

**CENTENNIAL
LECTURE SERIES
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Critical Issues • Rigorous Research • Innovative Ideas

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

BRIDGET TERRY LONG, *Harvard Graduate School of Education*
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2017 | THE MUSIC CENTER | LOS ANGELES, CA

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Access and Success:
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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



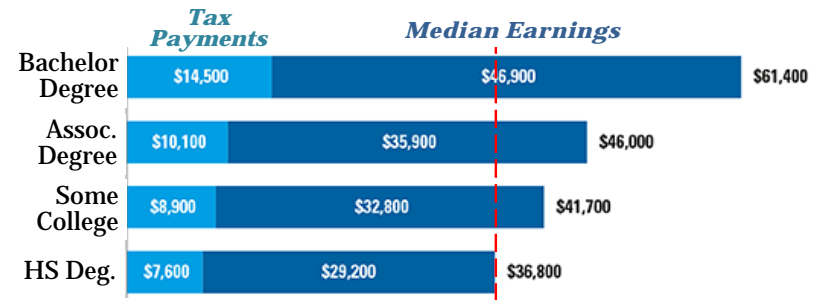
The Neo-traditional Student

Pell Grant Recipients, 2013-14 <i>47% are Age 24+</i>	Works full-time Attends part-time Has Dependents	Veterans G.E.D. Holders Attends On-and-Off
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There are many important benefits...

Median Earnings & Tax Payments, 2015

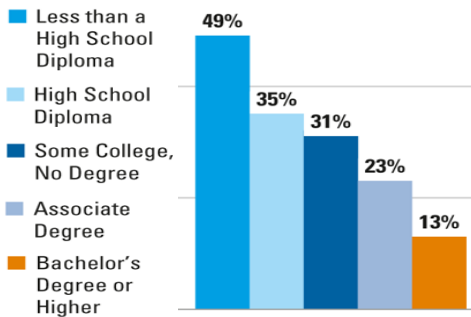
Full-Time, Year-Round Workers Age 25 and Older



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

Poverty Rate, 2015

Female-Headed Households with Children



Source: The College Board, Education Pays 2016, Figure 2.16A

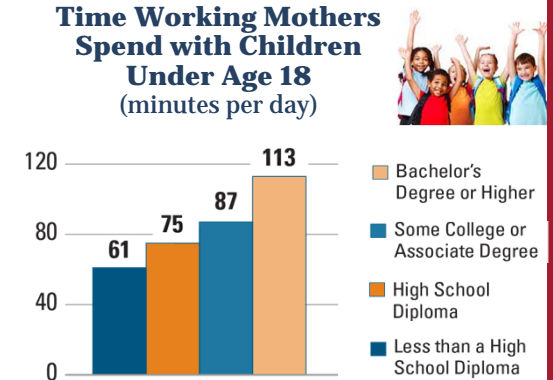
Other Benefits

- Lower unemployment
- Better work conditions and satisfaction
- Lower rates of disability
- Lower Government Dependency

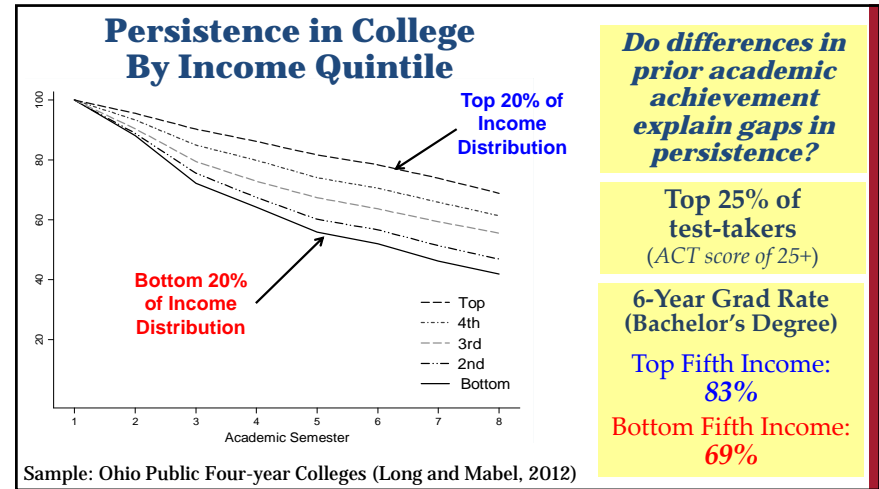
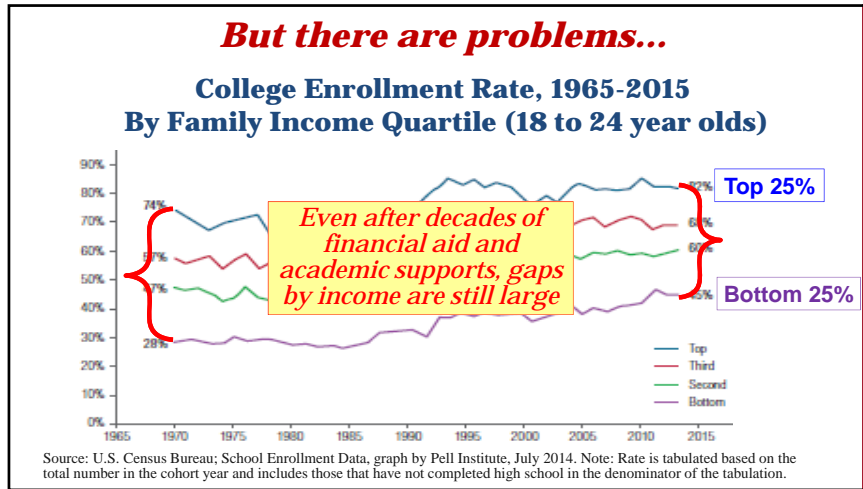
The Public Benefits of Higher Education

