

Using Evidence to Influence Policy

HGSE Faculty Pop-Up Series

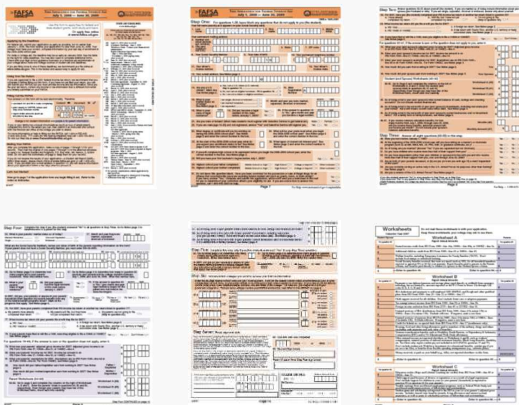
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February 9, 2021

Using Information to improve Outcomes

Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, & Sanbonmatsu (2012)
Intervention in H&R Block offices



- Transferred tax information into the FAFSA
- Streamlined the remaining questions
- Gave aid estimate; submitted electronically

The 8-minute intervention increased enrollment 26% among graduating HS seniors... 3 years later, they were still in college

The Impact...

THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Aid Experts Like President's Plan to Streamline Fafsa but Hope for Bigger Changes

By Kelly Field | JUNE 25, 2009

Washington

Campaigning for the presidency last year, Barack Obama promised to do away with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, the six-page form that critics say discourages some low-income students from applying to college.

The New York Times

Easing a College Financial Aid Headache

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Al Thomas, a Navy counselor, helped his daughter Jacquelin at Christopher Columbus High School.



MIDDLECLASS TASK FORCE
THE VICE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

STAFF REPORT
**Financing the Dream:
Securing College Affordability for the Middle Class**
April 2009



U.S. Department of Education

Obama Administration Announces Streamlined College Aid Application

Improvements aimed at increasing college access for low- and middle-income students

June 24, 2009

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
COUNCIL OF ECONOMIC ADVISERS
NATIONAL ECONOMIC COUNCIL



Simplifying Student Aid: The Case for an Easier, Faster, and More Accurate FAFSA
September 2009

Using Evidence to Impact Policy: *Lessons Learned*

- Know your audience.
- Speak their language.
- Make the answer obvious.
- Understand how decisions are made.
- Don't go it alone.
- Get an early win to perpetuate further success.
- Keep your eyes on the prize.



Learn to speak the languages of others

- We speak different languages—the way a teacher speaks about the problems of education is different than the things emphasized by a researcher, which is also different from the aspect that will garner the attention of a policy maker
- We have different goals, constraints, priorities—*understand what motivates others if you want to influence them*
- Invest in listening to others—how they think about the world, how they frame their arguments, and what they find convincing

“The skills necessary to complete the FAFSA do not appear to be related to the skills necessary to persist in college.”

Lesson: Speak in their language.

Tailor your messaging for how your audience thinks and speaks

Academic paper

“This project examines the effects of two experimental treatments designed to test of the importance of simplification and information using a random assignment research design... Comparing the outcomes of participants in the treatment groups to a control group using multiple sources of administrative data, the analysis suggests that individuals who received assistance with the FAFSA and information about aid were substantially more likely to submit the aid application, enroll in college the following fall, and receive more financial aid.”

Policy Brief

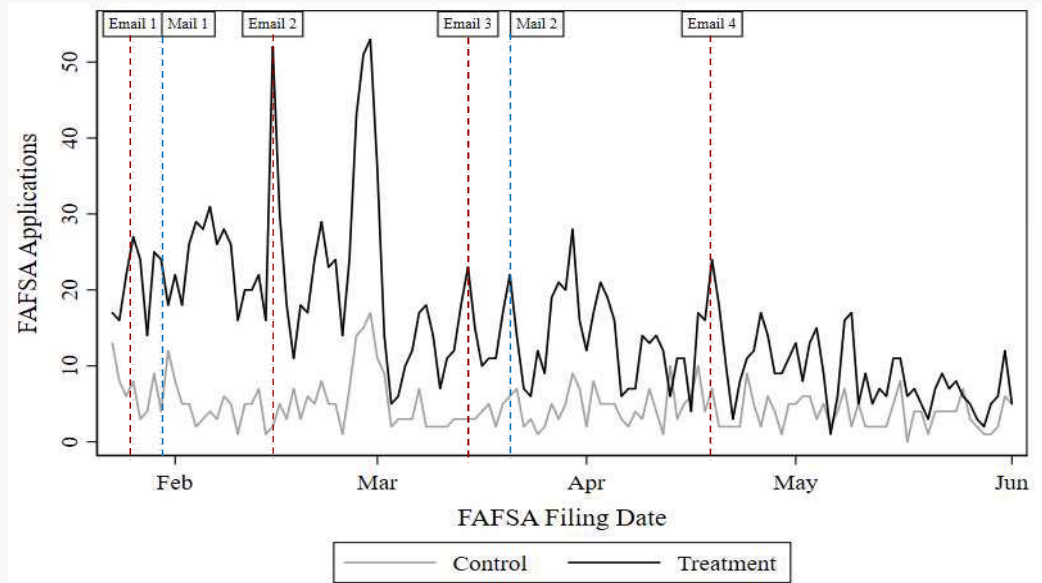
“It is not only possible but also likely efficient to use information from an IRS tax form to complete most of the FAFSA.”

