

# Research examines structural and behavioral barriers to student success

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The George Washington University Graduate School of Education and Human Development (GSEHD) has released six papers to increase understanding of how student behaviors and decisions can affect educational success. Written by an interdisciplinary group of researchers from around the country, including the George Washington University, the papers examine the impacts of students' responses to the financial aid system, to information about college and to classroom and institutional processes.

The project investigators—Sandy Baum at GW; Robert Shireman, director of California Competes; and Patricia Steele of HigherEd Insight—worked with a diverse group of experts on [student](#) aid, student success, [cognitive psychology](#) and [behavioral economics](#). The research illustrates the student decision making process, how different responses affect [educational outcomes](#) and how the structure of the student aid system can either hinder or support student aspirations. The work highlights the reality that simply providing information and making funds available is insufficient for supporting student success. Systems must be designed to align with the way students process information and make decisions in the face of complex and unfamiliar situations.

"These papers are designed to strengthen efforts to increase the success of all students, particularly those from low- and moderate-income backgrounds, in attaining postsecondary education," said Dr. Baum, research professor at GSEHD. "They provide insights into some of the problems with current policies and suggest promising directions for

improvement."

Dr. Baum said that money alone will not close the gaps in college access and success. "We need to better understand the hurdles students face in taking advantage of educational opportunities and make the changes necessary to better position them for success."

The project's six papers include:

- Understanding Student Behaviors: A Prerequisite to Supporting College Enrollment and Success by Sandy Baum, George Washington University and Robert Shireman, California Competes
- Prompts, Personalization, And Payoffs: Strategies to Improve the Design and Delivery of College and Financial Aid Information by Ben Castleman, University of Virginia
- Student Aid, Student Behavior, and Educational Attainment by Sandy Baum, George Washington University and Saul Schwartz, Carleton University
- Motivation, Behavior, and Performance in the Workplace: Insights for Student Success in Higher Education by Charles Kurose, The Spencer Foundation
- Go to Class! Participate! Study! by Robert Shireman, California Competes and Josh Price, University of Texas-Arlington
- How Can Incentives Improve the Success of Disadvantaged College Students? by Nicole Stephens, Northwestern University and Sarah Townsend, University of Southern California

**More information:** [gsehd.gwu.edu/faculty/sandy-baum](https://gsehd.gwu.edu/faculty/sandy-baum)

Provided by George Washington University

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