



Future Directions for Behavioral Economics in Higher Education

Ben Castleman



Primary focus of BE in higher ed

Make it easier for students to:

- Follow through on their college intentions
- Pursue beneficial resources or pathways

Interventions that
actually make
tasks easier

**Consistent evidence
of sizeable impacts**

Interventions that
inform or remind, but
don't simplify the
underlying task

**Modest or null impacts,
especially at scale**

Interventions that actually make tasks easier

- Meeting students/families where they are
 - Integrate FAFSA help with tax prep
- Changes to policy defaults
 - Mandatory SAT/ACT
- Assistance to simplify tasks
 - Sustained advising

Interventions that inform or remind, but don't simplify the underlying task

- Info about benefits
 - Tax credits for H.E.
- Reminders to complete tasks
 - FAFSA nudges
- Light-touch assistance
 - Remote advising

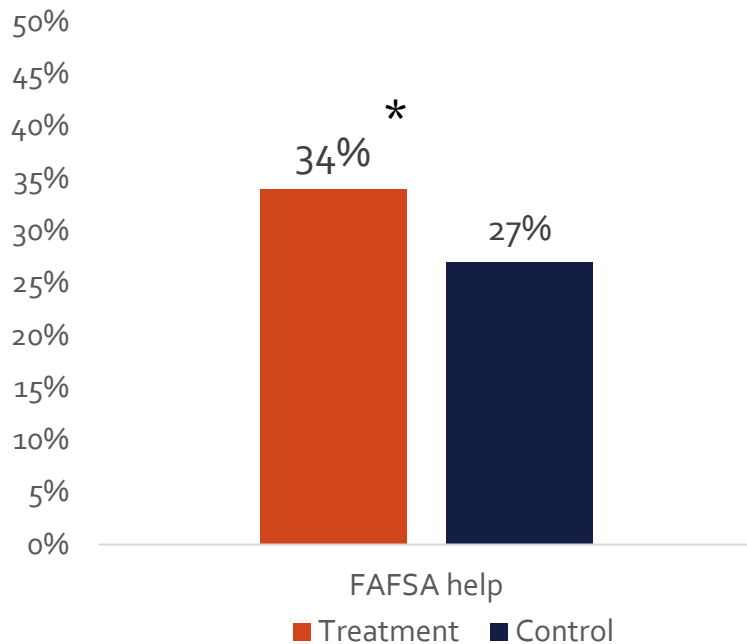
In the following slides, results are from RCTs unless noted with an ^; those results are from quasi-experimental studies.

Meeting students where they are

Financial Aid

- Tax pros provide FAFSA help to families during tax prep
- Software to pre-populate FAFSA

College enrollment

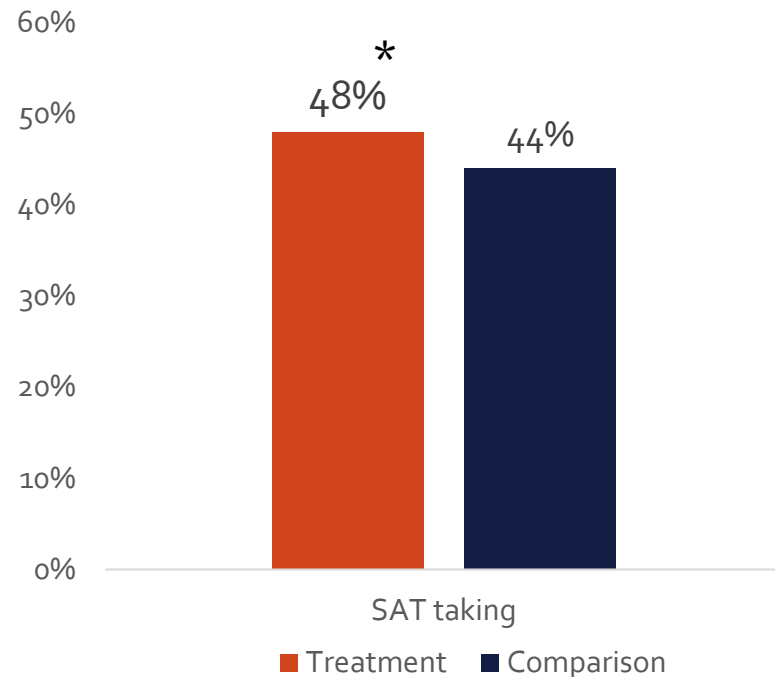


Bettinger et al., 2012

College entrance exams

- Opening a new SAT testing center at a high school

SAT taking[^]



