedicated to it on campus. My review of the literature pertaining to supporting first-generation students indicated that a sense of belonging is critical to adjustment, and the feeling that one belongs can oftentimes be tied to having a space of one’s own. Such is the logic behind LGBT centers, women’s centers and other such identity centers at universities. I intended to seek out any physical

promotional materials (such as pamphlets and posters) that would to aspects of the first-generation, low-income experience. This aspect of my research was somewhat cut short, however, as upon contacting each university, I was informed that none of the EOPs has a particular student center, and any information available in print was available online. Therefore, I had to adapt my research methods.

### Positionality

It is critical to this study that I recognize my own positionality and the way that this affects my own ability to look critically at Vassar as an institution. I was inspired to write this piece in part by the ongoing discussions at Vassar as to our accolade ‘The Most Economically Diverse College in the Country’ (Leonhardt, 2014). As such, I cannot look objectively at the college I have attended for almost four years. In writing primarily about Vassar and its context, I also have the added benefit of a more profound, nuanced understanding of the institution. I have been essentially been doing an auto-ethnography of the college for four years.

Contextualizing Struggle, Centering Pride:  
The Legacy of the Civil Rights Movement in the Educational Opportunity  
Program at the State University of New at New Paltz

The SUNY system as a whole and New Paltz in particular have a rich history that is tied intrinsically to the fight for Civil Rights in the 1960s. Out of this tradition was born the institution that is the EOP, which in this day and age provides integrative, wide-ranging support to non-traditional students truly in need of aid. In this chapter, I will be discussing the historical policy roots of the SUNY system, starting with Arthur Eve in the mid-twentieth century. I will then tie this legacy to the types of support provided by New Paltz today.

Historical Context

It is impossible to analyze the unique educational opportunity programs that exist at Bard, SUNY New Paltz, and Vassar without delving into the historical context that created each of the three programs. I will first be situating New Paltz in term of the rich history of public higher education in New York and then will reflect upon the core values of the present day program.

The rise of the State University of New York itself has its basis in the critical process of supporting the ever-diversifying student population of the United States. After the end of the Second World War, SUNY's creation was inextricably bound to the legendary 1948 presidential campaign, etched in American memories by President Harry S. Truman's improbable comeback victory over Governor Thomas E. Dewey. For higher education in New York State,

the events leading up to the Election Day surprise have a different significance. Returning GIs' unpredicted desire for post-secondary education, concerns with the post-war economy, Dewey's national ambitions, and New York's intense ethno-religious political tensions, framed the debates that shaped the State University of New York.

The predecessor to such education opportunity programs is the Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge (SEEK) program that was founded in the City University of New York (CUNY) system in 1965. This state funded program "had its origin in the admission of 'high risk' students to many private colleges" (NYSED, 1971). The New York State Education Department decided at that time to provide funding for financial support for low-income students, as well the creation of an alternative application pathway: through the SEEK program, admission to CUNY schools was made available to those who would not have otherwise been admitted (NYSED, 1971). Thus, SEEK aimed (and still aims) to reach students who are doubly disadvantaged – not only did qualifying students have to be economically disadvantaged but also academically so. Students gained admission to CUNY by displaying the *potential* to be good students, a potential that the program recognizes might not have been fully realized because of their backgrounds. In conjunction with this, SEEK provides remedial and transitional classes to its participating students, with the goal of eventually having them integrate into the general student body (NYSED, 1971).

In its original charter, the goals of the SEEK program are to recruit "high school graduates residing in high poverty areas" (NYSED, 1971) with the underlying goal being "racial integration." This second goal is especially telling of

the time and space inherent to SEEK; *Brown v. Board of Education* was enacted eleven years before its 1965 inception, the *Civil Rights Act* only the year before. The *Voting Rights Act* was also a product of the same year. This program, which seeks (pun intended) to address the systemic disenfranchisement of the African American community, is truly a product of the Civil Rights Movement.

Indeed, extension of the program to the SUNY system in 1967 was thanks to New York State Assemblyman Arthur O. Eve, for whom the Act is named. Eve was the highest-ranking African American Assemblyman (Hicks, 2002) during his time in office, and fought tirelessly for the promotion of racial equality. Other Persons of Color have had a huge influence on the development of these programs. As Carlos N. Medina and Jeffrey Scott state in their chapter of *SUNY at Sixty: The Promise of the State University of New York* (2010), the impetus for EOP's creation "particularly came from the black and Puerto Rican legislative caucus, including New York City politicians such as Percy Sutton, Charles Rangel, Basil Paterson, Shirley Chisholm, and Bobbi Garcia" (Medina & Scott, 2010). The creation of the EOP, as it was renamed, allowed the integration of even more disadvantaged students. The charter for EOP specifies its focus on "instructing and advising atypical learners," thereby emphasizing the academic element: the presence of academic potential, but the absence of achievement.

Although public universities had existed in some form in New York State since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, what we would now call the SUNY system was born in 1948 (Devine & Summerfield, 1998). It's creation was a result of the ending of the Second World War, a conflict that saw a surge of men, especially men of color, returning from overseas seeking the education they were promised through the

G.I. Bill. Governor Thomas E. Dewey put together the "Temporary Commission on the Need for a State University." This commission was crucial as the influx of veterans changed university demographics immensely; more students of color and students from less affluent backgrounds were attempting to gain access to the existing expensive private colleges. Prior to the creation of SUNY, the only financial support available were scholarships, and SUNY was created with the vision of being a free university, in line with many public universities in Europe.

### The Webpage

Having established the heritage of SUNY and the way that it revolutionized the availability of higher education to low-income students in New York, I will now be moving to the second of my research questions, using New Paltz EOP's website as a source of information about how the college supports students contemporarily.

The webpage provided by New Paltz for its EOP program gives the reader both a very positive impression of the program, but also insures confidence in the reader as to the academic capabilities of its students. The layout of the EOP homepage is clear, efficient and professional. There are no gimmicky, infantilizing aspects. In fact, one sentiment is tangible throughout the whole EOP website: pride.

It is clear whether you are looking at the smiling faces of EOP students that are prominently displayed in the center of the page, or at the quotes

scattered through each page, or through the introductory paragraph, entitled *What Is EOP?:*

Founded in 1967, due to the efforts of Assemblyman Arthur O. Eve, the State University of New York has been firmly committed to the policy of providing access to the 64 campuses and the Educational Opportunity Centers in the SUNY system. Since the inception of the Educational Opportunity Program, more than 40,000 students have received degrees. The Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) brings closer to fulfillment SUNY's policy that '...every student capable of completing a program of higher education shall have the opportunity to do so.'

This carefully worded piece of writing displays the attitude of New Paltz as well as the SUNY as a whole towards one of its policies. By beginning the passage with the year in which EOP was founded and a reference to Arthur O. Eve, the author is imbuing the program with a level of credence and respect through its longevity and ties to a Civil Rights figure. The use of numerical figures later on in the paragraph reinforces the scale of the program, not only historically, but also in its efficacy. This implies that EOP is intrinsic to SUNY, to the running of the university and to its founding purpose. EOP is a part of New Paltz and an integral one, a fact that seems to come out of its proud history, as has been previously discussed.

