Realizing the Promise: From Access to Academic Success

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- Realizing the Promise: Framing Evaluation Research
  - The Role of Aid Guarantees for Low-Income Students
  - Balanced Model for Research on Access and Academic Success
- What have we learned from studies of other programs?
  - Twenty-first Century Scholars
  - Washington State Achievers
  - Gates Millennial Scholars Program
- Implications for Evaluation of North Carolina Covenant
- Concluding Reflections
The Role of Aid Guarantees for Low-Income Students

Potential Outcomes
- Early guarantees can improve
  - Aspirations for college
  - Preparation for college
  - Application for college
- Guaranteed Aid at Admission
  - Opportunity to enroll in selective college
  - Academic and social engagement during college
  - Persistence and degree attainment

Evaluation challenges
- Use sound logical models in evaluation designs
- Consider competing explanations of outcomes
- Use data with comparable students that do not receive similar awards (e.g. random assignment), or
- Address selection issues (consider instrumental variables or regression discontinuity)

Evaluation studies of program that provide aid guarantees
FIGURE 1
A Balanced Framework for the Study of College Access and Success: Linking K-12 and Postsecondary Policies to Preparation, College Choice, and Persistence

K-12 POLICIES
High School Policy
- Funding
- Curriculum
- Standards
- Testing

SOCIAL & EDUCATIONAL FACTORS
Family Income & Education
Student Expectations & Plans
Academic Preparation
Taking Examination
Application & Admission

POSTSECONDARY FINANCE & ENCOURAGEMENT
Aid Guarantees: Ease Family Finance Concerns
Encouragement for Preparation and Enrollment Diversity
State Coordination of Tuition & Grant $

College Costs
Student Financial Aid
Enrollment in 2-Yr. & 4-Yr. College
Persistence to Degree

Source: Adapted Balanced Access Model from St. John, 2003
Programs With Aid Guarantees

- **Twenty-first Century Scholars**
  - Guarantees aid for low-income 8th graders who take pledge
  - Encourages college preparatory curriculum
  - Requires college application
  - Some colleges align support services and aid
  - Students receive supplemental funding if they enroll in-state

- **Washington State Achievers**
  - Funds high school reforms in selected high schools
  - Selects students during junior year for scholarship program (using non-cognitive variables)
  - Encourages academic preparation and requires application
  - Provides mentoring in high school and college
  - Provides “last dollar” grant up to fixed maximum
  - Students receive grants if they enroll in-state as freshman (transfer possible)

- **Gates Millennial Scholars**
  - Qualified students of color: high GPA, low-income, leadership
  - Selects 1,000 students per year
  - Selection based on non-cognitive variables
  - Last dollar no limit for awards for
    - Undergraduates in any college
    - Graduates in preferred fields
Twenty-first Century Scholars

- Studies to date
  - Used 1999 high school seniors (8th grade survey, aid applications, college enrollment)
  - Initial study: Improved odds of enrollment, especially in two-year and private colleges
  - Follow-up study: Four-year persistence and degree attainment similar for awardees and other aid recipients (and other low-income students)

- Planned studies
  - Qualitative studies of student (by IUPUI and Purdue)
  - Six-year persistence attainment with 1999 cohort (with tests for selection and, if necessary, instrument variables)
  - Analyses of preparation and persistence with 2000 cohort (includes College Board data on preparation)
  - Development of a new cohort to examine effects of utilization of program services

- Study findings are encouraging, but need to
  - Explore new questions, and
  - Refine evaluation methods
Washington State Achievers

- Studies of students in WSA and ‘comparison’ high schools
  - Demographic analyses indicate school effects on college enrollment in four-year colleges in third year (Charles Hirschman and colleagues, University of Washington)
  - Evaluation studies indicate impact on aspirations, enrollment, and (especially) enrollment in four-year colleges; also confirm third year effect (St. John & Hu)

