

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

Who gets into college and why does it matter?  
The impact of college admissions on economic mobility and America's leaders.

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INTRODUCTION

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**REEVES:** Hi there. I'm Richard Reeves. I'm a nonresident senior fellow at the Brookings Institution in our Governance Studies Program. And I'm president of the American Institute for Boys and Men. It's a very exciting day for us here at Brookings as we're going to showcase some important new work from the Opportunity Insights team on who gets into college and why that matters. Unless you've been living under a rock for the last few weeks, you may have noticed that the question of college admissions of who gets in and why is very much part of the national debate. Most obviously, since the Supreme Court struck down to a large extent the affirmative action practices of many elite colleges. But that in turn has triggered a broader debate about the philosophy, as well as the practice of college admissions. Who should get in? Why do they get in? What's the point of these institutions? Are they cultivating a certain kind of class of future leaders? And if so, who should be those leaders? Who gets to decide on what basis? And so it is with with impeccable timing that the Opportunity Insights team based out of Harvard University, but involving scholars from a number of institutions has produced a really landmark piece of research which is able to use very high quality data to really examine who's getting in the causal results of those people getting into certain institutions. And so I'm just going to hand straight over to the research team to present their main findings. And then we have a panel that I'll introduce, including one of the researchers, to dig in a little bit further. So what I'm going to do is introduce two of the authors, and that's Raj Chetty of Opportunity Insights and Harvard and John Friedman of Opportunity Insights and Brown University, both, I think, institutions that actually are involved in these admissions practices. And so they speak of them from a position of some authority. And so with that, I'm going to hand the mic over, virtually speaking to Raj and John to run us through that, and then I'll switch up to the panel. So huge. Welcome to the online stage and thanks again to Opportunity Insights.

**CHETTY:** Thanks so much, Richard, for the warm welcome. It's always a pleasure to be here with you and the Brookings team and looking forward to the discussion today. So we're going to talk today about Ivy-Plus colleges. And so just to set the stage in our research group here at Harvard Opportunity Insights, we're broadly interested in the determinants of economic mobility and how we can give kids from low income backgrounds better chances of rising up and achieving the American dream. And one of our key areas of focus, among others, has been the role of institutions of higher education. And today we're going to focus on one particular slice, one narrow slice of that distribution, where if you look on this first slide here, if we look at the the set of schools we're focused on, it's going to be the Ivy League schools, the Ivy League schools, as well as Chicago, Duke, Stanford and MIT, 12 very selective private colleges in the United States. And if you start by just looking at this first little bar that you're seeing here, this is showing you what fraction of college students attend one of these 12 colleges. And you can see that number is only 2.8%. So from one perspective, you might ask if we're interested in reviving the American dream, interested in economic mobility, why would you spend your time focusing on this very tiny slice of institutions that's educating you, really something like half a percent of the American population? Well, that I think view is correct in the grand scheme of things. But if you focus now on certain positions of great influence in American society, think about people at the top of the income distribution in the top 1% of earnings, top 0.1% of earnings, Or look at CEOs of Fortune 500 companies, you start to see that 10 or 13% of people at these top positions have attended one of these Ivy-Plus colleges, even though they constitute only something like half a percent of college students. Now, if you go further to other categories, look at things like arts and sciences. Look at people who attended elite graduate schools or won prestigious honors like a MacArthur Fellowship. Now you get even bigger numbers. 30% of those folks have attended one of these colleges. And now if you look at various measures of public service senators, presidents, Supreme Court justices, look at Supreme Court justices, it's literally off the charts. 71% of Supreme Court justices in the past half century or so attended one of these 12 Ivy-Plus colleges. So while from a broad perspective, it's true that this is a very narrow slice of the distribution in terms of who is influencing society and who's shaping key decisions, making laws, making new discoveries, these colleges really play an outsized role. So that is one motivating reason that we're interested in studying these institutions. There's another key motivating fact. We go to the next chart here you can see, which is that these institutions tend to draw students from particularly high income families. So to show you that I'm going to first take a very simple measure of pre-college qualifications, let's look at the set of kids who got an SAT score of 1500 or higher. So that puts you in the top 1% of scores on the SAT

And look at the distribution of parent incomes of people who got above the 1500 on the SAT. Now, you can see here that kids from high income families are more likely to get those very high test scores, partly because they had the advantage of going to better schools in better resourced neighborhoods. Perhaps the SAT itself is picking up a little bit of bias where kids from higher income families are able to prepare more for the test and so on and end up with higher scores. But if you start from that benchmark now and compare it to the fraction of kids who are actually attending Ivy-Plus colleges from these different income groups all the way from low income families on the far left to the top 1%, the top 0.1% on the far right. You can see that even relative to that benchmark of kids scoring about 1500 on the team, there's an enormous spike up in the fraction of kids who come from the very richest families in America making more than \$600,000 a year to be in the top 1% or more than \$3 million a year to be in the top 1%. You can see that that green line is far above what you predict based on the distribution of high achievement on their set in the population. Now that comparison is to kids, but that SAT scores above 1500. Turns out, if you actually look at the data, a more representative description of where kids are coming from at these colleges is SAT scores more above 1300. That's about the 85th percentile on the test. And relative to that more reasonable benchmark, you can see that the number of kids at these Ivy-Plus colleges from very high income families is even more overrepresented relative to what you'd expect based on pre college qualifications, as measured by the study. And I should note, if the SAT is biased in favor of high income kids, this is only going to understate the extent to which there's. Representation at Ivy-Plus colleges relative to what you'd expect based on pre college qualifications. So these two motivating facts. One on how people are doing after attending Ivy-Plus colleges and the second who is coming into these colleges motivates the two central questions that we want to ask today. You just put those two things together. You might yourself be wondering, do highly selective private colleges effectively amplify the persistence of privilege across generations? Are they taking kids from very high income families and basically channeling them to positions at the top of society and conversely, flipping that on its head? Could the same highly selective private colleges potentially diversify America's leaders by changing who they're admitting, by changing who they're bringing into these colleges? And those are the questions we're going to address today. I'm going to turn it over to John to take us through that.

**FRIEDMAN:** Well, thanks, Raj, so much. How are we going to use the data to go about answering these broader questions? We're going to start by posing what I think are two more specific questions that will be able to directly answer in the data. So first of all, we want to think about inputs. And that second graph that Raj showed us to motivate this question. And we want to understand why is it that students from high income families are more likely to be attending these schools? Right. Is it because they're applying at higher rates? Are they able to accept offers of admission at higher rates, maybe because of higher financial aid or the ability to pay without financial aid, or is it that they're being admitted at higher rates, which is something that's more directly in the college's control? And then second, none of this would matter if the causal effect of attending these schools weren't very large. Right. These are a very outstanding and selected group of students. And so maybe those patterns on the first chart that Rod showed just results from these students being so highly selected in the first place. And so there we're going to try to use a new approach to estimate what's the causal effect of attending one of these schools. That is, take the very same student. How much of a difference does it make for their long term trajectories if they go to an Ivy-Plus institution as opposed to, say, one of the very best state flagship schools in the country? Now, we're going to do this with a new combination of data sets. We are measuring parent income backgrounds and student long term outcomes using IRS tax records in a way that's very similar to what we've done in similar papers before. We're also using federal Pell Grant records, along with the tax records, to measure college attendance for students really across all levels of institutions between 2001 and 2015. And then for that period, we have standardized test scores for those students as well. What I really think makes the key difference in this paper is that we're able to merge in additionally to the set of information, internal admissions and application records from a bunch of Ivy-Plus institutions, some of the best state flagship institutions in the country. And that's, I think, really going to allow us to make progress on both of those two questions that I just posed. So let me jump in to the first question and just to rephrase it. Why is it that we see those disparities in attendance that Roger started with, even for students that have the same test score? And so just to recall, right, here's this chart that Raj showed, especially when you

