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Lessons from a Statewide Transfer Grant Program

Impacts of the Texas Transfer Grant Pilot Program on Community College Student Transfer

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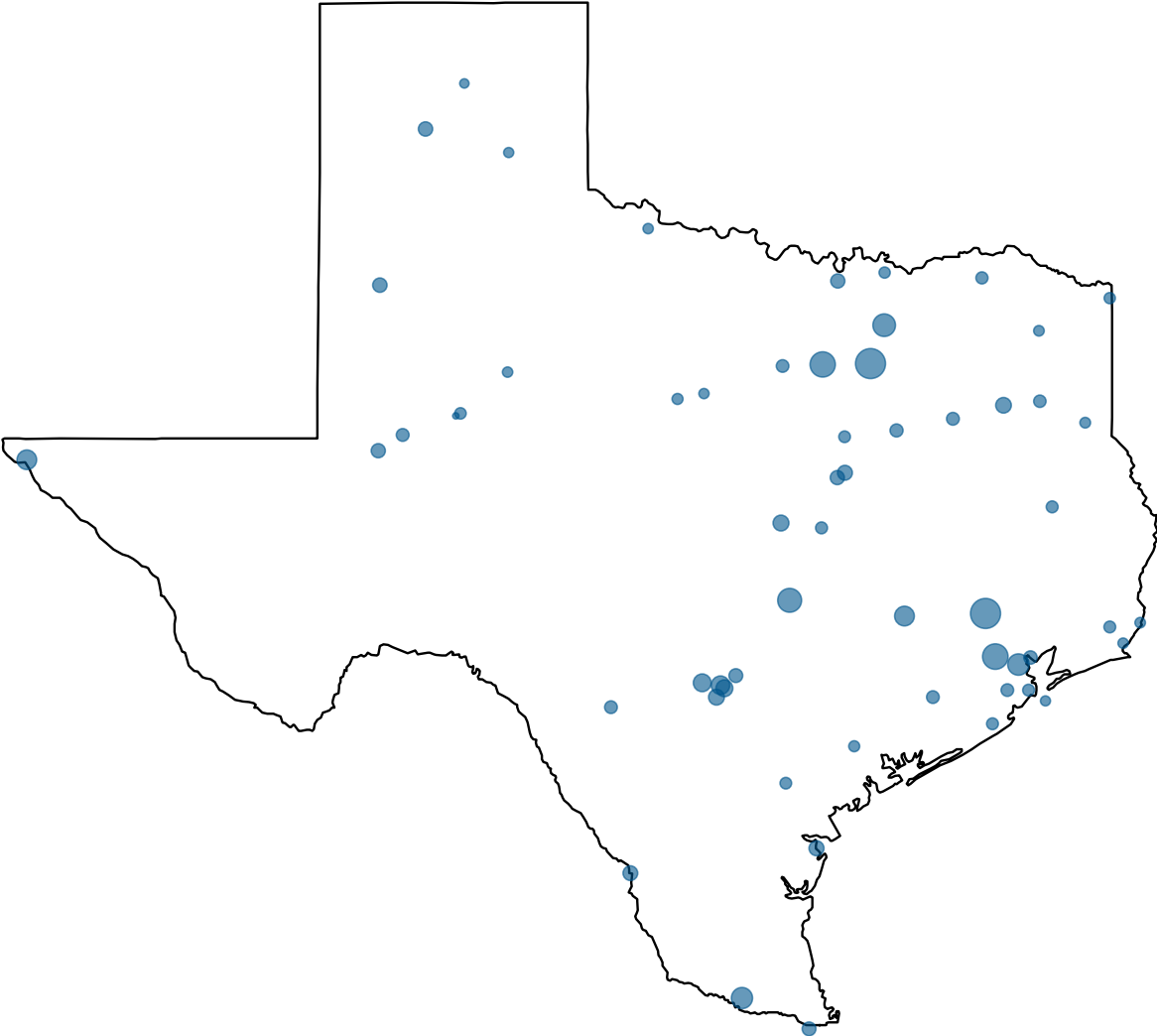
More than half of community college students nationwide intend to pursue a four-year degree; however, in Texas only one in four community college students transfer to four-year institutions successfully.¹ Among students who do transfer to a Texas four-year institution, roughly 60 percent go on to graduate with a bachelor's degree.² The result is that only about 15 percent of Texans who start at a community college end up graduating from a four-year institution. To improve transfer rates and, ultimately, bachelor's degree attainment, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) launched the Texas Transfer Grant Pilot Program with money provided by the U.S. Department of Education's Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund.³

The Texas Transfer Grant Pilot Program included students from every community, technical, and state college in Texas. The map of Texas community colleges in Figure 1 shows the reach of a statewide intervention in the United States' second-largest state. About 9 percent (89,834) of all Texas community college students were eligible for the grant (see below for eligibility criteria), which is designed to support community college students from low-income backgrounds who have earned college-level credits and may be considering transferring to a four-year university. The pilot program offered \$5,000 grants to about 15 percent of eligible community college students for the fall 2022 semester (a total of nearly 14,000 students). A second grant was later offered to a subset of the same group of students for the spring 2023 semester. The grants were offered to community college students regardless of students' transfer application status, with the intention of reducing financial barriers to transferring to a four-year institution.

