

**Enhancing Student Services  
at Lorain County Community College  
Early Results from the Opening Doors Demonstration  
in Ohio**

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## Overview

Community colleges enroll nearly half of all higher education students nationwide; with relatively low tuition and open admissions policies, they are a vital pathway to better jobs and higher earnings for many individuals. Unfortunately, only about a third of those who entered a community college in 1995-1996 had earned a degree or certificate six years later. Students who are juggling school, work, and family obligations face substantial challenges in completing their education, and inadequate student support services and insufficient financial aid can impede their progress. In 2003, MDRC and a consortium of funders launched the Opening Doors demonstration to test reforms in six community colleges aimed at helping students stay in school and earn credentials.

This report presents early results from the Opening Doors program at Lorain County Community College in Elyria, Ohio, outside Cleveland. The program, which operated from 2003 to 2006, provided enhanced student services and a modest scholarship to participating students for two semesters. Students were assigned to one of a team of advisers, with whom they were expected to meet frequently to discuss academic progress and issues that might affect their schooling. Students also sometimes met with other advisers on the team and a designated contact in the financial aid office. Each adviser worked with no more than 110 students. In contrast, other students at Lorain had access to advising staff as needed at a walk-in center, which employed one adviser for roughly every 1,000 students. Students in the Opening Doors program received a \$150 scholarship each semester (for a total of \$300), which was paid after required advising sessions. Lorain targeted its program to students whose family income was below 250 percent of the federal poverty level, and who were either incoming freshmen or had completed less than 13 credits and had a history of academic difficulties. Most of the participants were mothers, about half were employed, and their average age was 25 when they entered the study.

MDRC is evaluating Lorain's program using a random assignment research design. Students were assigned in a lottery-like process either to a program group that received Opening Doors services or to a control group that received Lorain's standard services. Analysis of transcript data for students who entered the study during its first year — about half the full research sample — shows that:

- **Lorain's Opening Doors program gave students a boost while they received services.** Students in the program group were more likely than students in the control group to reenroll in college after one semester. They also registered for and earned more credits.
- **The boost ended when the program's services ended.** In the semester after the program ended, academic outcomes for the two research groups were similar.
- **However, the positive effects on enrollment during the program gave Opening Doors students a small advantage overall.** Results summarizing outcomes for students' first three semesters in the study show a small increase in the number of semesters enrolled for the program group. There was no difference, however, between the two groups in total credits earned.

While it is too soon to draw final conclusions, Lorain's early results show that the program improved students' short-term outcomes but does not yet appear to have had a significant lasting effect. Future reports will present results for the full research sample on a wider array of measures, including degree completion, transfer, employment, and well-being.



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## Preface

With their open admissions policies, convenient locations, and low tuition, community colleges are accessible to millions of adults who might otherwise lack the preparation or the means to pursue higher education. For low-income people, in particular, community colleges offer an important pathway out of poverty and into better jobs. Yet only a third of students who begin their studies at a community college earn a degree within six years.

The Opening Doors demonstration is attempting to make a difference. MDRC is working with six pioneering community colleges that are testing innovative programs — including improved curricula and instruction, enhanced student services, and financial aid supplements — designed to help students persist in school and earn a credential.

This report presents early results from the Opening Doors program at Lorain County Community College in Elyria, Ohio. The program provided intensive advising and counseling services and a modest scholarship to participating students for two semesters. Lorain targeted its program to students whose family income was below 250 percent of the federal poverty level, and who were either incoming freshmen or had completed fewer than 13 credits and had some academic difficulties. Many of the participants were single mothers who were balancing family responsibilities with school and, often, with work.

MDRC has analyzed transcripts for students who entered the study during its first year — about half the full sample. We found that during the second Opening Doors semester, students in the program group were more likely than those in a control group, who received the college's standard services, to reenroll in college and to register for and earn more credits. In the semester after the program ended, however, outcomes on enrollment and course registration for the two research groups were similar.

While it is too soon to draw final conclusions, Lorain's early results show that the program improved students' short-term outcomes but did not yet appear to have had a significant lasting effect. MDRC found similar results at Owens Community College in Toledo, Ohio, whose Opening Doors program was structured like Lorain's. A separate report about the program at Owens is available.

It is possible that for Lorain's Opening Doors intervention to be more successful, it needed to last longer than two semesters. It is also possible that the differences between the services that the program group and the control group received were not substantial enough to produce large, long-term effects. Our next report will present results for the full research sample, and will indicate how students fared after the program ended in their rates of degree completion and transfer, as well as their employment, engagement in school, civic participation, and health.

Gordon L. Berlin  
President



## Acknowledgments

The Opening Doors demonstration has been possible only with the support and work of many organizations and individuals. The demonstration is supported by a number of foundations and government agencies, which are listed at the front of this report. We are grateful for their generous backing and ongoing commitment. We owe special thanks to the funders that focused in particular on the demonstration at Lorain County Community College: The George Gund Foundation, The Joyce Foundation, and KnowledgeWorks Foundation.

We are also grateful to the administrators and staff at Lorain who enthusiastically rose to the challenge of developing and running a new program and participating in a complex research project. They have been terrific partners over the years. Space does not permit us to name everyone who has played a role in Opening Doors, but we would like to particularly acknowledge some individuals. President Roy Church actively supported the project from its inception and provided crucial leadership. Judith Crocker, Mary Murphy, and Joe Freconna worked closely with MDRC to develop the program model and fit the study's research procedures into Lorain's operations, all within a tight time frame. Judith has continued to work with MDRC throughout the project, providing valuable support and assistance.

Ray Kneisel, the Opening Doors Coordinator, managed the implementation of the program and supervised the program's staff, and has worked closely with MDRC throughout the study. He and the other Opening Doors advisers — Carrie Delaney, Maureen Hess, Eddie Henson, and Pat Zolman — brought the program model to life, assisting students on a daily basis. They, along with Mary Szabados and Theresa Booth, also devoted a lot of time and effort to recruit students for the study. We appreciate the Lorain team's willingness to participate in various activities related to the study, including interviews with MDRC staff during numerous campus visits. We thank them and Judith Crocker for their review of an earlier draft of this report. Finally, we appreciate the help of Lu Phillips, who provided the student transcript data to MDRC, and Diana Smarsh, who provided the data on the Opening Doors scholarship payments.

Many MDRC staff have contributed to Opening Doors and to this report. Robert Ivry developed the demonstration, helped design the Lorain program, and provided guidance on the study and on this report. Thomas Brock has led the evaluation of the Opening Doors programs, helped set up the demonstration at Lorain, and advised us on this report. Two former MDRC employees played central roles in the study at Lorain. Melissa Wavelet worked closely with the college's administrators to design the program and offered guidance to help them deliver services to students as intended. Janelle Sagness worked closely with Melissa and one of this report's authors on all aspects of the demonstration in Lorain. Colleen Sommo oversaw the collection and analysis of the quantitative data used in this report, Lashawn Richburg-Hayes gave

advice on the analysis of the program's effects, and Jed Teres programmed the Opening Doors scholarship data. All the current MDRC staff mentioned, along with Gordon Berlin, John Hutchins, and Margaret Bald, reviewed earlier drafts of this report and provided helpful comments. Leo Yan assisted in the production of the report and conducted fact-checking. Joel Gordon, Galina Farberova, and Shirley James and her staff developed and monitored the random assignment and baseline data collection process. Margaret Bald edited the report, and Stephanie Cowell prepared it for publication.

Finally, we would like to thank the hundreds of students who participated in the study at Lorain, and, in particular, those who answered surveys or participated in interviews. All were low-income students striving to get an education, most while juggling work and family responsibilities. We hope that the findings from Lorain and the other sites in Opening Doors will be used to improve college programs and services for them and others in the future.