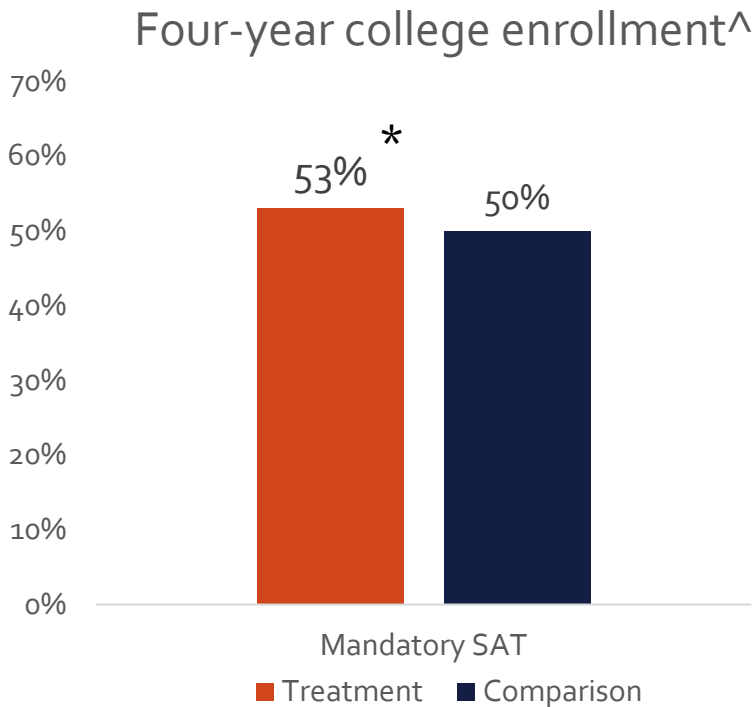
Bulman, 2015

**=quasi-experimental*

Changes to policy defaults; Direct assistance

College entrance exams

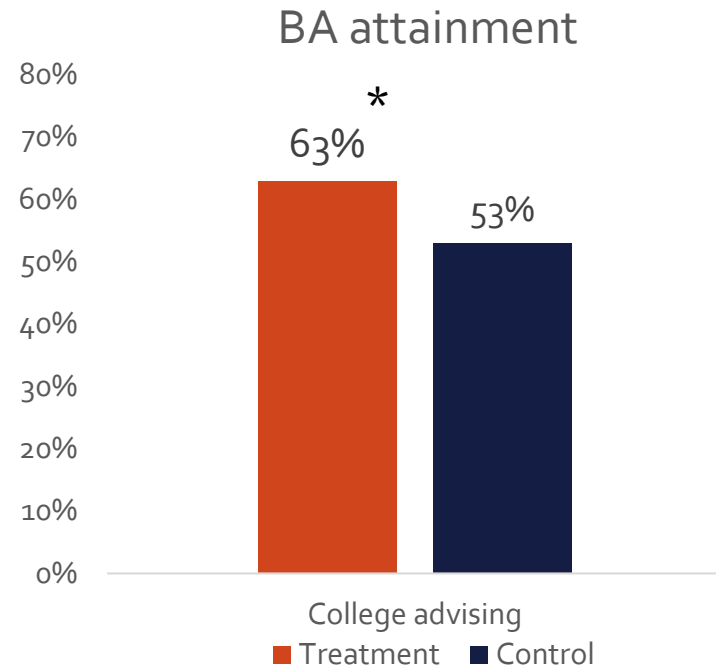
- Multiple states require all juniors to take the ACT/SAT as a HS graduation requirement



