

Paper Abstracts

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****Job Market Paper****

Estimating the Responsiveness of College Applications to the Likelihood of Acceptance and Financial Assistance: Evidence from Texas

This paper investigates how students' college application behavior changed in response to changing admissions regimes and expected financial support in Texas since 1996. Texas's state legislature passed *House Bill 588* to counteract the negative effects of the *Hopwood v. Texas* decision on minority enrollment at Texas's *elite* institutions. This legislation guarantees admission to any public college or university in Texas, to any Texas high school student who graduates in the top decile of their high school cohort. However, minority enrollment at the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M-College Station remained below pre-*Hopwood* levels. The University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M-College Station responded by instituting targeted recruitment programs at disadvantaged high schools that produced few graduates who matriculated at the respective institutions. We use students' SAT score sending data as a proxy for application behavior. We find that the transparent use of class rank in the admissions process increases the likelihood that students who report being in the top decile send score reports to the University of Texas at Austin, decreases the likelihood of sending score reports to non-selective schools in Texas, and decreases the probability of sending out more than four score reports. We also find that the targeted recruitment programs were successful in incentivizing students to send score reports to the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M. Treatment effects were largest for students in the top decile at the targeted schools, at over nine percentage points at the University of Texas at Austin and over four percentage points at Texas A&M. Treatment effect heterogeneity is important in understanding the distributional effects of legal changes and targeted recruitment programs. Our results suggest that a combination of outreach, support, and financial assistance can attract able students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

An Evaluation of the Kalamazoo Promise

On November 10, 2005, then Superintendent of the Kalamazoo Public School System, Janice Brown announced—to the complete surprise of Kalamazoo’s residents—the beginning of the Kalamazoo Promise. Fully funded by anonymous donors, the Kalamazoo Promise is an urban revitalization program that offers up to four years of free tuition to any public college or university in the state of Michigan for graduates of the Kalamazoo Public School system who meet the following eligibility criteria: 1) Students must graduate from Kalamazoo Public Schools, reside in the Kalamazoo Public School District, and enrolled in the Kalamazoo Public School system continuously for at least four years. 2) Students must be admitted to and be enrolled in a public college or university in the state of Michigan, make regular progress towards a degree or certification, maintain a 2.0 GPA, and complete at least twelve credit hours per semester. The portion of tuition that the Kalamazoo Promise pays depends on the length of the continuous enrollment in the Kalamazoo Public School District.

The Kalamazoo Promise makes public colleges and universities in Michigan more affordable and likely more attractive than out-of-state universities. Furthermore, the change in the attractiveness of public colleges and universities in Michigan should be greater for poorer students—who are financially constrained—than for wealthier students. The unexpected announcement of the Kalamazoo Promise, the sizeable amount of the aid, and the short time since the announcement of the program presents an opportunity to identify the causal effects of the program on the choice of postsecondary institutions. By examining the early cohorts, we avoid the problem of the selective migration of students into Kalamazoo Public Schools and can assess the pure impact of decreasing the cost of public colleges in Michigan on students’ tendency to apply to these institutions.

Using quasi-experimental methods, we analyze a unique data set that includes all ACT test takers in the state of Michigan from 1996–2006. We estimate the effects of the Kalamazoo Promise on the set of colleges that students designate to receive test score reports, our proxy for applications. We find that the Kalamazoo Promise increases the likelihood that students submit score reports to public colleges and universities in Michigan.

Programs similar to the Kalamazoo Promise have debuted in Denver, Colorado; Peoria, Illinois; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This paper provides an initial evaluation of a program that—in a very short time—has seized the attention of philanthropists. Credible information about these programs is needed to increase the efficacy of these efforts.