- 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)



Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013); College Board (2016).



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**

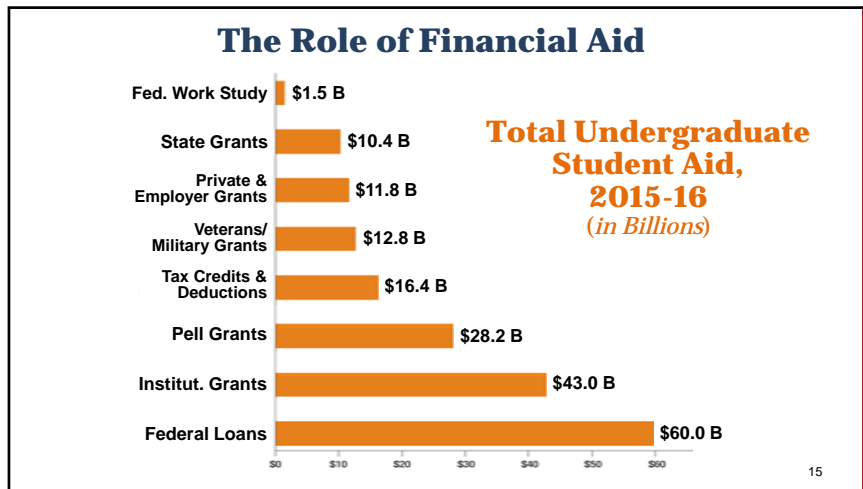
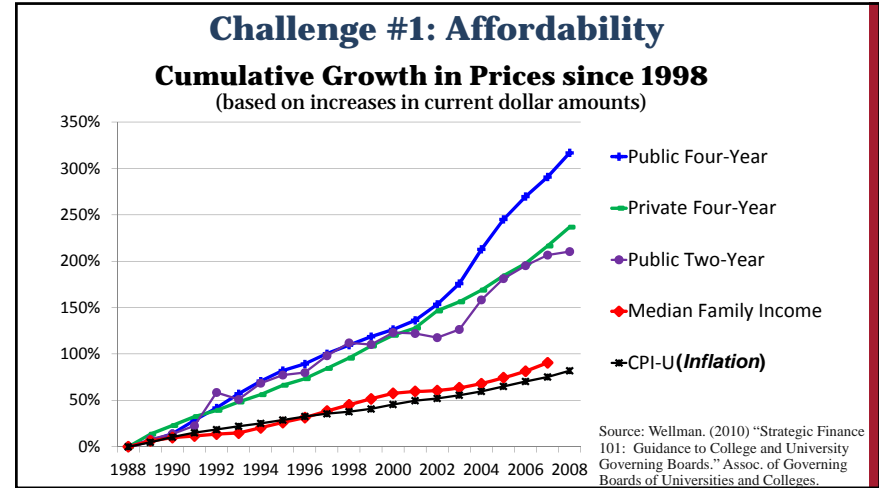
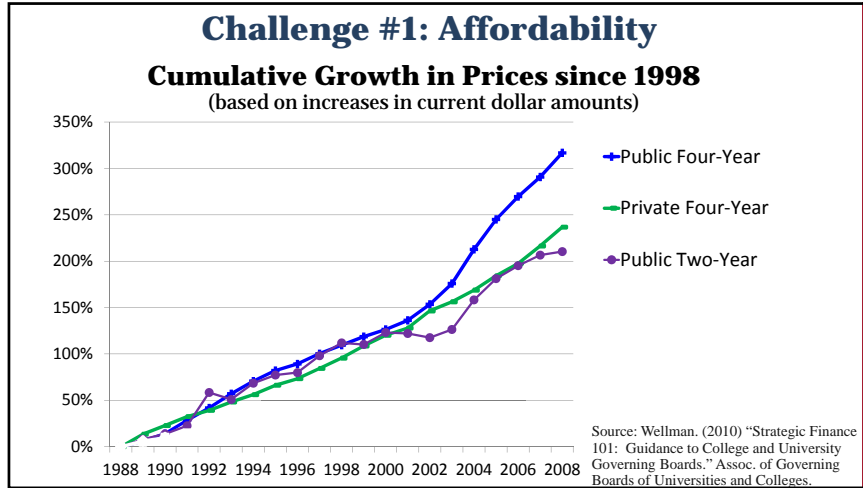
Addressing Gaps in College Access and Success