Hurwitz et al., 2015

College advising

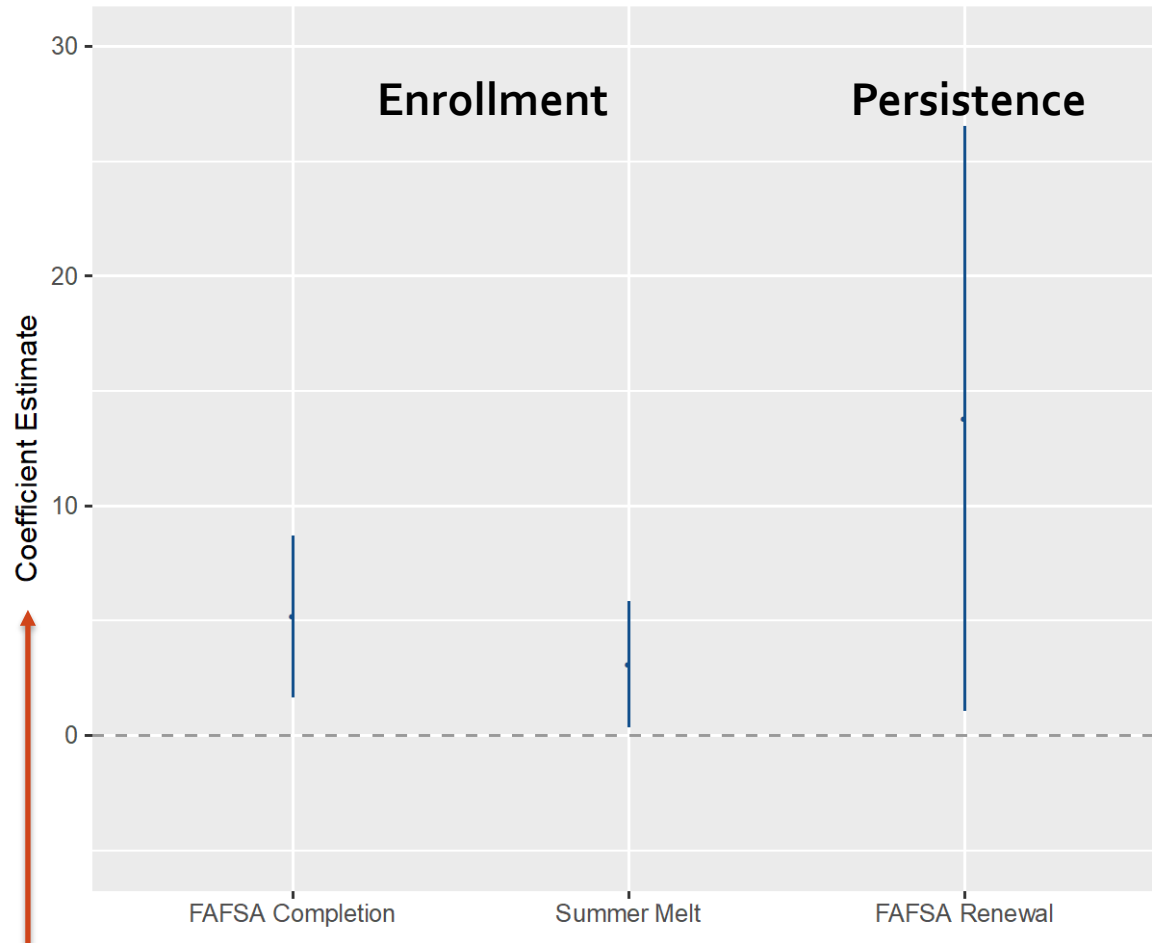
- 1:1 advising during senior year (10-15 hours per student)
- Assistance with college search, applications, FAFSA, college choice



