

Study of Enhanced College Advising in Upward Bound: Impacts on Where and How Long Students Attend College

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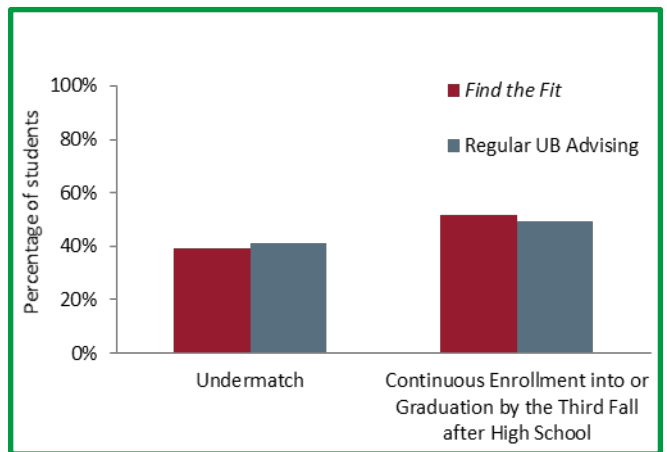
Decisions about whether and where to go to college can make a difference in students' later success. However, many students from low-income families—"undermatch"—they do not enroll at all or do not enroll in the most selective college they likely could attend. This study examined whether promising advising strategies, bundled in a package called *Find the Fit*, could improve college choices for rising high school seniors in the federal college access program Upward Bound. *Find the Fit* includes customized information about college going and costs, text messaging of application and financial aid deadlines, and training for the students' advisors. About 200 Upward Bound projects across the country volunteered to test *Find the Fit*, with half randomly selected to get access to it during the study period. This final report compared the college choices of 4,500 students in projects with and without access to *Find the Fit* to determine its effects on college attendance.

KEY FINDINGS

• **Despite shifting where students applied, *Find the Fit* did not reduce the rate of college undermatch.** An earlier report from the study found that students offered *Find the Fit* were more likely to apply to more selective colleges compared to students in regular UB advising projects. However, about 39 percent of students in *Find the Fit* projects and about 41 percent of students in regular UB advising projects undermatched, meaning that they either did not attend college or enrolled in a college that was less selective than the level to which they could be admitted.

• ***Find the Fit* led some students to choose more selective colleges regardless of undermatching, with no clear negative consequences.** Students in *Find the Fit* projects were 3 percentage points more likely than those in regular UB advising projects to attend colleges at the highest selectivity levels. These impacts did not seem to result in higher college costs or to change the share of students transferring to a less selective college or dropping out.

• ***Find the Fit* did not increase the share of students who persisted in or completed college.** A similar share of students in *Find the Fit* projects and regular UB advising projects (52 percent versus 49 percent) were continuously enrolled into the third fall after graduating high school (or completed a credential).



Getting students to attend more selective colleges was meant to position them to reap the potential educational and career benefits of attending institutions with more instructional and financial resources, more academically prepared peers, and strong reputations. If college selectivity is indeed related to better college outcomes, broader effects on college selectivity than those found in this study would be needed to subsequently shift longer-term college outcomes. The findings from this study suggest lessons for improving college advising for students from low-income families and raise questions that remain to be answered.