

Study finds model for getting students to complete community college

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A University of Chicago Poverty Lab study finds comprehensive supports for community college students provides lasting benefits. Credit: Poverty Lab

Community college students who receive comprehensive supports are more than 30 percent more likely to enroll full-time and continue in their first year in the program, according to a new study by the University of Chicago Poverty Lab.

The preliminary findings are part of an eight-year, randomized controlled trial of One Million Degrees, a Chicago nonprofit that provides wraparound support to low-income community college students in the Chicago area. The results of its partnership with Poverty Lab, a leader in providing data-driven solutions to study the effectiveness of programs, add to a small but growing body of rigorous evidence on how to support community college students.

Early results from the study's first two [student](#) cohorts find that participating in the [program](#) leads to a 35 percent increase in [full-time](#) enrollment and a 35 to 47 percent increase in persistence to the next [school](#) term. Among this group, the study found a 13 percent increase in full-time enrollment and an 11 to 16 percent increase in persistence to the next school term.

"Community colleges hold promise for increasing social mobility and promoting racial equity," said Carmelo Barbaro, executive director of the Poverty Lab. "To deliver on this enormous potential, we need to generate evidence about the most effective ways to give community college students the support they need to persist and ultimately graduate. While initial results suggest the model works to keep students enrolled, we look forward to understanding long-term whether it will also help them graduate."

The Poverty Lab is part of Urban Labs, a set of five institutions tackling urban issues housed within the Harris School of Public Policy at the University of Chicago. The Poverty Lab partners with civic and community leaders to identify, rigorously evaluate, and help scale programs and policies that reduce poverty and create paths to [social mobility](#).

Although community colleges enroll 8.7 million students each year—nearly half of all students in postsecondary institutions in the

U.S.—these students are disproportionately low-income, first-generation college-goers, and/or students of color. Students face multiple barriers to success in community college; in Chicago, less than one in four community college students graduates within three years. One Million Degrees provides student a unique support model that targets students' academic, professional, personal and financial needs.

"Students who attend [community colleges](#) have so much talent and experience to bring to the table. OMD builds a web of support around them and engages a wide network of volunteers and supporters across Chicago to help accelerate these high potential students on their pathways to economic mobility," said Paige Ponder, chief executive officer of One Million Degrees, which currently serves about 800 Chicago-area schools.

Encouraging early results

These results are the first in a three-cohort, randomized controlled trial that will include almost 5,000 students and will evaluate long-term whether this promising model also shows impacts on degree attainment, employment, and earnings. The students in the study attend all seven City Colleges of Chicago, as well as Harper College in suburban Palatine.

Initial results show the OMD program is particularly impactful for participants who come directly from high school. High school students who participate in the program are twice as likely to persist to the next school term and 83 to 93 percent more likely to enroll full-time. OMD also substantially increases the likelihood that students enroll in college at all the fall after their senior year in high school, indicating great promise to move the needle among the approximately 20 percent of Chicago Public Schools graduates who do not immediately pursue postsecondary education.

These encouraging preliminary results stand against a backdrop of little previous evidence about how best to support community college persistence and graduation. A study of the City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs—a wraparound program for [community college students](#) similar to One Million Degrees—found that ASAP doubled graduation rates.

"While the ultimate outcome of interest is whether the OMD program improves students' chances of receiving a degree or transferring to a four-year college," said Kelly Hallberg, MPP'05, the Poverty Lab's scientific director and one of the study's principal investigators, "these early enrollment and persistence findings provide some of the first suggestive evidence that comprehensive supports for community [college](#) students can be effective here in Chicago. We look forward to monitoring the program's progress to understand whether persistence will manifest into continued success for these students."

More information: Increasing Academic Progress among Low-Income Community College Students: Early Evidence from a Randomized Controlled Trial: [urbanlabs.uchicago.edu/attachm ... Working+Paper v7.pdf](http://urbanlabs.uchicago.edu/attachm...Working+Paper+v7.pdf)

Provided by University of Chicago

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