

Unpacking the Long-Term Impact of Holistic Supports for Community College Students

Community colleges enroll a higher share of first-generation and non-traditional students, such as parents and GED holders, who often face academic and non-academic barriers, which can lead to low completion rates. These barriers include navigating complex transfer and articulation agreements, work and caregiving responsibilities, transportation needs, and basic-needs insecurity. The University of Chicago’s Inclusive Economy Lab (IEL) has been partnering with One Million Degrees (OMD) to understand the impact of its approach to providing holistic supports - including advising, tutoring, career services, degree-planning supports, and financial assistance - to address these barriers and improve degree attainment.

Initial findings from a randomized controlled trial (RCT) revealed that three years after randomization, students who were offered or who participated in OMD were significantly more likely to earn an associate degree. The impact of the program was greatest for students who applied to the program before coming to campus (generally during their senior year of high school).

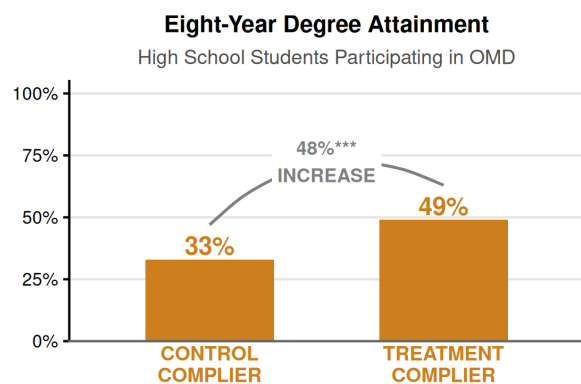
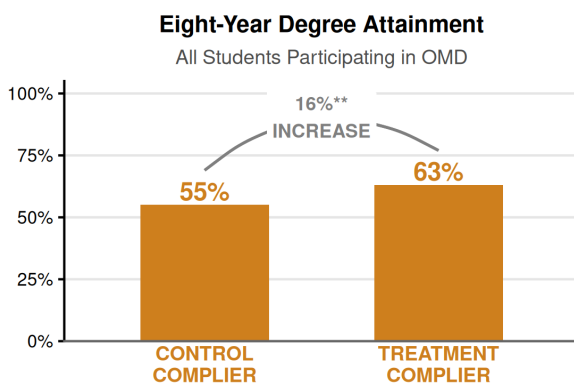
Enough time has passed that the study is now able to track educational outcomes for the study sample eight years post-graduation and, for the first time, examine the impact of the program on participants’ employment outcomes.

KEY FINDINGS

According to seven and eight-year findings from the study, students who participated in OMD are more likely to earn degrees, secure stable employment, and have higher earnings.

Sustained Improvements in Degree Attainment

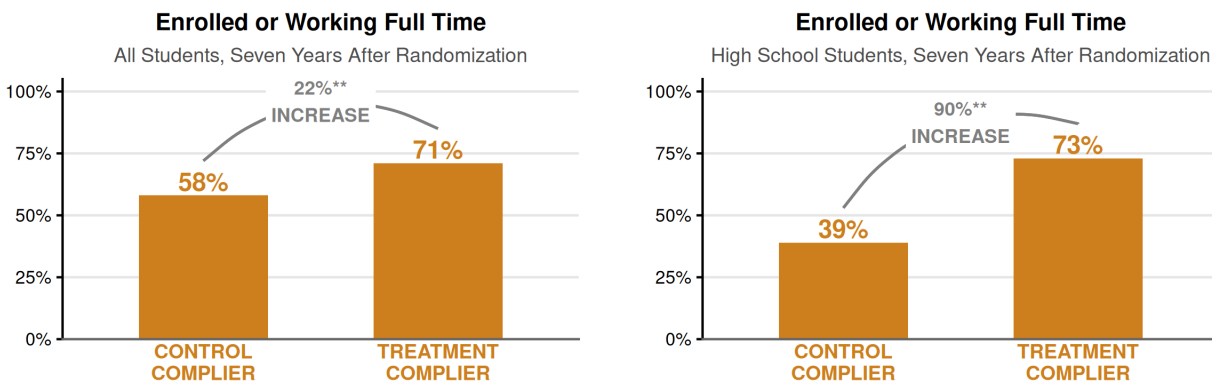
- *Increases in degree attainment did not fade over time, demonstrating that OMD helps students earn more degrees, not simply earn degrees more quickly.*
 - Participants were 16 percent more likely to earn any degree than their peers in the control group eight years after randomization.
- *Participants who applied in high school continued to benefit more from the OMD program.*
 - These students were 48 percent more likely to earn a degree than their control group peers eight years after randomization.



