



## The Opening Doors Demonstration: A Random Assignment Study

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### Presentation Outline

1. Background on Opening Doors Demonstration
2. Random assignment design
3. Some results from a site in Opening Doors
4. Benefits of random assignment
5. Ongoing RA studies at MDRC

## Why Focus on Community Colleges?

- Open-entry institutions, located in all 50 states
- Adults with some college or an A.A. degree earn 12% more than high school grads, 66% more than high school dropouts
- Provide pathway to four-year colleges
- Other benefits associated with higher education: Better health, greater civic participation
- BUT, nearly half of all students who begin at community college with the intention of earning a degree do not complete or transfer within 6 years. Key reasons:
  - Poor academic preparation
  - Competing work and/or family obligations
  - Part-time attendance
  - Difficulty paying for college

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## Opening Doors Demonstration

- Began with focus groups
- Identified three strategies to test:
  - Reforms in curriculum and instruction
  - Enhanced student services
  - Increased financial aid
- Desired results:
  - Increased course completion and persistence
  - Higher rates of graduation and/or transfer
  - Increased employment and better jobs

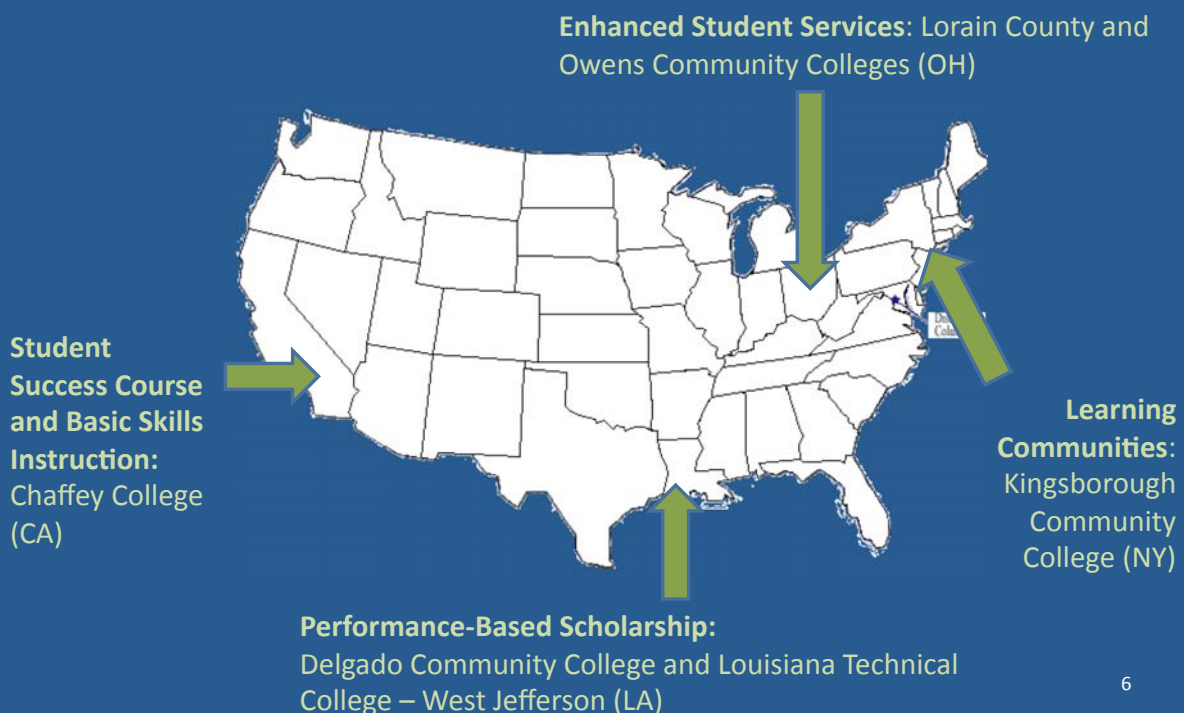
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# Opening Doors Funders

- Lumina Foundation for Education
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Ford Foundation
- William T. Grant Foundation
- The George Gund Foundation
- The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- The James Irvine Foundation
- The Joyce Foundation
- KnowledgeWorks Foundation
- The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation
- MacArthur Research Network on Socioeconomic Status and Health
- MacArthur Research Network on the Transition to Adulthood
- Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
- National Institutes of Health
- Princeton University, Industrial Relations Section
- Robin Hood Foundation
- The Spencer Foundation
- U.S. Department of Education
- U.S. Department of Labor

