

Trinity College

## Trinity College Digital Repository

---

Senior Theses and Projects

Student Scholarship

---

Spring 2004

### What Has Become of the Graduates of the Trinity College Saturday Academy?

Courtney Doyle  
*Trinity College*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Doyle, Courtney, "What Has Become of the Graduates of the Trinity College Saturday Academy?". Senior Theses, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 2004.

Trinity College Digital Repository, <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses/98>

# **What Has Become of the Graduates of the Trinity College Saturday Academy?**

**Courtney Doyle  
Educational Studies Senior Research Project  
Trinity College  
December 15, 2003**

# **What Have Become of the Graduates of the Trinity College Saturday Academy?**

## **Research Question**

What educational and career paths have graduates of the Trinity College Saturday Academy followed and how do graduates and parents perceive the long term benefits on their lives? My research question is a combination of a descriptive question as well as a process question because I will be researching what has become of the Saturday Academy graduates and also parents and students perceptions of the benefits the program provided them for their lives.

## **Significance**

In 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms of almost any urban and low-income city school systems, there are many promising students who could go on to great things with the right help. But all too often, many of them never make it to college. For these reasons supplementary education programs are essential in counteracting the effects that can contribute to youth's lack of opportunities and ability to succeed academically. Simply defined, supplementary education is "any structured, adult-supervised learning experience that is not part of a child's regular academic schooling" (Morgan 2). These programs are largely accessible in our society, but most prominent to suburban, preadolescent youth. "Because out-of-school activities are voluntary, you people can and do 'vote with their feet.' They willingly participate in programs they find attractive and responsive to their needs, and because of this, a growing chorus of voices has been calling for the creation of more such efforts" (Quinn 96).

The Saturday Academy is one such program. It tries to keep its students stimulated and enthusiastic to learn so they can become the productive adults our country needs. According to the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, the middle school years are “a critical turning point when attitudes toward educational achievement are shaped. Many students, particularly those who are disadvantaged, who lack strong familial support and role models are less likely to pursue higher education” (Business-Education Report 1994). The semester long academy program is targeted at average students. To qualify for the academy the student must be at average 7<sup>th</sup> grade level in reading and math and well behaved. There tend to be a lot of programs for those in need and for the gifted and talented students, but there is not a lot for the average students, they tend to be forgotten. Such is not the case with the Saturday Academy. For my research project, I am analyzing the outcomes of the program and the effects it has had on the lives of those whom experienced it.

In her article “Where Need Meets Opportunity: Youth Development Programs for Early Teens,” Jane Quinn states, “early adolescence is a time of burgeoning independence, autonomy, and focus on peers. It is also a time when individual interests, skills, and preferences become salient to young people” (Quinn 96). All too often in urban cities we see or hear of failing school systems and children that are constantly falling through the cracks. However, “background circumstances are not an absolute predictor of individual success or failure. Clearly, however, children with troubled family histories who grow up poor, crime-ravaged neighborhoods must overcome many impediments to succeed” (Clark 17).

### **Further Significance and Background of the Trinity College Saturday Academy**

In addition, “despite the increasing number of programs for youth now operating (such as school-to-work, mentoring, employment, tutoring, and recreational), very little is known about their quality or impact” (Flaxman 1996). This was the guiding factor in my interest in researching what have become of the graduates of the Saturday Academy. The Trinity College Saturday Academy is a nationally recognized educational enrichment program for middle school students, specifically 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, and their parents. The program runs in 10 week sessions in the fall and the spring with a graduation ceremony for each session. The goals of the program are as follows: (1) to provide academic enrichment opportunities for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade students in math, science, communications and computer technology, (2) raise the educational aspirations of students by exposing them to the link between higher education and economic success, (3) empower parents to become more effective partners in helping their children achieve their academic potential, (4) motivate students to achieve their educational goals ,(5) expose parents and students to early college awareness and (6) to encourage and increase minority and disadvantaged student enrollment in college.