get down towards the left side of this graph, the lines get pretty close to zero. And so I think another way to represent this information is to basically just plot the ratio of the green line to the blue line. That's asking the question how much more likely are students from any given parent income background to attend an Ivy-Plus institution? And note that we're measuring parent income. We've grouped students based on the place in the income distribution of their parents, compared with all other students born in the same year. So, for instance, you know, I was born in 1980. My parent's income is going to be compared to be ranked relative to all other families with children born in 1980. And then I'm going to fall into one of these income buckets. And so when you do this, this is the ratio that you get the students who are least likely to attend relative to the the kind of pure test score baseline are students from what I'll call the middle income families. These are students right about the 70th or 80th percentile of the income distribution. Of course, that's not the middle of the national distribution, but it's about the middle of the distribution for students that are applying to these institutions. You want to think of families earning somewhere in the range of \$80,000, \$100,000. They're attending these schools at 22% lower rates than you would expect from test scores. And students from the top 1% are attending at 80% higher rates than you'd expect from test scores. And that got way over on the right as students from the top point 1%, they're attending at over twice the rate you'd expect from test scores. And so this is the basic disparity that we want to try to explain. I won't spend much time on this, but I do want to note that there are pretty large differences across this by college. Just to give you a quantitative measure of what we're trying to explain, this overrepresentation of high income students reflects about 157 students from high income families from the top 1% who wouldn't be attending if instead they attended at the same rate as students from middle income families, but who had the same test score. And it's this 157 that differs tremendously across colleges. So here are just the very similar lines for four different Ivy-Plus schools. You see, for instance, that MIT has a relatively flat gradient as compared to, say, Stanford or Dartmouth, where students from the very top of the income distribution are three or four times more likely to be attending these schools than the pure test score baseline would suggest. And I want to note that we've posted school specific information on these gradients, not just for those 12 Ivy-Plus schools, but for about 130 other selective institutions to our website. And we hope that that will, you know, support further explorations into these patterns. Now, let's come back to this 107 number. What accounts for these numbers? Right. Is it applications? Is it admission? What's going on? Well, it turns out that the largest share comes from differences in admissions rates. And so this is a very similar plot, except instead of looking at overall attendance patterns, I'm looking at who gets admitted to these schools among students who apply. And again, comparing students relative to others that have the same test score. And so what you see here is that in the middle income families, students are being admitted at about an 11% rate. But when you get up to the top of the income distribution, students with the very same test scores are being admitted at 50%, even 26% at the very, very top rates. And so if you just quantify what that's driving, that accounts for about half of the 157 students. What's pretty striking when you look across different types of colleges, though, is that you don't see this pattern at all when looking at some of the best public flagship institutions in the country. Their students are getting in, if anything, at somewhat lower rates among high income families compared to students from more modest backgrounds with the same test score. And so, you know, this is the most important share. It's about half the other components of this turn out to come. 19 extra students from higher matriculation rates, 35 from application rates, and then 25 students from the fact that athletes disproportionately come from high income families as well. And so putting this together, you find that about two thirds of that 157, more than 100 students comes from these different factors that you could attribute essentially to different admissions preferences that a college can completely control themselves. Right. I mean, they may or may not want to make these changes, but these are things that if they wanted to, it's really an internal decision whether to, for instance, have preferences for recruited athletes. Now, just to say a little bit more what's going on under the hood for those admissions preferences for non athletes? Well, we find that about half of it is accounted for by legacy preferences. I think it's intuitive that legacy students are disproportionately coming from high income families. What I think may be more surprising is that even within legacy students, it turns out that legacy students from high income families are admitted at substantially higher rates than even legacy students from middle income families. Again, comparing students that all have similar test scores here. This graph shows that legacy students from families in the top 1% are admitted at about five times higher rates than non legacy applicants. Other legacies

from the bottom 95% of the income distribution are admitted at about three or three and a half times higher rates. And then one of the I think neat things we can do in our data is we can say, well, how much of this is coming from the fact that these students are really stronger on some other dimension? One way to test that is by looking to see whether these students get in at similarly higher rates when they apply to now other Ivy-Plus institutions where their parents did not go to school. And what we see now is that there are some small differences, which I'll come to in a second, but most of those differences are no longer there. When you look at admissions at other schools. And so I think these differences are mostly accounted for just by a pure preference for students whose parents attended that institution, even relative to another completely identical student, but whose parents attended a different institution. So quantitatively, the legacy preferences explain 47 of this chart, and then the rest of it turns out to be the explained by the weight that schools place on nonacademic factors that play a role in admissions. You want to have in mind things like extracurricular activities that students undertake, maybe personality characteristics that come through in their essays, the strength of the guidance counselor recommendations and teacher recommendations. What we see is that those are much, much higher for students coming from high income families relative to other students from more modest means that have, again, the same test score. Now, in the data, it seems that much of this spike you see at the top is coming from the high schools that these students attend. And so if you then look, how do students from different high schools come through in these nonacademic factors in admissions? What you see is that students coming from non-religious private schools. So here is an example from the Boston area near to where we are. Schools like Milton Academy, those students have much higher nonacademic ratings compared to especially students coming from affluent public schools, but really students from most other types of schools. And our sense is that a lot of this is coming through the particular experience and detail and emphasis that's placed on the college application process and college advising process that happens at those schools and where there's just much less emphasis. Even at some of the most affluent public schools. So quantitatively, these nonacademic factors and the fact that high income students are particularly likely to achieve these high ratings on these nonacademic factors, that accounts for the rest of the admissions. This is not mechanical, but it turns out that everything else is just not very large. And so at the end of the day, these three particular preferences in admissions for recruited athletes, for legacies and for students from high income families with these nonacademic characteristics, this entirely accounts for these 103 extra students who are being admitted from high income families. So now let me turn to the second question in the paper, which is why does this matter? What's the implication for these students for getting into these schools when these high income students get in? How much of a difference does it make in their life? Now, the central challenge here is like in a lot of empirical work, we need to separate out the fact that some of the factors that students, you know, get in for may also independently affect their long term trajectories. So, for instance, you know, even students with the same test score, maybe one of them got really good grades in hard classes. And that's indicative of some difference where they're going to be able to get a higher paying job in the future. That type of thing might not have anything to do with the colleges they attend. And so in order to isolate a bunch of other factors which might be less related to long term outcomes, we're going to look at students who were all placed on the waitlist. And so they're all kind of pretty close to the margin here. There's a relatively small share of applicants. And then at the end of the day, some of them end up getting accepted and some of them end up getting rejected. Now, what are the types of things that might make a student be accepted or rejected off the waitlist? Well, what we find when we look at the data is a lot of it is coming from kind of pretty idiosyncratic factors. So just to give you one example, there was one discussion that, you know, we were able to get in on where a student was being considered who played the oboe. And that student so happened there was a space where the orchestra needed an oboe that year. And so that student was pretty close to the margin and was tipped in by this, you know, pretty random factor. And so long as you are okay with the fact that, you know, the fact that the student played the oboe is not any more related to long term outcomes than, say, another student who played the trumpet but who didn't have a space to fill in the orchestra, then this comparison is going to give us a clean estimate of the differences between colleges. That's unrelated to these more systematic differences between students like who's getting good grades and hard classes. And what we show in the paper is that this comparison turns out to more generally, you know, beyond just this simple example to isolate factors that are not driving admissions but are not related to long term

outcomes. What do we find when we look at outcomes linking back to those very top end outcomes that Raj focused on at the beginning? We find that students are 60% more likely to end up in the top 1% of the income distribution at age 33. And when you look not at the top of the income distribution, but at more the middle of the income distribution, just as Roger showed you, we see much smaller effects. And so here over on the left, the median income rank is only at the 82nd percentile as opposed to the 79th percentile. What does that mean? You want to think about maybe five or \$6,000 of difference off a base of of about \$60,000. And so, you know, that is a decent amount of money, but it's not maybe life changing money. What's different about getting into places like the top 1% is it really is transformational for the trajectories of these students. And it's not just in terms of the money that they earn. We see that these students are now almost twice as likely to be attending those very selective graduate schools where we saw Ivy-Plus students were kind of also highly overrepresented. Just looking in the population and then to try to get some measure of some of those even broader leadership positions, like, you know, being in the Senate. Of course, we can't measure that directly, but we put together a measure of whether you're working at a prestigious firm. These include not only some very prestigious jobs in more high income industries like law or consulting, but also some very prestigious firms in lower paying industries like research, hospitals or nonprofits. Students are nearly three times as likely to work in one of these prestigious jobs when they attend one of these Ivy-Plus institutions. Now, let me wrap it up in the final few minutes. How does all this come together? What would be the practical differences in the world if some of these colleges decided to change some of these admissions policies? Well, a lot of it's going to depend on the extent to which there are tradeoffs between the types of students that are being admitted under these particular policies and the set of long term outcomes. Right. Is there maybe there's some reason that students with these great nonacademic characteristics, maybe they're the ones who are really going to go on to these great outcomes. When we look in the data, though, this is just comparing students with these different characteristics. Students with high nonacademic ratings are no more likely to be predicted to end up in the top 1% than students with lower nonacademic ratings. Similarly, students recruited as athletes really show no difference compared to other similar students in the long term. And legacy students are actually less likely to appear down the road in the top 1%. What really actually does predict these outcomes, though, are students with strong academic credentials. And as we saw, that's the one thing on which schools are not really driving some of this admissions preference for high income students. More generally, it's both the part of the academic rating that's driven by the holistic review process. But also it turns out that that underlying test score baseline is quite strongly correlated with long term outcomes as well. Here we're comparing the chance that students get into the top 1% across students with different test scores, comparing students of the same race and gender and parent income background. This is not saying that test scores are not biased, it's just saying that it's strongly predictive of these long term outcomes in a way that many of these other factors, in fact, including high school GPA, are not. And so putting all this together, what does this mean? Well, starting from the baseline where there are about 60% of students from the bottom, 95% of the income distribution attending these schools. At present, if you first removed legacy preferences, you then on top of that, removed this tilt towards high income students and nonacademic ratings. You further equalized the parent income backgrounds for recruited athletes. So again, we didn't have that extra tilt. You'd be able to increase the share of students from these backgrounds by about 144 students in that average class of of 1650, nearly 10% of the admitted class. And that's actually on the same order of magnitude of the types of changes in number of students that are actually predicted to be driven by the new ban on affirmative action as well. Now, maybe schools will find it difficult to take away these particular ways in which high income students are benefiting. Another way to achieve the same level of increase in socioeconomic diversity is to introduce new affirmative preferences, just to directly offer students from low and middle income families a benefit in admissions. And if you ask, well, what level of benefit do you need in order to get to that same 67%, it's about twice the rate of admissions for students with high academic credentials coming from these more modest backgrounds. And so, you know, that's not nothing. But relative to the boost that we saw legacy students are getting, it's quite a bit smaller. What's more, because of what I just showed you about how a bunch of these factors like legacy preferences and not academic ratings because they're not related in positive ways and may even be negatively related to long term outcomes. You can do all of this while actually increasing the share of students who achieve some of these very top outcomes in adulthood and reach these

