Snapshots of Selected Research Papers
AERA 2014 Annual Meeting
Philadelphia, PA
April 3-7, 2014

**Embargo Policy**
All AERA Annual Meeting papers are embargoed until the date and time they are presented at the conference.

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Contact: Ray Franke, University of Massachusetts Boston
Embargoed until: 12 p.m. EDT, Thursday, April 3

Study snapshot:

- In examining the effects of specific forms of student grants and loans on low-income student success, this study found that federal, state, and institutional need-based grants raise the likelihood of graduating with a bachelor’s degree within six years — with federal and state grants being the most influential.
- However, the positive impact of federal grant aid on degree attainment is heavily outweighed by the negative effect of borrowing federal unsubsidized loans.
- For every $2.25 spent additionally in federal grant assistance, positive effects on degree attainment for low-income students are undone by borrowing just $1 in unsubsidized loans.
- For every $1,000 in additional aid received: federal grant aid increases the chances for low-income students to graduate within six years by 2.42 percent to 2.82 percent; state need-based grants increase the likelihood by 2.4 percent to 2.59 percent; and institutional need-based grants raise it by 1.31 percent to 1.62 percent.
- However, for every additional $1,000 in unsubsidized federal loans low-income students receive, they are 5.66 percent less likely to graduate within six years — the only negative effect for all aid types.
- Unsubsidized federal loans require borrowers to begin making interest payments immediately, while students are enrolled. The negative effect of unsubsidized loans on completion indicates they impose a significant financial burden on low-income students, while need-based grants directly reduce the costs these students pay upfront to attend college.
- Subsidized federal loans, loans from other sources, merit grant aid from state or institutional sources, and other/outside grants were not found to have a significant positive or negative effect.
- The research findings are particularly important for discussions on the future of the federal Pell program and in preparation for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. State policymakers contemplating further cuts to higher education and aid programs should weigh the long-term effects on the state’s economy when reducing funding for crucial need-based aid programs.
- The Beginning Postsecondary Students and IPEDS/Delta Cost Project databases, both administered by the National Center for Education Statistics, were the primary data sources for the study.
“The Effects of Rurality on College Access and Choice”
Contact: Michael Andrew Koricich, Texas Tech University

Embargoed until: 10:35 a.m. EDT, Friday, April 4

Study snapshot:

- Although extensive research has been done on the educational access of many underrepresented groups, rural students have received relatively little attention — despite having postsecondary attendance and completion rates that lag behind the national average and the rates for urban and suburban subgroups.
- This study — one of only a few recent works to comprehensively examine how living in a rural community impacts postsecondary attendance and institutional choice — identifies factors that depress educational attainment for rural populations and offers recommendations to colleges and federal and state governments for closing the rural/metropolitan opportunity gap.
- The study found that, almost universally, students from rural counties had decreased chances of attending college and were less likely to select private colleges, four-year institutions, highly selective institutions, and those that confer graduate degrees.
- These students, by virtue of the community in which they were raised, are less likely to achieve the same level of academic achievement — and corresponding economic prosperity — as those who come from metropolitan counties.
- At the state level, stronger curricular alignment between K-12 institutions and colleges, and the implementation or expansion of dual enrollment/dual credit programs might help close this opportunity gap.
- Postsecondary institutions should refine, standardize, and better publicize credit-transfer policies; subsidize academic materials in K-12 institutions; look for ways to develop dual enrollment courses that could be delivered through distance education; and look toward admissions policies that give additional consideration to low-income students.
- Data for this study were taken from the Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 and the 2004 survey of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, both administered by the National Center for Education Statistics.
“Selectivity and the College Experience: How Undermatching Shapes the College Experience Among High-Achieving Students”

Contact: Kevin Fosnacht, Center for Postsecondary Research, Indiana University, Bloomington,

Embargoed until: 10:35 a.m. EDT, Friday, April 4

Study snapshot:

- This study finds that high achieving students who “undermatch” in their choice of institution, by attending a less selective institution than permitted by their academic credentials, report a less challenging academic environment during their first college year, fewer self-perceived gains, and lower levels of college satisfaction, than their peers who choose to attend more selective institutions.
- Students who undermatched report fewer gains, specifically, in their practical competence, general education, and personal and social development, than did their peers at more selective colleges.
- These students indicate fewer gains and less institutional satisfaction despite reporting more frequent interactions with faculty and more engagement in active and collaborative learning activities.
- If undermatches perceive fewer benefits from attending college, are less satisfied with the experience, and believe that the costs of college outweigh the benefits, it is no surprise that previous research found that undermatches are less likely to complete college.
- According to the study, less likely to undermatch are: (1) students who expected a difficult time academically during college, and (2) students who had two or more close friends already enrolled in the same selective institution.
- More likely to undermatch are: (1) students with higher levels of self-perceived academic preparation, (2) students whose parents had an associate’s degree or less, and (3) students who attended an institution within 20 miles of home.
- About 60 percent of students in the study undermatched, confirming previous research that found the practice prevalent. This is troubling because selectivity is not just a barometer of institutional status. Even after controlling for student characteristics, selectivity influences students’ persistence and graduation rates, graduate school enrollment and degree attainment, and future earnings.
- While there are valid reasons for why students may choose a less selective institution than possible, a lack of information on the variety of college choices is not one of them. The best solution to reduce undermatching is to improve students’ knowledge about their college and career choices, including through more outreach by selective institutions.
- The study used data from the 2010 Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement and the 2011 National Survey on Student Engagement.
“Student Veteran Transitions from Combat to College: A Nationwide Analysis”

Contact: Janet Bayby, Baylor University

Embargoed until: 12:25 p.m. EDT, Friday, April 4

Study snapshot:

- Since the authorization of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, colleges and universities have experienced an unprecedented increase in student veteran enrollment, as enhanced benefits are allowing veterans to pursue higher education as never before. Student veterans may bring with them complex needs — including physical and psychological challenges — not normally encountered by faculty, staff, and administrators.