The website is also crafted, as all forms of advertising should be, to appeal to its specific demographics. From the way I look at it, there are two relatively

distinct groups to whom New Paltz's EOP webpage must appeal: primarily, it must appeal to students (both high school students who could potentially apply, and students who are already in the program); it is also crucial, however, that the page attract the interest of donors on whose donations EOP relies.

The extent to which the page is tailored to students is integral to the content of the page: the page clearly and simply presents its information to the reader and has a comprehensive list of resources to help a member of the program navigate various elements of college life. At the same time, the website achieves a balance with eye catching images that appeal to both donors and scholars.

One particularly striking advertising technique employed by the EOP is the use of photos showing images of students presumed to be EOP scholars with the heading "Faces of New Paltz." There are three images that scroll across the screen, each showing a different student in a close-shot portrait, emphasizing therein, their faces. All three students are People of Color; all three are pictured smiling, with their full names and majors printed below an inspirational quote of theirs (see Appendix I). A prime example of this advertising tactic is the photo Akeem Samuels:



New Paltz chose to represent a black man, particularly framed as smiling confidently while looking into the camera in the image on the left; on the right, a more candid shot of him laughing bashfully while covering his face. These photographs together make the subject come across as likeable and sympathetic. The choice of Samuels' clothing also seems very intentional; he wears a letterman jacket and beanie that (although not clearly visible) appears to say USA on it. Thus, he is framed in terms of traditional American values for American masculinity – patriot, athletic, accomplished. Akeem Samuels, an All-American boy, someone you would want your son to be friends with, someone you would want your daughter to date.

The website also incorporates a quote along with each image, adding depth and personality to each image. Akeem is quoted as saying that "the best part of being at New Paltz is the community. They are accepting of your differences, and they are very diverse." This variety of statement just serves to reaffirm the focus on the integration of EOP students as fully fledged students, as affirmed in the program's original charter (NYSED, 1971).

This particular image also provides a snapshot of a wider programmatic aspect emphasized by the New Paltz EOP: supporting the academic prowess of each student. Samuel's photo is captioned in the style "Akeem Samuels, Psychology," clearly indicating the centrality of the academic component of student life. What is more, EOP students are given fascinating academic means to engage with the metanarrative of their educational pathway. Each student participating in the program is required to take a course entitled "Key Issues in the Education of Under-Represented Students," offered through the Black Studies Department.

The aim of the course is to "develop an historical and personal understanding of what it means to be an 'underrepresented student' in the world of higher education," as well as to further develop academic skills students will need in college life, such as public speaking and PowerPoint ("SMP Academics," 2016). Adding this particular academic component to the program could have manifold benefits. Not only for the academic development necessary for many first-generation low-income students (as was discussed in the previous chapter) but also for the self-esteem and sense of inclusion which is truly needed to keep these students in college. This class is also a requirement for other educational support programs at New Paltz, such as the Scholar's Mentorship Program, a "networking initiative for talented and high achieving general admission students of color" ("Scholars Mentorship Program", 2016). Thus, EOP students are given the opportunity to feel a part of not only their own program, but also one including "general admission" students, increasing the sense of inclusion in a wider network of students whose identities reflect their own. In this way, "Key

Issues in the Education of Under-Represented Students” addresses the need for having high achieving members of your identity group around you (Santiago & Brown, 2004).

Another key support system employed by the EOP at New Paltz is their Peer Mentoring Network. Their Peer Mentoring Program has a webpage to itself, a unique feature that indicates not only the scope but also the emphasis of New Paltz’s program. Peer Mentoring has clearly been isolated by the administration of the school as a key method for supporting first-generation students.

In introductory paragraph on this page, it is stated that the EOP “seeks qualified individuals for the position of Peer Mentor for our incoming first year class.” This kind of wording, such as ‘qualification’ entices students to become mentors, along with other such words that denote prestige and privilege, such as the use of “protégé” to describe freshmen enrolled in the mandatory program.

The webpage emphasizes a “helping relationship” that is established between mentor and mentee. The adjectival modification of the word ‘relationship’ when used in this context allows for the clarification of the type of relationship; New Paltz’s EOP thus validates and recognizes the difficulty of the transition to college for these students. Indeed, in the next paragraph of writing on the page, it is established that the “objective” of the Peer Mentor role is to “provide support for first-year students as they adjust to their college experience.”

### Application Process

In terms of availability and salience of materials on the school's website, the only thing it seems to fall short on in is its explanation of the application process. I believe the end goal of such a promotional material is to be clear, concise and accessible to the underrepresented population it is attempting to reach.

While the page is easy to find, as can be seen in Appendix II, its presentation of information is quite overwhelming. On the one hand, this reflects a poor formatting choice on the part of New Paltz's website designer, which in terms of promotional materials to a millennial target audience can be quite a fatal issue.

On the other hand, the cluttered website reflects the complicated application process of the SUNY EOP system. As with any state-funded program at a state funded university, there are many bureaucratic steps to take. This could potentially deter some students from applying, but also means that students will find themselves within an educational environment whose purpose runs counter to the inherent elitism of small, private colleges such as Bard and Vassar.

In fact, when compared to the other programs, New Paltz's offers a wide range of support students. They are the only school to incorporate a specific class through the school's Education Department that allows students to critically analyze their sociological context as EOP scholars. Its peer mentor program is the most distinctly organized. Potentially most critically, it allows the largest swathe of students access to higher education. These benefits can be seen as coming from the state funding the school has, as well as the way the history and mission of the

SUNY system as a whole. As has been previously mentioned, SUNY was created to offer education to students who would not have had it previously. EOP is a natural extension of that, hence why it has existed for nearly fifty years. And with true civil rights powerhouses like Arthur Eve behind it, EOP is well positioned to do true good.

A Unique Program for a Unique School: Bard College's Innovative BEOP

Standing in opposition to New Paltz's large, all-encompassing programming and state school ethos we see Bard presenting a slightly different model for a student support program. In this chapter, I will be delineating the ways that the program breaks off from the same policy branch as the SUNY system, incorporating Bard's school character to produce the program we see now.

In 1969, the policies that had been enacted first in CUNY schools and then SUNY schools were finally expanded to give private colleges and universities access to funding (NYSED, 1971). This program, HEOP, is still in effect today. According to the documentation provided by the New York State Education Department (1971) HEOP's goal is to "[offer] sufficient supportive, remedial, and counseling services in addition to credit generating course work, insures the development of a student's self-confidence and motivation to compete, to complete successfully a higher educational experience, and ultimately to become an integral part of the college population" (NYSED, 1971, p. 7). In this way, and many others, it is identical to EOP.