To elaborate on one specific goal, exposing parents and students to early college awareness, the Saturday Academy stresses the idea of “imparting knowledge” on both

parents and students, as stated by the program director herself. In saying “knowledge,” I am referring to the understanding and awareness parents and students gain of the various options that exist for them educationally within this society. The program implements this in many ways such as; bringing in guest speakers from businesses, holding information sessions for parents and for students, and providing trips to private schools within the area. The Saturday Academy does not attempt to persuade parents or students in any one particular path or school, but rather makes them conscious of these various options that do exist. Children and parents are exposed to every type of schooling possible, from private and parochial high schools, public high schools, to 2 year colleges, 4 year public/state universities and private four year colleges, to name a few. They make sure that parents know that higher education is a viable reality for their child.

The Saturday Academy was established as a result of serious social problems facing Hartford’s educational system, such as drastically increasing drop out rates, which create problems causing children to not be successful academically. In illustration of these problems, Ivan Kuzyk’s, A Hartford Primer & Field Guide from the Fall of 2001, shows that the city of Hartford has the largest school system in the region and also the most troubled. From 1998-2000, for example, 22,458 students were enrolled in the school system, in comparison to West Hartford, the next largest, with 9,044 students enrolled. (Kuzyk 8). The drop out rate was 51% with only 52% of students going on to pursue higher forms of education. In 2000, a total of 544 students were graduated from Hartford’s three high schools, total.

Clearly, these problems needed to be addressed, and so, Aetna Life & Casualty of Hartford established the Saturday Academy in 1984 as an effort to address these social

problems facing the educational system of Hartford. They established more than just an academic enrichment program, but also a program focusing largely on relationships between business and education, also pulling family into the picture. It was at Aetna that the design of the program, still in existence today, was established. There are four core subjects addressed at the academy; mathematics, communication skills, computers, and science. These four areas were chosen as the focus because it is believed that they are critical for preparing students for college and the workforce of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In addition to classroom curriculum, students of the Saturday Academy participate in workshops. These workshops cover more “real life” issues such as gang violence, drug abuse, sex, and self esteem. The students go on field trips to the Boston Science Museum, have Diversity Day and a Career/Education Fair. In its beginning years at Aetna, employees served as program volunteers, administrative assistants and helped conduct evaluations. They coordinated “Shadow Days” where Saturday Academy students visited Aetna facilities to help understand how academics apply to the workplace and to gain insight into various jobs and their career potential.

Experiences such as these produce opportunities for students to broaden and apply their cognitive skills that schools teach. Students “who do these things outside of school are more likely to be achievers, because they receive appropriately rich opportunities to practice and thoroughly learn the requisite skills while participating in a well-rounded array of activities” (Clark 19). The academy is completely separate, in terms of curriculum, from their daily middle schools. The program is for additional imperative knowledge and experience that will aid them in their later lives.

In the fall of 1994 the academy moved to Saint Joseph College which had been given a \$37,500 grant to serve as administrator for the program. The Saturday Academy had expanded to numerous other locations around the country. These locations were:

- Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, GA.
- Howard University in Washington, D.C.
- Middlesex Community College in Middletown, Conn.
- Saint Joseph College in Hartford, Conn.
- Trinity College in Hartford, Conn.
- University of Southern California in Los Angeles, Calif.
- University of Wisconsin Milwaukee, Wis.

Finally, in 1997 the program found its current location at Trinity College and is now coordinated and funded through the Connecticut Department of Higher Education and GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs). All the other locations were phased out by 1996-1997 because of funding issues. The program at Trinity College is the only remaining Saturday Academy.

### **Methodology**

Through the course of my research my methodology has been altered many times and as a result so has my research question. My very first step was to obtain permission to do my study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I also made contact with the program director, who has been extremely helpful in providing me with the initial class rosters and all information on the background and origins of the Saturday Academy.