The Authors

## Introduction

Community colleges play a vital role in American postsecondary education. They enroll nearly half of all college students nationwide and, because of their open admissions policies and low cost relative to most four-year institutions, are accessible to millions of adults who might otherwise lack the preparation or financial means to pursue higher education. Unfortunately, this open access does not always translate into academic success. A national study found that only a third of students who began at community colleges had obtained a degree within six years.<sup>1</sup> Research by MDRC and others suggests that many community college students want to earn a degree, but are stymied by the competing demands of work, family, and school. Institutional barriers, such as poorly tailored instruction, insufficient financial aid, or inadequate advising, can also impede students' academic progress.<sup>2</sup>

MDRC launched the Opening Doors demonstration in 2003 to study the effects of community college programs designed to help students persist in school and achieve greater academic and personal success. Six community colleges in four states are taking part in the demonstration: Lorain County Community College (the subject of this report) and Owens Community College in Ohio; Chaffey College in California; Delgado Community College and Louisiana Technical College-West Jefferson in Louisiana; and Kingsborough Community College in New York. Each college implemented an Opening Doors program that involved some combination of expanded support services for students, increased financial aid, and reforms in curriculum and instruction. (See Table 1 for a summary of each program.) MDRC is managing the initiative and, with a group of scholars affiliated with the MacArthur Foundation-funded Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood,<sup>3</sup> is conducting an evaluation to determine whether the Opening Doors programs affect students' abilities to complete more courses, earn better grades, and obtain college certificates and degrees. The evaluation is also examining the effects of the enhancements on students' employment, earnings, health, and other measures of personal and social well-being.

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<sup>1</sup>U.S. Department of Education (2002).

<sup>2</sup>Brock and LeBlanc (2005).

<sup>3</sup>Members of the Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood are Gordon L. Berlin (MDRC), Mark Courtney (University of Chicago), Sheldon Danziger (University of Michigan), Connie A. Flanagan (Pennsylvania State University), Frank F. Furstenberg (University of Pennsylvania), Vonnie C. McLoyd (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), Wayne Osgood (Pennsylvania State University), Jean E. Rhodes (University of Massachusetts, Boston), Cecilia E. Rouse (Princeton University), Rubén G. Rumbaut (University of California, Irvine), Richard Settersten (Oregon State University), and Mary C. Waters (Harvard University). Christina Paxton of Princeton University is leading the evaluation component focused on health outcomes.

## The Opening Doors Demonstration

**Table 1**

### Opening Doors Programs and Target Groups

<b>Site</b>	<b>Brief Program Description</b>	<b>Target Group</b>
<b>Chaffey College</b> Rancho Cucamonga, California	<b>College Survival Skills and Enhanced Student Services:</b> Students took a two-semester guidance course that provided instructional support as well as advising; students were required to visit the college's Success Centers, which provided extra academic support.	Students ages 18-34 on academic probation who earned fewer than 35 credits and who either had a cumulative grade point average below 2.0 (C) or who did not complete at least half the courses in which they enrolled
<b>Delgado Community College and Louisiana Technical College-West Jefferson</b> New Orleans area, Louisiana	<b>A Scholarship Predicated on Academic Performance:</b> Students eligible for \$1,000 scholarship for each of two semesters; scholarship tied to maintaining at least half-time enrollment and a grade point average of 2.0 (C).	Parents ages 18-34 whose family income was below 200 percent of the federal poverty level
<b>Kingsborough Community College</b> Brooklyn, New York	<b>Learning Communities and a Book Voucher:</b> Groups of students took three linked credit courses together; students received enhanced advising and tutoring and vouchers to pay for textbooks.	Incoming freshmen ages 17-34 who planned to attend college full time
<b>Lorain County Community College</b> Elyria, Ohio	<b>Enhanced Student Services and a Modest Scholarship:</b> Students assigned to an Opening Doors adviser with a small caseload with whom they were expected to meet frequently; students had access to designated contact in financial aid office; students eligible for \$150 scholarship for each of two semesters, paid after mandatory meetings with adviser.	Students ages 18-34 whose family income was below 250 percent of the federal poverty level and who were either incoming freshmen or who had completed fewer than 13 credits and had a history of academic difficulties
<b>Owens Community College</b> Toledo, Ohio	<b>Enhanced Student Services and a Modest Scholarship:</b> Students assigned to an Opening Doors adviser with a small caseload with whom they were expected to meet frequently; students had access to designated contact in financial aid office; students eligible for free one-on-one tutoring; students eligible for \$150 scholarship for each of two semesters, paid after mandatory meetings with adviser.	Students ages 18-34 whose family income was below 250 percent of the federal poverty level and who were either incoming freshmen or who had completed fewer than 13 credits and had a history of academic difficulties

SOURCE: MDRC field research data.

To measure the programs' effects, the evaluation is using an experimental research design similar to that used in trials of new medications or therapies. At each participating college, students who agreed to take part in the study were randomly assigned to a program group that received enhanced Opening Doors services or to a control group that received the college's standard services. Both groups will be tracked over time to find out whether the enhanced services result in better outcomes for students. Random assignment ensures that the motivation levels and personal characteristics of students in the program and control groups were the same at the beginning of the study; hence, any subsequent differences in educational or other outcomes can be attributed with a high level of confidence to Opening Doors.

This is the third in a series of reports that presents preliminary findings from the sites in the study, based on a portion of the research sample. The first two in the series discussed the very promising early findings from the studies at Kingsborough Community College and the participating colleges in Louisiana.<sup>4</sup> This report presents preliminary findings from a program that targeted low-income students at Lorain County Community College in Elyria, Ohio. Lorain's Opening Doors program, which operated from fall 2003 through spring 2006, provided students with enhanced student support services and a modest scholarship for two semesters. Participating students were assigned to one of a team of Opening Doors advisers, with whom they were expected to meet frequently to discuss academic progress and resolve any issues that might affect their schooling. Students also could and sometimes did meet with other advisers on the team. Each adviser worked with far fewer students than the regular college advisers, which allowed for frequent, intensive contact. Participating students were also eligible for a \$150 scholarship during each program semester, for a total of \$300. Students in the study's control group received the standard student services at Lorain and did not receive the special scholarship.<sup>5</sup>

The rest of this report focuses on the implementation and early effects of the Opening Doors program at Lorain. The second section of the report provides some background on the study, and the third section provides some information about the college, the target population and research sample, and the program's operation. The concluding section presents preliminary findings on the effects of Lorain's Opening Doors program on measures of student performance and persistence, based on student transcript data for about half of the research sample.

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<sup>4</sup>The Kingsborough results are presented in Bloom and Sommo (2005) and the Louisiana results are presented in Brock and Richburg-Hayes (2006). A report on the program at Owens Community College in Ohio is being published simultaneously with this report (Scrivener and Pih, 2007). A report on the results from Chaffey College in California will appear later in 2007.

<sup>5</sup>Lorain called its program Opening Doors Enhanced Services (ODES).

## Background on the Study at Lorain County Community College

Researchers have been working for years to understand the factors that lead community college students to stay in or leave school. Much of the early research focused on the background and personal characteristics of students and their families, such as gender, race and ethnicity, high school performance, parental education, and family income. For example, Gates and Creamer used the National Longitudinal Survey of the High School Class of 1972 to examine student retention in community colleges, and built a predictive model that focused on students' backgrounds and personal characteristics — such as high school grades and the decision to delay college entry — as explanatory factors. That model explained just 4.3 percent of the observed variation in community college retention,<sup>6</sup> highlighting the need for broader theoretical frameworks for understanding student persistence in and completion of community college.