- NORC tracking study of scholarship applicants (recipients/non recipients)
  - Evidence of more leadership activities by recipients than non recipients (Sedlacek, University of Maryland)
  - Evidence from evaluations of improved
    - Choice of four-year colleges, especially private institutions
    - Persistence, through improved college choices
    - Student academic and community engagement, through improved college choice and aid awards (St. John & Hu)

- In Process:
  - Tracking study of students in treatment and comparable high schools
  - Enable further testing of issues related to selection Re: school & aid effects
Gates Millennial Scholars

- NORC longitudinal files of Qualified Applications (Recipients/Non recipients)
- Recent studies have tested for selection bias
  - Tests of selection bias indicate no selection problems for analyses of student academic success and persistence, although more analyses of selection were recommended (DesJardins)
  - Regression discontinuity analyses of selection cut point for key outcomes indicates effects on persistence and grades (DesJardins & McCall)
- Evaluation studies using NORC Surveys indicate receipt of GMS improved
  - Choice of four-year college, private college, and selective colleges
  - Academic and social engagement during college (possible interaction with non cognitive selection variables)
  - Enrollment in graduate school, especially in education
  - Taking jobs related to academic majors (employment congruence)
What Have we Learned?
Summary of Evidence

- Strong evidence that early grant guarantees improve
  - Preparation and application (especially when coupled with school reforms)
  - Enrollment in four-year colleges
- Strong evidence that receiving adequate aid (sufficient to reduce unmet need and borrowing) improves academic success for low-income students, including
  - Persistence and degree completion
  - Academic and community engagement during college
  - Graduate education (when additional aid provided)
  - Employment in related fields
- We need to continue to refine data collection and analyses methods for evaluations of student aid programs, especially when guarantees are used to encourage low-income students
Implications for Evaluations of North Carolina Covenant: Evaluating Effects on Applications and Enrollment

- Potential impact of “promise”
  - Increased applications for low-income residents and non residents
  - Improve qualifications low-income applications
  - Improved enrollment by accepted low-income applicants

- Potential data sources
  - Multiple years of applicant and enrollment data and UNC (approach used in institutional research)
  - State level cohort data (similar to Indiana studies)
  - Tracking studies of high school students problematic, given limitations of ‘choice’ (i.e., surveys of high school students tracking into college)
Implications for Evaluations of North Carolina Covenant: Evaluating Effects on Academic Success

- Potential Outcomes Related to Academic Success
  - Major choices (eliminating/reducing effects of debt)
  - Academic and community engagement (requires NSSE or other surveys)
  - Achievement in college (grades and other intermediate outcomes)
  - Persistence and degree attainment

- Potential data sources
  - Tracking student population (UNC cohorts)
  - Surveys of students: Expanding NSSE and initiating new surveys
  - Tracing NC cohorts (Indiana approach)
  - Surveys tracing applicants, including students who do not enroll (GMS approach)

- Analysis issues
  - Non random assignment of awards
  - May need either instrumental variables or regression discontinuity
Concluding Reflections

- Research indicates a critical need for programs that ensure low-income students the opportunity to enroll and persist in four-year colleges.
- The early research on programs with aid guarantees indicates improved opportunity to:
  - Enroll in four-year colleges
  - Engage academic and socially during college
  - Complete degrees
  - Find employment compatible with degree
- The standards for evaluation research are changing, so research community is responding.
- We should learn from this history in research of the UNC program and others that provide aid guarantees.
Selected References on Indiana’s Twenty-first Century Scholars


Selected References on WSA

- Some reported findings from recent, yet to be published research: see Gates Foundation webpage.
  - Who applies for and who is selected for Washington State Achievers, by Among Emeka and Charles Hirschman (167-194)
  - Early academic behaviors of Washington State Achievers, William E. Sedlacek and hung-Bin Sheu (195-210)
  - The impact of guarantees of financial aid on college enrollment: An evaluation of the Washington State Achievers Program, Edward P. St. John and Shouping Hu (211-256)
Selected References on GMS

- Presentation also referenced research that has not yet been published; See Gates Foundation webpage.