Certain restrictions were set on the use of state funding for private colleges however. For instance, New York State Education Department notes that the funding for SUNY and CUNY includes "stipends for personal needs such as for clothing, laundry, and recreation," (NYSED, 1971, p. 6) private colleges cannot use HEOP money for this. This is but one example of a context in private colleges

are required to provide more in terms of funding than state funded colleges, something which has led into the creation of hybrid programs such as BEOP.

Much of the prowess, uniqueness of Bard's Educational Opportunity comes from its duality. The program goes above and beyond what is expected for a program of its kind, or rather, what is federally mandated. This is because the program itself has two separate, but intertwined elements.

Firstly, there is the aspect of it that relates back to the mid-twentieth century and the policies of Arthur O. Eve. To this end, Bard uses the state funds available to it through the HEOP program. This is all well and good, especially because this funding is readily available and worthwhile as an option for students who come from inside the state. Indeed, of Bard College Class of 2019, 23% came from New York state ("Bard Class Profile: Class of 2019," Bard College). So opting into this program makes financial sense for the students and for the college itself.

What makes Bard's program unique, however, is the way in which it expands upon its HEOP. Members of the SUNY system, and state universities as a whole, tend to attract more in-state students because of their subsidized tuition across the board, and so their programs that use state funding to support those among these groups who are severely disadvantaged makes sense. For a "competitive and innovative" ("About Bard," Bard College) liberal arts college such as Bard, the vast majority of their students come from out of state. So it would be naïve, and indeed severely limiting, to have an extensive and multifaceted program for educationally and economically disadvantage students from inside the state and nothing for such students from other parts of the country.

As such, Bard also has the Bard Opportunity Program, which uses school funds to replicate the program for doubly disadvantaged students from across the nation (“Welcome to Bard Educational Opportunity Programs (BEOP),” Bard College). It is the through the combination of the HEOP and BOP that Bard’s amalgamation gets its name. For all intents and purposes, Bard’s program forms one unified being. The students attend programming together whether or not they are from New York, and are offered all the same services. In this way, the very nature of BEOP provides students with another form of cultural capital, in that they are able to share experiences with and learn from peers.

In fact, it would seem that the some of Bard's zeal for unique, integrative programming comes directly from their president, Leon Botstein. Botstein, since his appointment in 1975, has gone on to become the longest-serving university presidents in history of the United State (Levine, 2011). To put this information in context, Catharine Bond Hill has been President of Vassar for ten years as of 2016, and will be stepping down this year; the president of New Paltz is currently Donald P. Christian, who was inaugurated in 2012 (Horrigan, 2012). The president is known as a very eccentric and gregarious, indeed omnipresent, individual whose influence plays into every aspect of college life (Gregory, 2014). This attitude also extends to funding - Botstein has been known to fund programming that would often be deemed outlandish or potentially useless. For instance, Botstein’s personal interest in classical music performance led to the creation of the Bard College Conservatory of Music (Gregory, 2014), despite being a predominantly undergraduate institution of just 2000 students (“About Bard,” Bard College). Whatever Botstein is invested in, he will fund. Thus, it makes

sense that he would be willing to match the state's commitment to non-traditional students with his own unbridled enthusiasm.

BEOP is at once simpler and more complicated in its scope than New Paltz's comparable program. In this way, significant differences lie in the execution of each program. Indeed, the size of Bard and thus the number of scholars it has presently make it easier to cater to the individual needs of each student, and to make the program have more of a tailor-made feel. Furthermore, with its BOP, Bard has control of what it chooses to provide for students.

Thus, it can be seen that the website of the program has a much less complicated interface than the New Paltz one, with less information, but an implication that more is known once you are in the program. This aspect is shown in the section labeled "Student Support," one aspect of BEOP offered to students. On this page, there are many diverse aspects that students can take part in, including but not limited to the BEOP Summer Program and a Peer Mentoring program ("Student Support," Bard College). Both of these elements reflect positively on the program in general, as the theory presented across the board states that programs such as these are of the utmost importance.

BEOP meets at the intersection between state funded, rote programs and Bard's unique character. Among the programs available to first year BEOP scholars is the Language and Thinking Workshop:

All entering first-year students at Bard are required to enroll in the three-week Language and Thinking (L&T) Workshop held in the summer before their first semester. This is an intensive orientation program geared

almost exclusively toward writing and critical thinking. The program also offers a substantive introduction to the campus, the College, and community activities. (“BEOP Student Support,” Bard College)

Bard is unique in that, while many colleges require Freshman Writing Seminars, all students at the college are required to enroll in an academic enhancement program before they ever arrive on campus. This is framed as useful to all students, as college-level writing requires more of students than that which they would have been taught in high school. To a BEOP scholar, however, there is the added benefit of addressing different educational needs in a way that normalizes these issues; all students must face the fact that college is an adjustment, and thus, students whose educational backgrounds might not have supported high-level academics are not singled out or made to feel less than.

BEOP is also different in its focus specifically on academic preparation, first and foremost. In a sense, this makes sense, as Bard is a selective liberal arts college whose curriculum and courses were not originally designed to meet the needs of students whose academics are not as normative. This is a feature not shared by New Paltz; thus, it reflects the private college’s use of its own funds.

As with many other private liberal arts colleges, Bard was first intended to educate only those who were already in possession of great social and cultural capital within society. In the case of Bard, it was founded to train Ministers of the Episcopal Church (Devine, 2011). This legacy is still vastly important to understanding how Liberal Arts Colleges choose who they do and do not accept.

However, a less cynical lens can also be applied. A summer program such as this one is also inherently beneficial to the students taking part. A unique feature of the HEOP is that it requires schools to accept students who would not normally meet admissions requirements. It is extremely shrewd, therefore, for schools to ensure that by the time BEOP scholars matriculate into the regular semesters, they are able to keep up with the work. Providing academic preparation such as this may also contribute positively to the mental health and overall happiness of students within the program, as they will be less stressed about work and more able to focus on building social networks.

The primary objective during this two-week program is to ensure that the BEOP scholars reach and maintain the level of academic proficiency necessary for successful college work.

The following courses are among those taught on a daily basis:

**Quantitative Skills:** In addition to basic math, students review algebra, logarithms, functions, and graphing of functions.

**Reading and Rhetoric/Literature:** Assignments include reading and analysis of selected fiction and nonfiction. Weekly papers are required.

(“BEOP Student Support,” Bard College)

It can be seen from this description of the BEOP summer program that the function of the program is to get scholars up to scratch with the level of work required of them in college in order to lower drop-out rates (another statistic crucial to university rankings). This is a cynical take on the date, but one that

stands nonetheless. These universities do not stand solely as institutions of learning, but also businesses and brands, especially when attracting students who will one day become alumni who will contribute to endowments becomes a factor.