Barr and Castleman, 2021

Interventions that inform/remind but do not simplify

Results from *early, local* texting nudge campaigns



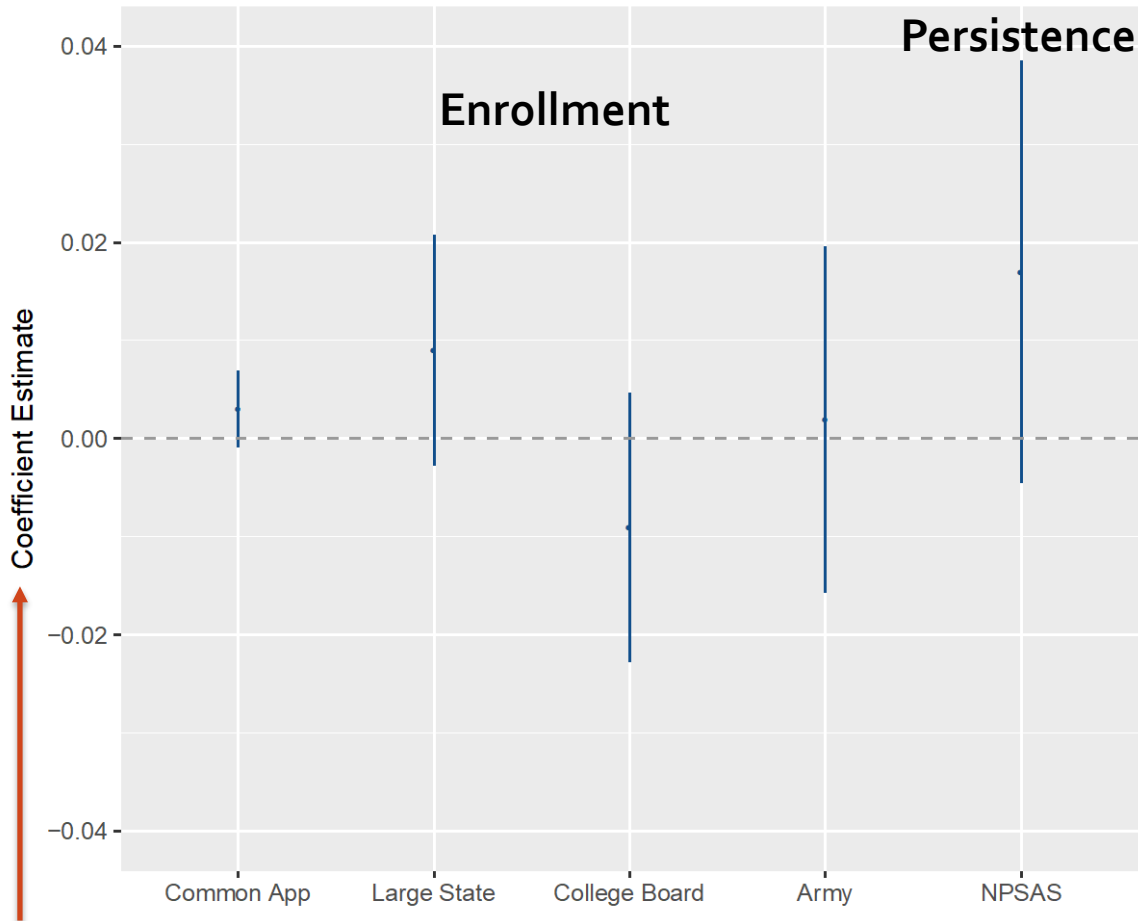
Hi Alex! Have you signed up for the UMB orientation? Last one is 7/15. Need to register? <http://bit.ly/umborient>. Need help? Reply to talk w/ an advisor.