Note: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Stronger Labor Market Outcomes

- *Individuals who were offered the OMD program and who participated were more likely to be connected to the labor market.*
 - In the seven years after they were offered a spot in the program, OMD participants were more likely to either be working or be enrolled in school full-time in every year.
 - Seven years after randomization, participants were 21 percent more likely to have a stable job than the control group. (A stable job is defined as a long-term, full-time position that provides consistent income, fixed hours, and employee benefits.)
- *Similar to academic outcomes, the program had the biggest impact on employment outcomes for students who applied to the program before they enrolled in community college.*
 - Participants who applied during high school were 90 percent more likely to be enrolled or working full time and 83 percent more likely to be working in a stable job compared to their peers. (A stable job is defined as a long-term, typically full-time position that provides consistent income, fixed hours, and employee benefits.)



Note: *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$.

Increased Earnings

- *Participants who applied in high school earned more than their control peers.*
 - Seven years after randomization, our analysis suggests that high school participants were earning \$14,246 more annually than the control group, though this estimate is only statistically significant at the 10% level.

ABOUT ONE MILLION DEGREES

One Million Degrees (OMD) is a Chicago-based nonprofit organization that partners with local community colleges to support students financially, academically, professionally, and personally. The four cornerstones of the program¹ are:

Financial Support

- OMD provides scholars with a performance-based stipend up to \$1,000 annually (\$750 for suburban campuses).
- OMD also operates an enrichment grant fund to which students apply to cover select expenses.

¹ The summary describes OMD's model at the time of randomization.

- For students whose financial aid leaves tuition gaps, OMD provides last-dollar scholarships; however, because scholars must qualify for a Pell Grant or Chicago STAR (a local college promise program for high school graduates), these funds are infrequently needed.

Academic Support

- OMD offers academic support in the form of private tutors and referrals to campus tutoring resources. Further, all students are assigned to an OMD staff person embedded on their college campus. These Program Coordinators (PCs) provide individualized support in registering for classes, developing academic plans, and applying for jobs or four-year colleges. PCs have a student caseload of 65:1, significantly smaller than typical advising caseloads in community college.

Professional Support

- OMD pairs every student with a coach, local professionals who volunteer to support scholars in a mentoring capacity. Coaches and scholars jointly attend monthly professional development programming led by OMD.
- Outside of formal OMD programming, coaches meet with scholars to provide them with personalized supports, job shadowing, and networking opportunities that help them fulfill their career development goals as well as personal ambitions.

Personal Support

- One of the primary personal supports for OMD students is the Program Coordinator embedded on their college campus who aids scholars in navigating challenges that arise and support them in achieving their individualized goals.
- Further, scholars develop close interpersonal relationships with other scholars during welcoming orientation events and monthly OMD programming, which bolsters their connection to college and fosters a sense of belonging.

ABOUT THE INCLUSIVE ECONOMY LAB

Founded in 2015, the UChicago Inclusive Economy Lab (formerly Poverty Lab) conducts rigorous studies that expand economic opportunity for communities that have been harmed by discrimination, disinvestment, and segregation. The lab partners with policymakers, community-based organizations, and others to identify their most urgent and pressing challenges, co-generate evidence about what works, and translate findings into policy changes to end intergenerational poverty. One of five Urban Labs based at the Harris School of Public Policy, the Inclusive Economy Lab is led by Pritzker Director Marianne Bertrand, Chris P. Dialynas Distinguished Service Professor of Economics at the Booth School of Business. inclusiveeconomy.uchicago.edu.

TO SUPPORT THIS WORK

To learn more about this work and opportunities to support it, please contact Carmelo Barbaro, Executive Director of the University of Chicago Inclusive Economy Lab, at cbarbaro@uchicago.edu.