However, a less cynical lens can also be applied. A summer program such as this one is also inherently beneficial to the students taking part. A unique feature of the HEOP is that it requires schools to accept students who would not normally meet admissions requirements. It is extremely shrewd, therefore, for schools to ensure that by the time HEOP scholars matriculate into the regular semesters, they are able to keep up with the work. It can also be argued, furthermore, that providing academic preparation such as this may also contribute positively to the mental health and overall happiness of students within the program, as they will be less stressed about work and more able to focus on building social networks.

As can be seen in Appendix III, Bard espouses its mission of being a liberal institution inclusive of all students even through the application for its opportunity program. This application is presented on their website as a link to a Google doc, which can be filled out by either the applicant alone or in conjunction with a parent or guardian. There are several pages of the application, but each question is simply worded and requires only some information, or rather allows students to supply as much as they are capable of providing. The information asked of the students is comparable to that of the New Paltz's application, but several things contribute to this application seeming more accessible and less intimidating. For one, its web presentation is accessible and relevant to the young millennial high school student – these students will likely be familiar with the

format of a Google Doc Form. Furthermore, there is an element of essential immediacy that is inherent to the functioning of this aesthetically pleasing, click-through web format.

The design of the form is crucial in that it both provides and allows space for students to explain themselves. For instance, the questions on the form are very intentionally and sensitively worded. As can be seen in Appendix III, each question has an explanatory caption - offering further justification and guidelines to help the student fill out the form. For instance, the section where it asks you to designate “Parent/Guardian Income Reported on Taxes last year” bears the subtitle (in a light gray font that seems to reflect its elucidatory nature) “Ex. \$14,000 (Dependent students should fill this in. Estimates are fine. If the parent/guardian did not file taxes, please write that).” The box underneath allows you to type whatever is necessary, whether numbers or words. The colloquial mode in which the instructions are worded is also intended to make teenagers feel more comfortable in the process.

This is especially important considering the boundaries that many economically and educationally disadvantaged students face in even applying to college. Navigating financial aid forms and college applications requires a distinct quantity of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), including but not limited to parents (or adults with ample experience navigating bureaucratic systems) who are available to spend time aiding a student in the process of writing the many parts of a college application. In situations where this capital is likely to be missing, clarity and simplicity in the wording of applications is crucial.

Another extremely important element inherent to the importance of a form such as this is the extent to which it allows the student to explain their extenuating life circumstances. As has been discussed in previous chapters, students from low-income and first-generation backgrounds are more likely to be non-traditional students in other regards as well. As such, their applications may not reflect their capacity to learn and thrive. Therefore, the fact that the form allows students to explain extenuating circumstances is of the utmost importance. For instance, in the section where it provides space for students to write the name of their high school, it also explicitly states, using the aforementioned captions, that the applicant can "also list other high schools you attended here." Bard is attempting, therein, to be cognizant of BEOP scholar's circumstances which may have led to their educational disadvantage.

Fighting for Themselves: ‘Transitions,’ a Student-Led Policy Initiative at  
Vassar College

Thus, this paper culminates with a unique and personal project - an educational opportunity program that was born, not out of policy and politics, but out of students fighting for the things they need against institutions standing in their way. In this way, Vassar's Transitions program goes above and beyond the requirements of a state funded HEOP, incorporating elements not seen in any of the other programs, as it was designed with a level of care and attention to detail that is rarely achievable. In this chapter I will be employing more of a narrative style; Vassar's policy has a unique history that must be explained, and diverges from the other policies enacted in 1965. Indeed, my discussion of Vassar's policy marks the culmination of this piece, as it is truly this college's program that inspired the topic.

As was mentioned in this paper's introduction, Vassar has recently been heralded as one of the most economically diverse colleges in the country. This shift towards intentional inclusion of low-income students has come during the tenure of President Catharine Bond Hill. Hill, who received her PhD in Economics from Yale University, has focused much of her life's scholarship on supporting low-income students within Higher Education (Padilla, 2006). In line with this ethos, Hill chose to reinstate Vassar's need-blind admissions policy in 2007, her first year as President of the College. At Vassar, 'need-blind' means that "100% of admission decisions for those candidates are made without regard to the student's financial situation" ("Financial Aid FAQ," Vassar College

Admissions). Hill admitted that this policy enactment did not have the “best timing” but the Board of Trustees held fast, dipping into the school’s endowment as the Financial Crisis worsened (Glastris & Luzer, 2015).

Despite Hill’s commitment to increasing admission and financial support of low-income students, Vassar's Transitions Program came to be through an entirely other pathway. The program was first envisioned, in the Spring of 2009 (Butler et al., 2009), when a team of four students embarked on an Independent Study with Professor of Political Science Zachariah Mampilly to create a plan for a program that none of them had access to in their freshman year. The students engaged with material to “seek a great perhaps” something to better the experiences of their peers.

These students are Jacquie Butler ’09, Kleaver Cruz ’11, Indiana Garcia ’11, and Rachel Tetteh ’11. This group compiled data and analyzed it in the form of a white paper entitled *Addressing the Needs of Non-Traditional Students: Adopting a Suitable Pre-Matriculation Program at Vassar College*. This paper is ambitious in many ways. Not only is it fantastic in that it was compiled almost exclusively by sophomores, but also in its depth of research and adherence to the same sort of support model I have researched for this piece.

From the original charter:

Vassar College prides itself on being a diverse institution and in many ways actively seeks to diversify its community and student body. Through its admissions processes and financial aid packages, students from diverse backgrounds are drawn and accepted to Vassar College, yet ultimately find

themselves (in comparison to their peers), academically under-prepared, economically lacking, and socially disregarded. In most, if not all, aspects of student life non-traditional students struggle to perform both socially and academically, with economic factors underlying many of these struggles. The first year in college is crucial for any student, and hardships non-traditional students endure upon arriving to Vassar influence the entirety of their student careers.

(Butler et al., 2009, p. 4)

The origins of this document and the policy that proceeded from it are of distinct interest to me. The paper was created as an act of distinct self-advocacy, with students exercising the sort of will and self-determination that Vassar implies it prides itself on but does not always truly encourage. And the results have been quite astounding; these four students effected a policy implementation that went on to create a new school-funded program that, as a person who arrived at Vassar in the years following its creation, very much seems a full and integral part of the college. The speed and efficacy of these students' push is quite astounding. It seems that the historical moment in which the charter came into being was perfectly poised for such a shift; Hill had brought in a new era of commitment to non-traditional students, but the students also had other backing. As can be seen in the authors of the white paper, the independent study that birthed Transitions was overseen by Professor Zachariah Mampilly, a member of the Political Science Department and Director of Africana Studies. Another key individual who supported Transitions in 2009 and serves as its Director today is Luis Inoa. Inoa, Assistant Dean and Director of Residential Life, also happens to have personal

and professional interest in educational opportunity programs. What is more, he is also one of the readers of this paper, such is his expertise. Thus, it is clear that the efficacy of this student activism was partially because of the institutional backing and climate at time of its inception

Regardless, it is still deeply impressive to see my peers, or perhaps my predecessors, take the stuff that I have been latently studying, and use it as a policy implementation. Indeed, it is a function of the field of educational policy writing that policy recommendations are often made, but these students took it one step further.