- This study, by accessing a nationwide cross-sample of student veterans at various sizes and types of higher education institutions in the United States, provides insight into student veterans’ perceived needs and the factors related to their intent to stay enrolled at their current institution.

- 51 percent of participants report the process of using the Post 9/11 GI Bill was somewhat or extremely difficult. 49 percent believe student veterans are somewhat or very disrespected on campus (compared to 12 percent who feel student veterans are respected).

- Students at medium and large sized universities are more likely to often participate in campus programs and activities outside of their campus student veteran associations, and are more likely find it easy to connect with non-student veterans on their campus.

- The study found three significant predictors of student veterans expecting to remain at their university: marital status, presence of a veterans’ coordinator, and the location of the university as being the primary reason to attend.

- Married student veterans are 2.86 times more likely to say they plan to remain at the same institution. Student veterans at a university with a veterans’ coordinator on campus are 6.94 times more likely to remain. And students who said that the location of the university was the primary reason they attended are 4.24 more times likely to remain.

- To improve retention at campuses without the resources to create a full-time position to serve student veterans, administrators should consider designating a staff member in financial aid, admissions, or student services to assist student veterans with the GI Bill process.

- In addition, institution administrators should also include spouses in specialized activities, and be especially attuned to the needs of unmarried student veterans who may lack a strong support network. Public demonstrations of support such as Veterans Days celebrations involving various campus groups might also help bridge the cultural/social gap between student veterans and other members of the campus community.

- The study used survey data collected from 500 student veterans, who were contacted through campus chapters of the Student Veterans of America across the nation.
“Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence Experiences Among Middle School Youth”
Contact: Dorothy Espelage, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Embargoed until: 4:05 p.m. EDT, Sunday, April 6

Study snapshot:

- Few prior studies have focused on the experiences of middle school youth related to sexual violence and sexual harassment, and very little research exists on the locations within schools where middle school students experience such behavior.
- This study’s findings indicate that middle school-aged students are experiencing real acts of sexual violence/harassment — results that are consistent with studies of high school and college-age students that find sexual harassment is prevalent.
- 27 percent of female middle school students and 25 percent of male middle school students report experiencing verbal or physical sexual harassment/violence. Four percent of female middle school students and 2.8 percent of male middle school students report experiencing sexual assault.
- 4.6 percent of middle school students surveyed are dismissive of sexual violence, using phrases like “I am not sexually harassed. All sexual harassment is just jokes made by kids wanting attention at this school.”
- Among those students who indicated experiencing sexual harassment/violence, the most commonly reported acts are unwanted physical touching (21.6 percent), rumor spreading (18.9 percent), verbal sexual commentary (18.2 percent), and homophobic name-calling (17.9 percent).
- Nearly 9 percent (8.6 percent) of responses from those who reported sexual harassment/violence included some form of “normalizing,” with respondents suggesting that sexual harassment may have been occurring but that the student considered it “just joking” or “not that bad or serious,” or that “you get used to it.”
- The most commonly reported locations of sexual harassment are in school hallways (22.7 percent), classrooms (21.4 percent), school gyms (13.0 percent), and near school lockers (9.7 percent).
- The prevalence of sexual harassment in the classroom, one of the areas in school most organized and monitored, raises questions about whether the acts are occurring when adults are absent — or when they are present but unable to prevent the harassment.
- The study used survey data collected from 1,391 students from four Midwestern middle schools (grades 5-8) in spring 2008, as part of a project funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Contact: Dayna Weintraub, University of California, Los Angeles

Embargoed until: 4:05 p.m. EDT, Sunday, April 6

Study snapshot:

- This study, countering common narratives of meddlesome “helicopter parents,” found that higher-achieving first-year students are either satisfied with the amount of communication with their parents, or desire more interaction, especially with fathers/stepfathers.
- The vast majority of students report that they currently have “just the right amount” of communication with their mothers/stepmothers (71.7 percent). Of the remaining students, three-quarters indicate that the current levels of communication with their mothers are “less than desired.”
- Students are somewhat less satisfied with their level of communication with fathers. While 54.7 percent are “satisfied” with the current level of communication, another 41.5 percent report “less than desired” levels.
- Three measures of student-parent interaction are significant predictors of first-year academic performance: (1) students who approach fathers for social and emotional support earned higher grades; (2) students who perceive higher quality interactions with their mothers had higher GPAs; and (3) frequent communication with mothers correlated with lower grades.
- Students who report frequent communication are interacting weekly, substantially more often, with their mothers by phone, as compared to speaking with fathers only a few times a month. It is unclear whether the frequent communication could interfere with students’ ability to focus on their academics or the result of students in academic trouble seeking out their parents for support.
- The three most discussed topics with fathers, ranked in order of prevalence, are academics, health/wellness, and finances. The most frequently discussed topics with mothers, ranked in order of prevalence, are health/wellness, academics, and leisure.
- Because mothers and fathers interact differently with their children, academic advisors should track their interactions with parents, noting situations that precipitate hearing from mothers versus fathers, and make extra effort to capitalize on inquiries from fathers. Administrators also should use orientation programming and academic advising sessions to educate students on strategies for including their parents, especially their fathers, in their academic learning.
- The study used three sources of longitudinal survey data drawn from first-year students living in residential housing at a highly selective public research university in the Western United States during the 2011-12 academic year. The sampled institution had a first-year student enrollment of 5,825.