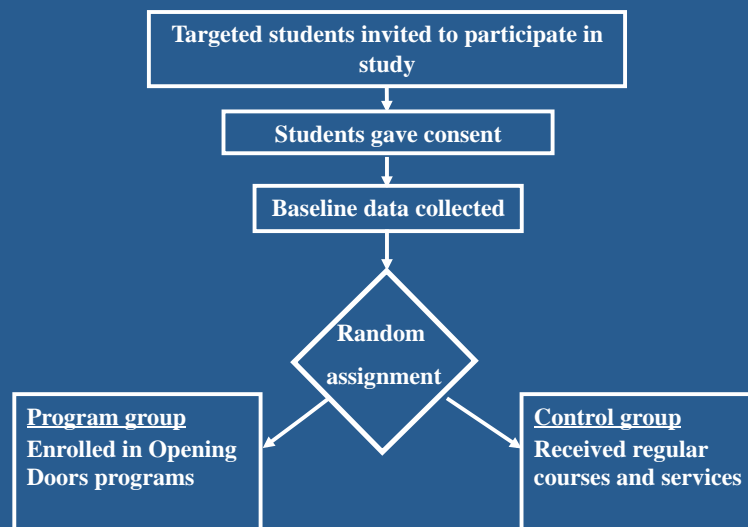
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# Opening Doors Study Sites



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## Opening Doors Used a Random Assignment Research Design



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## Opening Doors in Louisiana: Performance-Based Scholarships

- Implemented in 2004-2005
- Students received \$1,000 for two semesters (\$2,000 total) on two conditions:
  - Enroll at least half-time
  - Maintain “C” or better average
- Program counselors monitored academic progress and disbursed payments in increments:
  - \$250 on enrollment
  - \$250 on passing midterms
  - \$500 on passing courses
- Scholarships paid in addition to Pell Grants and other aid
- Control group did not receive Opening Doors scholarship or advising; had access to standard financial aid, counseling, and other services

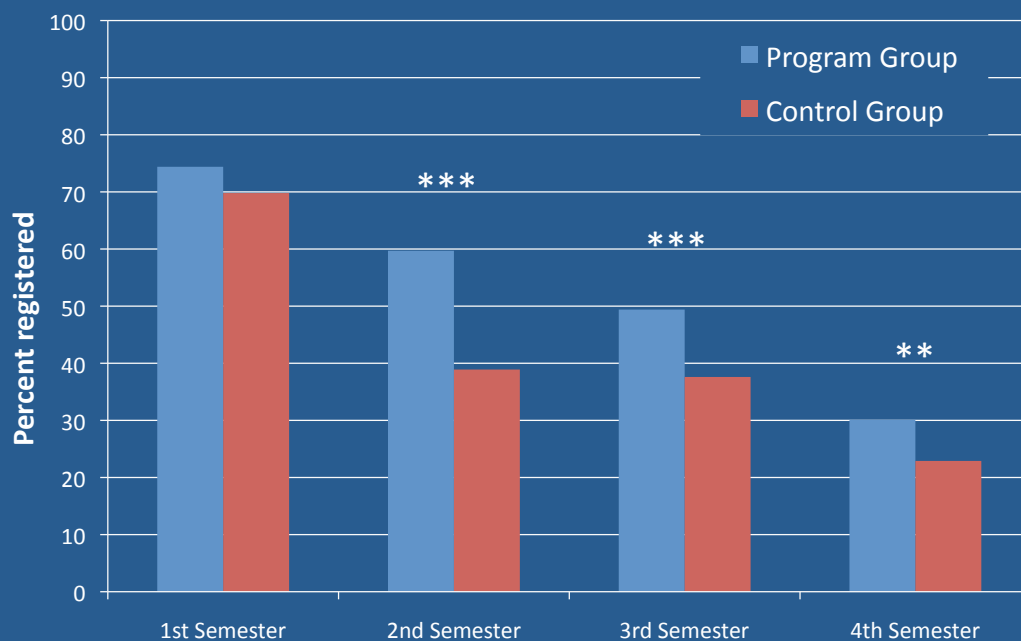
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## Research Sample

- Program targeted low-income parents
- 1,019 students randomly assigned (about half in program group, half in control group)
- Key characteristics (at start of study)
  - Average age: 25
  - Predominantly mothers and African American
  - Majority received some form of public assistance

