Supporting College Student Access and Success: Making Sure Hard Work Pays Off

BRIDGET TERRY LONG, Harvard Graduate School of Education

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Vivian Gadsden
President,
American Educational Research Association

Bridget Terry Long
Academic Dean
and Saris Professor of Education and Economics,
Harvard Graduate School of Education

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Dr. Bridget Terry Long, Ph.D.
Academic Dean and Saris Professor of Education and Economics
Harvard Graduate School of Education
Does Education End at 12th Grade?

Higher Education... College... Postsecondary...

- Teaching “best and brightest”
- Producing research
- A place for a 2nd chance...
  - Students not served well by the K-12 system
  - Life-long learning in a changing world

The Neo-traditional Student

- Pell Grant Recipients, 2013-14: 47% are Age 24+
- Works full-time
- Veterans
- G.E.D. Holders
- Has Dependents
- Attends part-time
- Attends On-and-Off

Median Earnings & Tax Payments, 2015

Full-Time, Year-Round Workers Age 25 and Older

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tax Payments</th>
<th>Median Earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>$14,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assoc. Degree</td>
<td>$10,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>$8,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS Deg.</td>
<td>$7,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The College Board, Education Pays 2016, Figure 2.1

The Public Benefits of Higher Education

- Higher rates of volunteering
- More time spent volunteering
- Greater tolerance and concern for human rights
- Better health

Time Working Mothers Spend with Children Under Age 18 (minutes per day)

- Bachelor’s Degree or Higher: 61 minutes
- Some College or Associate Degree: 75 minutes
- High School Diploma: 87 minutes
- Less than a High School Diploma: 113 minutes

But there are problems...

College Enrollment Rate, 1965-2015
By Family Income Quartile (18 to 24 year olds)

Even after decades of financial aid and academic supports, gaps by income are still large

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; School Enrollment Data, graph by Pell Institute, July 2014. Note: Rate is tabulated based on the total number in the cohort year and includes those that have not completed high school in the denominator of the tabulation.

Addressing Gaps in College Access and Success

There are large, continual gaps in enrollment, persistence, and completion by income and race.

Higher education is an expensive, possibly risky, but also necessary investment for most to reach a middle-class standard of living.

The consequences of making poor decisions are huge.

Addressing Gaps in College Access and Success

Three Major Challenges:
1. Affordability
2. Academic Preparation
3. Complexity and Information

What does research tell us about these challenges?

More importantly, what does research tell us about possible solutions?
Challenge #1: Affordability
Cumulative Growth in Prices since 1998
(based on increases in current dollar amounts)

The Role of Financial Aid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Aid</th>
<th>Amount (Billions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fed. Work Study</td>
<td>$1.5 B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Grants</td>
<td>$10.4 B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private &amp; Employer Grants</td>
<td>$11.8 B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans/Military Grants</td>
<td>$12.8 B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tax Credits &amp; Deductions</td>
<td>$16.4 B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pell Grants</td>
<td>$28.2 B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instit. Grants</td>
<td>$43.0 B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Loans</td>
<td>$60.0 B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Undergraduate Student Aid, 2015-16

What does the Evidence tell us about the effects of Aid?

**Example:** Florida Student Access Grant (FSAG)

- In 2000, FSAG: Need-based grant: $1,300
  - 57% of Tuition & Fees at Public Four-years (90% at CCs)
- Students also received the Pell Grant (about $1,750) → A good test for the effects of increasing need-based aid
- Studied 45,727 Florida public HS students who completed FAFSA
- Small difference in family resources determined who received aid
- 22% increase in 6-year graduation rate (Bachelor's degree) for students near the aid cut-off (family income ~ $30,000)

The Role of Financial Aid
What does the Evidence tell Us?

- Overall, multiple studies have found strong, positive effects of grants on enrollment and degree completion.
- ...But do families know aid exists and how to get it?
- The largest effects are for transparent, easy-to-understand programs – Simplicity matters

Challenge #2: Academic Preparation
The Struggles of Underprepared Students

- Estimates suggest only one-third of students leave high school at least minimally prepared for college (smaller proportions for Black and Latino students).
- Nationally 35%-40% of 1st year students (55%-60% at community colleges) are placed into postsecondary remediation.
  - Focus on HS-level skills (not college competencies)
  - Also called developmental or basic education
- The placement exam taken once arriving on campus has become the key academic gate-keeper to postsecondary study

Postsecondary Remediation: Does it Work?

