Research Brief

College Promise Predictor of Students' Completion Rates

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College Promise programs enhance college students' access to colleges and universities, support students' persistence towards completion, improve completion rates, and decrease debt for students participating in the respective programs. By decreasing debt, student loan default rates decreased for the College Promise program graduates participating in this study, thus improving our economy through better loan navigation in the future for those who need such loans.

However, a study has not previously existed that documents the outcomes supporting Promise program success at the national level. This research brief highlights, for the first time, the national level impact of College Promise programs upon completion rates and default rates at statistically significant levels. The College Promise Predictor of Students' Completion Rates (CPPSCR) pilot study explored completion rates using multiple regressions. Below are the two main outcomes that arose from the study:

1. College Promise programs in the United States contribute to <u>Higher Completion Rates for Students in Colleges and Universities associated with College Promise programs</u> versus Students at Colleges and Universities not associated with College Promise programs. The completion rates were statistically significantly higher ($p < 0.05$) for Pell Students, Non-Pell Students, and All Students at rates of 44%, 44%, and 45%, respectively.

2. College Promise programs in the United States contribute to <u>Lower Default Rates for Students in Colleges and Universities associated with College Promise programs</u> versus Students in Colleges and Universities not associated with College Promise programs. The default rates were statistically significantly lower ($p < 0.05$) for All Students at a rate of 19%.

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CPPSCR Pilot Study Outcomes

College Promise programs in the United States contribute to Higher Completion Rates for Students in Colleges and Universities Associated with College Promise programs versus Students in Colleges and Universities not associated with College Promise programs.

College Promise programs in the United States contribute to Lower Default Rates for Students in Colleges and Universities Associated with College Promise programs versus Students in Colleges and Universities not associated with College Promise programs.

The remainder of this document is structured as: Background and Literature Review, Research Study Approach and Methodology, and Findings.

Background and Literature Review

The College Promise Predictor of Students' Completion Rates (CPPSCR) pilot study builds on previous College Promise research. At a minimum, College Promise programs seek to improve college affordability, especially for those with limited means (Perna & Smith, 2020) [1]. In general, College Promise programs provide funding beyond traditional means, including first dollar programs from grants and loans, and last dollar programs such as scholarships for students who are awarded funds for their demonstrated persistence. The overall result from College Promise programs is that they lead to funding for students along a continuum, from a model that provides for all or most college-related expenses, to a model that provides limited funding.

Previous research has found that students associated with a College Promise program demonstrate a higher likelihood of attending college and graduating versus those without an association to the program (Harris et al., 2020) [2]. One well known program is the El Dorado Promise program. The El Dorado Promise program was established back in 2006 thanks to generous funding from the Murphy Oil Corporation to provide scholarships to graduates of El Dorado High School who had lived in the city for at least four years. The Promise awards can be, at a maximum, equal to annual resident tuition at an Arkansas public university but may be used at any accredited two- or four-year, public or private educational institution in the US., and making the El Dorado Promise a national-level College Promise program. As a study that looks beyond the original three program categories described by Perna and Leigh (2018) [3], we determined that the continuum of programs we assessed must include statewide and national level Promise support.

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One study by Ruiz et al. (2020) [4] indicated that there were no improvements in college completion rates for three community colleges collaborating with a College Promise program. Those three community colleges had only collaborated with a College Promise program for a "few" years. Therefore, we limited our research in the pilot study to College Promise programs that had maintained collaborations with colleges or universities for at least four years. Those four years would allow for a minimum of one to two community college cohorts graduating, and the potential for one traditional four-year university level cohort of students to graduate. Another component of the non-improvement found by Ruiz et al. is the low level of Promise funding ($500 per student) from the three participating College Promise programs. Future research and policy solutions will likely be the determinants of College Promise funding amounts provided to students and its effect upon completion and default rates.

Research Study Approach and Methodology

Our pilot study, entitled, "College Promise Predictor of Students' Completion Rates" (CPPSCR), measured whether a statistically significant difference existed in completion rates for students at colleges or universities connected to a College Promise program. Specifically, what this pilot study did was to take the aggregate of the College Promise programs and determine if they were contributing to a higher level of student completion rates and lower default rates for students associated with those programs versus no association, as determined by the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data at the national level. In essence, the pilot study assessed the effectiveness of College Promise programs, as called for by Swanson et al. (2020) [5]. The primary hypothesis was articulated as:

> There is no difference in completion and default rates for colleges or universities connected to a College Promise program versus no connection to a College Promise program.