It is astounding, in another sense, and quite damning, that Vassar had no version of an educational opportunity program until 2009. 57 private colleges in New York take part in HEOP, including many peer institutions, Bard aside: New York University; Skidmore College; Hamilton College (“Institutional Roster,” HEOP: A Better Education). As the introduction states, Vassar has been lauded for its diversity (Leonhardt 2014; 2015) receiving a \$1 million grant from the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation just this past year (Yuhass, 2015) (Vassar College Office of Communications, 2015) and indeed has received praise for Transitions (Scott, 2015).

It seems odd to me that Vassar, a school that has won financial prizes for its support for non-traditional students would have had such a fledgling, grassroots program to support these individuals. All research points to students benefitting academically, not to mention socially and psychologically, from taking part in EOPs, but it took Vassar until students begged them in 2009 to put anything in place, when funding had been available for forty years.

What is more, the proposals made by the Pre-Matriculation Working Group have been substantially modified to be in their present form. Perhaps the Group's most forceful conviction was that they "strongly recommend[ed] that the institution implement a six-week summer pre-matriculation program similar to the one outlined in this paper as soon as possible" (Butler et al., 2009, p. 3). They went on to outline specific details of this program, such as a focus on academic skills; creating a sense of community; fostering networks between Transitions scholars and faculty (Butler et al., 2009). Six week programs specifically are relatively common features of EOPs throughout the nation, especially within the University of California system, and have worked well there – UC schools on the whole have the highest acceptance, retention and five year graduation rates of non-traditional students in the nation (Leonhardt, 2015).

Indeed, David Leonhardt wrote an article that accompanied the 2015 rankings entitled "California's Upward Mobility Machine" (Leonhardt, 2015) which sought to analyze why UC schools have become such a powerful force in higher education equality. Leonhardt discovered that UC schools such as UC-Irvine (the top-ranked overall) have done a lot to recruit and keep low-income students – including working with community colleges to recruit transfer students. What is more, UC-Irvine has a six-week pre-orientation program, Summer Bridge, and a whole department, Student Support Services dedicated to "non traditional students," According to the website, Student Support Services is, an "academic support program dedicated to helping first-generation college, low-income, former foster youth, and/or disabled students succeed and thrive at UCI" ("UCI – Student Support Services," 2015).

Although the program that was eventually implemented prior to the start of the 2010 academic year was modified, it still had many of the intended features. During the four days of the orientation program, students worked in peer mentoring groups, and with Transitions Interns (a program that still exists today) as well as faculty (Clevenger, 2010).

Researching for this chapter proved quite difficult, because available webpages were few and far between. I believe promotional material plays a key role in supporting educational opportunity programs. First and foremost, webpages allow internet-savvy American youth to access information about programs that will help their adjustment. Such a webpage could also potentially help raise enrollment of non-traditional students, as they would be able to self-advocate by choosing a program that they know would support them.

One positive aspect of Transitions is that, I have spent ample time in the previous two case studies discussing the means by which students must apply to be a part of their schools EOP. For Transitions, however, if you are low-income, from a first-generation or both, you are automatically qualified to be a part of the program. As such, Transitions takes the burden off students to find and apply to the program. It is just available to them if they want to take part.

It is interesting to note that a major difference between Transitions and any other specifically the SUNY system is that there is no alternative application pathway for educationally disadvantaged students. All students must be accepted through Vassar's regular highly-selective admissions pathway, although the Vassar is a key participant in the Questbridge program ("Partner Colleges," Questbridge). Questbridge and Vassar's participation in it provides a key example

of the type of programs that Vassar is particularly interested in. Questbridge is a very newsworthy private non-profit organization that “aims to create a singular place where exceptionally talented low-income students can navigate educational and life opportunities” (“Mission & Vision,” Questbridge). It has a chic website and partners with a multitude of very elite colleges: Duke University; Princeton University; Williams College. It is exactly the sort of program that Vassar desires to be a part of. It is providing a good service to students, true. But Questbridge promotes a false impression of the playing field. As can be seen in this paper, EOPs have existed for a half-century in this state and the nation, especially at public colleges. The most elite colleges in this nation should not be patted on the back for being late to the game, albeit with a shiny new website.

This is true of Vassar’s approach to student support in general. Vassar has been praised for its innovation for Transitions; students who created the program and the staff who fought to keep it alive should receive the recognition they deserve. But Transitions is more an indication about Vassar’s desire to *seem* committed to ‘diversity,’ without being particularly proactive as an institution.

### Analytical Synthesis

As we arrive at the end of the three case studies, it is important to allow space for comparison and synthesis of analysis, so as to create space for the comparison of the three case studies.

### Funds

Firstly, funding sources differ significantly between the three schools. New Paltz's program is completely state-funded; Bard's is a partially state and partially college funded program; Vassar's Transitions program is completely funded by the college itself. This monetary dimension extends outwards into the implementation of programming, manifesting in tangible factors.

There are pros and cons to incorporating state funding that affect the way these three programs look. A very practical benefit to accepting state funding is that it removes the financial 'burden' (I would like to recognize that this is a loaded word when one is talking about oppressed persons) from colleges, allowing them a ready source of funding to draw from, so that they may engage in support while not having to take funding away from other aspects of college life. This incorporation of state funding has clearly benefitted Bard in particular, acting as an incentive to incorporate non-traditional students in an elite environment.

Potential drawbacks to the acceptance of state funding exist as well. While they give colleges an available source of money to support low-income students, these funds also come with 'strings attached.' As has previously been established,

along with money comes a set of obligations as to the type and scope of programming schools can use the funds to provide. This could pose a problem for some private colleges, especially elite universities who provide themselves on individualism and institutional tradition.

Bard's acceptance of state funding, and provision of further funds to the cause proves telling. The funds provided by New York State can only be used to support doubly disadvantaged students from New York itself; this poses potential problems at a private university that actively recruits students from outside the state. It would look unfair for a private college to address the needs of non-traditional students from inside the state without reciprocity for those from the rest of the United States. In this way, Bard does a commendable job in expanding BEOP out to a wider student population.

Vassar's choice to opt out of HEOP entirely seems to reveal a disturbing trend toward neoliberalism. As has been previously discussed, a college's choice to opt out of state funded programming could stem from a suspicion toward state control. This can be seen as stemming from a neoliberal framework because it promotes the idea that private institutions know best how to care for people, and will not be motivated solely by monetary factors. I worry that Vassar's path towards Transitions reveals that this is not the case, and that Vassar used its non-obligation towards non-traditional students as an excuse to ignore their needs until factors forced them to.