leadership positions in society. And so taking a step back, I think the answer to the question that Raj posed at the beginning is, yes, schools really can affect not only the socioeconomic diversity of the students that are on campus with some admissions changes. They are also able to make a significant effect on the diversity of students who will rise into these leadership positions later in life. So thank you so much for listening to this presentation. I'm not going to stop sharing and I look forward to the discussion among the panel.

**REEVES:** Thank you, John, and thank you, Raj. One of the one of the many things I admire about Opportunity Insights is their ability to distill a huge amount of data into a very clear form. And you showed that again today. I also admire the fact that you make your data available, and Raj has already mentioned this, but there's there's just as a huge, huge gold mine over at the Opportunity Insights website. And they've already had significant coverage for this work, including the New York Times and elsewhere. But do check out their data and the Opportunity Insights website. We're going to turn to the panel now. We're also going to open up for questions. Please fire them our way. You can do that by on Twitter by going to our @BrookingsGov and then using the hashtag college admissions. Or you can just email events@brookings.edu and it'll come through come through to me. So I'd like to invite the panelists to come on. I think John and or Raj are going to look around in case questions come up that will go back to the data. But let me introduce our very distinguished panel. I'll do so briefly. Please check out their full resumes. But Biddy Martin is the very recent former president of Amherst College and so has very direct and personal experience of some of these issues herself. Beth Akers, formerly a Brookings scholar, now at the American Enterprise Institute, and then my colleague Katharine Meyer, who is in the Brown Center Education Policy here at Brookings. And so we're going to go to the panel. I'm just going to give you a general question to start with, because there's so much here and you've had a chance. Absorb it, but just give us your initial reactions. What what were your main reactions to this report stood out for you as something that we really need to pay attention to as policymakers and as policy analyst? And then I'll ask David Deming, who was also on the panel. And one of the coauthors of this report is also at Harvard and part of Opportunity Insights to give his initial reaction. And Dave is going to be part of this distinguished panel, too. So initial reactions are start with Beth and then I'll move on to Betty Bidi and Katharine. Beth.

**AKERS:** Thank you, Richard. Congratulations to the researchers for really was a remarkable piece of work here. I think that tremendous thing right off the bat is the ability to put together the data set that allows for this sort of research to happen and excited to see where continues to come of it. We're in a political moment where we are looking to potentially ask more of the institutions that are recipients of such huge amounts of tax dollars. And I think this research puts a finer point on something we sort of already believed to be true, which is that institutions aren't really, you know, doing their part in in terms of creating opportunity and providing opportunity and equity. Jason Furman had a nice quote, I think it was in the New York Times. He said there's a, you know, institutions space, there's a tradeoff between equity and excellence. If we were to criticize their business practices prior to the publication of this work, but, you know, points out that the elite institutions aren't anywhere near that tipping point. There's just so much room to improve here. And with the taste for policy to intervene in what institutions are doing, maybe this opens the door in a bigger way for that.

**REEVES:** Great. Thank you. But certainly, certainly that is the moment that we're in right now. And, Biddy, I'd love to hear your initial responses. Do we have any? Yes, I think. Yes.

**MARTIN:** Thanks. It's an amazing study and I congratulate Raj and his team as well. I think it reveals a number of things that have been true for some time, and that is of great value to the institutions who use this study, but also to the country as a whole. I I'm I'm amazed by the consistency across the group of institutions that were studied. I'm struck by so much in the paper. And when we get to some of the other questions, I'd like to talk a little bit about what happens when the educational program drops out of the analysis of income outcomes.

**REEVES:** What do you mean by the educational program? Could you be more specific?

**MARTIN:** Yeah, well, I'll say it now. I was thinking about the oboe example.

**REEVES:** Oh, right. Yeah.

**MARTIN:** It's random at one level, but I didn't like the characterization of randomness as a factor. In fact, some of this waitlist activity has to do with the educational interests of the faculty at these institutions. And so it's not just that the orchestra needs an oboe player, though, that would be the interest of a music faculty. But also there are additional reasons why when looking at a waitlist, admissions staff will think about what the faculty has promoted. You know, for example, if there are lower enrollments, as there are now in classics or philosophy. Would you take a student off the waitlist who expresses an interest in those fields before you do something else? Now, that would never account for all of the all of what you found. So I don't mean to suggest it would, but when the educational program and aspirations of a faculty in an institution which aren't distinct from one another institution, the institution, when they fall out of the analysis, you don't see what some of the trade offs might be.

**REEVES:** I see. Yeah. Well, I like what you said about non randomness. That's partly because I know parents who do a very careful analysis of what orchestras are most likely to need and therefore get their kid to play the oboe, because that turns out to be a very specific one. And so it opens up the way you can game it, right? The more complex you make it, then, the more you can you can game the system. So it's not it's certainly not random. On the parental side, for sure. But thank you for that and we'll come back to that for sure. Katharine love to hand to you.

**MEYER:** Yeah I'll I'll echo Beth and Bidy's congratulations to the author is on what is just a tremendous data undertaking and particularly appreciate Roche setting this paper in the broader context of the work that Opportunity Insights is doing on economic mobility in general. That while we're talking about this paper and the findings today and you've certainly motivated why we should care about going to these Ivy-Plus institutions and the impact they have on students trajectories. But we shouldn't lose sight of the vast majority of institutions of higher education in this country, many of whom are really doing, you know, as your work and others have shown, the lion's share of work, raising people into better economic situations. I will say on on the substance side of this paper, what really struck me was how important future work is going to be at understanding the mechanisms. What exactly is it about attending these institutions that is driving these better outcomes for students? And if we think that we can identify something really powerful there, how do we again, expand that to the broader set of institutions and the broader set of students to help to help everybody actualize these really positive outcomes?

**REEVES:** Yeah, great. Thank you. And then, David, I'm giving you a chance to go to here's what I'm going to do. I'm actually going to put you on the spot because you're on the panel. You're one of the coauthors. And so I'm going to push you a little bit because Beth said at the beginning, and it's I think between the lines of the report, institutions aren't doing their bit. They're not doing their part. And there are some obvious reforms that can be made here. Do you agree with that interpretation? I think all the panel have spoken to that. This is just a signal of significant failure which has to be addressed because. But Roger and John didn't have to say that because they just put there. They're just presenting the data. Right. But you're on the panel, so you have to answer. Yeah, well, thanks.