“CUNY university system currently devotes far too much money and effort to teaching skills that students should have learned in high school”
(CUNY four-years phased out remediation in 1999)

Elimination of remediation could “effectively end the American experiment with mass postsecondary education” (Time, 2002)

Research: Effects of traditional remediation programs are mixed at best (in face of large costs) (Bettinger & Long, 2008; Calcagno & Long, 2009)

Redesigning Program to Streamline Mathematics Remediation

“Mainstreaming”: Placed students directly into college-level courses with a special outside workshop

Remediation had positive and stronger effects for students with weaker preparation (Boatman and Long, 2017)

“Modules”: Remedial course broken up into 12 modules

“Acceleration”: Allowed to begin the next course in the sequence immediately

The redesigned developmental math courses had more positive outcomes (Boatman, 2016)
Challenge #3: Information Navigating a Complicated System

Affordability and Academic Preparation are barriers – but common among both are complex processes and the need to sort through complicated information.

Unclear processes
Cumbersome applications
Too little and incorrect information
Late information
Overwhelming information

Students are shut out due to poorly-understood processes unrelated to learning and education

Just a few steps in the College Process...

College preparation
Forming aspirations
HS course selection
Aid eligibility projection

SAT/ACT
Fee waivers
Registration
Exam preparation
Score sending
Retaking the exam

College search
College search tools
College literature
Determining match
College Visits

FAFSA completion
FAFSA completion
SAR interpretation
College apps
Application choices
Fee waivers
Common app

College choice
Award letter interpretation
Guidance on choice

Supplementary loan applications
Placement exams
Housing applications

Degree and Major Academic Requirements

Dean James Ryan, reflecting on his experience as a 1st-generation college student:
“I felt like I had arrived in a different country, one where I didn’t understand the customs, language, or culture.”

Example: The FAFSA (federal financial aid form)
(the 2009 form minus the instructions)
Helping with the Federal Financial Aid Application
The FAFSA Experiment, 2007-2009
(Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, & Sanbonmatsu, 2012)

Eligibility: Family Income less than $45,000; member age 15-30
Families complete their tax returns normally at H&R Block offices
Families randomly-assigned to the FAFSA treatment group:
  – Transferred relevant tax information already collected into the FAFSA form (1/2 to 2/3rds of form)
  – Streamlined interview to collect remaining information
  – Gave individualized estimate of aid awards and local college options
  – Submitted the FAFSA electronically

The FAFSA Experiment
Did something so small have an impact?
(Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, & Sanbonmatsu, 2012)
The FAFSA Treatment (an 8-minute intervention):
  ➢ Increased college enrollment 29% (8 percentage points) among graduating high school seniors
  ➢ Three years later, students were 8 percentage points more likely to be enrolled 2 consecutive years

The skills necessary to complete the FAFSA do not appear to be the skills necessary to persist in college

Example: The Early College Planning Initiative
Why don’t more Families Save for College?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interventions (2013-14)</th>
<th>Opened Account</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Control Group:</td>
<td>0.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational workshop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment Group #1: Above + assistance with the 529 app</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment Group #2: Above + funds to open account ($50)</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1,000 Boston Public School families
Students Grades 7-10
Workshops on how to prepare academically and financially for college

Longer term, families started saving monthly and saved on average $1200 more (without additional interventions)

Small things can make a BIG Difference
➢ Sign-up processes matter greatly:
  • The burden of navigating applications can hold back students,
  • Once crossing key barriers, student can gain momentum
➢ With complex processes, more than more information may be needed
➢ Proactive outreach is key

Simplify, support, and guide students to help them channel their efforts and get appropriate credit for their hard work
**Making Sure Hard Work Pays Off: Ways to improve the system**

- Change the infrastructure to make the process easier (e.g., change financial aid forms)
- Use Personalized Information to Simplify Processes (e.g., link eligibility to other programs; pre-populate forms)
- Thoughtfully deliver information (perhaps with technology)
- Change how practitioners focus their time and attention → On personalized information, not routine tasks