MDRC evaluated the pilot program to build evidence about its efficacy and help inform future THECB decisions about the program. Initial analyses showed the grant offered for



Figure 1. Map of Texas Community Colleges



SOURCE: Data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.

NOTE: The size of each point represents the number of students enrolled at each institution.

use in the fall of 2022 had a 1.5 percentage point impact on transferring to a four-year institution ($p < 0.001$).⁴ This policy brief follows up with additional findings about the pilot program’s impact on students’ enrollment and academic outcomes at Texas four-year institutions during the fall 2022 and spring 2023 semesters – two semesters after students initially received the fall 2022 transfer grant. These additional analyses show that the initial impacts of the first grant on fall academic outcomes are sustained into the spring semester, diminishing slightly in that semester. However, among students who were offered an additional spring 2023 grant, program impacts grew in the spring semester, suggesting that a multisemester program model may offer benefits that compound over time.

Evaluation Design

MDRC conducted a randomized controlled trial evaluation of the pilot program that combined quantitative analyses of student academic records with qualitative student interviews. The evaluation addressed two primary questions:

- Does offering the Texas Transfer Grant to community college students affect their enrollment rates at public and private four-year institutions in Texas?
- What do community college students think—and how do they feel—about the Texas Transfer Grant offer, particularly with respect to their decision to transfer to a Texas four-year institution?

In addition to these confirmatory questions, the evaluation investigated a range of exploratory questions regarding the program's impact on enrollment at particular types of institutions (public, private, two-year, four-year),⁵ as well as impacts on student credit accumulation and grade point average (GPA), and on whether the program diverts students from obtaining two-year degrees.⁶ The evaluation also assessed differences in impacts among subgroups defined by student race/ethnicity and gender, as well as by their age, GPA, and two-year college at the time of random assignment.

Eligibility Criteria and Evaluation Sample

Based on requirements established by the Texas Governor's Office, the amount of program funding available, and an analysis of historical Texas student data, the THECB and MDRC established five student program eligibility criteria:⁷

- Students must have been enrolled at a Texas public two-year institution for at least one semester during the 2021 calendar year.
- They must not have been enrolled at a Texas four-year institution for any semester during the 2021 calendar year.
- They must have completed a 2021-2022 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and must have been eligible for Pell Grants according to the information collected through that form. (FAFSA is the main federal application form for Pell Grants, which are the main form of need-based federal financial assistance.)
- They must have maintained a postsecondary GPA of 2.0 or higher during the 2019-2021 academic years.
- They must have earned at least 24 college-level credits as of the end of summer 2021.

Based on these criteria, a total of 89,834 eligible students were identified. Eligible students were randomly assigned to three evaluation groups:

- **Control group students** (75,868 students) were not offered the Texas Transfer Grant; these students received no communications about the pilot program.
- **“Single-grant” program group students** (11,674 students) were informed in June 2022 that they could receive a fall 2022 grant if they enrolled at a public Texas university for at least nine credits.
- **“Multigrant” program group students** (2,292 students) received the same communications about the fall 2022 grant as single-grant students; in addition, they were informed in November 2022 that they could receive a spring 2023 grant if they enrolled in at least nine credits at a public Texas university for spring 2023.⁸

Table 1 shows characteristics of Texas community college students broadly, as well as characteristics of students in the sample. About 9 percent of Texas community college students were eligible for the grant and thus included in the study sample. Students who met the eligibility criteria were more likely to be female, Hispanic, and Black than the overall population of Texas community college students.⁹

Program Implementation and Student Experience

To receive a transfer grant in either the fall 2022 or spring 2023 semester, program group students needed to file their 2022-2023 FAFSAs and apply to and enroll in a Texas public four-year institution of higher education at least three-quarter time (nine credits) for the relevant semester through the semester census date (the date after which students can no longer add or drop courses).¹⁰ Grants were incorporated into students’ financial aid packages each semester, except in a limited number of instances where students were already receiving other aid to cover their financial needs.¹¹

Communication timing. Students in the single-grant and multigrant program groups were initially notified about the fall 2022 grant offer on June 2, 2022. MDRC and the THECB had hoped to reach students in January so that they would have more time to consider how the grant offer might affect their fall enrollment decisions, but administrative challenges delayed the communications. Between June and mid-September, students were sent a series of eight emails and two hard-copy letters that reminded them of their eligibility. These communications explained the grant offer, described the steps the students would need to take to receive the grant, and included a link students could use to ask the THECB further questions. Both the single-grant and multigrant evaluation groups received the same communications over this period. Control group students received no emails or letters.