**DEMING:** For putting me into the hot light, Richard.

**REEVES:** Sure.

**DEMING:** I'm in opposition of commenting on my own paper. That's fine. I want to first of all, thank the panelists for their great comments. And before I ended answer your question. But first, I want to clarify one thing that you brought up about the waitlist. We didn't mean to suggest that admission off the waitlist is random. It's clearly not who these are very well considered decisions, but rather it's idiosyncratic. It's not related to future out the future outcome for measuring. So whether you're an oboe player is not related to whether you're going to be in the top



1% versus being a saxophone player or something else. So that's really the spirit of the waitlist design. Not that it's like people are just throwing darts at a board. Rather the decisions aren't related to future outcomes. So I just want to clarify that now to your question, Richard. I'll tell you, I mean, look, you know, in some sense we want that. We want the research to speak and to let you know we don't have a moral authority on this question on anybody else. I'm not going to dodge. But I think it's important to say that our results stand for what they are, and we think it's up to everybody to interpret them. But let me tell you just one thing I think is a bigger picture comment about the first part of the paper, the who gets it and why the part that's received the most attention. I look at that bigger picture as a statement about how intense the blood sport is for admission to these highly selective colleges and all the things that people will do to get their children in and all of the ways that what. Our system you create will be gamed to the hilt. And so, for example, if you think about the case of recruited athletes, it's not like there's anything about being an athlete that makes you more, you know, athletics and privilege are not necessarily paired. But what happens is people know that being a record athlete is one way to get into an Ivy Post college. If you don't have perfect grades and scores and everything else perfect. And because people know that from a very young age, if you are a person of privilege, you invest in your child. Learning a sport that's unusual, that requires a lot of practice of expensive club teams, private coaches. And I think that if we stopped recruiting athletes, the way we do that practice would also maybe not stop but would cease to be so intense. And what that means is if we just got rid of recruit athletes, we're not actually SOL or even legacies for that matter. We're not actually solving the problem. What the real problem is, all of the many ways that income and wealth and privilege creep in to the admissions process. And so I think the most important lesson I take from the study is that admissions like, I don't think college presidents and admissions officers want to do this. I just think it's very hard when there are so many people who care so much and they are trying in so many ways that it's just hard to see all the ways that privilege plays a role in tipping the scales toward certain kids. And so I think if we do nothing else in the study, it's important for us to shine a light on that directly so that everybody's more aware of it. And I do think that that alone will have a big impact. I'm not saying we shouldn't have policy solutions, but I do think that's a big that's a big part of the story and hope we can contribute in that way.

**REEVES:** Great. Thank you for that. And I agree that just because a move in the right direction doesn't solve all the problems is not a good reason not to make that move, which are sometimes the arguments that's made against it. But you've actually set us up quite well, I think for the next question, which is kind of what what are the tradeoffs here and what what do presidents and admissions officers really want? What do they really think? Former Harvard president Larry Summers wrote an op ed a couple of weeks ago calling for an end to preferences for what he called aristocratic sports, as well as for legacy preferences. As president of Harvard, he was publicly defending legacy preferences. But I think he would now say that's because it's a collective action problem here. There's just an equilibrium that these institutions are in. And so, Bidy, I'd love to come to you. The question of what are the tradeoffs here? Why is this so difficult for for institutions to kind of move on? How do they get trapped in what I think we would say is a suboptimal equilibrium from an opportunity perspective around admissions and speak perhaps to your own experience and Amherst's recent experience.

**MARTIN:** I should probably just start by saying that we did eliminate legacy preference of Amherst while I was president, and that's what I think is the right thing to do. Having said that, why is it hard, whether it's athletics or legacy or some of these other nonacademic factors? Some of it is tradition. Some of it the traditions are notoriously hard to get rid of in any society. I mean, what's culturally endemic is not a quickly or easily changed, and the authors point that out. The other is money. So I think these institutions, at least some of them moral and some of the liberal arts colleges, have done a better job at the lowest income levels than for the middle class middle classes. I'll say because the definitions of middle class are quite, quite complex. In any case, I think all these institutions need to do better. One of the things I'm struck by is just the importance of the public research universities. I got all my education at publics except for one summer language school at Middlebury. I couldn't get into any of these places. Now it's a good thing I'm really old, but. I really do think that these recommendations. Our sound in the sense that they're pathways that will help institutions change. I don't think they can be implemented immediately

without creating other difficulties. I, I think it's probably well understood that just as out-of-state tuition helps public institutions within states keep state tuition levels lower, having more high income, full pay, students at these elite institutions also helps with the with the budget that is required to do everything that these universities do. So some of the trade off really is money. And so the institutions have to get to work figuring out how to change the relative priority of different things that will be very hard for them to do.

**REEVES:** Yeah, I agree. And in some ways I'm more sympathetic to the arguments that are made perhaps by a small liberal arts college that doesn't have a huge amount of money, it doesn't have a huge endowment and is trying to balance the budget, then perhaps for some of these other institutions where the claim of poverty is harder for them to make, given given that the resources at their disposal. But thank you for that. Katharine, I would love to get your response to is is there any would anything be lost from just moving away from perhaps perhaps with some you know, with a bit of timing, as Biddy suggests? Not overnight. But would we lose anything from just getting rid of this sort of thicket of admissions complexities?

**MEYER:** Yeah, I mean, I don't want to discount the colleges can set their own mission and their goals about what they want their student body to look like and what they think is going to contribute to a highly valuable experience. You know, when you look at the students who are admitted and they have these higher nonacademic scores, yes, we can think that probably a good amount of that is driven by them having greater familiar wealth resources that are giving them more opportunities, that they have greater access to teachers and counselors who can write those recommendations. But it also perhaps, you know, at least partially, one hopes, reflects some sort of experience these students are bringing to the table. And so, of course, there is some sense of, you know, what are these students bringing to the to the cultural experience of the college and how would that shift in our colleges? A lot of different definitions from themselves. I don't want to discount the fact that going to college games are fun. You know, I think here we I think it's important that we're really getting into the nuance of what do we mean by recruited athletes and what do we mean by recruiting for noncompetitive sports versus more of the D1 sports. But that's maybe a broader competition conversation. And then the last thing I'd just say is that I think building on the point that he made in that you did, Richard, how much of this is about the colleges working together? I think we got a really good case study of what happens when a couple of colleges try to change admissions, when we saw a bunch of colleges try to shift away from early admissions practices. You know, we saw a couple of Ivy as a couple of the selective public flagship institutions try to scale back and eliminate the consideration of early decision and early action. And they said they were doing that because they wanted socioeconomic diversity. They felt these practices were disadvantaging the lowest income applicants. They ultimately all ended up adding that back a couple of years later because there wasn't enough of a groundswell and they felt like they were at a disadvantage compared to the other Ivy institutions. And so I think a lot of these changes are going to have to be done together or it is going to be very difficult for them to last.

**REEVES:** Yeah, I strongly agree with that. And that's what college presidents will say privately, is that, yes, I don't want to do this, but I can't go on my own. But then they also say and maybe, maybe, Biddy, you'd be able to answer this question now and do want to come back to Beth or anybody who feels they can weigh in. They're worried that if they if they collaborate around their admissions policies, that you'll run into problems of acting like a cartel. Is there anything to that?

**MARTIN:** Or is it to know that increasing activity on the part of the government in looking at what they perceive to be collaboration among institutions that have disproportionate impacts on certain groups of families? And yeah, we could go into that, but.

**REEVES:** Well, that's so but that's that's I mean, that's it's so interesting, Biddy, because what that suggests is that for all this discussion of what laws should be passed, what public policy should do, it could be that there's something that public policy could stop doing, which is to kind of have this fear that if they acted together, let's say that they got together and acted on this, that they would face scrutiny or investigation from the government for collaborating with each other. If there

was a way to remove that threat, it would make it easier to solve the collective action problem. Right.

**MARTIN:** In some cases, yes. I mean, the way financial aid is awarded, there are there have been certain agreements among institutions about how to assess need. And the investigations have changed significantly the cooperation among institutions that had been the case. So, yes, and there are other there are other issues on which this kind of of government scrutiny is could.

**REEVES:** Be an issue. Yeah, that's interesting. Okay, Beth, I want you to chime in on is there anything good here? Right. Good. Just because you just look at this stuff and just want to set fire to all of it or repress perhaps I should say I do. And just think this is ridiculous. Just get rid of all of it. But what would be lost in the bonfire of these admissions policies, if anything, do you think and maybe talk a little bit about that. Do you think the two should policymakers have any role in this or is it just up to the institutions individually?

**AKERS:** I mean, I'm an economist, so of course I'm going to say, look, this is all driven by the money. And so it's institutions acting in their own best interest or what they believe is their own best interest. I think a point of optimism is that there's a possibility that institutions don't actually know the counterfactual. So if they want to use legacy admissions and were to lose the donor funds that came from having these families that were giving lots of money because their dependents had admissions preference, maybe some new funders would come out of the woodwork, those who value diversity and equity, and that would be a new funding model for the institutions. And I think it's entirely reasonable that that could offset the amount of money that's raised in response to maintaining legacy admissions. I also think that the existence of this paper and then the conversation that we're having today are making it more expensive for these institutions to carry on legacy admissions practices because it implies a bit of shame. I know you mean most people, you know, when taking a close look at this, would think that this is an unsavory practice, whether it's illegal or not. And the more we can call attention to the fact that this is happening, the costlier it is for institutions to do that. And I think that tipped the trade off in the direction of them choosing the thing that we want them to do, which is to move away from this practice altogether.