Tinto developed a theory that shifted the focus from students' background characteristics to their experiences after arriving on campus.<sup>7</sup> He argued that students are more likely to stay in school and perform well when they feel fully integrated into the college experience, both socially and academically. Such integration occurs when students have regular, meaningful interactions with faculty, staff, and fellow students, both in the classroom and in less formal settings. Recently, Braxton and other scholars have reassessed Tinto's theory and attempted to delve more deeply into the processes through which student commitment to completing higher education increases via integration into the academic and social communities of the college or university.<sup>8</sup> These efforts place greater emphasis on cultural and organizational explanations for student persistence and success, and highlight the role that colleges themselves can play in fostering student persistence and program completion.

Guided, in part, by this body of research, MDRC developed the Opening Doors demonstration. After an extensive reconnaissance phase, which included a series of focus groups with current, former, and potential students at six community colleges, MDRC chose to focus on three strategies: enhanced student support services, increased financial aid, and curricular and instructional reforms.<sup>9</sup>

Most, if not all, community colleges offer at least some student support services, but the nature and levels of funding for these services vary widely by state and institution. In his research on one of the most common set of student support services offered at community colleges — academic guidance and counseling — Grubb found that most states did not earmark monies specifi-

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<sup>6</sup>Gates and Creamer (1984).

<sup>7</sup>Tinto (1993).

<sup>8</sup>Braxton (2002).

<sup>9</sup>See Matus-Grossman and Gooden (2002) for a discussion of the focus group study.



cally for these services; rather the colleges mainly funded them from their general revenues.<sup>10</sup> He observed that, “like other services that do not directly generate enrollments and therefore revenues, guidance and counseling have often been relatively peripheral to community colleges.”<sup>11</sup>

Even though academic guidance and counseling is arguably the most important student service, most community college students receive minimal help. Nationally, the average community college employs one adviser for approximately every 1,000 students.<sup>12</sup> While colleges differ in how their advisers deliver services and the topics they cover, the necessity of working with many students tends to drive advisers toward a traditional problem-solving approach in which a student presents an issue and the adviser offers a quick response. The National Academic Advising Association urges community colleges and four-year colleges and universities to provide sufficient staffing so that students and advisers can have ongoing, interactive relationships, and to adopt a developmental approach whereby advisers help students clarify personal goals and objectives, rather than simply approving their choice of courses.<sup>13</sup> The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) suggests that the availability of supports for learners, such as academic advising, leads to higher levels of student engagement. CCSSE uses student engagement as a yardstick to assess whether, and to what extent, an institution’s education practices are likely to produce greater persistence and other positive outcomes for its students.<sup>14</sup>

In order to rigorously test the effects of enhanced student services at community colleges, MDRC sought out schools for the Opening Doors demonstration that were both interested in offering such services to a group of students who might need extra support and willing to participate in a random assignment evaluation. As discussed below, Lorain County Community College was interested and developed a program with MDRC that combined enhanced services with a modest scholarship.

## **Opening Doors at Lorain County Community College**

### **The Environment**

Lorain County Community College is located in Elyria, a midsized city of 56,000 about 25 miles west of Cleveland, in northeast Ohio. It is set in what is known as the nation’s Rust Belt, an area spanning several Midwest and Mid-Atlantic states. Through much of the 20th century, the region had a high concentration of manufacturing and heavy industry, and many residents worked

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<sup>10</sup>Grubb (2004).

<sup>11</sup>Grubb (2001), p. 5.

<sup>12</sup>Grubb (2001).

<sup>13</sup>Gordon, Habley, and Associates (2000).

<sup>14</sup>Community College Leadership Program (2005).

in factories. Over recent decades, however, this sector of the economy has declined. Between 1980 and 2005, for example, the United States lost 24 percent of its manufacturing jobs.<sup>15</sup> During that period, northeast Ohio lost 41 percent of its manufacturing jobs, and Lorain County suffered the most substantial job losses of any county in the region.<sup>16</sup> Thousands of displaced workers needed to be retrained, a challenge that Lorain County Community College has taken on, and new businesses had to be developed and attracted to the area.

### **The College**

Most students at Lorain County Community College go to school at the college's beautiful, forested main campus in Elyria, but some students take classes at the satellite campus in the nearby city of Lorain. During the fall 2003 semester, when the study began, the college served about 9,400 students, and, as at most community colleges, the majority (about two-thirds) attended part time.<sup>17</sup> About two-thirds of the students were women and nearly half were over 25. The student body is predominantly non-Hispanic white. The main campus is easily accessible by car from the primary residential areas of the city, and most students drive to school. The commute via public transportation takes longer and has limited service. The in-state tuition at Lorain for the 2003-2004 school year was \$2,565, and about half of the first-time, full-time students received some form of financial aid.

Like most of the other schools in the Opening Doors demonstration, Lorain is a well-established community college that offers a range of programs leading to an associate's degree or a technical or vocational certificate. During the 2003-2004 school year, the most commonly pursued academic and vocational programs at Lorain were: (1) Health Professions and Related Clinical Sciences, (2) Liberal Arts and Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities, and (3) Business, Management, and Marketing. The college's administrators pride themselves on Lorain's reputation for academic excellence, innovation, and efforts to foster linkages with the workforce development and economic development systems. Notably, Lorain is the only community college in the state that offers a University Partnership Program, in which students can earn bachelor's and master's degrees from any of eight four-year institutions in Ohio without leaving the Lorain campus. The college provides targeted education and training opportunities to displaced workers and incumbent workers, who have faced difficulties in the labor market.

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<sup>15</sup> Austrian (2006).

<sup>16</sup> The Public Services Institute and the Joint Center for Policy Research, Lorain Community College (2004).

<sup>17</sup> The information in this section about the 2003-2004 school year and the college's graduation and transfer rates was drawn from the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

Lorain was the first college in the state to build an Advanced Technologies Center, which provides training in industrial and technical specialties.<sup>18</sup>

According to information reported by Lorain to the U.S. Department of Education, 9 percent of freshmen who entered the institution in 2000 completed an associate's degree within three years. Corresponding rates at the other Opening Doors colleges range from 2 percent to 23 percent. Many community college students transfer to other schools to complete a degree. At Lorain, 19 percent of the students who entered the college in 2000 had transferred to another postsecondary institution within three years. Transfer rates at the other Opening Doors colleges range from 11 percent to 20 percent.<sup>19</sup>

### **Program History**

During the Opening Doors demonstration's reconnaissance period, in which MDRC gathered information on the factors that might foster or hinder students' success in college, Lorain was identified as a potential site. The college's leadership was interested in the possibility of participating, and in late 2002, Lorain and MDRC began working together to design an Opening Doors intervention. The college was interested in building upon its existing network of student supports, as well as its previous efforts to provide targeted services to low-wage workers, displaced workers, at-risk youth, and other groups of students who might benefit. Over a period of several months, Lorain and MDRC defined and fleshed out the package of services, described below, that constituted the college's Opening Doors program. Although Lorain initially considered targeting only low-wage workers, it expanded the eligibility criteria to meet the sample size requirements for the study and included a broader subset of the colleges' low-income students, some of whom were not working.

### **Targeting and Enrollment for Opening Doors**

To be eligible for the Opening Doors study at Lorain, students had to meet the following criteria:

- Age 18 to 34
- Family income below 250 percent of the federal poverty level

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<sup>18</sup>For more information, see Lorain's Web site, [www.lorainccc.edu](http://www.lorainccc.edu).

<sup>19</sup>For the graduation and transfer rates of the other Opening Doors colleges, see Table 2.1 in Brock and LeBlanc (2005).