Table 1. Student Baseline Characteristics

| Characteristic | Texas Community College Students | Students in the Evaluation | | | | P-Value |
|---|---|----------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------|---------|
| | | All Students | Program Group | Control Group | Difference | |
| Gender (%) | | | | | | |
| Female | 59.3 | 69.3 | 69.3 | 69.3 | 0.0 | 0.993 |
| Male | 40.7 | 30.7 | 30.7 | 30.7 | 0.0 | 0.993 |
| Average age (years) | | 26.64 | 26.57 | 26.66 | -0.08 | 0.250 |
| Age (%) | | | | | | |
| 19 or younger | | 6.0 | 6.2 | 5.9 | 0.2 | 0.294 |
| 20 to 23 | | 42.7 | 42.6 | 42.7 | -0.1 | 0.856 |
| 24 or older | | 51.3 | 51.2 | 51.4 | -0.1 | 0.746 |
| Race/ethnicity (%) | | | | | | |
| Hispanic ^a | 45.7 | 53.3 | 53.3 | 53.3 | 0.0 | 0.987 |
| White | 29.2 | 21.7 | 21.7 | 21.7 | 0.0 | 0.981 |
| Black | 12.6 | 15.1 | 15.1 | 15.1 | 0.0 | 0.978 |
| Asian | 5.6 | 4.3 | 4.3 | 4.3 | 0.0 | 0.936 |
| Multiracial | 2.7 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 0.0 | 0.896 |
| Unknown | 2.3 | 2.7 | 2.7 | 2.7 | 0.0 | 0.821 |
| Another identity ^b | 1.9 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.0 | 0.706 |
| Academic history ^c | | | | | | |
| Postsecondary GPA at random assignment | | 3.12 | 3.12 | 3.12 | -0.01 | 0.310 |
| College-level credits at random assignment | | 49.80 | 50.11 | 49.75 | 0.36 * | 0.074 |
| Number of students | 997,730 | 89,834 | 13,966 | 75,868 | | |

SOURCES: MDRC calculations using deidentified data accessed through the University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System.

NOTES: Rounding may cause small discrepancies in sums and differences.

Calculations shown have been weighted to ensure identical effective (weighted) random assignment ratios across all random assignment blocks and sub-blocks. See the Technical Supplement for more information.

For the table above, statistical significance levels have been indicated by MDRC as *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

^aHispanic students were counted as Hispanic regardless of their race. Non-Hispanic students were counted under the other categories shown.

^b“Another identity” includes students with a race/ethnicity of Pacific Islander, American Indian, or Alaska Native, as well as international students. International students are individuals from other countries who are studying in the United States on student visas.

^cValues shown are based on data available as of the time of random assignment.

Students in the multigrant evaluation group were notified about the spring 2023 grant offer by email on November 1, 2022. Between November and January, multigrant students were sent seven emails and one hard-copy letter about the spring grant. Spring 2023 communications con-

tained information similar to that in the fall 2022 communications. Students in the control and single-grant groups received no emails or letters about the spring 2023 grant offer. Notably, the multigrant group included students who had already transferred to a four-year college in the fall (451 students) as well as students who had not yet transferred to a four-year college (1,841 students). Students who had already transferred would receive a second grant intended to decrease their financial burden and increase their likelihood of persisting in school. Students who had not yet transferred would receive a first grant intended to decrease their financial burden and give them an incentive to transfer to a four-year college.

Figure 2 shows a timeline of the communications with the single-grant and multigrant evaluation groups.

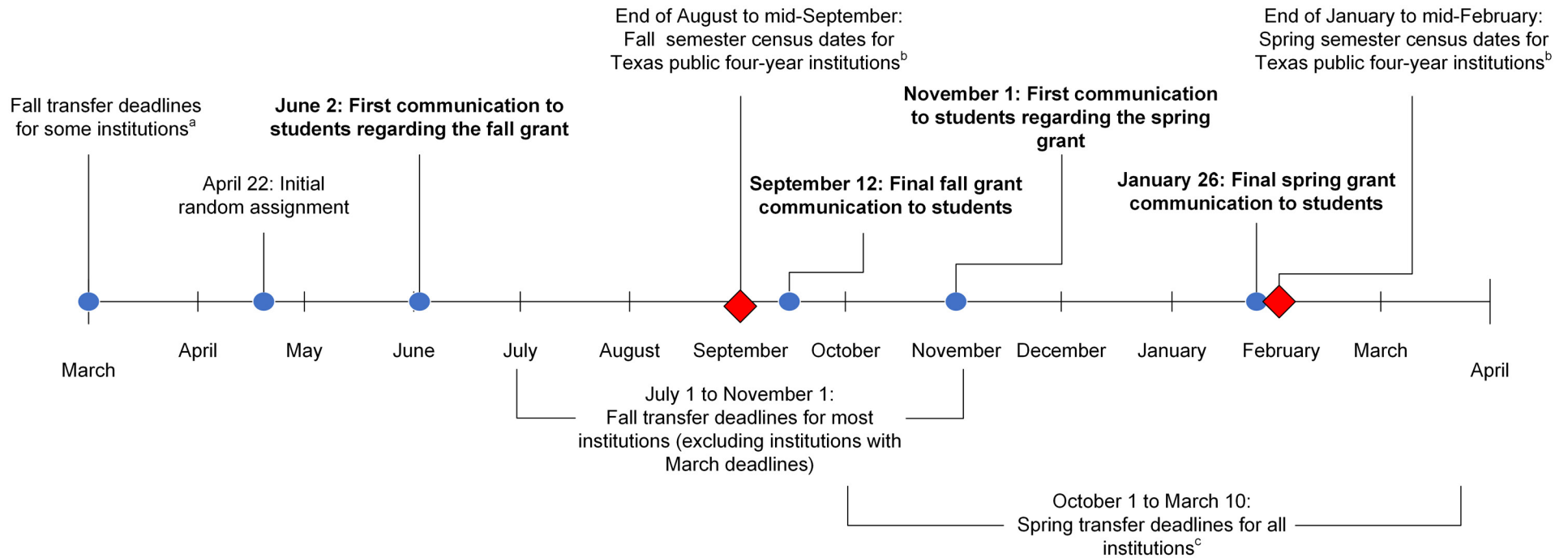
Student experience. The MDRC evaluation team conducted two sets of interviews with students about their experiences with the program. MDRC interviewed 26 program group students about their experience with the fall 2022 grant offer in August and September 2022, and an additional 25 multigrant students about the spring 2023 grant in January, February, and March of 2023. During the interviews, students were asked about their thoughts on program communications, the benefits of the grant offer, and ways the program could be improved.¹²