Originally I had intended to focus on two specific cohorts of former students/graduates: those who began their seventh grade years in either the fall of 1996 or the fall of 1997. In doing so I mailed out 151 surveys to the addresses on the original class rosters from these two particular cohorts. Questions on the survey were as follows:



- What are your overall educational goals and expectations?
- Since the Saturday Academy, what is the highest grade level you've completed?
  - What year did you complete this grade and from what school?
- Did you graduate from high school?
  - From what school? When?
- Did you go on to college?
  - What college and how many years have you completed?
- Did you pursue different educational paths after high school?
  - If so, what and where?
- Are you currently employed?
  - If yes, for how long?
  - What kind of work?
- Tell me about how you think the Saturday Academy has affected your life. (networking skills, public speaking, career opportunity possibilities, college preparation, etc)
- What is your marital status?
- Do you have any children?

Of the 151 mailings, only one completed survey was returned to. Three were returned due to a wrong address or “no longer living there” response. I am using the information from this survey and thus this information is still necessary. This lack of response leads to many questions and things we don't know. I can only speculate as to why the results came out this way. For example, Hartford by nature has a very transient population which leads me to believe that most of my mailings arrived at addresses at which the graduates no longer reside. If they did reach the hands of a graduate it could be that that particular graduate has dropped out of the educational system for one reason or another and thus does not feel comfortable talking about his or her lack of educational success.

Due to such lack of response I have been forced to update my original methodology with the addition of phone/face-to-face interviewing. In turn, I have also broadened my cohort to both parents and students with no restriction as to the year they attended the program. Through this process I have discovered that parents of graduates

are much more accessible than are the students themselves. Therefore, my research has changed to including perceptions of both students **and** parents. I used the initial class rosters, provided to me by the program director, for phone numbers. I constructed two interview guides, one for parents and one for students. For the parents questions are:

- How old is your child now?
- How did you come to hear of the Saturday Academy?
  - Why did you choose it for your child?
- What were your goals of the program?
- Do you know your child's overall educational goals and/or expectations?
- Since the Saturday Academy, what is the highest grade level your child has completed?
  - Where did he/she go to high school?
  - Did they go onto college? Where? How long? Major?
  - Do you think SA was a factor in this?
- Do you think the SA was a positive influence academically, emotionally, socially on your child?
- They focus a lot on networking skills, public speaking, career opportunity possibilities and college preparation, what are your thoughts on that?
  - Has it helped your child?
- Would you and/or your child recommend the "Saturday Academy Experience" to future students, friends, family, etc? Why?

The interview guide for the student I spoke with over the phone follows the same questions as the previously listed survey questions.

I have 9 total interviews/survey responses: 3 parents yielding information on 4 students, and 5 phone/survey responses from students. With the parents I did 2 face-to-face tape recorded interviews and one over the phone. This provided me with data on a total of 4 children (one parent has two graduates of the Saturday Academy). With the students, one interview was over the phone while the remaining 5 were results of surveys being filled out and returned to me. This is more clearly seen in chart form as follows:

|                           |                         |                                  |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Student 1 – Jane          | Phone interview         | No parent interview              |
| Student 2 – Abbey         | Survey returned in mail | No parent interview              |
| Student 3 – Mary          | Survey return           | Interview with mother – Parent 3 |
| Student 4 – John          | Survey return           | Interview with mother – Parent 3 |
| Student 5 – Jessica       | Survey return           | Interview with mother – Parent 1 |
| Student 6 – Sarah         | No student interview    | Interview with father – Parent 2 |
| <b>Total = 6 students</b> | ----                    | <b>Total = 3 parents</b>         |

### **Thesis**

Since their experience at the Trinity College Saturday Academy, most graduates have continued their secondary and higher education through private or parochial institutions, rather than public ones. With these secondary educations, most graduates are pursuing specific education and thus career goals and/or ideas.

Also, both parents and graduates tend to think positively about the program, but for different reasons. Parents tend to be more focused on the emotional and social benefits of the program on their child. Graduates, on the other hand, are more focused on the positive influence of particular academic skills of the program, such as public speaking, math and science.