- Beginning freshmen, or continuing students who have completed fewer than 13 credits and have had academic difficulties (indicated by not passing or withdrawing from courses)<sup>20</sup>
- High school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate
- No associate's degree from an accredited college or university

The program was open to both part-time and full-time students.<sup>21</sup>

Opening Doors staff had to conduct extensive outreach to make students aware of the opportunity to participate in the study and encourage them to sign up. Once a student was identified as eligible,<sup>22</sup> Lorain's staff sent an initial invitation letter describing the Opening Doors program, its potential benefits, and the study, and encouraged the student to call the office to set up an appointment for intake. The staff sent follow-up letters and made multiple phone calls to recruit students, posted flyers, placed advertisements in newspapers and on the radio, and sometimes even tried to recruit students in person outside their classrooms. During spring 2004, MDRC arranged for Lorain to receive assistance from a consultant with expertise in recruitment for (and operation of) workforce and education programs, who provided training and helped revise recruitment materials. Once the program became established, word of mouth also helped the recruitment effort.

Because recruitment took so much time and the sample grew slowly, the Opening Doors staff at Lorain began recruiting students well before each semester began. To randomly assign the group of students who entered the program in the fall 2004 semester, for example, staff began recruitment in March 2004 and randomly assigned students through August.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>“Academic difficulty” was defined as completing no more than 75 percent of the credits attempted. For example, a student who had taken three three-credit courses and passed them all would not have been eligible for the study. A student who had taken four three-credit courses, passed three, and withdrew from or failed one would have been eligible.

<sup>21</sup>This list of criteria was in effect for most of the study. For the first round of sample intake (which accounts for about 10 percent of the full sample in the site), however, the criteria were somewhat narrower: The income cutoff was 200 percent of the federal poverty level and the credit completion rate cutoff was 60 percent. MDRC and Lorain agreed to expand the criteria to increase the pool of students eligible for the study and, thus, generate a larger research sample.

<sup>22</sup>Lorain used its student database to identify eligible students, and periodically generated lists.

<sup>23</sup>About half (51 percent) of the fall 2004 cohort of sample members were randomly assigned between March and June. The effects of this extended period of entry into the study will be examined in a report on the Ohio sites. Because Lorain's program and research design were not finalized until summer 2003, for the first semester's sample MDRC and Lorain had less time for sample intake. Students who began the program in the fall 2003 semester were randomly assigned between August and September.

As noted earlier, the Opening Doors evaluation required that eligible students be randomly assigned to a program group that received the enhanced student services and the scholarship or to a control group that did not. During study intake, college staff explained the purpose of the study, collected information on students' demographic characteristics, and obtained their written consent to participate in the research. Although the random assignment process meant that only half the students would ultimately receive the enhanced services and scholarship (since the other half would be in the control group), college staff emphasized that students had nothing to lose by applying. Indeed, applicants who completed the process were given a \$20 gift card from a major discount store as both an incentive and compensation for their time. Once the paperwork was complete, college staff telephoned MDRC with applicants' names and identification numbers, and MDRC's computer system randomly assigned students to the program or control groups. The college informed students of their research status right away, and those in the program group were scheduled for a first appointment with an Opening Doors adviser.

A total of 898 individuals enrolled in the study at Lorain. Sample enrollment was carried out between August 2003 and October 2005. Cohorts of program group students began participating in the Opening Doors program during the following five semesters: fall 2003, spring 2004, fall 2004, spring 2005, and fall 2005.

### **Characteristics of the Opening Doors Sample**

Table 2 presents some selected characteristics of the individuals who enrolled in the Opening Doors study at Lorain between August 2003 and August 2004, whose academic outcomes are examined in the following section of the report. These students comprise the first three of five groups, or cohorts, of students to enter the study — 53 percent of the full research sample in this site. The characteristics shown in Table 2 were collected by Lorain staff just before each student was randomly assigned.

As the table shows, 80 percent of the sample members are women. More than half the sample members (58 percent) are non-Hispanic white, although a significant number are black (21 percent) and Hispanic (14 percent). Virtually all of the sample members (99 percent) are U.S. citizens and the vast majority (94 percent) are at least the second generation of their families to be born in the United States. For the large majority (90 percent), English is the only language spoken regularly in the home.

As it reflects Lorain's student body, the study sample is somewhat older than a traditional college-going group. The majority of the sample at Lorain were between ages 21 and 30 when they entered the study, and the average age was just over 25. More than half the sample earned their high school diploma or GED certificate five or more years before they entered the study, and almost half had completed some college courses. A large proportion (56 percent) of the sample

The Opening Doors Demonstration

Table 2

Selected Characteristics of Lorain County Community College  
Sample Members at Baseline: 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Cohorts

	Full Sample
Gender (%)	
Male	20.5
Female	79.5
Age (%)	
18 - 20 years old	16.1
21 - 25 years old	39.6
26 - 30 years old	27.9
31 and older	16.4
Average age (years)	25.4
Marital status (%)	
Married	26.4
Unmarried	73.6
Race/ethnicity (%) <sup>a</sup>	
Hispanic	14.2
White	57.8
Black	20.8
American Indian or Alaskan Native	0.4
Asian or Pacific Islander	0.4
Other	1.1
Multiracial	5.3
Number of children (%)	
0	17.8
1	36.7
2	24.1
3 or more	21.4
<i>Among sample members with children:</i>	
<i>Average age of youngest child (years)</i>	3.3
Household receiving any of the following benefits (%) <sup>b</sup> :	
Unemployment/Dislocated Worker Benefits	6.5
Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or disability	10.3
Cash assistance or welfare (TANF)	16.4
Food stamps	40.8
None of the above	47.7
Live in public or Section 8 housing (%)	19.6
Financially dependent on parents (%)	10.3
Ever employed (%)	99.8

(continued)

**Table 2 (continued)**

	Full Sample
Currently employed (%)	54.0
<i>Among those currently employed:</i>	
<i>Number of hours worked per week in current job (%)</i>	
1-10 hours	4.6
11-20 hours	21.9
21-30 hours	26.9
31-40 hours	33.1
More than 40 hours	13.6
Diplomas/degrees earned (%) <sup>b</sup>	
High school diploma	72.0
General Educational Development (GED) certificate	27.0
Occupational/technical certificate	15.7
Associate's degree	0.4
4-year (or more) degree	0.2
Date of high school graduation/GED receipt (%)	
During the past year	13.5
Between 1 and 5 years ago	30.8
Between 5 and 10 years ago	29.5
More than 10 years ago	26.2
Main reason for enrolling in college (%) <sup>b</sup>	
To complete a certificate program	11.1
To obtain an associate's degree	55.7
To transfer to a 4-year college/university	20.7
To obtain/update job skills	9.8
Other	4.8
Completed any college courses/credits (%)	47.9
First person in family to attend college (%)	37.4
Working personal computer in home (%)	68.9
Own or have access to a working car (%)	90.6
Language other than English spoken regularly in home (%)	9.9
U.S. citizen (%)	99.0
Respondent born in U.S. (%) <sup>c</sup>	98.1
Respondent or 1 or more parents born outside U.S. (%) <sup>c</sup>	6.2
<b>Sample size</b>	<b>478</b>

(continued)

## Table 2 (continued)

SOURCE: MDRC calculations using Baseline Information Form (BIF) data.

NOTES: Calculations for this table used all available data for the 478 sample members who were randomly assigned between 08/06/2003 through 08/31/2004.

Characteristics shown in italics are calculated for a proportion of the full sample.

Missing values are not included in individual variable distributions.

Distributions may not add to 100 percent because of rounding.

<sup>a</sup>Respondents who said they are Hispanic and chose a race are included only in the Hispanic category. Respondents who said they are not Hispanic and chose more than one race are only in the multi-racial category.

<sup>b</sup>Distributions may not add to 100 percent because categories are not mutually exclusive.

<sup>c</sup>"Born in U.S." includes Puerto Rico.

members reported that their main reason for enrolling in college was to obtain an associate's degree, and about a fifth (21 percent) said they wanted to transfer to a four-year institution.