Responding to a Practitioner

“We helped both first time and past FAFSA applicants but did not use old information. We tried to minimize the amount of information required to collect outside the office... Most of the time we could collect all the necessary information to complete the FAFSA in the office, but on other occasions had a call center follow up to get this information...”

Lesson: Make the answer obvious

Bettinger, Long, and Lee (2020) "Connecting Students with Financial Aid: The Impact of Information and Framing on Aid Renewal and Enrollment Intensity"



Submitted a FAFSA the Prior Year

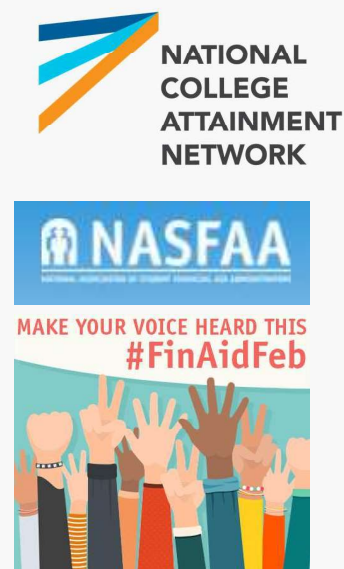
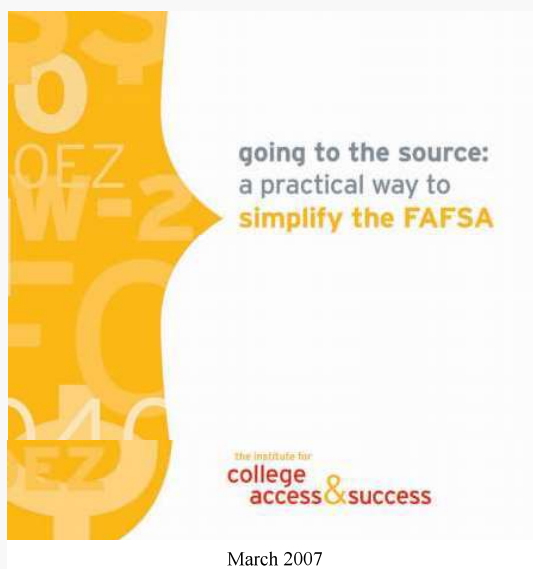
Lessons Learned

- Know your audience: *What are their goals? What do they care about?*
- Speak their language: *Tailor your communications to how your audience thinks and speaks*
- Make the answer obvious
- Understand how decisions are made.

Focus on the movable levers for implementation

- What can a leader control and change?
- What can a policymaker legislate?
- Where are the barriers to change easier to overcome?
- What can we monitor to measure progress?

Don't go it alone.



Keep your eyes on the prize.

- Get an early win to perpetuate further success.
- Sometimes a baby step is still progress. Find your place to make a contribution... for the time being.
- It's a marathon, not a sprint... Regardless of who is in the White House (or State House or board room) next year, we'll be plugging away.

The Lasting Impact...



U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP) Hearing: "Time to Finish Fixing the FAFSA."
September 17, 2020

A Last Push For Simplicity

A Senator Lamar Alexander nears retirement, he is making one last push to simplify applying for financial aid, and this time, he might get it.

By Kery Munkami // September 18, 2020



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Congress Will Give Colleges \$20 Billion in Relief and — Surprise! — Some Long-Awaited Policy Reforms

By Eric Kelderman | DECEMBER 21, 2020



Summary: Lessons Learned

- Know your audience.
- Speak their language.
- Make the answer obvious.
- Understand how decisions are made and focus on the movable levers for implementation.
- Don't go it alone.
- Get an early win to perpetuate further success.
- Keep your eyes on the prize.