### **Interpretation and Analysis of Primary Resources**

While extensive research exists supporting and promoting the needs for supplementary education programs, my research goes beyond and looks at perceptions of how successful such programs are. Responses to my interviews and surveys have been

analyzed by looking for common trends within interview and survey responses. With what I have collected many commonalities have become evident which lead to some interesting propositions.

In regards to the first part of my research question about educational and career paths followed by the graduates, a few interesting patterns have arisen. First, most have pursued their secondary and higher educations through private, parochial institutions and/or supplemental programs rather than public ones. In 2000, 8% of Hartford school children were enrolled in private schools (Kuzyk 67). Though all of my interviewees reside in Hartford, 5 out of the 6 graduates did not attend the Hartford public school system for high school.

As seen in the attached data sheets, Sarah (all names used are pseudonyms) attended Shiloh Christian Academy in Hartford. Both Mary and John attended, or are currently attending Northwest Catholic High School in West Hartford, CT. Jane, though residing in Hartford attended South Windsor High School through utilization of Project Concern, and Abbey attended the Sports Science Academy in Hartford. Jessica, the 13 year old 8<sup>th</sup> grader, is currently enrolled in the Classical Magnet Program based out of Quirk Middle School in Hartford. This program gives students a foundation in the Classics that will allow them to better understand the contemporary world. Established in 1981, it involves Trinity faculty from the Philosophy, Classics, Mathematics, History and Religion departments.

(<http://www.state.ct.us/sde/dtl/curriculum/gtdir731/groupi/hartfo.PDF>) Though it is based out of a public middle school, the program itself is privately run and organized. Per program director, it is currently in the process of making a move to its own building on

Woodland Street in Hartford, where it will then be able to extend to a K-12 program, which Jessica will continue to be a part of.

In addition, 3 out of 6 are currently attending private or parochial colleges or universities. Mary is a senior at Wesleyan University in CT, Jane is a freshman at Providence College in Rhode Island, and Sarah is currently completing both her senior year of high school and freshman year of college consecutively at Pensacola Christian College in Florida. John, the senior at Northwest Catholic High School is applying to Rochester Technical Institute in New York, also a private college.

This leads to speculation of prevalent issues with the Hartford Public School system that makes parents more likely to send their children to private schools or enroll them in programs such as Project Concern that buses students to suburban towns. As noted by one parent, “at the time both of them were going to start the programs [high school] there were huge upheavals in the educational components of the government here in Hartford and the board of Ed was in uproar...it’s a little better now, but not by much.”

The notion of private and parochial schools aside, this data shows that 5 out of 6 students interviewed are, simply stated, going to college. This demonstrates that students are seeing college as a reality and a viable option. As seen in the data, all of the institutions attended by these graduates are four year programs. This supports the fact that when exposed to colleges at the Saturday Academy, they are exposed to all types of colleges. These students are clearly remaining focused on a path that will lead them toward bright and promising futures and defying becoming a statistic, an addition to the 51% dropout rate. The 6<sup>th</sup> student is currently in middle school but according to her mother intends on continuing through the educational system through college.

This patterns of attending private institutions and college in general, also speaks of one of the Saturday Academy goals of imparting knowledge. It illustrates the desire of the academy to raise parent and student awareness. As mentioned previously, the Saturday Academy does not promote leaving the Hartford public school system, but rather puts every possible option out there on the table for parents and students to learn of, be it Project Concern, Magnet schools, and private or parochial institutions as shown by one mother when saying “it helps a lot of kids I saw begin to open their eyes to the possibilities.” This pattern highlights that awareness that maybe they did not have prior to their experience with the Saturday Academy.