### Admissions

Policies regarding students admission to New Paltz EOP, BEOP and Transitions also reveal telling institutional trends. New Paltz has by far the most convoluted process; Bard's has been simplified substantially; Vassar's requires no admissions at all. Idealistically, Vassar's path is the most ethical, the least dubious. Of course students shouldn't have to apply to a be a part of a support program. By the same token, however, this means that all students who are a part of Transitions had to be accepted into Vassar through its traditional pathways. Thus, while New Paltz is working to address the needs of students who are both *economically* and *educationally* disadvantaged, Vassar is only truly addressing the needs of those who have economic needs, but whose lack of economic, social and cultural capital has not hindered their admission to a highly selective liberal arts college.

Bard perhaps presents a pathway between the two; its highly accessible, simple application form is submitted alongside your Common Application, thus allowing the college a full view of one's life's extenuating circumstances provided alongside your application. Furthermore, Bard does not require the submission of SAT or ACT scores in an application, thus indicating that its admissions process is already geared towards breaking down strict numerical barriers to higher education in order to create a more nuanced picture of applicants.

### Academic Support

A telling difference between the programs is the extent to which they offer academic support to non-traditional students throughout their time at the

university. Both New Paltz and Bard offer relatively extensive academic support to their educational opportunity students upon their arrival to the college. As both colleges have, to differing extents, altered their pool of accepted students to include those with less traditional academic backgrounds. Their recognition of the importance of academic support to non-traditional students is supported by the literature reviewed in this paper.

Vassar Transitions does address this challenge to some extent through its orientation program, as students have the opportunity to attend mock lectures and meet with professors; while these measures can help students acclimate to a college learning environment, they still fail to support actual learning differences. Perhaps Vassar perceives its Transitions students as being less in need of academic support as almost all (with the exception of Questbridge scholars) have been accepted through traditional admissions pathways. Regardless of this, an institution must recognize that an ability to thrive in an educational setting must not be conflated with the ability to complete a stellar college application.

New Paltz is indeed the only of the schools to allow students to take a self-critical academic lens to their experience on its campus. In this regard, the college should be commended for its commitment to allowing students to self-actualize and see themselves in the college context.

#### Availability of Materials

Finally, a key difference between the three schools pertained to the availability and accessibility of information to potential applicants. In this realm, Vassar once again stood out as the school with by far the least information

available, without even a website for students to access. Transitions does have a newsletter, but this is unavailable to students until they are accepted into the college. New Paltz does by far the best in terms of transparency with its programming. In the digital age, web presence can play a crucial role in reaching high school-aged students, and thus the web presence and availability of materials can affect the connectedness of non-traditional students. This is especially true as none of the three schools has a specific space for students to congregate in; online communities and spaces of recognition could potentially be used to help negate the feeling of isolation felt by many first-generation students.

What is more, a web presence likely helps recruit more students to the college with the specific purpose of attending such programs. For this reason, I question to what extent Vassar is actively trying to recruit non-traditional students, despite its supposed commitment therein.

### Conclusion

Ongoing research into the field of supporting non-traditional students is critical to the development of higher education in the modern age.

It is important to use it to apply a critical lens to the way that Vassar runs itself. Especially as a person who has poured a lot of herself into the running of Vassar's Residential Life programming, I want to think long and hard about other ways that my college supports people whose path to get here has not been so clean cut. I am trying to aware of the ways in which I am a *very* traditional Vassar student; I have been educated in private women's institutions throughout my life. I see myself reflected in the stories and photos, the buildings and traditions and narratives of this college. Other students, however, have to fight for that to be true. As the Pulitzer Prize-winning author Junot Díaz told students at Bergen Community College in 2009, "It's that if you want to make a human being into a monster, deny them, at the cultural level, any reflection of themselves." Díaz spoke to writing literature as a means of constructing 'mirrors' so that People of Color might see themselves reflected in cultural discourse. I believe that this process can also be achieved through support programs within higher education.

As such, comparing Vassar to peer colleges is critically important. All three programs are part of a common historical narrative running through each program. Starting with the SUNY system, we see the development of New York State's commitment to new social realities post-World War. We see new truths emerge about how we support people who survived a terrible war, we see Americans grappling with privilege in the post-Civil Rights era.

BEOP is, in many ways, reflects of the Bard's uniqueness of spirit. While the college originated as a college for Episcopalian ministers (Kline, 1982), it has moved in a highly *liberal* direction. Under the guidance of Leon Botstein, the school has become a leader in radicalizing liberal arts. BEOP is indicative of this school ethos: it fulfills well the criteria for a successful educational opportunity program (as defined in the Literature Review) by integrating both academic and social development programming.

It is also very accessible without compromising the scope of outreach it provides. Multiple measures (including its application interface and support of out-of-state students) have been taken to ensure that BEOP reaches as many high school students as possible. These policies are also situated within Bard's wider policies (such as being SAT/ACT optional) that reflect a commitment to standing against the so-called college admissions rat race.

For its part, the nature of New Paltz fundamentally reflects its identity as a state university, and thereby inherent commitment to diversity. New Paltz undeniably has the greatest wealth of resources and possibilities for its EOP scholars. Its implementation represents the most distinct link back to the original policies of Arthur Eve.

State funded HEOP has been available since 1967 – it reflects how deeply imbedded elitism is into the very fabric of Vassar College that the school opted out for so long. However, the individuality of Transitions does reflect a positive trend in recent years. What with the trend towards economic diversity under the Hill administration, as well as the continued importance of student activism in

response to the Black Lives Matter movement and other contemporary social justice issues, we can expect to see more student-led innovation in the future.

Vassar goes its own way with so much of its programming and pedagogical methods, its character and its ethos. This has yielded many beautiful things that I am proud of in Vassar. But I can't truly say that I am proud that Vassar students themselves had to fight to receive the same kind of support provided by peer colleges for generations.

It is of the utmost importance, especially at a time when Vassar is reaping the benefits of socioeconomic 'diversity' for our administration to focus on developing Transitions further. For instance, reaching towards having a six-week pre-orientation course as is standard at many other colleges. Working harder to foster peer mentoring and community formation; perhaps the Master Planning Committee should consider the development of an affinity space for Transitions students. But first and foremost, Vassar needs to work on Transition's web presence, so that potential students may access information about the program more readily. People need to know that Vassar is working to support its students. Vassar needs to work harder to support students. The building of mirrors is a serious business.

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Appendix I



## Appendix II

3/22/2016

State University of New York at New Paltz | Admissions

(http://www.omniupdate.com/oucampus/de.jsp?user=suny-  
ne %2Feop.html)



(http://www.newpaltz.edu)

my.newpaltz.edu  
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Quick Links ▾



### EOP

#### 2016 Admissions Criteria

**The Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)** is a New York State sponsored program designed to assist students who show promise and potential for academic success at the college level yet demonstrate both an academic and historical financial need for assistance in order to attend college.

