Personalized Pathways to Successful Community CollegeÂ Transfer: Leveraging machine learning strategies to customizedÂ transferÂ guidance and support

Researchers:

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Sector(s): Education

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Location: Virginia, United States of America

Sample: ~7500 Students

Target group: Higher education and universities Students

Outcome of interest: Enrollment and attendance

Intervention type: Nudges and reminders

AEA RCT registration number: AEARCTR-0007222

Research Papers: Big data, meet behavioral science

Partner organization(s): Virginia Community College System (VCCS)

Community colleges have established partnerships with four-year universities in their state to facilitate transfers, but transfer rates remain low. Researchers are designing and evaluating the impact of a program that provides personalized guidance, reminders, and information to community college students on four-year institution transfer rates in Virginia.

Policy issue

Community colleges enroll 40 percent of all US undergraduates, including a disproportionate share of low-income and first-generation college students.[1], While 80 percent of community college students plan to transfer to a four-year institution, only 31.5 percent ultimately do so within six years of enrolling at a community college.[2,3]Like community college systems in over 30 states,[4] the Virginia Community College System aims to smooth the transfer process to local four-year universities through Guaranteed Admissions Agreements (GAAs). GAAs specify that students who complete required coursework and maintain high academic performance receive guaranteed admission to four-year universities in the state. Researchers have partnered with a community college system to test whether providing students with personalized information about pathways they can pursue to fulfill the Guaranteed Admissions Agreements can increase transfer rates to four-year institutions.

Context of the evaluation

This evaluation is taking place in multiple community colleges within the Virginia Community College System and focuses on students enrolled in the College Transfer Associates Degree program who intend to transfer.

Virginia Community College System aims to support transfers to the University of Virginia and many other four-year public and private schools in the state through a Guaranteed Admissions Agreement; however, Virginia transfer rates remain low at 13.2

percent.[5] Students may be unaware of GAAs or may be confused by the complexity of the GAA documents and processes. For example, students must often go through multiple websites to confirm which classes meet all the necessary requirements to transfer. In addition, students may struggle to identify four-year institutions that are a good fit.

While 80 percent of community college students plan to transfer to a four-year institution, only 31.5 percent ultimately do so. Photo: Shutterstock.com

Details of the intervention

Researchers are conducting a randomized evaluation to test the impact of providing community college students with personalized information and guidance about transfer pathways along with access to advisors who can assist with the transfer process.

One-third of the sample in each community college will be randomly assigned to a control group, receiving "business as usual." One-third of the sample will receive the intervention including:

- Simple and clear information about Guaranteed Admissions Agreements (GAAs) with four-year universities in Virginia
- Personalized list of suggested four-year institutions based on the student's intended course of study and where similar students have transferred successfully
- Individualized reports of the student's progress towards GAA requirements
- Customized course pathways in which students are likely to succeed, maximize the number of community college credits that will transfer to four-year institutions, and minimize their time to degree
- Reminders of upcoming transfer deadlines and requirements at relevant four-year colleges

- Intrusive advising regarding transfer resources and questions

The remaining third of the sample will receive all aspects of the intervention, except access to the project-specific intrusive advising model.

Researchers will measure the impact of this intervention on transfer rates to four-year institutions and bachelor degree completion using data from the Virginia Community College System and the National Student Clearinghouse.

Results and policy lessons

Project ongoing; results forthcoming.

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1. Ginder, S.A., Janice E. Kelly-Reid, and Farrah B. Mann. 2017. "Enrollment and Employees in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2016; and Financial Statistics and Academic Libraries, Fiscal Year 2016" *U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics*: Washington, DC. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018002.pdf (Accessed June 1, 2018).

2. Horn, Laura and Paul Skomsvold. 2011. "Community College Student Outcomes: 1994-2009." *National Center for Education Statistics*. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2012/2012253.pdf(Accessed June 1, 2018).

3. Shapiro, Afet Dundar, Faye Huie, Phoebe Khasiala Wakhungu, Xin Yuan, Angel Nathan & Youngsik Hwang. 2017. "Tracking Transfer: Measures of Effectiveness in Helping Community College Students to Complete Bachelor's Degrees" *National Student Clearinghouse Research Center*: Herndon, VA.

4. http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/mbprofallRT?Rep=TA14A

5. "VCCS Cohort Graduation and Transfer Rates" Virginia's Community Colleges: Richmond, VA. http://www.vccs.edu/about/where-we-are/impact/vccs-cohort-graduation-and-transfer-rates/ (Accessed June 25, 2018).