With the data pertaining to the graduates currently enrolled or soon to be, I have noticed that, graduates tend to have a strong, if not definite, idea of what they want to do with their educations and lives for that matter. When presented with the open-ended broad question – “What are you/your child’s overall educational goals and expectations?” - parents and graduates themselves had overwhelmingly positive responses. I discovered that they each have a specific educational, which leads to career, goal that they are working toward achieving. “I’m going to be a bilingual child psychologist...I want to also minor in Spanish so I can be a bilingual family or child psychologist,” says Jane, freshman psychology major at Providence College. Mary, the senior at Wesleyan University in Middletown, is a very motivated and intelligent young woman. According to her mother, (Parent 3) she will be graduating this coming May with a Bachelors Degree in Government, and a minor in International Studies. With this her plans are to either become a judge or work for an international organization dealing with human rights. Other probable career paths the graduates mentioned pursuing include: a scientist,

attorney, judge, mechanical engineer, and medical doctor. This is clearly demonstrating that students are aware of the options that exist for them and that they are working to achieve their goals.

When looking to determine the long-term impact of the Saturday Academy on the graduates it became evident within the data that both parents and students tend to think positively about the program but for different reasons. Parents have a propensity to be more focused on the emotional and social benefits of the program on their child. Graduates, on the other hand, tend to be more focused on the positive influence of particular academic skills, such as math, science, and public speaking.

### **Parents**

In speaking with the parents, I noticed that their primary hopes when deciding to enroll their children in the Saturday Academy were for social and emotional opportunities. Parents tended not to place as much emphasis on the academic benefits the program presented their children with.

As William Morgan mentions in his study “Supplementary Education for Low-Income Youth”, a fundamental benefit from participation in such programs is that “youth receive an opportunity to begin to be different, to have a unique set of interests that set them apart from classmates....The participating youth develop a set of interests that provide a unique cultural preparation and orientation to their common school experience” (Morgan 3). In speaking with the parents of graduates about why they enrolled their children in the academy, this idea was a significant portion of the impression I received from them. As is illustrated by one parent in saying of her child born in Africa, “she has really had to adjust to American culture and American education so I just thought it

would be a good idea to give her as much exposure as I can"(Parent 1). This mother seemed really passionate about giving her child the opportunity to become accustomed to, and to socialize into the educational system here in the United States.

The desire of a sort of socialization was common amongst parents. They wanted something that would make their children happy and excited to learn while not being in a school classroom as demonstrated by Parent 2 when he mentioned that his daughter “was in a very fine private school and there was really no need for her to be a part of the program other than to assist her socially.” A significant cause of these socialization benefits is the result of the Saturday Academy’s method of providing a curriculum and schedule of activities that are completely separate and in addition to their traditional, everyday school work. This is a major draw for the parents because, “it is during the school-age years that adults hope children will discover and develop their individual talents, learn to recognize and overcome their limitations...they must also juggle a volatile mix of emotions, hormones, and social pressures while creating positive relationships with the peers and adults with whom they interact” (Larner 1999). Within my collected data this point is demonstrated by Parent 3 when she said “it helps a lot of kids I saw begin to open their eyes to the possibilities...kids just have a good time, they make new friends, sometimes they have old friends there, and the parents are there and the parents get to know the parents. So when your Jimmy says he’s going to Jack’s house you know who Jack’s house is and who’s there, and that’s building community.”

### **Students**

In contrast to the parents interviewed, the graduates of the program tend to be more affected by specific academic skills they gained or improved on as a result of



participating at the Saturday Academy. The most prominent response of the graduates, 4 out of 6, was in regards to the benefit of having classes in public speaking. As noted by Parent 3, “public speaking is extremely important. No matter where you go and what you do, you need to know how to speak, how to present yourself, and how to sell yourself...if you learn to public speak you learn to organize your thoughts and in learning to organize your thoughts it spills over into other parts of your life.” Jane noted that public speaking helped her a lot because she is really shy and at Providence College, it has helped her to feel more comfortable speaking up in her seminars as well as in her work at a local elementary school in speaking to students and adults.