**REEVES:** Right? Yeah, I think there's something of a shame deficit among the American elite, but that's a whole different conversation. But Raj, I actually want to bring you back in on a question. We'll come back to some others for the panel that we've just received. But I think it allows you to expound a little bit on something I think is sort of a question that's raised by the research. So the question specifically and this was from Sam, which is why is it that the folks do so well in getting into these prestigious firms, for example, like what is it that's driving the kind of causal benefits? I mean, specifically the question is, is it do they develop some skills, some superpowers at these colleges that help them get in? So I shouldn't say that so flippantly, but are there skills that help them get or is it really a network effect? Is it really just that there are associations, networking, drink, whatever? And so it's sort of pure network effect that's kind of driving it. And and that leads me to a specific question for you is like rather than focusing on like who's getting into these Ivy-Plus colleges and therefore becoming, you know, whatever it is, management consultants or Supreme Court justices, maybe management consultancies, and the Supreme Court should stop just hiring. Maybe they should just why couldn't we solve it at a different point in the pipeline, in other words, rather than at this point in the pipeline? So it's both an empirical question. And then I've got a broader policy implication question for you.

**CHETTY:** Yeah, both excellent questions. Thanks, Richard. So on the first, you know, in this particular study, the data we have, we're able to show the causal effect of attending one of these colleges and not directly unpack what these colleges are doing internally to generate those great outcomes that we see. We'd like to think maybe some of it is the great professors you have at these institutions, but in reality, our sense is that there are lots of other things going on as well, like through the networks you form, as you know, a previous study we released from Opportunity Insights for which we've discussed with you and some of our panel was on social capital and how

who you're connected to seems to really impact outcomes. And I suspect a lot of that is going on as well. When we look at the variety of outcomes that are impacted, ranging from working at prestigious firms but also getting admitted to top graduate schools and so on, our sense is this is a pretty broad set of places where you're having an advantage. So it's probably a multifaceted treatment that it's not literally that you get connected to some specific set of people. You're also acquiring some skills. It's a combination of things that's probably beneficial. So that I think is a good segue way to that. Second question of why not then address the problem sort of downstream. When we think about firms coming to recruit on these campuses, the way graduate schools at MIT, students in all of these downstream places, what if they didn't focus so much on the graduates of a handful of colleges in the United States and recruited more broadly? I think that's a very reasonable question to ask. In some sense. It's the same question that we are asking at this stage. At the point of college application. You could imagine doing the same kind of analysis at a subsequent stage and say, you know. Let's look at who gets into work at top firms or gets a top internship or clerkship, etc. and what are the outcomes for the people who come from the right pedigree versus people from other backgrounds? Is it justified that you hire more from Ivy-Plus colleges? I think that is an empirical question that would allow an empirical answer to your question. But let me say, short of knowing the answer to that at the moment, I think it's useful to focus on these colleges, because I think what strikes me is that there are a handful of 12 college presidents that we focus on on these colleges who I think by themselves could have quite a significant impact on the diversity of the American elite by changing these admissions practices. Whereas if you think about what firms would have to do, many different firms, many different graduate schools, you know, many different folks would have to change their hiring practices, which maybe they should consider doing in the future and could be an important part of the puzzle. But the power vested in these 12 institutions, just because of how society is structured at the moment, I think that's an incredibly powerful lever that we should be focused on, not ignoring other things. But I think that's why it makes sense to pay some attention to those.

**REEVES:** So given the current pipeline for the production of the elite, if we can put it that way, these we might want to change that further down the pipeline. But given where it is right now, this is a pretty fat part of that pipeline. So we should be looking pretty hard at it. Is that a fair summary? And then one of you speaking about this, your Harvard, as is at least one of your coauthors and Brown, etc., what do you what do you hear from presidents, admissions officers, etc., who are people of good faith, who who probably do they read your research? They're listening to all of this. They're saying, yeah, Raj, that's that's all very well. But, you know, look at it from my point of view. What do you see as the kind of best arguments that you've heard or encountered in favor of some of these practices and against the natural implication perhaps, of your research?

**CHETTY:** Yeah. So, I mean, the first thing I would start with and we have, you know, college presidents here who can speak to this directly, but my impression is people are sincere in their interest in diversity on a number of dimensions. You see that in the reaction to the Supreme Court decision that there's a genuine interest in racial diversity and likewise socioeconomic diversity. And I think universities are trying to navigate how to achieve that. And, you know, in this study, what we're pointing out is. That conversation, at least in the context of socioeconomic diversity, has tended to focus on measures like students getting Pell grants, students from the lower part of the income distribution. That's, of course, very important. But I think we've ignored a little bit as the middle class and the upper middle class. If you look at the graphs that we've put out with this paper, many of them have this U-shape where it really looks like the middle class is missing in terms of admissions and so on. And I think what's going on is the top 1% are really able to distinguish themselves on a number of dimensions. If you're from an affluent family going to one of the schools that John was describing, you know, an excellent public school. You don't necessarily get all the credentialing or the benefits, and you're also not recognized as someone coming from disadvantaged and as a result are being left out in this process. And so I think making that clear is something that universities can then react to. If I then, you know, talk to folks in admissions offices and presidents and so on, and I think there's some arguments people might have made in the past that there are better outcomes associated with some of these factors that they're concerned. You know, those kids who have that fantastic resumé with all the nonacademic credentials, those are really high performing kids. But, you know, when we look at the outcomes,

this is the power of empirical analysis. This is the power of big data. You can put that to the test. And, you know, that just doesn't seem to be the case. So I think the argument that remains is related to the one that made it really an economic one, that it is a reality, that these are private institutions. We need to have resources to run these places, along with. One final point on that, which is, if you think about that carefully, though, the many additional legacy students who are admitted, let's take that one example. Only a very small fraction of them are coming from families with the resources, I think, to make transformative donations on the scale of these institutions at this point in that 150 extra students from the top 1%, those are students from quite high income families. The reality, Richard, as you know, is being in the top 1%, honestly, is not enough to make a transformative donation to a number of these institutions. It's being in the top point 1%. It's a small handful of people. And so I'm not sure that economic argument in and of itself literally interpreted would ultimately be a reason to have the scale of these practices.

**REEVES:** Right. I agree. I think the Operation Varsity Blues scandal showed the gap in the market because you can't afford 5 million for a building, but you're willing to spend a few hundred thousand. So it's like it was this gap in the market for people like, yeah, well, I don't have enough money to make a huge donation, but I still want to get my kid in. And that was the market that in a bad way that you mentioned. So I want to ask a question that's arisen in a couple of different ways in the chat and back to back to the panel. I come to you first on this one, Katherine, but then maybe Bidy and Beth and David, which is this middle class issue that Raj just raised again. And this is not the first time Opportunity Insights have drawn attention to this. It was in their previous work on higher education as well. But it has a sharper edge now and it does seem it's partly economic. It does seem it is partly that we have, you know, some support for those from lower income backgrounds, I think Harvard. Is it free for everyone under 60,000, then? Maybe it's a little high now and then obviously, people at the top are doing okay, but we're losing this kind of missing middle. Katherine, is that something that you see from your own research and know you look at a broader range of institutions, which is that we're actually just not serving the middle class very well in terms of admissions and how much of that is about money cost.

**AKERS:** Yeah, I mean, I think that's a very good point, that there has been a ton of what I think is well deserved policy attention toward helping low income students get access to the types of institutions that are going to freeze their later term economic outcomes. And so I think we have had tremendous success there. And we see sort of from the the U-shape that we see a little bit, you know, not not a whole year, but maybe like a check mark shape, that there are some some good outcomes for low income students even in this study. And it is the sort of middle class. And I think here it's important to be clear about what we mean by the middle class as well. You know, for example, when you look at the outcomes being in the top 1%, that is, you know, the outcome for so many of the graphs and the figures. To be clear that that's not looking at whether or not students are becoming multimillionaires by the time they're 33, that outcome is earning about \$220,000 a year. That's still a very good, you know, a very high income salary for a 33 year old. But, you know, the outcome isn't some outrageous sum of money. Similarly, when you look at family income, it's not at the top. To Roger's point, the top 1% is not multimillionaires, but it's something around \$700,000 in family income. Again, a large amount of money. But if we think about what the middle class really is, it would not take much to raise some of these financial aid promises a little bit to encapsulate a lot more individuals who are working, you know, somebody whose parents are both teachers or who are both working in public service jobs. You know, they're in a secure financial position today, but it is going to be very difficult for them to afford college. And so expanding, you know, Stanford raised the. Threshold for their college tuition guarantee recently, raising that a little bit to \$120,000 at different institutions would help support the enrollment of these middle income students.

**REEVES:** Yeah. Yeah. Based on the Opportunity insights work I've seen, I think there is this gap, but as call it crudely, between power and privilege that I think policymakers probably need to respond to. But if you actually mentioned this middle class issue and I'm just I'm looking at the Amherst numbers and it looks like that's Amherst had a similar similar shape as far as I can tell in terms is this middle? When you were president, there was something that you were aware of that you were thinking about, and how do you understand the economics of that sort of, you know,

gentle U-shape we see. And then I look, David, I'd love you to weigh in on this, too, and then back to.