EOP IS NOT A FINANCIAL AID OR SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM



### FRESHMEN ADMISSION VIA EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM

#### GENERAL EOP ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

- You must be a legal resident of New York State.
- You must attend and graduate from a New York State recognized high school.
- You must be eligible academically **AND** financially to be reviewed for EOP admission.

<http://www.newpaltz.edu/admissions/eop.html>

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State University of New York at New Paltz | Admissions

## FRESHMEN ACADEMIC ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

**The Office of Undergraduate Admission** will make a determination on your academic eligibility for EOP admission.

You must have a minimum of a 75.0 cumulative high school average in a college preparatory program.

A college preparatory program is:

- 4 units of English
- 4 units of Social Studies
- 3-4 units of mathematics (Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II/Trigonometry)
- 3-4 units of science (three units of lab science)
- 2-4 units of a language other than English

**ACADEMIC ELIGIBILITY DECISION**

If you are found academically **eligible**, your application will be forwarded to the EOP Office for a final admission decision.

If you are found academically **ineligible (your high school average and SAT or ACT score exceed the maximum allowed for EOP)**, you will be notified by the Office of Undergraduate Admission and your application will be reviewed under the admission criteria for General Freshman Admission.

**FALL 2015 EOP FRESHMEN CLASS PROFILE**

- EOP Class size: 125
- High school average: Middle 50% - 82.2 - 88.3
- SAT (Critical Reading & Mathematics): Middle 50% - 850 - 980
- ACT Composite: Middle 50% - 17 - 21

## FRESHMEN FAMILY FINANCIAL ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENT

**The Office of Financial Aid** will make a determination on your financial eligibility for EOP admission.

- The most recent EOP financial eligibility guidelines ([http://www.suny.edu/student/academic\\_eop.cfm](http://www.suny.edu/student/academic_eop.cfm)) can be found online.
- Submit your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). (<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>)
- Submit your completed SUNY New Paltz EOP Family & Financial Questionnaire ([http://www.newpaltz.edu/admissions/eop\\_fam\\_financ\\_questionnaire.pdf](http://www.newpaltz.edu/admissions/eop_fam_financ_questionnaire.pdf)) to the **SUNY New Paltz EOP Office. SUNY New Paltz does not use the SUNY EOP Financial Form.**

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State University of New York at New Paltz | Admissions

## FAMILY FINANCIAL ELIGIBILITY DECISION

If you are found **both** financially and academically **eligible** for EOP admission consideration your application will be forwarded to the **SUNY New Paltz EOP Office** for a final admission decision.

If you are found financially **ineligible** (your family income and assets exceed the allowed income/assets level your application will be removed from EOP consideration. Your application will be reviewed under the criteria for General Freshman Admission by the Office of Undergraduate Admission.

## APPLY TO THE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM

Use one of these applications:

- **SUNY** Application (<https://www.suny.edu/applysuny/>)
- The **Common** Application (<https://apply.commonapp.org/Login>)

Please use only **ONE** application!

### WHAT TO SUBMIT WITH YOUR APPLICATION

- Your official high school transcript (We do not accept the SUNY SOAR or any other self-reported high school transcript).
- Your official SAT or ACT scores (We do not accept scores hand written on high school transcripts, student copy score reports, scores listed on the SUNY Supplemental Application or SUNY SOAR, or listed on the Student Profile of the Common Application).
- Your personal essay.
- Recommendation from your guidance counselor/college adviser or teacher.

Your transcript, your test scores, your essay, and the recommendations from your guidance counselor/college adviser or teacher can be uploaded with your SUNY application or with your Common Application. Ask your guidance counselor/college adviser to do this when you apply online.

### FRESHMEN APPLICATION DUE DATE

- Fall Admission: May 1
- SUNY New Paltz does not have a Spring EOP freshmen class.

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*SUNY New Paltz reserves the right to change the application due date without notice.*

**IMPORTANT APPLICATION INFORMATION!**

*SUNY New Paltz Admissions, EOP, and Financial Aid use email as our official method of communication. In order to assure that you receive all communications related to your application, please make sure the e-mail address that you provided on your application is correct. Please add SUNY New Paltz to your address book to avoid e-mails from newpaltz.edu being sent to spam folders.*

**TRANSFER ADMISSION VIA EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM**

If you are or have attended another college and have been enrolled in an EOP, HEOP, or SEEK program and are a New York State resident, you may apply for EOP transfer admission.

**GENERAL TRANSFER ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

- Minimum of a 2.75 GPA in all your previous college work.
- Specific requirements for your major  
(<http://www.newpaltz.edu/admissions/transfer.html>) as noted online.

**TO APPLY**

Complete and submit one of the following applications:

- **SUNY** Application (<https://www.suny.edu/applysuny/>)
- The **Common** Application (<https://apply.commonapp.org/Login>)

**TO COMPLETE OUR APPLICATION**

- Send an official transcript from each college you have attend to the **SUNY New Paltz Office of Undergraduate Admission**.
- Submit an official copy of your high school transcript to verify your New York State residency.
- Submit your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)  
(<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>)
- Send in the New Paltz EOP Transfer Verification Form  
([http://www.newpaltz.edu/admissions/eop\\_transfer\\_verification.pdf](http://www.newpaltz.edu/admissions/eop_transfer_verification.pdf)), which must be completed by the most recent college you have attended.

**TRANSFER ADMISSION DUE DATES**

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- Fall Admission: May 1
- Fall Admission: Art & Art Education - March 15
- Spring Admission: Dec. 1
- Spring Admission: Art & Art Education - Oct. 15

*SUNY New Paltz reserves the right to change application due dates without notice.*

**IMPORTANT APPLICATION INFORMATION!**

*SUNY New Paltz Admissions, EOP, and Financial Aid use e-mail as our official method of communication. In order to assure that you receive all communications related to your application, please make sure the e-mail address that you provided on your application is correct. Please add SUNY New Paltz to your address book to avoid e-mails from newpaltz.edu being sent to spam folders.*

**\*These requirements are for SUNY New Paltz only. Other SUNY, CUNY, and New York independent colleges will have different requirements for EOP, SEEK, or HEOP.**

**We encourage you to take a look at the award winning SUNY New Paltz EOP program online.**

**(<http://www.newpaltz.edu/admissions/eop.html>)>>More Info**

**(<http://www.newpaltz.edu/eop/>)**

**CONTACT**

1 Hawk Drive  
New Paltz, NY 12561  
845-257-SUNY (7869)  
877-MY-NP-411 (toll free)

**CONNECT**

News (<http://sites.newpaltz.edu/news/>)  
Events (<https://www3.newpaltz.edu/events/>)  
Alumni Relations (/alumni)

<http://www.newpaltz.edu/admissions/eop.html>

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State University of New York at New Paltz | Admissions

Directory (<http://www.newpaltz.edu/people/>)  
Visit Us (<http://www.newpaltz.edu/admissions/>)  
President's Corner (<http://www.newpaltz.edu/president/>)  
Construction Update (<http://www.newpaltz.edu/construction/>)  
Foundation & Support (<http://www.newpaltz.edu/foundation/>)