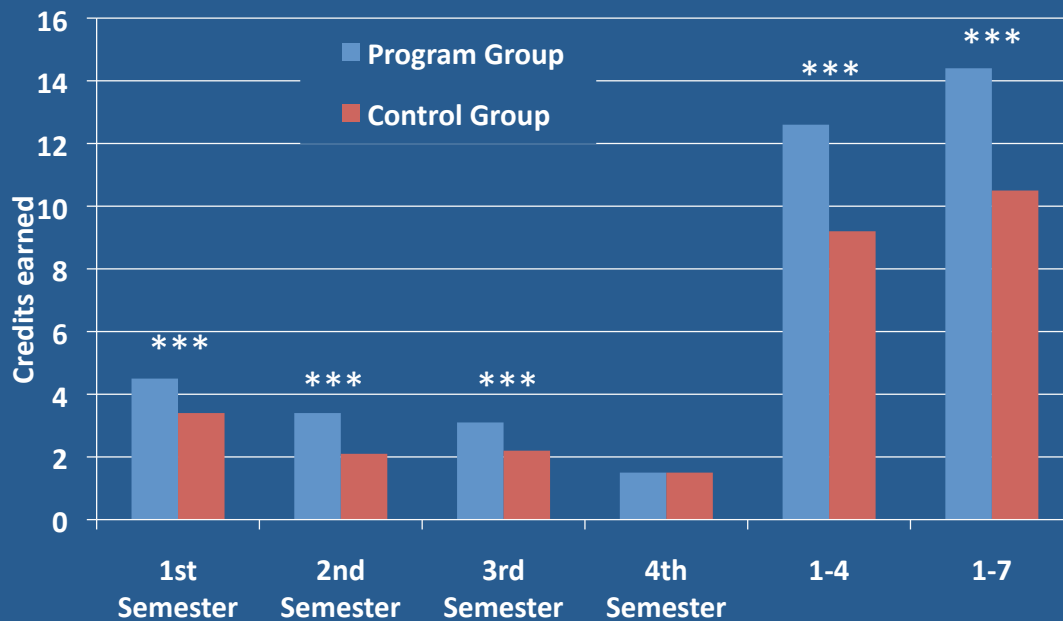
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## Effects on Registration (Early Cohorts)



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## Effects on Credits Earned (Early Cohorts)



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## Why Random Assignment?

- Unusual for higher education – but considered the “gold standard” for evaluation
- Ensures that baseline characteristics of program and control group members are virtually the same
- By comparing results over time, researchers can determine the impact, or “value added,” of a program over existing services

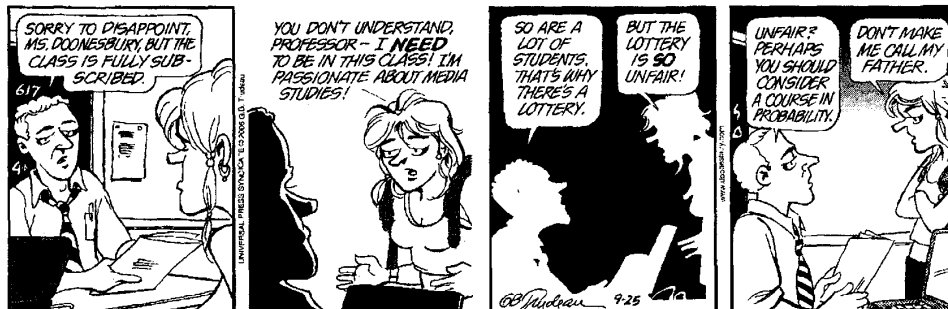
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# Why Random Assignment?

- Helps prevent erroneous conclusions about program effects
- Allows researchers to distinguish program effects from trends over time
- Provides reliable evidence policymakers and practitioners can use to make decisions
- Fair way of allocating limited resources, services, or program slots

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## *Speculating in the Market for College Courses*



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## Random Assignment Community College Studies in Progress at MDRC

- Part of the National Center for Postsecondary Research:
  - National Learning Communities Demonstration
    - A study of the effectiveness of learning communities for students in need of developmental English or math. Results: 2010-2011.
  - Texas Summer Bridge Program Evaluation
    - A study of a program offering instruction in basic skills and “college knowledge” during the summer between high school graduation and starting college. Results: 2010-2011.
- Performance-Based Scholarship Demonstration
  - A study of the effectiveness of variations of the Louisiana Opening Doors model in other states and institutions. Results: 2011-2014.

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## Random Assignment Community College Studies in Progress at MDRC

- Achieving the Dream Evaluation
  - Two impact studies of programs run as part of Lumina Foundation’s initiative to improve student outcomes by helping colleges improve their own data collection and analysis capabilities. Results: 2010-2011.
- Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) Evaluation
  - A study of a City University of New York program that combines learning communities, enhanced student services, and financial incentives to help students graduate in a timely manner. Results: 2012-2014.

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## For More Information

- All MDRC reports available for download at:  
[www.mdrc.org](http://www.mdrc.org)
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