Both fall and spring interviewees said that the communications clearly laid out the grant amount and associated requirements. One fall interviewee mentioned that the “communications were constant and were a great way to keep students on top of things.” About a third of the fall interviewees reported being initially skeptical about the grant because they either had not heard of the THECB or because they had not applied for the grant and had doubts about unsolicited letters and emails. These students became convinced the grant was real when they spoke with someone at their intended transfer institution or the THECB, or when they saw the grant reflected in their financial aid packages. Spring interviewees reported little to no skepticism about the spring grants, perhaps in some cases because they had received the fall grant. As one student said, “Since it is the second grant, it was straightforward... [there was] no confusion.”

More than half of students interviewed in both fall and spring said that the grant relieved the financial pressures and stresses associated with paying for their education. One spring interviewee said that the grant was “very helpful. I can go to school with ease. How am I [going to] make a [tuition] payment or feed my kids? The grant makes it possible for me to do both.” Another spring interviewee said that the grant “helped me be able to focus on my schoolwork without worrying about finances.” Students mentioned that the grant enabled them to pay for their tuition and books or cover other living expenses while attending school. One student shared that the grant made the fall semester at a public university as affordable as prior semesters enrolled at a two-year college.

Interviews painted a more mixed picture regarding the grants’ effect on students’ transfer and enrollment decisions. About a third of fall interviewees reported that the grant either enabled them to transfer or nudged them to transfer sooner than they would otherwise have done. As one

Figure 2. Texas Transfer Grant Timeline for Fall and Spring Semesters



NOTES: The “census date” is the date past which students can no longer add or drop classes.

^aThe institutions with March transfer deadlines for the fall semester are Texas A&M, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, Texas A&M University-San Antonio, and the University of Texas at Austin.

^bStudents had to be enrolled by this time in the four-year institutions to receive the relevant grant.

^cTexas A&M University and the University of Texas at Austin had October transfer deadlines for the spring semester.

student reflected, the grant “helped me transfer sooner, instead of having to wait a little longer ... because I’ve been looking for a job. Instead of having to wait and put everything on hold, I was able to go ahead and transfer and get started.” In the spring interview cohort, only four students, or 16 percent of students interviewed, said that the spring grant affected their transfer or reenrollment plans for the spring semester. Among spring interviewees who had already transferred before the spring 2023 semester (64 percent of the spring interview sample), most stated that they had planned to reenroll in their universities for the spring regardless of the grant’s availability. For example, one student mentioned having already signed up for classes before learning about the spring grant.

For those students who did not report a change in transfer behavior due to the grant, it still provided other benefits, such as financial relief, decreased work hours, increased enrollment intensity, or reduced amount of loans. For example, a minority of fall and spring interviewees mentioned other benefits of the grant, such as allowing them to work fewer hours and allowing them to enroll in a greater number of credits than they otherwise would have. An analysis of student academic records (below) shows that the program led to more students enrolling in nine or more credits in both the fall and spring semesters, although this picture is complicated by the fact that a portion of the increase was due to students enrolling who would not have enrolled otherwise.

Program Impacts on Academic Outcomes

MDRC analyzed student transcript records for the fall 2022 and spring 2023 semesters to estimate the program’s impact on students’ enrollment, credit accumulation, and GPA.

Table 2 shows the results of these analyses for the fall 2022 semester. In this semester, 15.8 percent of the control group enrolled at four-year institutions, compared with 17.4 percent of the program group — an estimated impact of 1.6 percentage points ($p < 0.0001$), almost exclusively reflecting increased enrollment at four-year public institutions.¹³ Similarly, 29.8 percent of the control group enrolled in nine credits or more at any type of public institution of higher education (not limited to four-year institutions), while 32.1 percent of the program group did — an estimated impact of 2.3 percentage points ($p < 0.0001$). Related program impacts were observed on the average number of credits attempted and earned by program group students: the grant offer led to estimated increases of 0.20 credits attempted and 0.17 credits earned over control group averages of 4.61 and 3.86 credits, respectively (an increase of approximately 4 percent, with $p \leq 0.0001$ for both outcomes). These improved academic outcomes are consistent with fall interviews in which students stated that the grant enabled them to transfer or take more credits than they otherwise would have. There were no discernible differences in student GPAs as a result of the grant. While the program caused students to enroll in four-year institutions at a higher rate and take heavier course loads, it did not meaningfully change their overall grades. There was also no discernible impact on the percentage of students who earned credentials at Texas public two-year institutions — that is, the grant program did not lead students to forgo obtaining degrees or certificates in order to transfer.