**MARTIN:** Well, yes, I think the checkmark the checkmark is a good way to put it. It's sort of tending toward a view, but it's checking. Yes, that's that's been true at Emerson. We have we were aware of it and we were thinking about it. And I'm sure knowing the admission head at Amherst, who's an MIT guy, that he's thinking about it harder and harder every day. It's again, a matter of the cross subsidies and the choices that need to be made. And, you know, so the financial the financial aid budget will need to increase. And the question will be. How much money can be raised for that purpose and or what will we not do? You know, it's a these are not for profits there. They have a balanced budget at the end of the year. That's what we're supposed to have as a not for profit. It's going somewhere. And everyone wants to believe any way the money is going somewhere important, whether it's the funds required to hire the best researchers in the world who are on the screen today, some of them and set up institutes, or it's the funding for financial aid or to support student experiences that go beyond the classroom. There are many, many calls on the funds, and I'm just trying to be straightforward, as this study has been, about the fact that it will take money from somewhere to to get rid of the check or the U-shape when there are fewer. Top 1% or top 1% students. And some of them is one of the thing that people fear. You know, there's something very important about a sense of community at each of these institutions. And as one of my favorite writers, Marilynne Robinson, says, the thing that's great about universities is it's one of the few remaining places that builds intergenerational community, a community of a sort that those who have graduated five decades ago treat current students as if they are kin and heirs. And of course, she's talking about treating people as kin and heirs who are not family members. But when you talk about legacy preferences, when you talk about athletics, when you talk about the changing the mix, there are alumni communities that are accustomed to certain traditions and to the culture of a place and even to certain preferences. And some of what one fears will go missing is the support just of intergenerational community. Leave money aside for a second. And that's that would be a loss for society as a whole. I think what Raj and his team are proposing can build a greater sense of intergenerational community by diversifying the family incomes of the students who attend these colleges and earlier work that they've done, which show that. Yeah, but it's complicated. Just shut up and just say it's complicated.

**REEVES:** Yeah. No, it's something that as a kind of recovering European, I've really had to learn that sense of intergenerational community, which is peculiarly American around colleges. But actually one of the most striking charts was the one showing that that that even among legacies, there is a significant income gradient there. And it seems to me the question is how can you if you think those traditions are important, how can they how can they be maintained? I won't name her, but a pretty well known scholar in this field. I happened to be at Princeton with her at a conference and she she'd just gone back for an alumni event which coincided with her grandfather's alumni event. And I said To how long? Well, how many generations has your family been coming here? And she looked at me knowing my interest in it and said, I can't believe I'm telling you this, but 1826 unbroken. So that's pretty good. But David, I promise to come bring you in on this missing middle question, but also on anything you want to respond to that's just been picked up so far.

**DEMING:** Sure. Yeah. So a couple of things. First, I want to make a kind of slightly nerdy data point that I think is important for the interpretation of this missing little thing. So it is not the case that middle income students are less represented than low income students at these colleges. Overall, they're just less represented among those with similar academic qualifications. And so you will see more kids from middle class than poor kids. But I think what's happening is that if you are poor, you are the focus of colleges. They know you're eligible for federal financial aid. They know they need to admit more students like that and they're on the lookout for you. If you're very rich, you are able to game the system to the hilt, as I was saying earlier, and the students who are in the middle class, the upper middle class, the lower upper class, all that range are just extremely academically qualified students who don't have anything else that distinguishes them. And the country is very big and there's lots of very talented people and the competition is so intense that I think they get lost for that reason. So I think part of it is it is about the way that we

judge applications and the many, many, you know, the kind of effort of holistic admissions is to like peer into the soul of applicants and figure out like on 70 different dimensions who's going to be most deserving. And that's exactly the kind of process that disadvantages middle class kids because they're not poor enough to talk about their hardship and not rich enough to buy all the advantages. And so I really think that's what's happening, is you've got so many middle class kids there, and maybe they're from an immigrant family and they want to be a doctor and there's ten of them and you're only going to take one. And that's how it happens. And so I think that's really what's under the hood here in some ways. The other point, the other points I want to make about this question is that I think that financial aid is an issue, but it's not quite as much of an issue as you would expect. Why? Because these we say middle class, you know, this is middle class among people who apply to college. And so they're not they you know, college is a stretch. But I say admit some middle class kids to Harvard and if they want to borrow money and pay off. Right. Like many of them are going to be willing to do that because they see the value of the education. And so it's not so clear to me that you need a lot more of it. You may need a little more financial aid or spread it more thinly around it. So I don't think that's a about I mean, I don't think that's a sufficient reason. It's a definitely a challenge. But I don't see admitting, you know, some kid who's at the eighth percentile of income distribution, needing a half tuition scholarship or a quarter tuition scholarship as being a serious obstacle given the amounts of money involved.

**REEVES:** Right. Well, I want to ask bring back it's a perfect segue way to Beth, because I think Beth is going to strongly agree with you that taking out debt to get a higher education is not a bad it's not a bad thing based on her own work.

**AKERS:** I was going to say, I'm not allowed to bring it in myself, but they've already talked a lot. And so I.

**REEVES:** Know they said that.

**AKERS:** You know, I think it's worth noting that we're in a moment where we've had a really tremendous shift in the way that we think about financing higher ed for people, where previously we were thinking about Pell Grants and delivering aid to people who came from the most economically disadvantaged families. With the president's new expansion of income driven repayment, we're now going to be delivering tremendous subsidies based on like the ex-post realization of what your income becomes. And so that really changes the question about what are the economic barriers and, you know, who is going to be missing in this new regime of funding and. Maybe we could revisit that question in five years with the same panel, but they have the data on that one.

**REEVES:** Yeah, they could actually. They'll have the data to follow and see what happens in the labor market. So I have another question, Beth. Beth, I'll get you to respond to this as you're you're kind of live already. This is from Hal Ravinder, but then I'm going to take it back to the OGI team as well. Well, he says, we're told, and we're beginning to believe that where you went to college didn't matter. Didn't make you who you are, wasn't it? Does it, Jeff Selinger? Now, who is it? Right about where you go is not who you are. Who is that? I don't know. But as I was then, I think it was. Yeah. Frank Bruni. But it's much to say. It doesn't really matter. Once you control for everything else, it doesn't know. Don't sweat it. Does this study knock that down. And should we now expect a surge in applications to these colleges as a result of this research, thereby driving down admissions rates?

**AKERS:** Well, look, I think the authors were really careful to point out that we're talking about access to this very narrow pipeline to leadership positions in our society. And so when we've talked about college in the past, we're more talking about it as a mechanism for mobility and for the vast majority of people. You know, the issues that we're talking about today are just not a part of the transaction that they participate in when it comes to going to college. So, I mean, will there be a surge? I mean, there's always been a surge, right? There's already are is way more applicants for these institutions than they can accept. That's part of their character. So I don't think we're going to see a huge response in that way because the incentive was already there. And I think most people

believed it to be there. Even in the absence of these very precise estimates that we now have because of this research.

**REEVES:** Yeah, but I'm just trying to just bring David back in on this and anybody else wants to weigh in. But what one thing you could do this research is do a really good marketing campaign on behalf of these institutions. Everything else equal. Sending your child here will triple their chance of getting into a prestigious firm. I mean, that's that's I mean, that's gold, right? That's PR gold for these institutions you've just delivered to them. David.

**DEMING:** Yeah. Richard so let me contextualize that a little bit. So, all right, we do find that a small positive but small impact on average earnings income ranks as what we actually use. And part of that is because people who go to and we're comparing, you know, if you went to an Ivy Post college versus one of the most selective public institutions like Michigan or Berkeley or things like that, and people who graduate from high schools do very well. On average, they end up at about the 80th percentile of income at age 33. That's very good. And so what we see like the way I think you should think about what it means to get admitted to an Ivy-Plus institution is that you've just you know, let's say I enrolled us into a lottery and I say one of us is going to we're all going to get some tickets and one of us is going to have a winning ticket. And the winning ticket is worth \$1,000,000. And if you get into an Ivy-Plus college, you get an extra ticket. And so I'm due the lottery and I may not win. I have an extra ticket, but there's still a lot of other people. And so it's increasing my chances of winning the kind of race to the top to get one of these top positions, which are already very scarce. It's still the case that only 20% of 80 plus college graduates end up in the top 1% of earnings. It's just a lot higher than for other. So that's why the average impact is a little bit small. But there are these is this big proportional increase in top outcomes because these highly prestigious, highly paying positions are just a very small number of jobs at the end of the day. And the funnel to them, you know, begins at these institutions. So you got no chance if you don't get one of them.

**REEVES:** Yes, the absolute number, I think that simple. And it also makes this broader point. We should be careful in this whole debate about being sensitive to difference in absolute numbers here and kind of relative numbers. But but I flushed John Freedman out from his lurking in the shadows. It's John Freedman who's moonlighting as head of external affairs for Brown stuff. I think John wants to talk about this question about the kind of broader swath of colleges more generally. But but I'd love you to respond to the the potential downside of this kind of work as well. I know it's not the intent, but it actually does show college does matter in a big way.

