

Moving from Access to Success:

An Evaluation of Bottom Line's College Access and Success Programs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Program Overview

For the last 13 years, Bottom Line has provided low-income and first generation prospective college students in the Boston metropolitan area with personalized guidance and support services. Bottom Line's services are designed to help students apply to, enroll in, and graduate from four-year colleges. Its services for students are twofold: it operates a College Access program that provides support to students as they are applying to and choosing colleges and a College Success program that provides one-on-one support to students throughout college. As Bottom Line expands the number of students that it works with and the locations where it works, it will grapple with questions of the extent and success of its programs. A question of particular concern to Bottom Line is how successful it is in helping students obtain a college degree. A 2008 study indicated that only 35 percent of students who graduated from a Boston public high school and enrolled in college in 2000 obtained a post-secondary degree within 6 years, a percentage below the national average of 43 percent (Boston Private Industry Council, 2008). Given these numbers, it is imperative that Bottom Line has additional information on how well it is helping its students enroll in and graduate from college. This evaluation seeks to provide Bottom Line with essential information on the experiences of the students that it serves and the impact of its programs on their lives.

Research Design

Using data on the classes of 2002-2008, this report explores the background of the students served by Bottom Line's College Access program, the types of colleges that these students attend, the persistence of these students in college, the rate at which these students graduate, and

the ways in which their persistence and graduation differ by their background and the characteristics of the schools that they attend. This report also estimates the effect of Bottom Line's College Success Program on the probability that a student graduates from college by attempting to make an apples-to-apples comparison of students who participate only in Bottom Line's College Access Program versus students who participate in both Bottom Line's College Access and College Success Programs. Finally, this report explores the ways in which College Success Program participants who left college describe why and how they left.

Findings

To provide Bottom Line with useful information on the extent and impact of its programs, this evaluation set out to answer three key research questions. The findings to these questions are as follows:

1. What are the post-secondary participation patterns of Bottom Line's College Access-only students?

Who participates in Bottom Line's College Access Program and where are they attending college?

Bottom Line's Access Program serves students who are mostly low-income, first generation college students and students of color. The students commonly attend four-year private non-profit institutions located in suburban or urban areas¹.

What are their persistence patterns?

Twenty-six percent of students who participate only in the Access Program obtain a college degree within four years, and 45 percent obtain a degree within six years. Of the students who leave college, only about half leave by the end of their first year. Enrollment data show that students are leaving college at all points in their post-secondary years.

¹ Data from the Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (IPEDS) on the characteristics of the post-secondary institutions attended by Bottom Line's participants is incomplete and may not accurately reflect the characteristics of the institutions that students attend.

What school-level and student characteristics are associated with Access-only students leaving college?

There are no apparent patterns in terms of a student's background or the characteristics of the schools that they attend that are associated with their departure from college.

2. How does the likelihood of graduation differ for students who participate in Bottom Line's College Success program versus students who only participate in Bottom Line's College Access program?

Who participates in Bottom Line's College Success Program and where are they attending college?

Bottom Line's Success Program serves students who are mostly low-income, first generation college students, and students of color. The students commonly attend four-year private non-profit and public institutions located in suburban or urban areas.

What is the effect of Bottom Line's College Success Program on college graduation?

Forty-five percent of students who participated in the Access and Success Programs obtained a college degree in four years and 73 percent obtained a college degree in six years, compared to 26 and 45 percent, respectively, of Access-only students. When comparing students who participated in Bottom Line's College Access and Success Programs to similar students who participated only in Bottom Line's College Access Program, participation in the College Success Program is positively associated with a 17 to 29 percentage point increase in the probability that a student will graduate in 4 years and a 27 to 43 percentage point increase in the probability that a student will graduate from college within 6 years. That is, for every 100 students who participate in both the Access and Success Programs, 42 to 47 will graduate in 4 years and 73 to 82 will graduate in 6 years. For every 100 students who participate only in the Access Program, 23 to 37 will graduate in 4 years and 39 to 48 will graduate in 6 years.

What school-level and student characteristics are associated with the effect of the Success Program?

The effect of Bottom Line's College Success Program on the probability that a student will graduate in 4 or 6 years appears to be the same for different types of students at different kinds of post-secondary institutions.

3. *Of the Success students who do not persist to degree completion, what do they report as their reasons for leaving?*

Of the 780 students who participated in Bottom Line's College Success Program between 2002 and 2008, 59 of them left college and did not return as of fall 2010. Students described their reasons for leaving college as being related to issues external to their campus life, academic transition, economic frustration, and temporary administrative roadblocks.

Conclusion

Attending and graduating from college has become increasingly important in the lives of young adults who are striving to become full-fledged economic and civic participants in American society. As an organization, Bottom Line prioritizes the success of the young adults who participate in its program. In addition to providing valuable resources to students as they apply to and enroll in college, its efforts to help students succeed in college are clearly paying off. Students who participate in Bottom Line's Success Program graduate from college at markedly higher rates than similar students who participate only in Bottom Line's Access Program. Helping students succeed in and graduate from college is the ultimate goal of Bottom Line's work. The evidence from this report demonstrates that continuing to provide support to students after getting in to college is related to substantially higher rates of success in college. As Bottom Line, and any other organization involved in this work, moves forward, it should consider how to prioritize efforts that best support improving the prospects of youth on the path to adulthood, paying particular attention to the relative effectiveness of programs that are designed to get students into college and programs that are designed to support students through college.