Table 2. Fall 2022 Student Academic Outcomes

| Outcome | Control Group | Program Group | Estimated Impact | P-Value | Standard Error |
|---|---------------|---------------|------------------|---------|----------------|
| Enrollment rate (%) | | | | | |
| Any four-year institution ^a | 15.8 | 17.4 | 1.6 *** | 0.000 | 0.344 |
| Public four-year institution | 15.2 | 16.6 | 1.5 *** | 0.000 | 0.338 |
| Private four-year institution | 0.6 | 0.7 | 0.1 | 0.187 | 0.077 |
| Public two-year institution | 35.0 | 35.0 | -0.1 | 0.891 | 0.432 |
| Private two-year institution | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.809 | 0.008 |
| Enrolled in 9+ credits, any institution (%) | 29.8 | 32.1 | 2.3 *** | 0.000 | 0.423 |
| Credits attempted | 4.61 | 4.81 | 0.20 *** | 0.000 | 0.050 |
| Credits earned | 3.86 | 4.03 | 0.17 *** | 0.000 | 0.046 |
| Grade point average (GPA) ^b | 2.86 | 2.84 | -0.02 | 0.171 | 0.014 |
| Degree attainment, public two-year (%) | 7.6 | 7.7 | 0.1 | 0.578 | 0.244 |
| Number of students (total = 89,832) | 75,866 | 13,966 | | | |

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using deidentified data accessed through the University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center.

NOTES: Rounding may cause small discrepancies in sums and differences.

Calculations shown have been weighted to ensure identical effective (weighted) random assignment ratios across all random assignment blocks and subblocks. See the Technical Supplement for more information.

For the table above, statistical significance levels have been indicated by MDRC as *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Estimates are adjusted by students' race/ethnicity and gender, as well as their age, GPA, and number of college-level credits accumulated at the time of their selection for the evaluation.

Age was not available for two students in the evaluation sample; they are excluded from the numbers above.

Credit-related outcomes do not include credits attempted or earned at private institutions.

^aThe confirmatory outcome is the students' rate of enrollment at any Texas four-year university.

^bGPA is calculated only among students who were enrolled for the relevant semester.

Table 3 shows the results of the analyses for the spring 2023 semester. In this semester, the multigrant group was offered an additional transfer grant that was not offered to the other evaluation groups. As a result, estimates of program impacts for the multigrant group were expected to be and tend to be larger than those for the single-grant group. In the spring semester, 17.4 percent of the control group enrolled at four-year institutions; the single-grant group enrolled at a rate 1.1 percentage points higher ($p < 0.01$) and the multigrant group enrolled at a rate 3.2 percentage points higher ($p < 0.0001$). These increases in enrollment were primarily due to students who had enrolled at a four-year institution in the fall 2022 semester continuing to remain enrolled in the spring 2023 semester. Similar evidence of program impacts was observed for the proportion of students who enrolled in at least nine credits for the semester: compared with a control group average of 24.7 percent, the data showed an estimated 0.9 percentage point ($p < 0.05$) impact for the single-grant group, and an estimated 3.4 percentage point ($p < 0.01$) impact for the multigrant

Table 3. Spring 2023 Student Academic Outcomes, for Single-Grant and Multigrant Groups

| Outcome | Control Group | Single-Grant Group | | | Multigrant Group | | |
|--|---------------|--------------------|------------------|----------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| | | Value | Estimated Impact | Standard Error | Value | Estimated Impact | Standard Error |
| Enrollment rate (%) | | | | | | | |
| Any four-year institution ^a | 17.4 | 18.5 | 1.1*** | 0.383 | 20.6 | 3.2*** | 0.829 |
| Public four-year institution | 16.6 | 17.7 | 1.1*** | 0.377 | 19.6 | 3.0*** | 0.813 |
| Private four-year institution | 0.8 | 0.8 | 0.0 | 0.089 | 1.0 | 0.2 | 0.209 |
| Public two-year institution | 25.4 | 25.2 | -0.2 | 0.427 | 24.5 | -0.9 | 0.907 |
| Private two-year institution | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.002 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.002 |
| New or continuing four-year enrollment (%) | | | | | | | |
| New (no four-year enrollment in fall 2022) | 3.7 | 3.5 | -0.2 | 0.182 | 4.1 | 0.4 | 0.422 |
| Continuing (four-year enrollment in fall 2022) | 13.7 | 15.1 | 1.4*** | 0.353 | 16.5 | 2.8*** | 0.756 |
| Enrolled in 9+ credits, any institution (%) | 24.7 | 25.6 | 0.9** | 0.429 | 28.1 | 3.4*** | 0.934 |
| Credits attempted | 3.92 | 4.06 | 0.14** | 0.055 | 4.24 | 0.32*** | 0.119 |
| Credits earned | 3.37 | 3.44 | 0.07 | 0.052 | 3.56 | 0.19* | 0.111 |
| Grade point average (GPA) ^b | 2.93 | 2.91 | -0.01 | 0.016 | 2.89 | -0.04 | 0.035 |
| Number of students (total = 89,832) | 75,866 | 11,674 | | | 2,292 | | |

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using deidentified data accessed through the University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center.