**FRIEDMAN:** That's right, Richard. And I think there's no way to get around the fact that this study kind of pushes, I think, a lot of people's beliefs, at least some direction towards these colleges, these few colleges mattering more in their chances at achieving some of these very top outcomes. What I wanted to say is just to kind of remind everyone that, you know, something we find in the study, but I think which is not something that only we have found it really aligns with, a lot of other studies have found, which is that when you get outside the Ivy-Plus schools into the very large range of schools from the, you know, these very best public flagship schools down through less selective nonselective, BA and master's schools down to community colleges, there's a huge range of different institutions. And we see in our data, like many others, have seen, that where you go on that spectrum matters a ton, not only for your chances of reaching some of these very top outcomes less than in the Ivy-Plus schools, but it still matters. But it also then matters much, much more for where you're going to land. As Dave was saying, in the middle of the income distribution. And it really makes a difference. Your chances of landing kind of up around that 80th percentile or somewhere much lower. And so I don't think you know, I think it's correct to draw the inference from this study that going to these small handful of schools really matters. But I don't think it's right to draw the inference that, well, just because of that, it doesn't matter anywhere else if you can't get to one of these schools, kind of that's it. You know, there's a huge range of schools that all have a really important impact on students trajectories that are affecting many more students.



**REEVES:** Right. Right. And because many of those institutions are so big in absolute numbers, they're going to be they're going to be generating a lot more people going into those elite professions.

**FRIEDMAN:** That's right.

**REEVES:** Even if that's not relatively.

**FRIEDMAN:** Right, if you ask the question how can higher and higher education institutions in this country more broadly contribute not just to the diversity of of people in leadership positions, but to the broad goal of having upward mobility towards economic security, being something that all have an opportunity for? Yeah, it's really those large public institutions that are educating the vast majority of students in this country. They're going to have to do the work on that.

**REEVES:** Right. So I have a quote we have a question that's coming from actually a colleague of ours, Harry Holzer, is at Georgetown. And most of you all know his work, which I got to put to the panel. I come to you, I think, first and then and then I'll go long, which is essentially how far should we leave this to the institutions themselves? Maybe we're shaming them into it. I'm very happy for anyone from Opportunity Insights also to weigh in on this, but essentially just kind of let this play out at the individual institutional level and hope for these ripple effects if that's what we want. Or should we be looking at policy or is there a way that legislatures in the various bills around, around withholding public funding, etc.. So in other words, how aggressive do we think public policy needs to be to help bring about this change? And how far should we leave it to the institutions themselves to come to this conclusion? I'd just like to get people's response to that question. Biddy would you mind having a go at that first as you've been in that hot seat?

**MARTIN:** You know, I don't think we know yet. You know, it's a question that the the presidents and the boards, but maybe the presidents. To a greater degree, want and will even want even more now to do the kinds of things that we were discussing. By the way, we haven't talked at all about boards. And when we talk about the presidents could do this or the presidents could do that, it's very important to remember that boards at these private institutions as well as at publics play a very important role and have fiduciary responsibility. So the process is necessarily complex. I worry about having government policy intrude too, too great an extent on decisions about what private institutions can and cannot do. On the other hand, we may see that that there needs to be a policy, a solution to some of this, but I'm skeptical of whether that's the way to go.

**REEVES:** Yeah, it's interesting. The UK experience there is Oxford and Cambridge used to have legacy preferences and they they remove them essentially as a result of a shift in public opinion. There was lots of discussion about that and among let, but there was no law. You know, the House of Commons passed a law abolishing it. It was just that in the end the institutions themselves realized that they were just going so hard against the grain of the shift in postwar sentiment that that it may. But I'd love to get other thoughts on this. What's the what? Maybe someone's willing to be a little bit more pro the intervention of government to sort of change incentives here. But Katharine, I want to come to you next and I'll come to Beth.

**MEYER:** I mean, I agree that I think that colleges are going to draw up legacy preferences in the coming years broadly because of public opinion. I think there is just a groundswell of, frankly, bipartisan public opinion that legacy preferences aren't adding a ton of value to the institutions, and that we're going to see that efforts from students in particular to organize and mobilize. And to the extent that alumni of institutions organize and mobilize, they're going to push the institutions to make these decisions. And so I think it's going to happen. You don't have to get into the question of, you know, where where do we draw the line in sort of government intervention into different admissions practices? I think it's worth noting that we have a lot of state regulation around admissions practices to begin with once. So on sort of these micro considerations of different characteristics. But we see that states set limits on how many out-of-state students that a public institution can enroll in. You know, I nobody are sort of distinguishing between the public and private institutions. But there is there are quite a quite a few levers that states haul to sort of shape

who's going to be involved in the class. And so, you know, maybe if public opinion is enough that they can pull those levers for the public institutions.

**REEVES:** Yeah, that's an interesting nuance. There actually is a campaign think it's called Leave Your Legacy, which is campaigning among alums to basically say you should refuse to give any money to your institution until they get rid of legacy preferences.

**MEYER:** And I think, you know, I'm not going to let this panel go by until I point out, as we talk through legacy admissions and that it is only white families that have the ability to trace their family legacy to Princeton back to 1826. And so just to point out that it is only certain types of students of families that are really able to draw on that legacy preference. And I think that is an important part of why public opinion is shifting towards moving away from that preference.

**REEVES:** I agree there was a striking moment when Georgetown did all that work to discover who the descendants of the enslaved people that had built the university, which was a really huge research effort. And then they gave a preference in admissions to those two descendants. But they were trying to find a way. They didn't know what preference to give them. So they landed on the same preference that we give to legacies. And then someone did some work, I think, showing that a disproportionate share of the legacies had been slave owners in the past. So it's like a weird, weird sort of special contract. But anyway, I'm Beth from AEI. Huge but big government intervention required here.

**AKERS:** I was going to say I'm asked.

**REEVES:** Please say yes.

**AKERS:** Please say, you know what? I'm going to fulfill your expectations here and be the big government person on the panel. I mean, I think in theory I would be okay with there being a limitation on this. But I think in practice, I have concerns both about the Department of Education and Congress's ability to execute this and to police it if it were in place and just the capacity constraints that the private education is dealing with right now, this seems like probably a low priority. And so while I think in theory, it would be a reasonable tradeoff for the public resources that we make available to these institutions, that they be expected not to do this. I'm not sure that it rises to the level of importance for me in the scheme of things that we need to address that I would that I would push for this to be a big intervention at this time.

**REEVES:** Yeah, but I. I agree. But someone else wants to come in.

**DEMING:** I can jump in. Sure.

**REEVES:** Please wait. And so go.

**DEMING:** So I'm not going to defend legacy preferences. You know, I think people find them so objectionable that they're probably doing more harm than good for the institution. So just for practical reasons, it's better if you see the train coming on the tracks. It's better to just get out of the way. But I will say that if that's the only thing that happens, I don't think it's sufficient to solve the problem. I think one of the things our paper shows is all of the ways that, you know, if we replace legacies with other rich kids, I don't think we've really solved anything. And so I hope that won't get lost in the conversation. I don't think it's just about legacies.

**REEVES:** Well, we've solved we solve for one thing, but not for another thing.

**MARTIN:** Let's just kind of well.

**DEMING:** I was I was offering, I guess, a personal opinion, which is I don't if if, if my institution or other citizens just replace legacies with other very rich kids. I don't feel that we've accomplished anything in terms of socioeconomic mobility or equity or fairness. No, no, that's true.

**REEVES:** That's true. We've taken we've taken away a hereditary principle. That's a good thing. But it doesn't necessarily mean that we're not going to it won't suddenly change this. And I think a lot of the other things. Right. No, I agree. Okay, Biddy.

**MARTIN:** Well, I was going to ask Raj and David and John, you know, whether you are at all worried about that, because we haven't talked much about the nonacademic rating, and I'm really interested in that. It doesn't tend to be a big driver at the places I've been, but obviously it seems to be many Ivies. Are you at all worried about the bias in SATs when you say it would be better to get rid of the nonacademic rating and use our sites and. There's a class and race bias that's been under discussion for a long time now about their safeties. I just wonder what your thoughts are.

