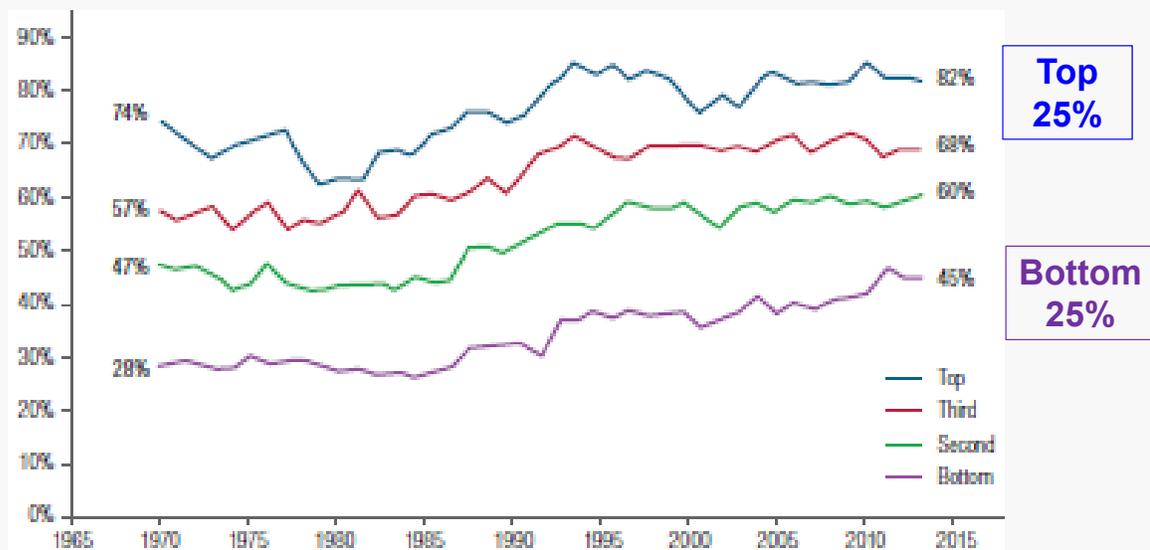


Addressing Challenges to Educational Opportunity with Behavioral Science

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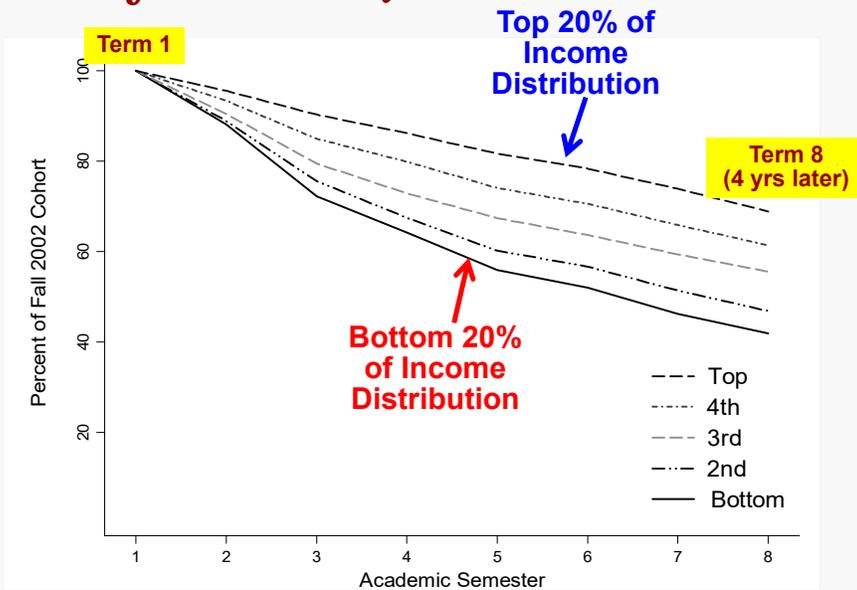
College Enrollment Rate, 1965-2015 By Family Income Quartile (18 to 24 year olds)



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.

Continuous Persistence in Higher Education by Income Quintile

Long & Mabel
(2012)
Analysis of Ohio
Public Four-year
Colleges



Source: Ohio Board of Regents administrative records. Sample: First-time college freshmen between the ages of 17 and 20 who enrolled at least half-time during fall 2002. Persistence outcomes are conditional on enrollment in all preceding semesters. Upper bound limits for income quintiles are: Q1 = \$17,916; Q2 = \$33,377; Q3 = \$53,162; Q4 = \$84,016.

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

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

...and these trends are happening in the midst of changing demographics and increasing student needs.



The Role of Information?

