

The background of the slide is a blue-tinted photograph of the Brookings Institution building, a large, multi-story neoclassical structure with many windows and a prominent portico. The word "BROOKINGS" is written in white, serif, all-caps font in the upper left corner.

BROOKINGS

A vertical orange line is positioned to the left of the title text.

## **Helping students to and through college: What does the evidence say?**

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**December 10, 2024**

# Motivation

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- Completing a college degree is the most reliable pathway to upward mobility and economic stability
- Access to college is unequal
  - Gaps by socioeconomic status are large
- Many struggle to complete college
- Students who complete some college but don't get a degree have poor financial outcomes
- How can we better support students to enroll in college and complete their degrees?

# This report

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- What are promising strategies to improve college access and completion?
- Many factors affect whether someone enrolls in college and completes a degree
- Many *interventions* have been developed and evaluated in the last two + decades
- What lessons can we draw from this evidence?
  - for practice
  - for policy
  - for research

# Roadmap

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- Types of interventions
  - Advisor and navigator
  - Comprehensive programs
  - Low-touch
- Some lessons
- Directions for future work
- Concluding thoughts

# Advisor/Navigator

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- Advisor, navigator, counselor, mentor or coach works directly with students one-on-one or in a group
  - Help with college applications
  - Coaching on time management and study skills
  - Academic and career planning
  - Connect students with other resources
  - Wide range of costs reflecting staffing and intensity
- Many modest positive effects
- Advising interventions can help

# Comprehensive programs

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- Multiple components address a broad range of personal, academic, financial and other needs
- For example, **CUNY ASAP** participants received
  - academic and career advising, tutoring, “last dollar” financial aid, MetroCard, and more
- ASAP and other comprehensive approaches have substantial effects on completion
  - Across settings and subgroups

## “Low-touch” interventions

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- Low-cost and scalable approaches to increasing access and completion
  - Information, reminders, nudges
- Information alone typically does little
- Nudges and reminders help for clear, time-limited tasks
- Task-based better than outcome-based goalsetting
- Insights could be incorporated into other programs
  
- Enthusiasm greatly diminished compared to a decade ago

# Institutions should focus on what they can do well and sustain

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- ASAP produced impressive results
  - Institutions that have the resources should strongly consider
- Reasons to consider less-than-comprehensive programs
- Comprehensive programs are expensive and difficult to sustain
- Comparing cost-effectiveness is difficult
  - Focus on *additional* degrees (or credits) per dollar
  - Some less-expensive interventions that have smaller effects could be cost-effective
- Implementing with fidelity in new settings is difficult



## Strategies that induce students into more selective institutions are promising

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- Students are more likely to graduate if they attend more selective institutions
  - Interventions that encourage this improve completion
- Only possible if high-quality, affordable options are available
- Need to account for additional spending at more selective institutions
- How do institutions respond?
  - Where does the additional financial aid come from?
  - Displacement?

# Effectiveness of FAFSA information and support is limited by underlying complexity

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- Considerable attention to FAFSA
  - Some interventions have been successful
  - Completing FAFSA not enough
- Students need to know how they will pay for college before it is time to apply, or even earlier
- Look for ways to move aid determination early
  - Could combine with direct admissions
- Pricing transparency only works if the prices are reasonable

## More to learn

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- What are the best ways to encourage students to use support services?
- What are the barriers to simplification?
- What role could faculty play?
- How do these programs affect long-run outcomes?
- What is the value of credits that don't lead to a credential?

# Concluding thoughts

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- Structural problems will limit progress
  - Many post-secondary institutions do not have enough resources to serve their students effectively
  - Effectiveness of access programs is limited by the availability of high-quality, affordable options
- Evidence suggests we can achieve incremental improvements – and that is important to do
- More great research is already in the field

A photograph of the Brookings Institution building, a large, light-colored stone structure with a prominent arched entrance and several windows. The image is overlaid with a dark blue filter.

# BROOKINGS

A solid orange vertical line.

**Thank you**