- CY 2012-2015
- Texts from non-profit or school districts
- Personalized content
- Interactive
- N=100s or 1000s

Castleman and Page, 2015; Castleman and Page, 2016; Page, Castleman, and Meyer, 2020

Interventions that inform/remind but do not simplify

Results from *later, large-scale* texting nudge campaigns



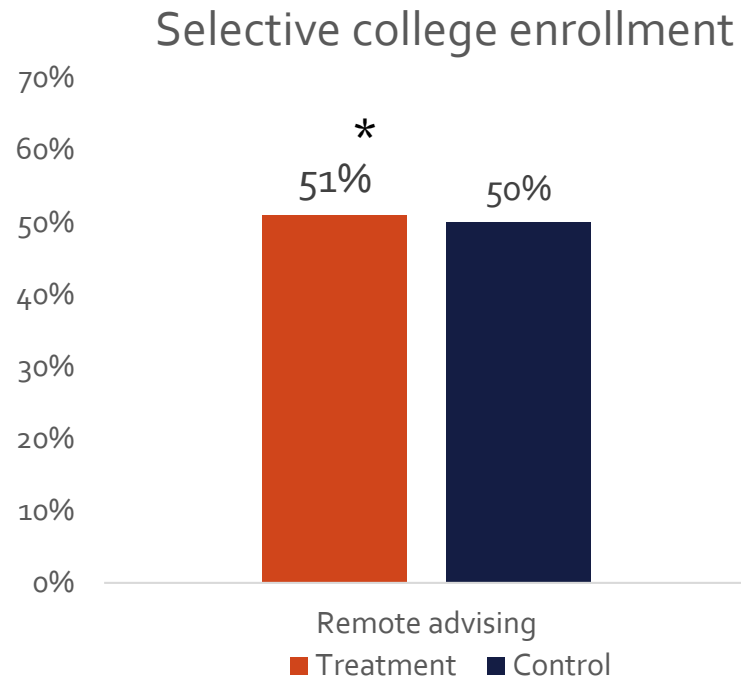
- CY 2015-2017
- Texts from national orgs or state agency
- Uniform content
- 1- and 2-way
- N=10,000s or 100,000s

Avery et al., 2021; Barr et al., 2021; Bird et al., 2021; Page et al., 2021

Interventions that inform/remind but do not simplify

Remote advising

- Similar in *intended* design as intensive in-person models, but using tech to facilitate 1:1 advising at a national scale
- Focus on high-achieving students and enrollment at selective institutions
- Much lower rates of engagement (~1 hour vs. 10-15 hours)



Sullivan, Castleman, and Bettinger, 2021

Frontiers in BE and higher education

- **Machine learning to personalize guidance**
 - Course-taking
 - Job matches
- **Expanded use of defaults**
 - Programs of study
 - Course pathways
- **Small incentives for key inputs**
 - Applying to well-matched colleges
 - Registering for courses that count towards program of study
 - Applying to well-matched jobs
- **Innovations to strengthen engagement at broad-access institutions**
 - Low take-up even with proactive advisor/mentor outreach

PVCC course Summer 2021	PVCC degree requirement	UVA course equivalent	UVA requirements
HUM 201 Survey of Western Culture I	Humanities elective Writing Intensive Course See more ▼	HUMS 2XXX	
MTH 261 Applied Calculus I	MTH/SCI elective See more ▼	MATH 1210	Gen-ed req
PVCC course Fall 2021	PVCC degree requirement	UVA course equivalent	UVA requirements
BIO 101 General Biology I	Science with lab See more ▼	BIOL 2100	Major pre-req Major grad req
MTH 264 Calculus II	MTH/SCI elective See more ▼	MATH 1320	
HIS 102 History of Western Civilization II	HIS ____ See more ▼	HIEU 2002	
CHM 241 Organic Chemistry I	Science with lab See more ▼	CHEM 2410	
CSC 110 Introduction to Computing	ITE 119 or CSC 110 See more ▼	CS 1010	

COLLEGEPOINT



Earn \$400 from CollegePoint just by applying to great colleges

GREAT SCHOOLS FOR YOU		
COLLEGE	LOCATION	AVERAGE FINANCIAL AID*
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor	MI	\$21,934
Michigan State University	MI	\$13,632
Albion College	MI	\$39,610
Kalamazoo College	MI	\$41,040

*This is the amount of grant and scholarship aid students like you could expect to be awarded.

Thank you!

Ben Castleman

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