

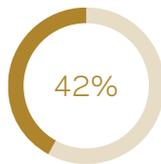
# LEO POLICY BRIEF

December 2017

## CASE MANAGEMENT CAN IMPROVE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PERSISTENCE AND COMPLETION

### THE ISSUE

Community colleges provide a low-cost education with high private rates of return for recipients. Completion significantly increases earnings and decreases unemployment for graduates compared to those with only a high school diploma. Despite these benefits, degree completion rates are staggeringly low. Six years after enrolling for the first time at a community college, only 39 percent of students have received some degree or certificate. Some have remained in school, but nearly 42 percent of students have dropped out. Addressing this completion crisis is crucial to improving the educational attainment and ultimately economic trajectory for more Americans.



First-time community college students who drop out



Jobs in the economy that will require postsecondary education and training

### CURRENT SOLUTIONS

Existing research points to four broad explanations for the low rate of persistence and completion among community college students: 1) cost of college attendance, 2) academic under-preparation, 3) personal non-academic obstacles, and 4) social and institutional obstacles. While survey evidence suggests that the latter two sets of impediments are important, current policy initiatives and research have focused primarily on costs and academic issues.

### STAY THE COURSE SOLUTION

An innovative, new program, Stay the Course, has been designed to address the personal, non-academic, social, and institutional barriers to success in college. Stay the Course has two main components: case management and emergency financial assistance. Catholic Charities Fort Worth (CCFW) designed Stay the Course and currently operates on two campuses of Tarrant County College.

### LEO'S STUDY

To measure the effectiveness of Stay the Course, LEO scholars designed a randomized controlled trial evaluation. To be eligible to participate in this study, students need to satisfy a set of enrollment criteria that emphasize feasibility of degree completion (currently enrolled in at least 9 credit hours, a GPA of at least 2.0, degree seeking, meet at least one remedial standard), low-income status, and being at risk of dropping out (excludes those with more than 30 credit hours accumulated thus far). Eligible students were randomly assigned to one of three groups: (1) the Stay the Course treatment group, which are offered comprehensive case management services as well as access to emergency financial assistance; (2) the emergency financial assistance only group; or (3) the control group, which are not eligible for Stay the Course services, but otherwise have full access to any existing college or community services, just as they would in the absence of this intervention.



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## RESULTS

Three years post random assignment, the data indicate that participation in Stay the Course is associated with a large increase in college persistence and completion, particularly for females. The graph below shows the difference in persistence and completion rates for the those in Stay the Course compared to the relevant control group.

These results show that Stay the Course participation is associated with increased likelihood of earning a degree and a decreased likelihood of becoming inactive. As shown on the graph below that the effects of the program are even greater for females, for whom the likelihood of earning an associate's degree increased by 31.5 percentage points. Comparisons of the emergency financial assistance treatment arm to the control group does not reveal any noticeable differences in outcomes. Learn more in the [full paper](#).

Altogether, these results indicate that Stay the Course improves persistence in school and degree completion for low-income students. A simple cost-benefit analysis shows that the earnings boost that results from obtaining an associate's degree is more than sufficient to cover the cost of this intervention.

## IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

These findings have important implications for providers and policymakers:

- It is possible to help low-income students persist in college at substantially higher rates with a fairly low cost, but well-designed intervention of dedicated support.
- Stay the Course is a model for providing non-academic supports, such as case management and emergency financial assistance, that improve persistence and completion.
- LEO scholars will continue to evaluate the outcomes of Stay the Course participants to determine the impact on employment and earnings.
- CCFW is working to replicate Stay the Course at sites nationwide and LEO will conduct a randomized controlled trial evaluation of the replication sites.

## Stay the Course increases community college persistence and degree completion.

### SIX SEMESTER RESULTS FALL 2013 COHORT

