The College Application Gauntlet: The Obstacles Presented by the Steps to College Enrollment

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Lack of equity in four-year college enrollment rates

- All students
- Black students
- Hispanic students

United States
Maryland
High four-year degree aspiration rates

Source: Education Longitudinal Study of 2002:2006, second follow-up
Only about half of those aspirations convert to enrollment

Source: Education Longitudinal Study of 2002:2006, second follow-up
Cost

• Maybe the cost of college deters students from their aspirations?

• Has received the bulk of policy attention
Many steps to complete between aspiration and enrollment

• Steps to college enrollment largely have been ignored
  – Completing college prep coursework
  – Taking SAT/ACT
  – Meeting with a college counselor
  – Completing college applications
  – Completing financial aid applications

• To the extent that each is an obstacle, potential for policy intervention

• Some steps important enough that the decision to complete that step is synonymous with deciding whether to enroll in college at all
Many steps to complete between aspiration and enrollment

- Bachelor's aspirations, 10th grade
- Bachelor's aspirations, 12th grade
- Took SAT or ACT
- Minimally academically prepared for college
- Sought out college guidance
- Applied to 4 year college
- Accepted to 4 year college
- Applied for financial aid
- Enrolled in 4-year college
Race gaps grow as students move through steps to enrollment

- Bachelor's aspirations, 10th grade
- Bachelor's aspirations, 12th grade
- Took SAT or ACT
- Minimal academic preparation
- Met with college counselor
- Applied to four-year college
- Accepted at four-year college
- Applied for financial aid
- Enrolled in four-year college
Five steps appear particularly important

- Bachelor's aspirations, 10th grade
- Bachelor's aspirations, 12th grade
- Took SAT or ACT
- Minimal academic preparation
- Applied to four-year college
- Enrolled in four-year college
Why don’t students complete steps?

• Academic preparation
  – When comparing students of the same levels of academic preparation, many race gaps shrink
  – Black and Hispanic students at similar achievement levels complete steps at same or higher rate as White students
  – Gaps may arise from disparities in learning opportunities within and between schools that serve minority and low-income students

• Information
  – Students may not know when or how to complete steps
  – Black and Hispanic students less likely to complete full set of steps that lead to college enrollment
  – Access to social and cultural capital helps to explain gaps in step completion
What can states do to help students through obstacles to college enrollment?
Financial aid

- Bachelor's aspirations, 10th grade: 90%
- Bachelor's aspirations, 12th grade: 80%
- Took SAT or ACT: 70%
- Minimally academically prepared for college: 60%
- Sought out college guidance: 50%
- Applied to 4 year college: 40%
- Accepted to 4 year college: 30%
- Applied for financial aid: 20%
- Enrolled in 4-year college: 10%
Financial aid

• Traditionally, Federal government has been biggest provider of financial aid
• States have tended toward providing merit-based aid
  – Georgia HOPE
  – CalGrant
• Generally each $1,000 in aid has increased likelihood of college enrollment by 3-4 percentage points
Applying for financial aid

- Bachelor's aspirations, 10th grade
- Bachelor's aspirations, 12th grade
- Took SAT or ACT
- Minimally academically prepared for college
- Sought out college guidance
- Applied to 4 year college
- Accepted to 4 year college
- Applied for financial aid
- Enrolled in 4-year college
Applying for financial aid

• Before receiving financial aid, students have to apply for it
• FAFSA is unnecessarily complex, making process difficult
• Students who receive help completing forms more likely to submit them and enroll in college
Application submission

- Bachelor's aspirations, 10th grade
- Bachelor's aspirations, 12th grade
- Took SAT or ACT
- Minimally academically prepared for college
- Sought out college guidance
- Applied to 4-year college
- Accepted to 4-year college
- Applied for financial aid
- Enrolled in 4-year college
Application submission

• The more applications students submit, the more likely they are to enroll successfully in college

• Forms like the Common Application make applying to multiple colleges easier

• Several state systems have single application that can be sent to any state school (CA, TX, NC)
High school course requirements

- Bachelor's aspirations, 10th grade
- Bachelor's aspirations, 12th grade
- Took SAT or ACT
- Minimally academically prepared for college
- Sought out college guidance
- Applied to 4 year college
- Accepted to 4 year college
- Applied for financial aid
- Enrolled in 4-year college
High school course requirements

• Students often do not take the courses that qualify them for enrollment at some colleges, let alone those that keep them out of remedial coursework.

• Stay tuned! Will be the focus of upcoming Maryland Equity Project policy brief
Taking the SAT or ACT

Bachelor's aspirations, 10th grade  | Bachelor's aspirations, 12th grade  | Took SAT or ACT  | Minimally academically prepared for college  | Sought out college guidance  | Applied to 4 year college  | Accepted to 4 year college  | Applied for financial aid  | Enrolled in 4-year college

%
Taking the SAT or ACT

• Many states have partnered with College Board or ACT and require all juniors take college-entrance exam

• Evidence for effectiveness is growing
  – Appears to direct students away from two-year colleges and into four-year colleges
  – Effect small, but still cost effective
Opportunities to learn

- Bachelor's aspirations, 10th grade
- Bachelor's aspirations, 12th grade
- Took SAT or ACT
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Opportunities to learn

• Explanatory power of academic preparation suggests lack of equity in opportunities to learn

• Work to reduce these inequities before high school may go a long way toward keeping students on path to college
Information

- Difficult to provide targeted information students need
  - Would need to come from more access to quality counseling
- Many states have websites that serve as clearinghouse for college information
  - Financial aid and scholarships
  - How to prepare
  - Find information about colleges
Plan For College

Prepare for College
There's a lot to know about college and postsecondary options. Learn all you can.

Explore Postsecondary Schools
Use search tools to get information about NC colleges and universities and find the school that is right for you.

Explore Programs and Majors
Search for programs and majors that match your interests.

College Entrance Requirements
Learn about entrance and transfer requirements for the various types of schools.

College Preparation Opportunities
Search for programs that can help you prepare for college.
Conclusion

• Steps to college enrollment important and overlooked part of application process
• Many points for policy intervention throughout high school
• Relatively simple interventions can have notable effects
• Potential to be very cost effective
• Keeps as many options open to students for as long as possible
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MARYLAND EQUITY PROJECT
ADVANCING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES