

Effects of College Counselors on College Access: An Inverse Probability Weighting Analysis

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AIR Forum 2016

New Orleans, Louisiana

This material is based upon work supported by the Association for Institutional Research, the National Science Foundation, and the National Center for Education Statistics under Association for Institutional Grant Number DG15-9439

Overview

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- 2. Prior Studies and Background**
- 3. Purpose & Research Questions**
- 4. Methods**
- 5. Findings**
- 6. Conclusion & Implications**
- 7. Future Research**
- 8. Questions**

Statement of the Problem

- There typically is not a staff member who is held accountable for college counseling and enrollment in public high schools (McDonough, 2005b; National Association for College Admission Counseling [NACAC], 2011)
- Traditionally, school counselors have often been tasked with college counseling; however, many counselors have other competing priorities and are not properly trained (McDonough, 2005b)
- Many students aspire to go to college, but do not enroll because they lack information and fail to complete some part of the complex college application process (Avery & Kane, 2004; Bowen, Kurzweil, & Tobin, 2005; Klasik, 2012)

Prior Studies on College Counseling

- The majority of studies related to college counseling focus on the role of traditional guidance counselors (Bryan et al., 2009; Hurwitz & Howell, 2014; Linnehan et al., 2006; McDonough, 1997, 2002, 2005a, 2005b; McDonough & Calderone, 2006; McKillip, Rawls, & Barry, 2012; Perna et al., 2008; Venezia & Kirst, 2005)
- Other studies have examined college counseling initiatives that take place outside of the school context (Avery, 2010; Castleman & Goodman, 2014)
- Only a few studies have examined the role of college counselors in public high schools:
 - National College Advising Corps evaluations (Stanford University)
 - College Coach Program in Chicago Public School (Stephan & Rosenbaum, 2013)

School-based College Counseling Models

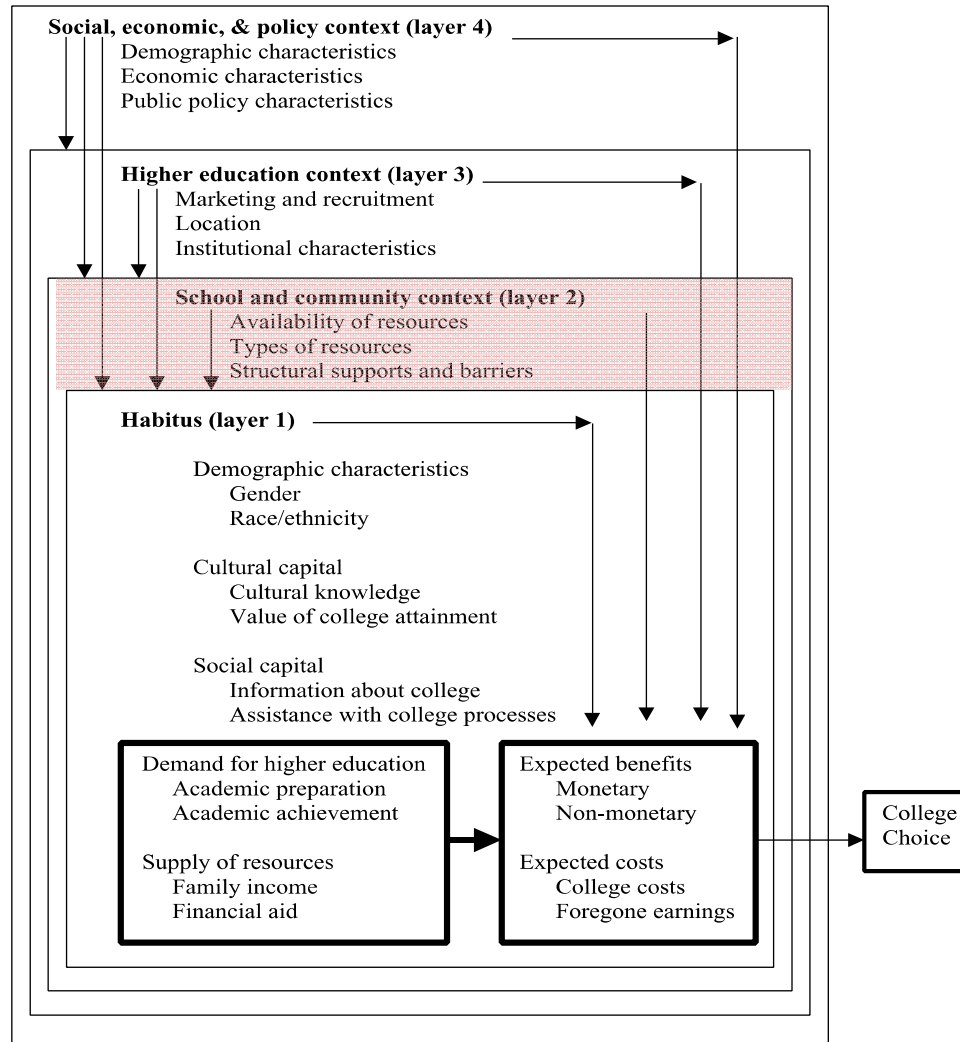
- College Advisers (College Advising Corps)
- College Coaching Program (Chicago Public Schools)
- BRACE Advisers (Broward County Public Schools)
- GEAR UP Coordinators (Federally-funded Grant Program)
- College and/or Career Center Specialists (School Districts)
- College Advisers (Michigan Advise, etc.)

Purpose & Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the effect of having a college counselor in a public high school on three primary college access outcomes.

1. To what extent does having a college counselor in a high school affect students' **college application behaviors**?
2. To what extent does having a college counselor in a high school affect students' **completion of the FAFSA**?
3. To what extent does having a college counselor in a high school affect students' **postsecondary enrollment**?

Perna's (2006) Multilevel Conceptual Model of Student College Choice



Data and Sample

2009 High School Longitudinal Study (HSL:09)

- Nationally-representative sample of 9th graders in 2009
- Analytical Sample: 10,000 public school students

Variables

- Treatment: College counselor in high school
- Outcome: college applications, FAFSA, enrollment
- Covariates: student and school level variables that affect both treatment assignment and the outcome variables

Collection Waves

- 2009 Base Year, 2012 First Follow-up, 2013 Update

Research Design

- **Quasi-experimental Design**
 - Propensity Score Analysis: Inverse Probability Weighting
- **Multi-level Modeling**
 - Students nested within schools
- **Nationally-representative Panel Dataset**
 - Students randomly selected within high schools
 - Same cohort of students overtime
- **Pre-analysis Stage and Final Models**
 - Careful decisions about weights and models

Methods: Treatment Variable

Two Questions on HSLS Counselor Survey

1. “Does your school have one or more counselors whose primary responsibility is assisting students with college **applications**?”
2. “Does your school have one or more counselors whose primary responsibility is assisting students with college **selection**?”

Four Treatment Categories

1. College **Application** Counselor (Y to Question 1)
2. College **Selection** Counselor (Y to Question 2)
3. **Either** College Counselor (Y to Question 1 OR 2)
4. **Both** College Counselors (Y to Questions 1 AND 2)

Methods: Pre-analysis Stage

Stage 1: Calculate Propensities with Logit Model

- Student-level covariates
- School-level covariates
- Survey weight

Stage 2: Create Inverse Probability Weights

- Average Treatment Effect (ATE)
- Treated units = $1 / p$ Control units = $1 / (1 - p)$

Stage 3: Create New Weight

- Calculate new weight using survey and inverse probability weights (DuGoff et al., 2014)

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Stage 3: Survey Weighting

- Calculate new weight using survey and inverse probability weights (DuGoff et al., 2014)

Methods: Analysis

College Application Models

- Logistic Regression: Applied to college (Y/N)
- Poisson Regression: Number of applications

FAFSA Model

- Logistic Regression: Completed the FAFSA (Y/N)

Enrollment Model

- Logistic Regression: Enrolled in college classes (Y/N)

Results

Average Treatment Effects of College Counselors

	Outcome 1		Outcome 2	Outcome 3
	Applied (Y/N)	Num of Apps	FAFSA	Enrollment
Application Counselor	.018*	0.024	0.01	.031*
Selection Counselor	.021*	0.039	0.01	.032*
Either Counselor	.020*	0.031	0.011	.034*
Both Counselors	.020*	0.027	0.009	.031*
Includes Covariates	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Limitations

Treatment Variable

- 2 separate questions
- Number of college counselors unknown

College Enrollment Outcome Variable

- Survey answered between June – December 2013
- Summer melt, accuracy of answer, etc.
- Student-reported

Conclusion

College Counselors

- Positive effect on students' completing college applications
- No effect on the number of applications a student submits
- Positive effect on students' postsecondary enrollment
- No effect on FAFSA completion

Perna's Conceptual Model

- College counselors (Layer 2) influence college choice

Magnitude of the Effect

- Is 2-3% points enough to fund these positions?
- Effective counselors vs. ineffective counselors

Implications: Policy

- Financial Investments in College Advising/Counseling
 - Federal
 - Non-profits
 - School Districts
- K-12 Accountability for Postsecondary Enrollment
 - Currently K-12 is focused on high school completion
- Higher Education and K-12 Partnerships
 - Admissions requirements
 - Scholarship programs
 - Pre-college programs

Implications: Practice

- Training and Credentialing
 - Currently no clear process
 - Graduate education, certificate programs
- Division of Labor with School Counselor
 - How are tasks divided?
- Primary Functions
 - Application assistance, college selection, test-prep, college-readiness
- Financial Aid Process
 - Complex FAFSA process, training college counselors

Future Research

- Field Experiments
 - Randomly assigning college advisors/counselors to high schools
- Quasi-Experiments
 - Cut-off scores (regression discontinuity)
 - Matched samples (IPW, PSM)
- Qualitative Research
 - Roles and best practices of college advisors/counselors
- Role of Personal Assistance
 - Expand Bettinger et al.'s (2012) findings on the FAFSA experiment

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QUESTIONS?

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