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?



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

Example: Florida Student Access Grant (FSAG)
(Castleman and Long, 2016)

- 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*

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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

Source: Bettinger and Long (2009); Bettinger, Boatman, & Long (2013)

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)

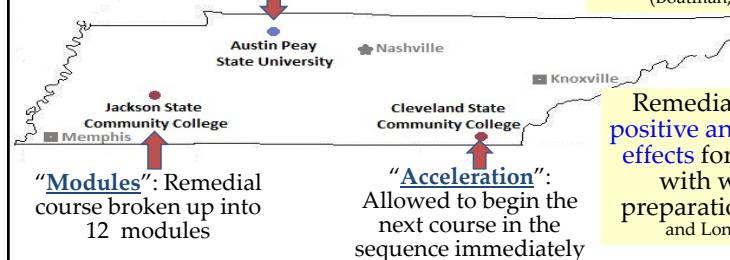
Research: Effects of traditional remediation programs are **mixed at best** (in face of **large** costs) (Bettinger & Long, 2008; Calcagno & Long, 2009)



Redesigning Program to Streamline Mathematics Remediation

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

The redesigned developmental math courses had **more positive outcomes** (Boatman, 2016)



“**Modules**”: Remedial course broken up into 12 modules

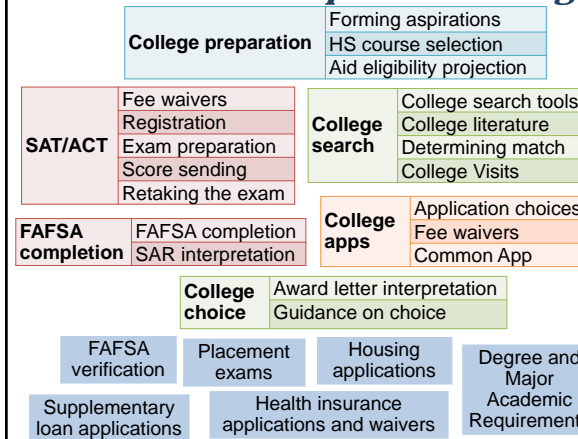
“**Acceleration**”: Allowed to begin the next course in the sequence immediately

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

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**.

Just a few steps in the College Process...



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.”

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

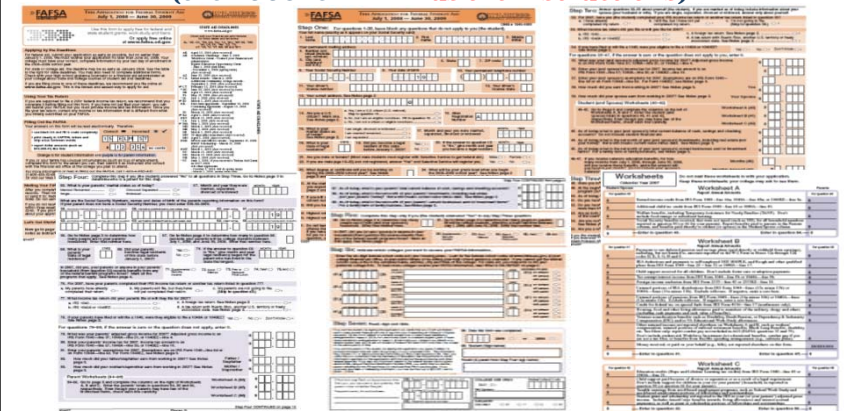
Late information

Overwhelming information

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



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?

1,000 Boston Public School families

Students Grades 7-10

Workshops on how to prepare academically and financially for college

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



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



Centennial Lecture Series Open Forum

Featured Speaker:

Bridget Terry Long, *Harvard Graduate School of Education*

Moderator:

Adolfo Guzman-Lopez, *Southern California Public Radio*

Commentators:

Audrey Dow, *The Campaign for College Opportunity*
 Juana Hernandez, *Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce*
 James T. Minor, *California State University*



Felice Levine

Executive Director,
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