



PRESS RELEASE

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Summer Bridge Program Gives High School Students a Boost Early in College, but Benefits Fade After Two Years, New Study Finds

NEW YORK, NY (June 18, 2012)- A two-year random assignment study of “developmental summer bridge” programs in Texas—designed to prepare high school students to move more rapidly into college-level classes—has found that students who attend the programs are more likely to pass college-level math and writing in their first year and a half of college than those who do not attend. The study also found that these effects fade after two years, and that the program has no effect on student persistence or credit accumulation.

The study, from the National Center for Postsecondary Research and in collaboration with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, tracked 1300 mostly Hispanic students over two years who participated in summer bridge programs at two four-year and six community colleges in Texas.

The intensive summer programs range in length from four to five weeks and provide up to six hours a day of instruction in math, reading and/or writing, as well as academic tutoring and college advising. Final results of the study reveal that students in the program—who tested below college-level at the start of the summer—were 7 percentage points more likely to pass college-level math and 5 percentage points more likely to pass college-level writing in the first year and half after participating. By spring, 2011 – the fifth semester after attending the program –program students were still slightly more likely to have passed these classes, but the difference was no longer statistically significant.

The findings are significant for the state of Texas, which in 2000 announced an ambitious plan to increase the number of students earning postsecondary credentials to 210,000 by 2015, an increase of more than 80%. Improving success rates for underprepared students is critical if the state wants to meet its goals: nationally, six out of ten students entering community college need at least one remedial class, and only 28% of these students go on to earn a college credential.

Developmental summer bridge programs have become an increasingly popular way to address the problem—one recent survey found that as many as 13% of four-year colleges offer bridge programs. However, until now, no rigorous studies existed on the effectiveness of these programs.

The NCPR study is the first to use a random assignment design to provide experimental evidence that these programs contribute to greater success early in students’ college careers, a period when they are most likely to drop out. As the study’s authors note, however, the findings suggest that four to five week summer bridge programs are not sufficient to improve long-term student outcomes, and that Texas colleges may need to layer additional interventions to sustain benefits for students.

For a copy of the report, visit: <http://bit.ly/L11J3J>

The National Center for Postsecondary Research (NCPR), housed at the Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University, is operated in collaboration with partners MDRC, the Curry School of Education at University of Virginia, and a Harvard University professor. Established in 2006, with a grant from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) of the U.S. Department of Education, NCPR measures the effectiveness of programs designed to help students make the transition to college and master the basic skills needed to advance to a degree.