## RESOURCES



A-Z Listing (<https://www3.newpaltz.edu/directory/azindex>)  
Academic Calendar (<https://www3.newpaltz.edu/calendars>)  
Employment (<http://www.newpaltz.edu/hr/jobs.html>)  
Financial Aid (<http://www.newpaltz.edu/financialaid/>)  
Maps and Directions (<http://www.newpaltz.edu/about/directions.html>)  
Orientation (<http://www.newpaltz.edu/studentdevelopment/orientation/>)  
Privacy (<http://www.newpaltz.edu/internetprivacypolicy.html>)  
Registration (<https://my.newpaltz.edu/index.php?tab=1&section=7>)  
Schedule of Classes (<http://www.newpaltz.edu/classes/>)  
Security and Fire Safety Report (</police/securityact.html>)  
Strategic Planning (<http://sites.newpaltz.edu/strategicplanning>)  
Study Abroad (<https://studioabroad.newpaltz.edu/>)  
Inclement Weather Protocol (<http://www.newpaltz.edu/emergency/policy.php>)


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(<https://www.flickr.com/photos/sunynewpaltz>) 

(<https://www.youtube.com/user/sunynewpaltz>)

Appendix III

## Bard College BEOP Supplemental Form (2015-2016)

Bard Educational Opportunity Programs (BEOP) provide substantial academic support and scholarship/financial aid awards to select individuals who have experienced educational and financial inequalities and who possess the desire, potential, and work ethic necessary to succeed in a liberal arts college environment.

The Arthur O. Eve Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) Scholarship is for New York State residents only, while the Bard Opportunity Program (BOP) is a nationwide initiative--students from all 50 states are encouraged to apply.

[www.bard.edu/beop](http://www.bard.edu/beop) 845.758.7491 [beop@bard.edu](mailto:beop@bard.edu)

To be considered for a BEOP Scholarship, you must first apply to Bard College by completing the Common Application. Please also submit this form AND your essay response to BEOP.

\* Required


## Indicate your interest to Bard and our BEOP Scholarships by responding to the following questions.

This form is to be completed and filled out by the student applying! We will ask for some identifying information, and for you to estimate how much money your parent/guardian earned last year. If your parent/guardian does not file taxes, please inform us of that.

### In what state is your high school located? \*

If you moved, please list all the states, and indicate from which state you'll graduate.

Continue »

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## Bard College BEOP Supplemental Form (2015-2016)

\* Required

### Contact Information

Answer all these questions.

#### What is your full name? \*

Please include first, last, and middle initial (if you have one).

#### Do you have a Social Security Number? \*

To be eligible for HEOP, you must be a US citizen or have US residency. Students who do not have a Social Security Number, please let us know as soon as possible, as this may affect your ability to receive federal/state funding and loans.

☐ Yes, I have one.

☐ No, I do not.

☐ Other:

#### Date of Birth \*

mm/dd/yyyy

With what gender do you identify? \*

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Transgender

☐ Other:

What phone number can we reach you at? \*

If you do not have a cell phone, please mention that below.

What email address do you want us to use? \*

please make sure you enter this correctly!

What address can we send mail to? \*

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Continue »

## Bard College BEOP Supplemental Form (2015-2016)

\* Required

### Scholarship Eligibility Verification - Household Information

Please provide the information below so we have a sense of if you are eligible for the HEOP or BOP Scholarships.

**Student is: \***

Please choose one.

- ☐ Dependent (someone claims you on their taxes)
- ☐ Independent

**How many people live in your household? \***

**How many people work in your household? \***

**How many people attend college in your family? (include yourself) \***

Please include yourself in this number!

- ☐ I'm the only person in college
- ☐ 2 people in college
- ☐ 3 people in college
- ☐ 4 people in college
- ☐ 5 or more in college

**If you are a dependent, please list the full name(s) of your parent/guardian and their relationship to you below. \***

Example: Smith, Yvonna (mom)

**If your parent/guardian mailing address is different than yours, please list it here. \***

If it's the same, please write "the same."

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Continue »

## Bard College BEOP Supplemental Form (2015-2016)

\* Required

### Scholarship Eligibility Verification - Itemized Income

HEOP has strict income guidelines that we must follow, please submit as much information as possible. If you are not sure, please estimate. Bard College will ask for copies of last year's taxes to prove eligibility.

#### Student Income Reported on Taxes last year \*

(if you did not file taxes, please write that)

#### Parent/Guardian Income Reported on Taxes last year \*

Ex: \$14,000 (Dependent students should fill this in. Estimates are fine. If the parent/guardian did not file taxes, please write that)

#### Does your family receive any of the following?

- ☐ Public Assistance (TANF, Cash Assistance, etc.)
- ☐ Social Security Income Benefits
- ☐ Veterans Benefits
- ☐ Other:

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## Bard College BEOP Supplemental Form (2015-2016)

\* Required

### Student Educational Background

Please complete as much information as possible.

**What is the name of the high school from which you will graduate? \***

You can also list other high schools you attended here.

**Have you already graduated? \***

☐ Yes

☐ No

**What date will you graduate from high school? \***

(Or if you already graduated, please share or estimate the date here.)

mm/dd/yyyy

**What is/was your cumulative grade point average in high school? \***

**What is the highest possible grade point average at your high school? \***

Ex. 4.0 or 100

Are grade point averages at your high school weighted? \*

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

If you received a GED instead of a high school diploma, please list the date earned below.

If no GED, please indicate "no GED" below.

Please share your highest standardized test scores. For the SAT, please list Critical Reading, Math, and Writing scores. \*

Note: Bard is SAT optional (we cannot and will not use these in our admission process), but for HEOP eligibility purposes we may ask to see ACT or SAT test scores.

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Continue »

## Bard College BEOP Supplemental Form (2015-2016)

### One More Item - Required Essay

Please be sure to also submit a required essay to us via email, fax, or US mail. We would like to receive these as soon as we are able - Supplemental Forms and Essays received by February 1 will be given preference.

#### REQUIRED ESSAY PROMPT

Bard College and the BEOP Office look for students who will be a good fit for the challenging academic environment of a liberal arts college. Along with this completed form, please submit a typed (12-point font, Microsoft Word or PDF file), one-page response to the essay prompt below.

Prompt: Please discuss whether your grades truly reflect your potential to do college-level work and succeed at Bard College. Describe any circumstances that may have positively or negatively affected your academic performance in high school. Share how you think BEOP staff members, workshops, and resources will benefit you during your college career. In addition, please share how you feel about reading and writing.

Send to:  
Bard BEOP  
30 Campus Road  
Annandale-on-Hudson, NY 12504-5000

Fax: 845.758.7850  
Email: [beop@bard.edu](mailto:beop@bard.edu)  
Phone: 845.758.7491

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*Never submit passwords through Google Forms.*

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