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WWC QUICK Review

“Information and College Access: Evidence From a Randomized Field Experiment”

What is the study about?

This study examined the impact of offering an online informational video and financial aid materials to high school students on: (1) their postsecondary aspirations, (2) the accuracy of their understanding of financial aid availability, and (3) the accuracy of their estimates of the economic benefits of postsecondary education.

More than 1,600 students from five low-achieving high schools in Toronto were invited to complete an online survey about their postsecondary aspirations. After completing the survey, respondents were selected at random to view a three-minute video and to use a financial aid calculator. Students were also given the financial aid application package for local postsecondary institutions along with instructions on how to apply for aid. Students in the control condition did not receive any of these materials. Outcomes were measured by a follow-up online survey conducted three weeks later.

What did the study report?

The study found that students offered the video and financial aid calculator reported more accurate assessments of returns to postsecondary education, less concern about postsecondary costs, and higher expectations for their educational attainment. The effects may have been larger for students who originally reported that they were unsure about their expected educational attainment. However, because of the need for additional

The New Quick Review

In March 2012, the WWC began using a new format for quick reviews to allow for a faster release. When a more complete review is conducted for the study described here, this information will be updated.

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Handy Definitions

- ▼ *quick review*
- ▼ *study rating*
- ▼ *meets WWC evidence standards without reservations*
- ▼ *meets WWC evidence standards with reservations*
- ▼ *does not meet WWC evidence standards*

data from the study authors, the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) cannot confirm the statistical significance of any of the study's outcomes.

See the *full glossary* ►

How does the WWC rate this study?

The study is a randomized experiment. Although overall attrition was 40%, attrition rates differed by only one percentage point in the treatment and comparison groups. Therefore, this study could potentially meet WWC evidence standards without reservations. A more thorough review (forthcoming) will be conducted to determine the study rating.

Citation

Oreopoulos, P., & Dunn, R. (2012). *Information and college access: Evidence from a randomized field experiment* (Working Paper No. 18551). Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w18551>.

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