Many study participants at Lorain are single mothers who are balancing family responsibilities with school and, often, with work. Indeed, most of the students MDRC interviewed for its qualitative study — in both the program and control groups — reported that they found balancing the demands of school with the other demands in their lives difficult. As Table 2 shows, more than 80 percent of the sample members had at least one child when they were randomly assigned, and 45 percent had two or more children. About three-quarters (74 percent) of the sample members were not married when they entered the study.

Just over half of the study's participants were employed at the point of random assignment. Among those who were employed, almost three-quarters worked at least 21 hours a week. Only 10 percent reported that they were financially dependent on their parents. A substantial proportion (52 percent) said that they or members of their household received government benefits designed for people living below the poverty level, such as food stamps (41 percent) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, the cash welfare program that mainly serves single women and their children (16 percent). Over a third (37 percent) reported that they were the first in their family to attend college. Almost all (91 percent) of the students owned or had access to a working car, and just over two-thirds (69 percent) had a working personal computer at home.

### Program Operations

MDRC staff visited Lorain periodically throughout the program's operations between 2003 and 2006, interviewed the Opening Doors staff, observed meetings between advisers and students, and spoke individually with a small number of program group members. In late 2004,



MDRC conducted a multiday field research visit and interviewed many college administrators, faculty, and staff, including those involved in Opening Doors, to understand how the enhanced program differed from the standard college services that were available to the study's control group. In addition, MDRC conducted a qualitative study at two Opening Doors colleges, including Lorain, that involved interviews with a subset of sample members about factors that affected their ability to persist in school. This section, which briefly describes the operations of the Opening Doors program, draws upon information learned during these visits. The information will be discussed in more depth in an upcoming report on the two Ohio programs scheduled to be published in 2008. The future report will also use results from a survey completed by program and control group students that explores the differences in the services they received and their experiences on campus, as well as statistics from a database in which Opening Doors staff recorded key information about their contacts with students.

As noted above, Lorain's Opening Doors program was a two-semester intervention. Lorain and MDRC agreed that the program would be operated to its full extent only during the fall and spring semesters, because a smaller proportion of students attend classes in the summer and the semester is shorter. Opening Doors students who started the program in the fall continued through the spring, and students who started in the spring participated in the program the next fall semester. Students in the program group could receive assistance from their Opening Doors adviser during the summer semester, but the services were much less intensive than during the fall and spring. Advisers were available to help students during the summer, but they did not reach out to them as proactively, systematically, or regularly. An exception to this occurred during the program's first summer, in 2004. As discussed below, the program had extra funds during its first year, so it paid an additional \$75 to students who were taking at least one course during the summer 2004 semester.

The linchpin of Lorain's Opening Doors program was a team of advisers with whom students were expected to meet regularly for two semesters to discuss academic progress and any issues that might affect their schooling. Each student was assigned to an adviser, who acted as the primary contact, but students could, and sometimes did, see other advisers on the team. The team was comprised of a full-time program coordinator and three part-time advisers. They each worked with far fewer students than other advisers at Lorain. The coordinator, whose caseload was the largest, worked with no more than 110 students a semester. In contrast, during fall 2003, the college employed the equivalent of nine full-time academic advisers; an enrollment of about 9,400 students that semester yielded a student-to-adviser ratio of more than 1,000 to 1. As noted in the section above, this ratio is typical of community colleges across the nation. The Opening Doors advisers were sometimes available to meet with students in the evening (as were the college's regular advisers). The Opening Doors team was supported by an administrative assistant who helped recruit study participants, schedule appointments with students, and keep program records.

The advising in Opening Doors was designed to be more intensive, personalized, and comprehensive than what students would typically receive at Lorain (or at most community colleges). The markedly lower student-to-staff ratio in the program allowed advisers to see students frequently and spend more time with them. This increased contact, the program's designers posited, would allow the advisers to uncover and address more issues relevant to the students' success in school. During each of the two program semesters, students were required to meet with their adviser twice, once shortly before or early in the semester, and then again, in mid-semester. As discussed below, these meetings triggered the payment of the Opening Doors scholarship. The program coordinator, however, encouraged the advisers to contact students much more frequently than just twice a semester — this message became increasingly strong as the program matured.

During a visit to Lorain in spring 2004, MDRC reviewed the records of a random sample of 10 students who had begun the Opening Doors program the previous fall. Since entering the study, the students had had an average of 12 contacts with their adviser, with the number of contacts ranging from 7 to 22. Lorain staff reported that the time they spent on recruiting sample members prevented them from spending as much time with students in the program as they would have liked. A future report on the Ohio colleges will examine the frequency and duration of the Opening Doors advisers' contacts with students.

During visits to the campus, MDRC observed that the Lorain Opening Doors staff seemed to have developed trusting, comfortable relationships with students. The program's advising seemed to become increasingly strong over time, after a start-up phase (which is typical in new programs). In the advising sessions that MDRC observed, staff and students talked about a range of issues, including course scheduling, registration, financial aid and other financial issues, tutoring, work-based learning efforts, juggling school and work, career aspirations, and personal issues. The Opening Doors advisers provided one-on-one advising and counseling themselves, and referred students to other services on and off campus. One of the part-time advisers who had expertise as a career development specialist met with many of the participating students to help them explore career options and align their academic efforts with their employment goals. She led the college's Career Boot Camp, a half-day career exploration seminar, in which some of the Opening Doors students participated. Opening Doors advisers also referred students to range of other services, including tutoring, Women's Link (a campus center that provides services and refers students to resources in the community), and personal counseling. (Because the Opening Doors advisers — and the college's other advisers — were not trained as therapists, they did not delve into psychological issues with students.)

A staff member in the college's financial aid office was designated as a special liaison for Opening Doors students, and she devoted about 40 percent of her time to the program. Participating students could bypass waiting lines that were sometimes long and could meet indi-

vidually for personalized help. Advisers sometimes contacted her themselves to seek help in resolving students' issues. Two other staff members at the college — an academic adviser and a counselor (whose roles are described in the paragraph below) — were officially part of the Opening Doors team but, in practice, played only a small role in the program. The main Opening Doors advisers occasionally referred students to them for help, but they spent only about 2 to 3 percent of their time on the program.<sup>24</sup>

Students in the study's control group met with the college's regular advising and counseling staff as needed. At Lorain, academic advisers are generalists who work with newer students to assist them with scheduling, financial aid, and course placement. Counselors, who tend to specialize in certain areas of study at Lorain, are available to work with students who need help determining their career direction or who are further along in fulfilling their degree requirements. (For ease of reference, this report refers to the Opening Doors staff as "advisers," but their work encompasses the responsibilities of the college's counselors, as well.) Because the student-to-staff ratio is so high, as noted above, regular advising and counseling staff are not expected to carry caseloads of students or follow up with students, cannot typically meet with students for as much time as Opening Doors staff, and do not tend to explore the same broad range of issues. These and other key differences between the Opening Doors program and regular college services are summarized in Table 3.

In the interviews from the qualitative study mentioned above, program group students at Lorain highly rated their advising experiences. They reported interacting more often and more intensively with advisers than the control group students who were interviewed. Most said that they could drop in on their adviser without an appointment, and others said they could call or e-mail and get quick responses. Discussing the Opening Doors advising, one student who had been out of high school for a few years said: "I feel like if I had the kind of help they've given me when I tried to start right after high school, I might have already completed my degree. Maybe I just needed the counseling that I didn't know where to get."<sup>25</sup> Students reported that they received help from their Opening Doors adviser with academic issues, as well as personal problems that were interfering with their school performance. A program group student who had an acute health problem described the help she received:

I was in the hospital last semester....I got put in ICU. [My Opening Doors adviser] went to all of my instructors and...he just went over the top. If I hadn't been in this program, I might have had to drop out. And then I ended up with a 3.0 GPA....I really felt appreciation for him.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>The percentages in this paragraph were derived from monthly reports on how staff spent their time.