NOTES: Rounding may cause small discrepancies in sums and differences.

Calculations shown have been weighted to ensure identical effective (weighted) random assignment ratios across all random assignment blocks and subblocks. See the Technical Supplement for more information.

For the table above, statistical significance levels have been indicated by MDRC as *** = 1 percent; ** = 5 percent; * = 10 percent.

Estimates are adjusted by students' race/ethnicity and gender, as well as their age, GPA, and number of college-level credits accumulated at the time of their selection for the evaluation.

Age was not available for two students in the evaluation sample; they are excluded from the numbers above.

Credit-related outcomes do not include credits attempted or earned at private institutions.

^aThe confirmatory outcome is the students' rate of enrollment at any Texas four-year university.

^bGPA is calculated only among students who were enrolled for the relevant semester.

group. More limited evidence of impacts was observed for the number of credits attempted and earned: compared with a control group average of 3.92 credits attempted and 3.37 credits earned, the single-grant group attempted 0.14 credits more ($p < 0.05$) and earned 0.07 credits more ($p = 0.15$), and the multigrant group attempted 0.32 credits more ($p < 0.01$) and earned 0.19 credits more ($p < 0.10$). Impacts on cumulative credits attempted and earned over the fall 2022 and spring 2023 semesters combined were 0.33 credits attempted ($p < 0.01$) and 0.24 credits earned ($p < 0.01$) for the single-grant group, and 0.56 credits attempted ($p < 0.01$) and 0.40 credits earned ($p < 0.05$) for the multigrant group.

Neither the single-grant or multigrant program had discernable impacts on spring 2023 GPAs or the percentages of students who earned credentials at Texas public two-year institutions. Like the fall 2022 results, this lack of impact suggests that the transfer grant did not lead students to forgo obtaining credentials from their two-year institutions in order to transfer.

A comparison of spring 2023 academic outcomes for single-grant and multigrant students confirms that the multigrant program was more effective than the single-grant program. Multigrant students were even more likely to enroll at four-year institutions and enroll in at least nine credits than students in the single-grant program. The magnitude of these impact estimates were 2.1 percentage points ($p < 0.05$) and 2.5 percentage points ($p < 0.05$), respectively.

MDRC also conducted subgroup analyses to explore whether the program's impacts on enrollment at four-year institutions and credit accumulation were larger for certain types of students. Subgroup analyses were conducted for the fall 2022 and spring 2023 semesters for subgroups defined based on students' gender, race and ethnicity, age at the time of random assignment, college credits accumulated at the time of random assignment, and postsecondary GPA at the time of random assignment. In addition, a subgroup analysis was conducted based on the community college that students had most recently enrolled at before random assignment, to assess the extent to which program impacts may have varied depending on students' starting institutions.¹⁴ These analyses did not show clear, consistent evidence of discernable differences in effectiveness for any of these subgroups.¹⁵ For more information on these analyses, see the technical supplement.

Conclusion

The Texas Transfer Grant Pilot Program offered \$5,000 grants to reduce the financial barriers confronting students contemplating transferring from a two-year to a four-year institution. The program increased the proportion of students who enrolled at a Texas four-year institution for the fall 2022 semester by 1.6 percentage points, or 10 percent over a control group enrollment rate of 15.8 percent. Receiving an additional offer of a spring 2023 grant further increased students' spring 2023 enrollment rate at Texas four-year institutions to an average of 20.6 percent, 3.2 percentage points over a control group average of 17.4 percent, or a roughly 18 percent improvement. It is noteworthy that receiving multiple grant offers did not merely sustain fall 2022 impacts into the spring 2023 semester, it actually increased them, which suggests that some program benefits were only realized through sustained, multisemester financial aid for students.

Many students who were interviewed about their experiences with the grant program stated that the grant offers helped them transfer to or reenroll at a four-year institution. Some students also reflected that the grant helped enable them to take more credits than they otherwise would have. Students also pointed to other benefits of the grant — such as reduced financial anxiety and reduced need to work while in school — that extended to many grant recipients, regardless of whether the grant offer persuaded them to transfer or not.