Affordability and **academic preparation** are barriers – but common among both are **complex processes**, the **need to sort through complicated information**, doing the right things at the right time in the right order

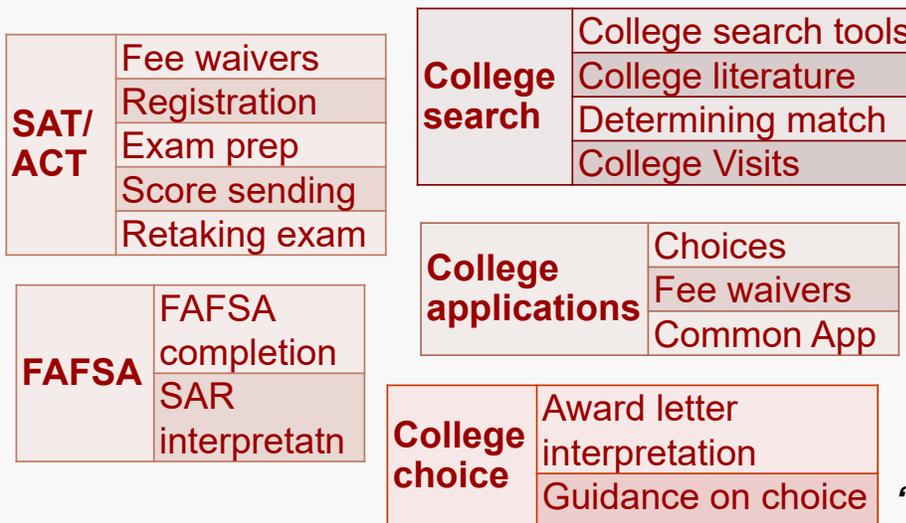
- Too little information
- Too much information
- Bad/incorrect information
- Unclear processes
- Late information
- Cumbersome applications

Information is a Cost...

Costly to collect the needed information, costly to sort through that information, costly to process the information to make a choice

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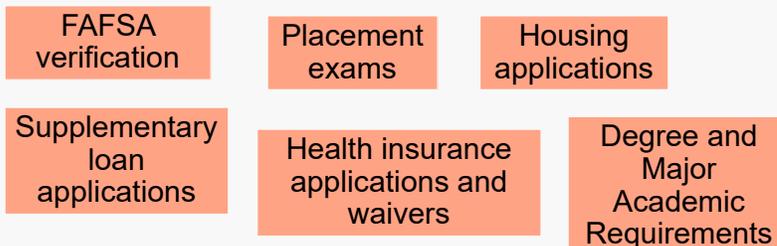
Just a few steps in the College Process...



The process is not obvious by logic or intuition.

Many students aren't sure what questions to even ask.

"I felt like I had arrived in a different country, one where I didn't understand the customs, language, or culture."



Challenge: Navigating a Complicated System

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

Better information might be an effective way to improve outcomes



What we have currently doesn't work well...

- Non-specific information
- Information posted is overwhelming; treats all facts equally
- Many focus on building websites but do little outreach

Lessons from Behavioral Economics:
The important role of information and how it is presented

Example: The FAFSA (federal financial aid form) (the 2009 form minus the instructions)

The image displays several pages from the 2009 FAFSA form. Key sections visible include:

- Step One:** Personal information, including name, date of birth, and Social Security Number.
- Step Two:** Financial information, such as household size, number of dependents, and marital status.
- Step Three:** School information, including the school's federal school code and housing status.
- Workbooks:** Worksheets for reporting income, assets, and other financial data.

The form is characterized by its dense layout, numerous checkboxes, and a mix of text and numerical input fields, which contributes to its perceived complexity.

Helping with the FAFSA

(Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, & Sanbonmatsu, 2012)

Intervention in H&R Block offices:

- Transferred tax information into the aid form
- Streamlined remaining questions
- Gave individualized estimate, submitted electronically

The FAFSA Treatment **increased college enrollment 26%** among graduating high school seniors



Three Years Later... students were **just as more likely to be enrolled 2 consecutive years** than the control group

A form would have deterred them, but they had the skills necessary to persist in college

The Early College Planning Initiative

(Long and Bettinger, 2017)

Why don't more Families Save for College?

1,000 Boston Public School families	Interventions (2013-14)	Opened Account
Students Grades 7-10	➤ <i>Control Group:</i> Informational workshop	0.98%
Workshops on how to prepare academically and financially for college	➤ <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)

Providing Information inside the Classroom

“Experimental Evidence of Professor Engagement on Student Outcomes”
(Carrell, Kurlaender, Bhatt, 2016)

- Feedback and suggestions in introductory microeconomics courses → Two strategically-timed emails to students from the professor indicating:
 - Knowledge of the students’ current standing in the course
 - Keys to success in the class
 - Reminder of when the professor is available
- Students in the treatment group **scored higher** on exams, homework assignments, and final course grade; some evidence that **spend more time on homework**



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Lessons and Implications

- Targeted, timely information can be impactful, but it is **not always enough**
 - Effective in promoting small tasks
 - Failed to get families to complete complicated processes
- **With complicated processes...**
 - Assistance, and even incentives, might be necessary along with *proactive outreach*
 - Getting over an initial hurdle can set students up for continued engagement and enable to access resources
- **Change the infrastructure to make processes clearer and easier to navigate**
- **Adjust messaging and provide timely support**