<sup>25</sup>Gardenhire-Crooks, Collado, and Ray (2006), p. 17.

<sup>26</sup>Gardenhire-Crooks, Collado, and Ray (2006), p. 17.

## The Opening Doors Demonstration

**Table 3**

### **Key Differences Between the Opening Doors Program and Regular College Services at Lorain County Community College**

<b>Program Feature</b>	<b>Opening Doors Program</b>	<b>Regular College Services</b>
Advising and counseling	Team of advisers, responsible for no more than 110 students each; students assigned to adviser, with whom they were expected to meet regularly; advising was personalized, intensive, and comprehensive; designated contact in financial aid office.	One adviser for about every 1,000 students; students not assigned to adviser and met with advisers as needed; advising tended to be short term and focused on academic issues; no designated contact in financial aid office.
Opening Doors scholarship	\$150 per semester for two semesters, for a total of \$300; extra \$75 paid during summer 2004 semester; payments tied to attendance at mandatory one-on-one advising sessions.	No Opening Doors scholarship
Cohort activities	Lunchtime gatherings with Opening Doors advisers; study tables and tutoring sessions before midterms and finals. (Small subset of the program group participated in these activities.)	No cohort activities
College orientation course	Enhanced college orientation course available; paperless course with fewer students, more individualized attention, and exposure to services on campus; greater focus on career services. (Fewer than 10 percent of program group took this course.)	Regular college orientation course available

SOURCE: MDRC field research data.

Control group students said they used advising and counseling services less than the program group, but they reported relying more on other campus services for help (such as Women's Link, the service and referral center mentioned above). The survey data, which will be analyzed in an upcoming report on the two Ohio sites, will shed more light on the differences between the experiences of the program and control groups, and will illuminate the degree to which control group students may have sought out services similar to those provided to the program group by the Opening Doors program.

To facilitate the enhanced advising in Opening Doors, Lorain created a database to collect key information about participating students and their contacts with staff. The advisers recorded

their in-person contacts with students, including the length of the meeting and the topics covered, and sometimes noted phone calls or e-mail communications. The advisers sometimes used the space for notes in the system to record specific details. The staff told MDRC that they often reviewed the database before meeting with a student to remind themselves about the relevant issues and when the student was last seen. As noted above, students sometimes met with an Opening Doors adviser who was not their primary contact. The database allowed staff to review the records for any participating student, facilitating the team approach. The database also allowed staff to record students' attendance at the required advising sessions, and the scholarship payments.

Opening Doors at Lorain also offered a few additional activities that some program group members took part in. The Opening Doors staff held lunchtime gatherings about once a semester to share information about services available on campus and foster relationships among participating students. Staff also arranged "study tables" and tutoring sessions before midterms and final exams. Although MDRC did not collect data about participation in these activities, conversations with the Opening Doors staff indicate that only a small subset of the program group members participated in each activity. This may reflect, in part, the students' busy lives. Many of the students who were interviewed for the qualitative study said that they did not have time for socializing on campus or extracurricular activities.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, the college offered an enhanced orientation course to participating students. All Lorain students pursuing an associate's degree are required to take a one-credit college orientation course. The college created special sections of the course for Opening Doors students. The class was smaller than the standard orientation class, and it offered more individualized attention, more exposure to services available on campus, and a greater focus on career services. In addition, the class was paperless: Students completed assignments on CD-ROM and by e-mail. Because the Opening Doors version of the class was not required, and many students had taken the standard orientation class before entering the study, only a small proportion of the program group — less than 10 percent — took the enhanced course.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, for each of the two program semesters, students in Opening Doors were eligible for a \$150 scholarship that they could use for any purpose, for a total of \$300. Students in the study's control group did not receive these scholarships. To encourage contact between students and their Opening Doors adviser, the scholarships were paid out in two installments each semester, after required meetings. The first meeting, which occurred just before or early in the semester, triggered a \$100 payment, and the second meeting, usually in the middle of the semester, triggered a \$50 payment. Because the program had extra funds during its first year, it

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<sup>27</sup>See Gardenhire-Crooks, Collado, and Ray (2006).

<sup>28</sup>Among the 237 program group members analyzed in this report, 21 (9 percent) took the course.

also paid \$75 to students who enrolled in courses during the summer 2004 semester and attended a required advising session.<sup>29</sup>

Among the program group students whose outcomes are examined in this report (see the next section for more detail), almost all (96 percent) attended at least one of the required meetings and received some Opening Doors scholarship money. Just under two-thirds (61 percent) of the students received the full \$300, and just over one-third (35 percent) of the program group members received the extra \$75 during summer 2004. The students MDRC spoke with said they were grateful for the scholarship and reported using the money for transportation, clothes to wear on the job or for their children, and to pay bills. As one student said, “It came in handy for when my daughters needed anything. It worked out good for me. I used it for bills, Pampers, and school supplies.”<sup>30</sup> Although it was certainly appreciated, in general, the scholarship did not seem to substantially improve students’ finances.

## **An Early Look at Program Impacts**

This section presents the early impact results for the first groups of students to enter the study at Lorain. The results are based on student transcript data provided to MDRC by the college. The data include information on course registration, grades, and credits earned for the first and second Opening Doors semesters, and information on only course registration for the first semester after the program. MDRC analyzed data for the first three cohorts of 478 sample members (just over half of the full sample at Lorain), which include students who were randomly assigned and planned to attend Lorain in the fall 2003, spring 2004, or fall 2004 semester.<sup>31</sup> Figure 1 illustrates the alignment of the three cohorts with semesters.

MDRC found that the Opening Doors program at Lorain had modest effects: Although it gave students a boost while they received services, the boost ended when the program’s services ended. As the analyses are based upon part of the full sample and a limited follow-up period, the results may change when later analyses are conducted.

### **What Should Be Expected in the Findings?**

As discussed above, the Opening Doors program at Lorain was a two-semester intervention consisting of enhanced student services and a \$150 per semester scholarship. The

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<sup>29</sup>Students who entered Opening Doors in fall 2003 and spring 2004 were eligible for the extra \$75. In addition, the subset of students who entered Opening Doors in fall 2004, but who were randomly assigned before the summer semester began, were also eligible.

<sup>30</sup>Gardenhire-Crooks, Collado, and Ray (2006), p. 31.

<sup>31</sup>The research sample was evenly divided between the program and control groups.

## The Opening Doors Demonstration

**Figure 1**

### Alignment of Opening Doors Semesters with Lorain County Community College Academic Semesters, by Cohort

	2003	2004			2005		
	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall	Spring	Summer	Fall
Fall 2003 cohort	OD1	OD2		PP1			
Spring 2004 cohort		OD1		OD2	PP1		
Fall 2004 cohort				OD1	OD2		PP1

**Key:** OD1 = First Opening Doors semester; OD2 = Second Opening Doors semester; PP1 = First postprogram semester

NOTE: Program group students who attended the summer semester at Lorain County Community College did not receive full Opening Doors program benefits. Therefore, summer semesters are not considered program semesters.

hypothesis underlying the intervention is that enhanced student services help alleviate certain barriers to academic success, while the scholarship helps defray certain costs for the student. More frequent and intensive academic advising better informs students about which courses they should take and what they need to do to earn a degree. Recurring meetings also allow advisers to recognize students' particular issues and assist them. Students may value having a familiar place of support where they can get help resolving problems or referrals to other campus services. This sort of meaningful interaction can help students feel that they are integrated into the college community, and, as noted above, a feeling of integration may increase the chances that they will persist in school and succeed.