The grant program is aligned with other policy incentives designed to encourage transfer between public two-year and four-year institutions in Texas through the new state funding formula. Texas community colleges can receive state funding through a model that rewards transfer outcomes such as students earning at least 15 semester credit hours and transferring to a Texas public university.¹⁶ The Texas Transfer Grant also complements other statewide grant programs for students with financial need, such as the Texas Educational Opportunity Grant Program, which provides grant aid to students enrolled in Texas public two-year institutions, and the Toward Excellence, Access, and Success Grant Program, which provides grant aid to students who are enrolled in Texas public four-year institutions.¹⁷

Going forward, the THECB plans to revise the administration of the Texas Transfer Grant program. Under the potential new approach universities will administer the grants, rather than the THECB doing so. Receiving messages from Texas universities (which are relatively well-known and visible to students) rather than a state agency such as the THECB (which is less well-known) may help address some students' skepticism about the grant program. Involving universities in the administration of the program may also result in better alignment between the program schedule and universities' enrollment, census, and transfer deadlines — during the pilot program, some universities' transfer and reenrollment deadlines had already passed before grant offers were communicated to students, denying students the opportunity to adjust their enrollment decisions for those institutions in response to the grant offer.

On the other hand, a decentralized approach to program administration may create opportunities for confusion. Depending on how different universities choose to communicate to students about the program, students may receive multiple or conflicting messages about the program and its implementation. The THECB or other state agencies or associations could play a role in coordinating efforts across universities and disseminating lessons learned from different ways of implementing the program at different four-year institutions, even as a greater responsibility for program administration shifts to Texas universities.

The findings from this evaluation make clear that the Texas Transfer Grant program helps some students make the leap from a two-year to a four-year public institution. Students' reflections in qualitative interviews support these findings and, furthermore, suggest that sustaining the Transfer Grant program into the future may provide opportunities to improve the efficacy of the grant.¹⁸ The THECB's plan to sustain the Texas Transfer Grant program represents a meaningful investment in Texas students' academic success, similar to Texas' other statewide grant programs such as those mentioned above, but with a greater emphasis on supporting college completion for Texas community college students pursuing a four-year degree.¹⁹

Notes and References

- 1 Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, *2021 Texas Public Higher Education Almanac* (Austin, TX: Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2021).
- 2 Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2021).
- 3 The GEER Fund was established in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) for the purpose of providing educational entities with emergency assistance in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, “Frequently Asked Questions about the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER Fund)” (website: <https://oese.ed.gov/files/2020/10/FAQs-GEER-Fund.pdf>, n.d., accessed February 6, 2024).
- 4 John Diamond, Rebekah O’Donoghue, Erick Alonzo, and Sukanya Barman, “Texas Takes on Transfer Grants: Interim Impacts of the Texas Transfer Grant Pilot Program on Student Transfer” (New York: MDRC, 2023). The p-value indicates the likelihood that the estimated impact (or a larger one) could have been generated by chance by an intervention with zero true effect. In social science evaluations, p-values of less than 0.05 are generally considered an indication that it is unlikely that the impact could have been generated by chance. A p-value of 0.0001 would be considered an indication that such a scenario is highly unlikely.
- 5 In an impact evaluation, confirmatory outcomes generally relate to the main questions addressed by the evaluation. Exploratory outcomes are typically not directly connected to the main questions and may be less likely to show an effect, but are still of interest for future work. Both confirmatory and exploratory outcomes are selected before the evaluation begins.

The intention in offering the grant was to give students incentives to transfer to Texas four-year public institutions, with the assumption that, absent the grant, many students might not have transferred at all. Private institutions have been included in the analysis to determine whether the grant also led students to attend public rather than private four-year institutions.
- 6 Securing a credential before transferring to a four-year institution safeguards against the potential pitfall of later leaving higher education without any credential.
- 7 The THECB and MDRC’s analysis of historical Texas student data and determination of student program eligibility proceeded using deidentified student data (that is, student data stripped of personally identifiable information) securely accessed through the University of Texas at Austin Education Research Center. Each criterion listed above was based on the most current data available at the time eligibility was determined.
- 8 Random assignment occurred in two phases. In April 2022, students were randomly assigned to either receive a fall 2022 grant offer (13,966 students) or not (75,868 students). In October 2022, the THECB confirmed that sufficient program funds were available to offer a subset of students an additional spring 2023 grant. At that point, the students who had previously received a fall 2022 grant were further randomized into the single-grant group (11,674 students) and multigrant group (2,292 students).
- 9 This demographic breakdown aligns with THECB’s strategic plan, *Building a Talent Strong Texas*, which explains that “Over the past decade, 95% of our state’s population growth was in communities of color. If we do not advance our higher education goals equitably, we can’t achieve them.” Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, “Building a Talent Strong Texas” (website: <https://www.highered.texas.gov/our-work/talent-strong-texas/>, n.d., accessed January 19, 2024).
- 10 Having students file a FAFSA enabled Texas institutions of higher education to package the grant with the rest of students’ financial aid.

Because data on spring and summer 2022 enrollment were not available when student eligibility for the program was determined, eligibility was determined using earlier enrollment data. As a result, 7.1 percent of students who were offered a fall 2022 grant had already enrolled at a Texas public four-year institution in advance of the fall 2022 semester. These students were eligible to receive a fall 2022 grant simply for reenrolling at their institutions.