**CHETTY:** Yeah, I think what we're able to say, but it's an excellent question is just empirically, if you look at the data at what predicts outcomes and do a horse race between things like the SAT academic credentials and these nonacademic measures, it is absolutely clear. And they show in the paper that among those currently available measures, the safety is far more predictive of any outcome you look at than these non academic measures and the nonacademic measures, if anything, you know, I think are uncorrelated or even negatively correlated. But some of the measures of post-college success that we look at. So that does not directly address the question you raised of whether the asset itself is biased. It's just saying the asset is the best among the things we have and in particular is better than the non academic rating. I suspect. And there's other evidence showing this that, you know, just take very simple things like kids from high income families take the test more times. Just that has been shown to increase their test scores relative to kids from lower income families to some extent. And moreover, you can prepare for the test, of course, and get coaching, etc., and all of that can have an impact. Now, you know, in a way, what we're finding about the predictive power of this, it is all the more surprising given that it can be potentially manipulated in that way. So what I take from it is not so much and I think it's very relevant to the current policy discussion on other issues, on going test optional, holistic admissions and so forth. I actually think there's quite a bit of signal and quite a bit of value in these standardized tests. And the discussion should be focused less on should we abandon them and more on how do we address some of their shortcomings, recognizing that they do have potential biases, they can be gamed to some extent. How do we address that and level the playing field rather than go to these other nonacademic measures that I think are starting at a much lower level?

**FRIEDMAN:** If I can also just add on to that. I think, you know, one of the things that we see in the paper is, you know, even setting, you know, the test scores aside. Right. It seems like admissions officers are much more easily able to evaluate academic credentials in the appropriate context from which a student has come in. And so, again, just to give you an example, you know, I've been in discussions of students and admissions committees where someone will say something like, you know, here's a student who's only taken one or two AP tests, but they're at a school that only offers two or three AP classes. And so, like, we should not expect them to take five or six AP classes and we might even rate them more highly on an academic dimension than a student who's taken more AP tests just as an absolute number. But where that's a very small share of the academic opportunities that have been offered at that student's high school. And I think the problem with the nonacademic readings, you know, it's not that it's inconceivable that some of these things would predict. I mean, we show not long term outcomes that, you know, maybe having students that are engaged in campus activities is is beneficial. Right? It's not that they're it's kind of obvious that these things have no informational value. I just think it's much, much harder for admissions officers to evaluate exactly what the student has done in the context of the opportunities that the student had. And. You know, we all know that schools, you know, some especially private schools, you know, have many more resources to devote, for instance, to the college counseling activity. But it just seems really hard when you're reading what's honestly like a really amazingly written letter to pull yourself out of the glowing prose and really put that in the context in the same way that they seem to be able to do for for academic ratings. And I think that's why, you know, in that graph we showed you, you see this really sharp spike up at in terms of the

level of nonacademic ratings for students coming from these backgrounds and from these schools in a way that you really don't see that when you look at the academic ratings.

**REEVES:** Yeah, So that's helpful. We're coming up on close on time here, but I, I can't let it pass the point about test option without pointing to the research showing that the main impact of going test optional appears to be to increase the female share versus a male share within colleges. Have some pretty solid, solid evidence for that, which is obvious because you know, setting as where there's a smaller gender gap and than others. But that's a whole different conversation perhaps for another day. But what let's do is just go down the sort of four main panelists and ask, you're the board of an institution, president, board, etc.. You're going to discuss this research. It's put on the agenda. What should we do about it? What should we as an institution do? What's our first step? So first reactions beat that. I'm going to I'm going to ask David and then Katharine and then Beth and Bidy, just to give one minute on on that you're the board, you're discussing this or you're advising them or they call you and say, what should we do? Okay, we've absorbed all this. What should we do as a result of this? So, David, let's start with you. And David. I want you to speak on behalf of Opportunity Insights, Harvard University, the entire academic profession. I'm getting to speak as a your personal view on what do you think?

**DEMING:** Okay, if my views do not express the views of any of my colleagues.

**REEVES:** Blah, blah, blah.

**DEMING:** Blah, blah. Okay. So I think I'd say two things, Richard. One is, I think it's just important for admissions officers to be much more conscious of family income and to do a really careful job of distinguishing between applicants who are upper middle class, lower upper class, truly, truly wealthy, etc., and to be more conscious of the ways that income, especially at the very top, affects often these non-economic things. And just to be conscious of it, you know, so I think for example, with athletes, it's like if you could just change how you recruit athletes so that the athletes reflected the same income distribution as other students or as as what you want, I think you could solve that problem. So I think a lot of progress can be made just by shining a spotlight on it. And then the other thing I'll say very quickly is I think if I were if I were an Ivy League college president, I would consider trying to expand, because I think a big problem we have is that these spots are the competition is so fierce and it's so zero sum preferences for one group necessitate rooting against another group. And that's always going be the case. But boy, wouldn't it be great if we had more slots to go around? And I think we're doing a really great thing at places like Harvard, and I'd love to do it for more kids, especially low and middle income kids.

**REEVES:** Yeah, the absolute numbers are almost comically small when you get into them. Katharine, what's your one minute piece of advice?

**MEYER:** Absolutely agree on expansion. That was going to be my first answer is, you know, it's hard and there are space constraints and you can do it slowly, but you have to expand the number of students who have access to these institutions. And I think if I'm considering myself as a college leader, then the lever that I have to pull is maybe along John's point about training admissions officers to better contextualize recommendation letters, perhaps adjusting the scoring system to place less weight on those recommendation letters, shift around how we're going to treat different elements of the application. I think it's important to note that, you know, the solution does depend on his pulling the lever. Those are the tools that a college leader has. If you look at a state or if you look at a school system and believe it is more along branches points about expanding access to the city, SAT ACT offering more opportunities to retake the test, you know, offering more tutoring programs to students in high school so that they're prepared for these. So I think it is important to distinguish, you know, what role you have and what levers you have available, and that it's going to take a collective effort from all of those actors.

**REEVES:** Thank you, Beth. What's your.

**AKERS:** I think the tagline for me would be that my institution and the others are not doing the best job they could be doing and identifying who are the students who are most likely to succeed. After my campus. And maybe we need to turn back to these researchers or get a small budget together and say like, Hey guys, give me some sort of optimal, you know, mechanism for identifying top students and maybe a data driven approach and how can we use that to kind of correct for the flaws that we've had here instead of focusing on what we're doing wrong, let's have a prescriptive model for how to do this better.

**REEVES:** I love that. But I think you might have lost them when you said small girl.

**AKERS:** Oh, no, I meant many small.

**REEVES:** You meant a massive multi-million dollar Gates Foundation. I know the Gates Foundation are listening. So this is money well spent. Okay. And Bidy, what's the I mean, you're almost advising your former self in a way, but to the board and you know the dynamics, What what would you hope to pick up from this?

**MARTIN:** Yes. And actually, I am a member of the Harvard Corporation, which is a fiduciary group. So putting that aside, just in general, I'd say read the study. I hope all the presidents are sending the the study to their boards and immediately sit down and work it through and think about what can be done in the short run. And over the longer term. I think that's the first thing that everyone can do. I would bet that there are places that are already talking in particular about legacy preference and that we'll see more schools in that preference in the shorter as opposed to the very long term. I think athletics is extremely complicated, but I agree that for those sports that don't involve students from low income or racial and ethnic groups other than white, that we really need to take a hard look at. But whether they might be club sports instead of our city sports. And so there are all kinds of things that can be done. But I really think it's got to be database. And when you look at expanding the student body, which I think everyone would love to do, you need to study that in light of what you think the right student faculty ratio is for the incredible success these institutions have. So you can't add students necessarily if you think they've got the quality thing right. You cannot add a lot of students without also adding faculty. And now you're talking again about money in addition to philosophy.

**REEVES:** So thank you. Well, given the attention this report has already received and the depth of this conversation, it seems pretty pretty clear to me that this is going to be discussed in in boardrooms and by presidents and admissions officers. So, again, to add my congratulations to the team, do you if you're watching this or you're interested in this, head over to the Opportunity Insights website. I've already mentioned the data there is incredibly rich, incredibly accessible. It is broken by individual institution. And so it is a gold mine and it's very, very accessible to everybody. This this issue is not just one of economics or even a probability, but arguably one. Now, a political economy, as we see some of the public opinion about higher education, both polarizing and heartening in some ways, I think there are even bigger potentially issues at stake than the ones that the I-Team has mentioned here around around opportunity and upward mobility, which is the way in which Americans view the higher education system and who they see as serving. And so I think behind all of that, and I can say this in a way that I think suspect the Opportunity Insights team would have to be more careful about, which is like there's a bigger issue lurking behind all of this, which is do Americans do all Americans feel like these institutions are theirs or do they feel like they're serving the interests of an elite or an elite America? And what does that mean? And this idea of addressing the pipeline of various issues, I love what Raj said about that, which is it doesn't mean you can't address it at other points, I think Katharine made the point about K-12, these debates about opportunity very often take the form of somebody blaming somebody else. Well, it happens in high school, it happens in elementary school or happens earlier, happens at that level, and people just point the fingers at the earlier institutions. But that's a that's an abdication of responsibility. This is nobody's fault but everyone's responsibility, and that includes the institutions of higher education. I don't find. So thank you again, the opportunity and that same David, Raj and John for fantastic presentation and Bidy, Katherine and Beth for joining us, all of you for joining us for what was a splendid event. And have a great day, everybody.