Bearing in mind this theory, the program might result in academic progress, as measured by higher student retention, more course attempted, and more courses passed. Since most students at Lorain entered the Opening Doors study after course registration,<sup>32</sup> the program would not be expected to affect the number of courses attempted during the first semester. It is reasonable, however, to expect to see some differences in the number of courses completed that semester because of the enhanced academic advising. It is also reasonable to expect the program group to outperform the control group during the second semester in such areas as retention, courses attempted, and credits earned, since the intervention was still in effect during this time. Additionally, if program group students made stronger academic progress during the program semesters and felt more integrated into the college community, they might be more motivated to continue this achievement after the program ended. Therefore, we might expect to see some differences between the two groups during the first postprogram semester in areas such as retention and course attempts.

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<sup>32</sup>Lorain's Opening Doors staff estimate that at least 80 percent of the sample members had already registered when they were randomly assigned.

## The Opening Doors Semesters

Table 4 shows information on registration and academic performance at Lorain during sample members' first academic year following random assignment, as well as information on enrollment and course registration for the first postprogram semester.<sup>33</sup> The first column shows results for the program group, and the second column shows results for the control group. The third column shows the effects, or impacts, of the program, which is the difference in outcomes between the two groups. The asterisks show statistical significance — that is, they provide an indication of the likelihood that the difference between the groups was actually caused by the Opening Doors program, and was not simply due to chance.

As indicated in the top panel of Table 4, registration rates during the first semester of the Opening Doors program were high for both the program group and the control group. Close to 90 percent of students in each group registered for at least one course during the first semester. During this semester, program group and control group students attempted a similar number of courses and registered for a similar number of total credits. As mentioned above, this is expected because the study was marketed to many students who were already registered. The program, however, did not affect the number of credits earned. In general, there were no differences in outcomes between the two groups during the first semester.

The second panel of the table shows academic performance for the second Opening Doors semester.<sup>34</sup> The retention rate for program group students was 70.5 percent, compared with 60.1 percent for the control group.<sup>35</sup> This difference of 10.5 percentage points is statistically significant, meaning that the detected differences are real and not due to chance. In addition, program group students attempted 0.4 more courses and registered for 1.4 more credits than control group students. This is an encouraging sign that the enhanced student services and modest scholarship might be leading students to persist and accumulate more credits toward a degree or certificate. During the second Opening Doors semester, program group students also passed slightly more courses than control group students. At the same time, program group students attempted 0.6 developmental credits and earned 0.3 credits more than control group

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<sup>33</sup>Impact estimates are adjusted for the sample members' age and gender, whether they were financially dependent on their parents, whether they had children under 5, and their highest degree, as indicated by baseline data collected just before random assignment.

<sup>34</sup>For the fall 2003 cohort, the second Opening Doors semester is spring 2004. For the spring 2004 cohort, the second Opening Doors semester is fall 2004. For the fall 2004 cohort, the second Opening Doors semester is spring 2005. Summer semester data were not included in any of the calculations for this report, with the exception of the section of the table titled "Summary outcomes with summer semesters."

<sup>35</sup>This drop-off in registration from semester to semester is common in community colleges, as students stop attending school either temporarily or permanently. See Bloom and Sommo (2005) and Brock and Richburg-Hayes (2006) for similar patterns in two other Opening Doors sites.



The Opening Doors Demonstration

Table 4

Impacts on Registration and Academic Performance During the First Three Semesters  
Since Random Assignment at Lorain County Community College:  
Fall 2003, Spring 2004, and Fall 2004 Cohorts

	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)
<b><u>First Opening Doors semester<sup>a</sup></u></b>			
Registered for any courses (%)	90.6	88.9	1.7
Number of courses attempted	3.2	3.2	0.0
Number of courses passed	1.9	1.8	0.1
<i>Percentage of attempted courses passed</i>	<i>61.7</i>	<i>61.0</i>	
<i>Passed all courses (%)</i>	<i>39.8</i>	<i>39.0</i>	
Total credits registered (regular + developmental)	9.0	8.7	0.2
Regular credits registered	6.0	6.1	-0.1
Developmental credits registered	2.9	2.6	0.3
Total credits earned (regular + developmental)	5.2	5.0	0.2
Regular credits earned	3.4	3.5	-0.1
Developmental credits earned	1.8	1.5	0.3
Withdrew from 1 or more courses (%)	42.5	36.2	6.4
<i>Term GPA</i>	<i>2.3</i>	<i>2.2</i>	
<b><u>Second Opening Doors semester<sup>b</sup></u></b>			
Registered for any courses (%)	70.5	60.1	10.5 **
Number of courses attempted	2.5	2.0	0.4 **
Number of courses passed	1.4	1.2	0.2 *
<i>Percentage of attempted courses passed</i>	<i>60.0</i>	<i>62.4</i>	
<i>Passed all courses (%)</i>	<i>38.3</i>	<i>40.7</i>	
Total credits registered (regular + developmental)	7.1	5.7	1.4 ***
Regular credits registered	5.4	4.6	0.8 *
Developmental credits registered	1.8	1.1	0.6 ***
Total credits earned (regular + developmental)	4.0	3.3	0.7 *
Regular credits earned	3.2	2.7	0.4
Developmental credits earned	0.9	0.6	0.3 **
Withdrew from 1 or more courses (%)	33.4	28.1	5.3
<i>Term GPA</i>	<i>2.1</i>	<i>2.2</i>	

(continued)

**Table 4 (continued)**

	Program Group	Control Group	Difference (Impact)
<b><u>First postprogram semester<sup>c</sup></u></b>			
Registered for any courses (%)	46.6	43.0	3.6
Number of courses attempted	1.5	1.4	0.1
Total credits registered (regular + developmental)	4.4	4.1	0.4
Regular credits registered	3.8	3.5	0.2
Developmental credits registered	0.7	0.5	0.1
<b><u>Summary outcomes without summer semesters<sup>d</sup></u></b>			
Total number of semesters enrolled	2.1	1.9	0.2 *
Total credits earned (regular + developmental)	9.2	8.3	1.0
<i>Cumulative GPA since random assignment</i>	<i>2.1</i>	<i>2.1</i>	
<b><u>Summary outcomes with summer semesters<sup>e</sup></u></b>			
Total number of semesters enrolled	2.5	2.2	0.3 **
Total credits earned (regular + developmental)	9.8	8.7	1.1
<i>Cumulative GPA since random assignment</i>	<i>2.1</i>	<i>2.1</i>	
Sample size (total = 478)	237	241	

SOURCES: MDRC calculations from Lorain County Community College transcript data.

NOTES: Calculations for this table used all available data for the fall 2003, spring 2004, and fall 2004 cohorts, which includes sample members randomly assigned between 08/06/03 and 08/31/04.

Because outcomes are presented for the pooled fall 2003, spring 2004, and fall 2004 cohorts, the models include a cohort indicator variable, in addition to indicator variables for: age, gender, financial dependency on parents, children under 5, and highest degree earned.

A two-tailed t-test was applied to differences between the research groups. Statistical significance levels are indicated as: \* = 10 percent; \*\* = 5 percent; and \*\*\* = 1 percent.

Outcomes that are shown in italics were calculated only for sample members who attempted one or more courses. Differences between program group members and control group members in these outcomes are not true experimental comparisons, and statistical significance tests were not performed.

<sup>a</sup>For the fall 2003 cohort, the first Opening Doors semester is fall 2003. For the spring 2004 cohort, the first Opening Doors semester is spring 2004. For the fall 2004 cohort, the first Opening Doors semester is fall 2004.

<sup>b</sup>For the fall 2003 cohort, the second Opening Doors semester is spring 2004. For the spring 2004 cohort, the second Opening Doors semester is fall 2004. For the fall 2004 cohort, the second Opening Doors semester is spring 2005.

