

Study of Enhanced College Advising in Upward Bound: Impacts on Steps Toward College

Where students go to college, not just whether they go, may be important to their educational and career success. For example, attending a more selective college is associated with a higher chance of completing college and earning more later.¹ Yet half of high school students from disadvantaged families “undermatch” – they don’t enroll in college at all or not at the most selective college they could.

FIND THE FIT The U.S. Department of Education tested a set of promising, low-cost advising strategies, called *Find the Fit*, designed to help students enrolled in the Department’s Upward Bound program choose more selective colleges. About 200 Upward Bound projects with 4,500 seniors agreed to participate. The projects were randomly assigned to receive *Find the Fit* to supplement their regular college advising (treatment group) or to offer their regular advising (control group). All treatment group projects implemented *Find the Fit* to some extent. This first of three reports looks at *Find the Fit*’s effects on students’ steps toward enrolling in a more selective college.

KEY FINDINGS

- Find the Fit* increased the share of students who applied to at least four colleges, and to more selective colleges.** Because applying to more colleges is associated with enrolling in a more selective one, *Find the Fit* advising included a recommendation to apply to at least four. Students in treatment group projects were more likely than those in the control group to both reach that target number (Exhibit 1) and apply to more selective colleges (Exhibit 2).
- Find the Fit* had no impact on the importance students place on academic quality in choosing a college.** Students in treatment group projects were no more likely than those in the control group to rate this factor as “very important” (about 75 percent in both groups).
- Overall, *Find the Fit* did not affect the share of students completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) early, but may have among some groups underrepresented in college.** Because financial aid can be a factor in attending a more selective college, *Find the Fit* urged students to complete the FAFSA by March 15, a date by which not just federal but also state and individual colleges’ aid is usually still available. Similar percentages of students in treatment and control group projects met this target date (65 and 61 percent, respectively). However, students in treatment group projects who were Black or had low college entrance exam scores (a proxy for academic preparation) were 10 and 8 percentage points more likely, respectively, to complete the FAFSA early than their control group peers; these findings may be due to chance because of the large number of subgroups examined.

Exhibit 1: Percentage of Students Applying to Four or More Colleges

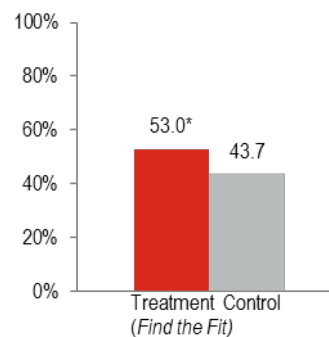
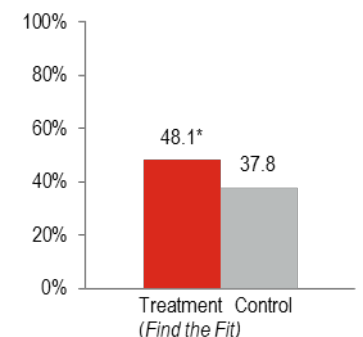


Exhibit 2: Percentage of Students Applying to a College that is at Least Very Competitive



*Difference is statistically significant at the .05 level. Sample = 1,920 treatment group students and 1,710 control group students who responded to follow up surveys.

1 Bowen, W.G., Chingos, M.M., and McPherson, M.S. (2009). *Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America’s Public Universities*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Hoxby, C. (2001). *The Return of Attending a More Selective College: 1960 to the Present*. In M. Devlin and J. Meyerson (Eds.), *Forum Futures: Exploring the Future of Higher Education*, 2000 Papers. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; Smith, J. (2013). *Ova and Out: Using Twins to Estimate the Educational Returns to Attending a Selective College*. *Economics of Education Review*, 36: 166-180; Witteveen, D. and Attewell, P. (2017). *The Earnings Payoff from Attending a Selective College*. *Social Science Research*, 66: 154-169.