- 11 A total of 1,978 students received the Texas Transfer Grant in the fall 2022 semester, while 409 students received the grant in the spring 2023 semester. Comparing the list of students who received the grant with academic records reveals about 200 cases where program group students failed to receive a grant even though they appeared to meet the criteria to do so. These cases occurred in both the fall 2022 and spring 2023 semesters; in each semester, they represent about 1.0 percent to 1.5 percent of the students who were offered a grant in that semester. Consultation with the THECB revealed that these cases may have occurred because either (1) students were already receiving other financial aid to cover their financial need and the grant could not be incorporated into their aid package or (2) the THECB's payments to four-year institutions (which had to be coordinated and administered in advance of students' current transfer) were initially insufficient to cover the eventual number of grantees at that institution. In the latter situation, the THECB worked with university administrators to provide additional aid to grantees, but some grantees dropped out of their universities before the additional aid could be disbursed. Comparing the list of grant recipients with academic records also revealed approximately 100 cases in which a program group student received a grant despite not appearing to have met the criteria to do so. The cause of these cases is unclear.
- 12 For each round of interviews, students were offered an electronic gift card as an incentive for participating in an interview. MDRC emailed 800 randomly selected students an invitation to participate in an interview in order to identify 25 students who were willing to be interviewed. Interviewees may not be representative of all students who received grant offers. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to infer that many of the experiences described by interviewees, particularly those experiences described by multiple interviewees, were shared by noninterviewed students as well.
- 13 These results were similar for both single-grant and multigrant students — because multigrant students were not offered the spring 2023 grant until November, the offer of that grant would not be expected to lead to changes in their fall-semester academic performance. Of the single-grant group, 17.2 percent enrolled at a four-year institution in fall 2022, compared with 18.2 percent of the multigrant group. Students' fall 2022 enrollment at all institutions except for one were finalized by October (and enrollment decisions for the final institution were finalized by November 1). Because spring 2023 grant offers were not extended until November, there is no clear mechanism by which the spring 2023 grant offer could have influenced students' fall 2022 enrollment. Statistical analysis confirms that this difference in enrollment rates could plausibly have arisen due to chance ($p > 0.20$). As shown in the technical supplement to this brief, students in both the single-grant and multigrant groups were similar with respect to their demographic and academic characteristics at the time of initial random assignment into the evaluation.
- 14 Impacts could vary among “sending” institutions for a variety of reasons, including the facts that colleges vary in the populations they serve, their proximity to public four-year colleges, their contexts, etc.
- 15 Women were significantly more likely to experience positive impacts on credits earned due to the grant in the fall 2022 semester, but these differences in impacts did not extend to enrollment outcomes or persist into the spring 2023 semester.

- 16 Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, “Formula Funding” (website: <https://www.highered.texas.gov/our-work/supporting-our-institutions/community-college-finance/formula-funding/>, n.d., accessed January 8, 2024).
- 17 Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, “Grant & Loan Programs” (website: <https://www.highered.texas.gov/our-work/supporting-our-institutions/student-financial-aid-programs/program-resources/grant-loan-programs/>, n.d., accessed February 6, 2024).
- 18 The program cost per student persuaded to enroll at a four-year institution was substantially lower in the spring 2023 semester than the fall 2022 semester. Total fall 2022 program expenditures were \$9.8 million, yielding an average cost of approximately \$700 per student offered the grant (\$9.8 million divided among 13,966 students in the program group). The grant persuaded an estimated additional 223 students to enroll at a four-year institution for the fall (1.6 percent of the program group), meaning that the average cost per student enrollment was approximately \$44,000 per student persuaded to enroll at a four-year institution – that is, \$9.8 million divided by 223. (In an earlier publication for this evaluation, fall impacts on enrollment were estimated to be 1.5 percentage points, yielding an estimated cost of approximately \$47,000 per student persuaded to enroll at a four-year institution. This brief presents updated values using more complete data.) Total spring 2023 program expenditures were approximately \$2 million, meaning an average cost of approximately \$870 per student offered the grant (\$2 million divided among 2,292 students in the multigrant group.) The spring 2023 grant persuaded an estimated additional 73 students to enroll at a four-year institution (3.2 percent of the multigrant group), meaning that the average cost per four-year enrollment for spring was about \$27,400 – that is, \$2 million divided by 73.

The authors of this brief have not identified causal evaluations of programs designed to increase transfer rates among community college students that would support an analysis of the Texas Transfer Grant’s relative cost-effectiveness. To put programs’ impacts into better context in the future, MDRC hopes to further investigate creating cost-effectiveness (impact per dollar spent) benchmarks through The Higher Education Randomized Controlled Trial project, or THE-RCT. For more information, see Michael J. Weiss, Marie-Andrée Somers, and Colin Hill, “Empirical Benchmarks for Planning and Interpreting Causal Effects of Community College Interventions,” *Journal of Postsecondary Student Success* 3, 1 (2023): 14–59, https://doi.org/10.33009/fsop_ipss132759.
- 19 THECB’s strategic plan, Building a Talent Strong Texas, underscores Texas’s focus on improving college completion rates. See Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, “Building a Talent Strong Texas” (n.d.).

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