The CPPSCR pilot study chose 103 College Promise programs as the College Promise cohort due to the amount of time in existence with at least four years of operation, therefore providing a valid and reliable connection to the respective colleges and universities. There were 63 respective colleges and universities connected to the programs in the College Promise cohort. Therefore, we needed a comparison group of 63 respective colleges and universities with no connection to a College Promise program to conduct the primary hypothesis test.

Starting with the College Promise Cohort, we found that of the 63 colleges and universities, there were four Research 1 level universities within 15 universities, and 48 community colleges. Those 63 colleges and universities were dispersed in 13 states covering the North, South, East, and West regions of the United States. We replicated the non-College Promise Cohort using a stratified random sample with 12

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states and the District of Columbia, and with 63 colleges and universities that included four Research 1 level universities within 15 universities, and 48 community colleges. The non-College Promise Cohort also represented the North, South, East, and West regions of the United States.

Utilizing 32 variables from IPEDS data (according to community college or university levels), the variables were initially reassigned according to dependent or outcome variables (DVs) and independent or predictor variables (IVs). Categories of variables are presented as: 1 DVs = Completion Rates, 2. DVs = Retention and Graduation Rates, 3. DVs = Graduate Value Indicators, 4. IVs = Student Characteristics, 5. IVs = College Promise Program Structure , 6. IVs = Aggregate Faculty Factor, IVs = Funding Factors. Once the two College Promise and non-College Promise cohorts' respective data were collected, both the current EXCEL and SPSS software packages were used to determine results from a series of multiple regression analyses. The expanded, and ultimately rejected, hypotheses were:

1. There are no statistically significant differences at the $p < 0.05$ level between the College Promise cohort and non-College Promise cohort for Completion Rates

2. There are no statistically significant differences at the $p < 0.05$ level between the College Promise Cohort and non-College Promise cohort for Default Indicators.

Findings

The pilot study found that Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2 were shown to be incorrect - students of colleges and universities associated with a College Promise program had statistically significantly higher completion rates and lower default rates than students of colleges and universities not associated with a College Promise program; however, the power of the outcome is at the lowest level possible to provide valid and reliable policy recommendations. A higher power rating through more observations is needed and we may find that the outcomes of 44% to 45% higher completion rates of College Promise college and universities over non-College Promise colleges and universities, could be even higher (i.e., 43.97% for Pell, 44.16% for non-Pell, 45.03% for All Students). The same can be said for the default rate since the true amount may still be lower in the CP cohort versus the non-CP cohort of students, as currently reflected by a 19.04% lower rate by College Promise colleges and universities.

Researchers found that the College Promise Structure accounts for over 10% of the analysis of the student loan default rate. It is encouraging to know that in addition to higher completion rates, students supported by College Promise programs could have a lasting reward with lower loan burdens after graduation and possibly better employment outcomes than students not associated with a College Promise program. College Promise programs effect college completion rates at nearly 20% as a single factor (i.e., 18% for Pell, 20% for non-Pell, 19% for All Students), and it is imperative that more be done to increase College Promise student success overall.

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Dr. Sanfrena Britt serves as the Chief Diversity Officer for Texas A&M University-Central Texas. She earned her doctorate in Educational Administration in Higher Education from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor and her Masters of Science in Counseling Psychology from A&M-Central Texas. In addition to her current position as executive assistant to the provost, Dr. Britt teaches as adjunct faculty for the departments of Educational Leadership and Human Development, and Counseling and Psychology at A&M-Central Texas, and as adjunct faculty for psychology at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor. The recipient of numerous awards for her scholarly work, Dr. Britt recently received the Outstanding Qualitative Research award for her doctoral dissertation entitled, Socioeconomic Inequality and Disadvantages in Education. She is also the CEO and founder of the College Promise Program of Central Texas. She began her career in higher education at A&M-Central Texas in 2013, and has served as an educator in the Central Texas area continuously since 1992.

College Promise is a national, non-partisan, non-profit initiative that builds broad public support for funding the first two or more years of postsecondary education for hard-working students, and ensuring those students have access to quality educational opportunities and supports.

Learn more at: collegepromise.org or email info@collegepromise.org

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