With regards to other subjects, science was mentioned by 3 out of the 6 graduates. Mary mentioned that “it certainly supplemented [her] education and exposed [her] to things like science labs that [she] had no contact with before.” 2 out of 6 acknowledged the program helping them with math, while 1 of the 6 mentioned the teaching of Power Point skills getting her ahead of other students in her class. None of the graduates surveyed mentioned anything in regards to social or emotional benefits they feel the program gave them.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion to my research, I believe that the Trinity College Saturday Academy has successfully “imparted knowledge” on the lives of the participants included in my study by making every option of the reality of higher education known. With the data collected and analyzed I have discovered that all the graduates have, in fact, gone on to higher forms of education after their experiences with the program. Due to reasons that can only be speculated upon, all of the graduates surveyed or interviewed attended

middle and/or high school through private, parochial, or supplemental means. In addition, most of the graduates have a clear course as to where they want these higher forms of education to take them in life.

Throughout this process of collecting and analyzing the data, it has become abundantly clear that overall, the Saturday Academy has proven successful in the eyes of both parents and the graduates themselves for varying reasons. I believe that clearly, parents want what is best for their children, and with a program that takes place weekly on Saturdays the reasons of enrollment are for social and emotional benefit. “Everyone believes that only good can come from [programs for youth], that at the worst they will not accomplish all that they could, but that youth will be better for the experience” (Flaxman 1996).

The graduates, in comparison are more concerned with the direct results of the program. That is, the students perhaps saw more of an immediate effect in their improvement in performance and/or comfort gained through the academic experiences provided them by the Saturday Academy. None of the graduates made mention to any social or emotional benefits gained by being a part of the program.

### **Opportunities for Further Research**

The findings of my research are based on interviews with three parents of graduates of the Saturday Academy and 6 surveys and/or interviews of graduates themselves. Therefore, though my findings and claims are valid for my cohort of participants, broad generalizations can not be made of *all* Saturday Academy participants over the 20 years the program has been in existence.

This task has proven far too overwhelming to be tackled over the course of one semester and my findings have opened the door to an endless amount of possible questions to be researched and/or included given more time. For example, what are the teachers at the academy's perception of the benefits of the program? Also, if programs such as The Trinity College Saturday Academy are so beneficial to its participants, why is it that only one of six original program locations is still running today? Is it a matter of funding, and if so how can that be resolved or improved upon?

Also, as discovered within the secondary source material, there is plenty of information on the needs and probably benefits of youth enrichment programs like the Saturday Academy, but why is there so little evaluation of such programs? If these programs are to reach their potential they need to be evaluated if not, then organizers don't know what they need to change and improve on. With funding so limited, "given the choice to spend money to evaluate a youth program or to provide more services, most program administrators would not choose the evaluation. They would rather use the funds to reach more youth, recruit and train more staff, or provide more experiences for the youth" (Flaxman 1996).

This has truly been a learning experience, both for me and for the staff of the Trinity College Saturday Academy. There are clearly many directions this research could take if provided with more time.

## Works Cited

- Clark, Reginald M. "Why Disadvantaged Students Succeed: What Happens Outside of School is Critical." In Public Welfare. Vol. 48. pp. 17-23. Spring 1990.
- Flaxman, Erwin and Margaret Orr. "Determining the Effectiveness of Youth Programs." In Eric Digest. No. 118. December 1996.
- "Insurance Company Funds Program." Business-Education Report: The Publication for Businesses Involved in Education. Vol. 5, No. 9. September 1994.
- Kuyzk, Ivan. A Hartford Primer & Field Guide. Trinity College Cities Data Center. Fall, 2001.
- Larner, Mary, Lorraine Zippiroli and Richard Behrman, "When School is out: Analysis and Recommendations." in The Future of Children: When School Is Out. Vol. 9. No. 2. Fall 1999.
- Morgan, William R. and Sandra Ezekiel. "Supplementary Education for Low-Income Youth: Saturday School at an African American Heritage Center." Report #7. Department of Sociology. Cleveland State University. 1993.
- Quinn, Jane. "Where Need Meets Opportunity: Youth Development Programs for Early Teens" in The Future of Children: When School Is Out. Vol. 9. No. 2. Fall 1999.