

RESEARCH BRIEF • MARCH 2024

# Experimental Estimates of College Coaching on Postsecondary Re-enrollment

Based on BFI Working Paper No. 2024-13, "[Experimental Estimates of College Coaching on Postsecondary Re-enrollment](#)," by Lesley J Turner, University of Chicago; and Oded Gurantz, University of Colorado

Among former students who left college prior to earning a degree, eligibility to receive one-on-one college coaching does not increase college reenrollment.

Fewer than 61% of students who enter college will graduate in eight years. Evidence suggests that completing college substantially increases employment and earnings, and difficulties with repaying student loans are disproportionately experienced by students who drop out. In this paper, the authors test whether student support programs involving mentoring can help bolster re-enrollment for students who have withdrawn from college and wish to return.

The authors study this question using a **randomized controlled trial** for low- and middle-income former students. Using data on state aid payments in California, the authors identify former students who received state aid only briefly, which

they consider a proxy for students who are unlikely to have graduated. They sent these students emails and text messages informing them of an opportunity to receive coaching to help them return to college, and the students who indicated that they had not yet earned a college degree were invited to participate in the experiment.

Roughly 8,000 former students opted into the study and these participants were randomly divided between a treatment group and a control group. Students in the treatment group gained access to remote, one-on-one coaching from InsideTrack, a college counseling service provider. The control group only received information on the steps for re-enrolling in college, without any coaching.

## **BFI Blackboard**

**Randomized controlled trial (RCT):** A scientific study in which participants are randomly assigned to either a treatment group receiving the intervention being tested or a control group receiving a placebo or standard treatment. This method is used to objectively evaluate the effectiveness of a new treatment or intervention.

The authors use data on participants' enrollment decisions to measure whether assignment to the treatment causes former students to return to college. They find the following:

- Assignment to college coaching had no **significant** impact on students' college enrollment outcomes, nor did it make students more likely to submit financial aid forms.

The authors propose several explanations for their null result. They caution that the economic and political uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, which coincided with their experiment, may have prevented some students from re-enrolling, and they maintain the optimism that coaching

may prove effective during less challenging circumstances. They also note that low take-up rates in the treatment group may have limited the program's effectiveness. Only half of the participants in the treatment group contacted or responded to outreach from their college coach, and fewer sustained continuous engagement. Finally, many students who had dropped out of college were ineligible for financial aid, and often also had financial holds remaining on their accounts that required payment before re-enrolling. Conversations between coaches and students revealed a complex set of challenges that students face in returning to college, which the authors further detail in their [working paper](#).

**Significant:** Often refers to statistical significance, which is a measure of whether a result is unlikely to have occurred by chance and instead is attributable to a real effect or difference.

#### READ THE WORKING PAPER

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[bfi.uchicago.edu/working-paper/2024-13](https://bfi.uchicago.edu/working-paper/2024-13)

#### ABOUT OUR SCHOLAR



#### **Lesley J. Turner**

Associate Professor,  
Harris School of Public Policy



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
HARRIS SCHOOL  
OF PUBLIC POLICY