(continued)

**Table 4 (continued)**

<sup>c</sup>For the fall 2003 cohort, the first postprogram semester is fall 2004. For the spring 2004 cohort, the first postprogram semester is spring 2005. For the fall 2004 cohort, the first postprogram semester is fall 2005, which was still in process at the time of data receipt. Registration data for the fall 2004 cohort is subject to change.

<sup>d</sup>For the fall 2003 cohort, summary outcomes without summer semesters use data from the fall 2003, spring 2004, and fall 2004 (registration data only) semesters. For the spring 2004 cohort, summary outcomes use data from the spring 2004, fall 2004, and spring 2005 (registration data only) semesters. For the fall 2004 cohort, summary outcomes without summer semesters use data from the fall 2004, spring 2005, and fall 2005 (registration data only) semesters.

<sup>e</sup>For the fall 2003 cohort, summary outcomes with summer semesters use data from the fall 2003, spring 2004, summer 2004, and fall 2004 (registration data only) semesters. For the spring 2004 cohort, summary outcomes with summer semesters use data from the spring 2004, summer 2004, fall 2004, and spring 2005 (registration data only) semesters. For the fall 2004 cohort, summary outcomes use data from the fall 2004, spring 2005, summer 2005, and fall 2005 (registration data only) semesters.

students, possibly indicating that program students were more aware of which courses they needed to complete to earn a degree.

### **After Opening Doors**

As mentioned earlier, only data on registration patterns are available for the first post-program semester. Analyses of these early data do not suggest any differences between the program group and the control group in retention, course attempts, or credits registered, as shown in the third panel of Table 4.

Summary outcomes in Table 4 were measured in two ways: without summer semester data and with summer semester data. Enrollment during the summer semester at Lorain was not required, though some students from the analysis sample did register for the summer 2004 semester. As noted above, program group students who registered for the summer 2004 semester received a \$75 scholarship and student services that were less intensive than those offered in the program during the fall and spring semesters. It is possible that this less intensive summer intervention could produce effects that were similar to, but smaller than, those of the full program intervention.<sup>36</sup>

The summary calculations without summer semester data (shown in the fourth panel of Table 4) suggest that the program resulted in a modest effect on the number of semesters enrolled, but no difference in the total credits earned or cumulative grade point average between the two groups. Overall, program group students enrolled for 0.2 more semesters than control

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<sup>36</sup>It is important to look at summary outcomes with and without the summer 2004 semester because close to 40 percent of the first two cohorts of sample members registered for the summer 2004 semester.

group students. The summary calculations with summer semester data (shown in the last panel of the table) show a slightly larger difference in the number of semesters enrolled. This difference, however, is being driven solely by the summer 2004 performance of the spring 2004 cohort of sample members.<sup>37</sup>

### **What Do the Results Mean?**

Thus far, it appears that the Opening Doors program did not affect student performance until the second program semester, when program group students returned to school at higher rates, attempted more courses, and earned more credits. Preliminary analysis of the first post-program semester, however, does not show an effect of Opening Doors on retention or course registration. Summary statistics for sample members' first year in the study show a small difference in the total number of semesters enrolled, which is driven largely by the second-semester impact on registration. Based on these early findings, it appears that the intervention implemented at Lorain produced some effects on enrollment and registration, but that these effects were not enduring. It also had an early effect on academic achievement, as measured by credits earned. Whether or not the effect on credits earned continued after the program ended will be determined in the next report. In any case, the gains achieved by program group students during the program gave them a slight advantage over control students overall.

It is possible that in order for the intervention to be more successful, it needed to last longer than two semesters. It is also possible that the *difference* between the services that the program group and control group received were not substantial enough to produce large, lasting effects. As noted above, Lorain has a number of programs that provide extra help to students, which sets the bar relatively high for the enhanced Opening Doors program. A survey of sample members conducted a year after they entered the study will provide information on the services the program and control groups received, and will shed light on this difference.

Finally, it may be that the package of enhanced student services with a modest scholarship was not enough to produce large, lasting results. Another Opening Doors program offers an interesting contrast. As described in Table 1, two colleges in the New Orleans area operated a program for low-income parents that provided modestly enhanced advising and a much larger

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<sup>37</sup>The \$75 scholarship and availability of enhanced student services seemed to induce the spring 2004 program group students to register in higher numbers for the summer 2004 semester. Analysis of the fall 2003 cohort did not indicate any difference in summer 2004 semester registration. Separate analyses not included in the table indicated that, among the spring 2004 cohort, 48.3 percent of the program group registered for the summer 2004 session, compared with 27.3 percent of the control group. The difference of 21.0 percent is statistically significant. There was also no difference in summer 2005 semester registration (a scholarship was not offered) by the spring 2005 cohort. A more detailed analysis of this behavior will be presented in the full report on the Ohio Opening Doors programs.

scholarship than Lorain: \$1,000 per semester for two semesters. Scholarship payments were tied to maintaining at least half-time enrollment and a 2.0 (C) grade point average. The Louisiana program produced much larger impacts on students' outcomes than the program at Lorain, and the effects continued after the program ended.<sup>38</sup> Because the program in Louisiana took place in a very different context than Lorain's and targeted a different group of students, the results cannot be directly compared. However, the emerging findings from the two studies suggest that the greater value of Louisiana's scholarship, combined with the performance expectations, may be a more winning formula than what Lorain attempted.

Despite some modest effects, it is still too early to judge Lorain's Opening Doors program. The findings presented in this paper are based on a subsample, and results may change when the full study sample is analyzed. The results in this report reflect, in part, the program's start-up phase, and it is still too early to determine the program's long-term effects. Further, the benefits of the program's enhanced student services might not be evident solely in student transcript outcomes, but could be manifested in other ways, such as by increased engagement in school, civic participation, or improved health. To ascertain this, MDRC will analyze additional data from a student survey administered about a year after students were randomly assigned. A report on the survey data, along with academic performance for the full sample, will be published in 2008.

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<sup>38</sup>See Brock and Richburg-Hayes (2006) for the early results of the Louisiana program.



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## About MDRC

MDRC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan social and education policy research organization dedicated to learning what works to improve the well-being of low-income people. Through its research and the active communication of its findings, MDRC seeks to enhance the effectiveness of social and education policies and programs.

Founded in 1974 and located in New York City and Oakland, California, MDRC is best known for mounting rigorous, large-scale, real-world tests of new and existing policies and programs. Its projects are a mix of demonstrations (field tests of promising new program approaches) and evaluations of ongoing government and community initiatives. MDRC's staff bring an unusual combination of research and organizational experience to their work, providing expertise on the latest in qualitative and quantitative methods and on program design, development, implementation, and management. MDRC seeks to learn not just whether a program is effective but also how and why the program's effects occur. In addition, it tries to place each project's findings in the broader context of related research — in order to build knowledge about what works across the social and education policy fields. MDRC's findings, lessons, and best practices are proactively shared with a broad audience in the policy and practitioner community as well as with the general public and the media.

Over the years, MDRC has brought its unique approach to an ever-growing range of policy areas and target populations. Once known primarily for evaluations of state welfare-to-work programs, today MDRC is also studying public school reforms, employment programs for ex-offenders and people with disabilities, and programs to help low-income students succeed in college. MDRC's projects are organized into five areas:

- Promoting Family Well-Being and Child Development
- Improving Public Education
- Raising Academic Achievement and Persistence in College
- Supporting Low-Wage Workers and Communities
- Overcoming Barriers to Employment

Working in almost every state, all of the nation's largest cities, and Canada and the United Kingdom, MDRC conducts its projects in partnership with national, state, and local governments, public school systems, community organizations, and numerous private philanthropies.