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Mobilizing Momentum in the Science and Practice of Behavioural Insights



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Keeping PSE Options Open: A Field Experiment to Help All Grade 12 Students Through the Application Process

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Preview

- Life After High School is one of several SRDC projects seeking to find ways to:
 - *increase supply of skilled workers to future Canadian economy and*
 - *promote inclusion for less advantaged youth*
- Cluster randomized experiments in BC in 2010-11, Ontario in 2011-12 and 2013-14 tested “nudge” approaches to increase postsecondary application and enrolment among Grade 12 students from low- transition high schools. Try to change defaults:
 - *Every Grade 12 student completes a college or university application*
 - *Every Grade 12 student completes a student financial aid application*
- Significant impacts on postsecondary application and enrollment, financial aid receipt.
- Fee waiver critical, and likely simplifying program choice too.

Life After High School applies lessons from Behavioural Economics to students' decisions about education

- “Nudges” are seemingly small differences in signup procedures and marketing that lead to large differences in participation (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008)
 - *Changing defaults*
 - *Simplifying options*
- Financial aid programs often assume that everyone eligible and interested will apply. BUT –
 - *850,000 US college students who would have been eligible for federal financial grants in 2000 did not apply (King, 2004)*
 - *Canadian Task Force on Financial Literacy (2011)*
- “Automated completion” of financial aid applications in the H&R Block FAFSA Experiment (Bettinger, Long, Oreopoulos, & Sambumatsu, 2009) increased college enrollment by 8 percentage points.

Many steps and hurdles along the way can discourage postsecondary access

Making application to college or university a default

Grade 12 activity to:

- **overcome inertia** (*status quo bias*) and *complexity bias* that hold some students back in making decisions about their future
- **increase the salience of postsecondary education** as a destination all students can aspire to (*bandwagon effect*)
- **accelerate students' options to take up postsecondary** by increasing options open to them on the way out of high school. In trying to decide what to do next, decision to go to PSE only involves deciding to show up (*availability heuristic*)

Theory into practice: trial a short “nudge” program for G12 students

Three hours of workshops during class time, in front of a computer

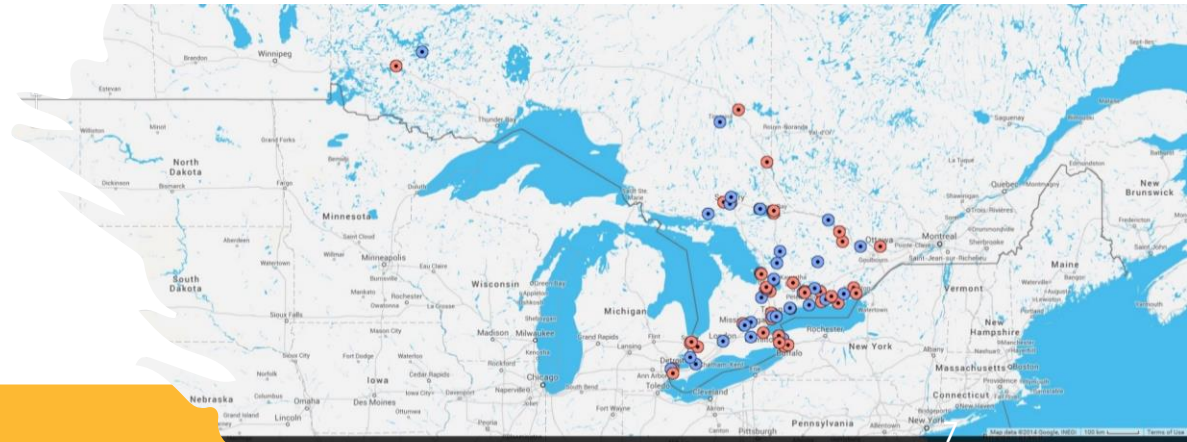
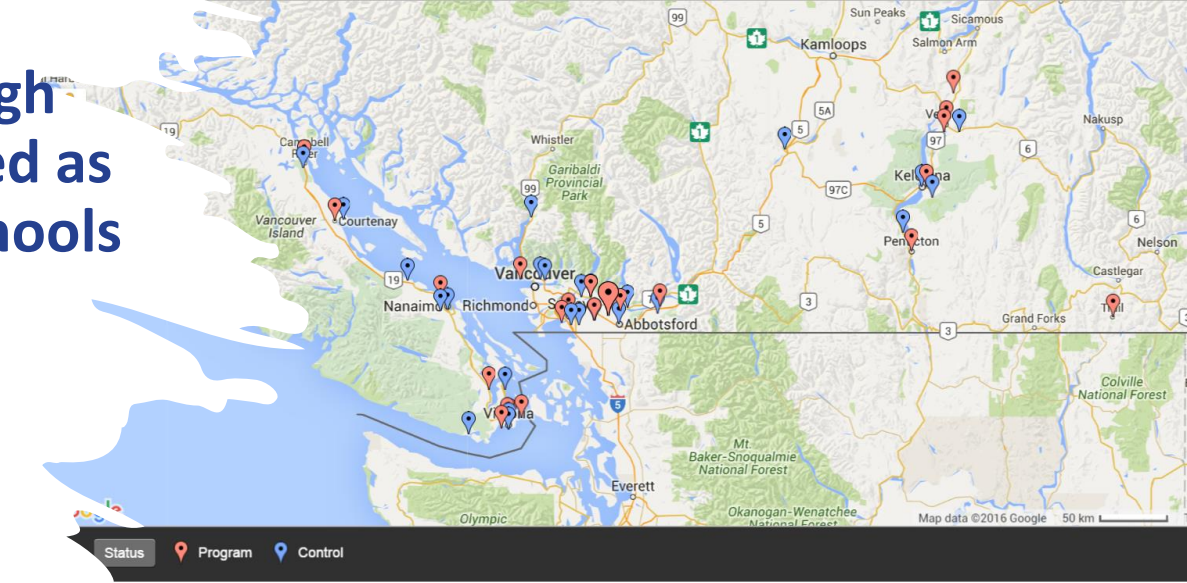
- **Workshop 1:** Late Oct to mid-Nov
 - ✓ Introduces LAHS, creates LAHS student accounts
 - ✓ Students browse PSE programs and calculate financial aid eligibility; map out a budget
- **Workshop 2:** Mid-Nov to mid-Dec
 - ✓ Prepare and submit real college or university applications
 - ✓ Application fees [\$15-\$135] paid
- **Workshop 3:** April to May
 - ✓ Prepare student financial aid applications



50 BC and 86 Ontario high schools were randomized as program and control schools

CSLP and Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities funded tests of approach via experimental pilots in 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2013-14 in schools selected for low postsecondary transition rates (averaging 30 per cent and 40 per cent at the time of selection in ON and BC respectively)

MaxBell and another foundation supported additional BC schools and analysis



Variant program models to find most effective and efficient

Year	No. of program schools	Application fee waiver?	Workshop Facilitators: external or internal?	IT	Program choice tool
BC 2010-11	24	Yes	School chooses	School	External
ON 2011-12	43	Yes	School chooses	School	External, simplified
ON 2013-14	7	Yes	SRDC	External	Existing career planning tools
	4	No	SRDC	External	
	5	Yes	SRDC+ follow up	External	
	3	Yes	School	School	
	9	No	School	School	

Summary of findings:

Life After High School nudge has potential to increase PSE access

BC (2010-11)

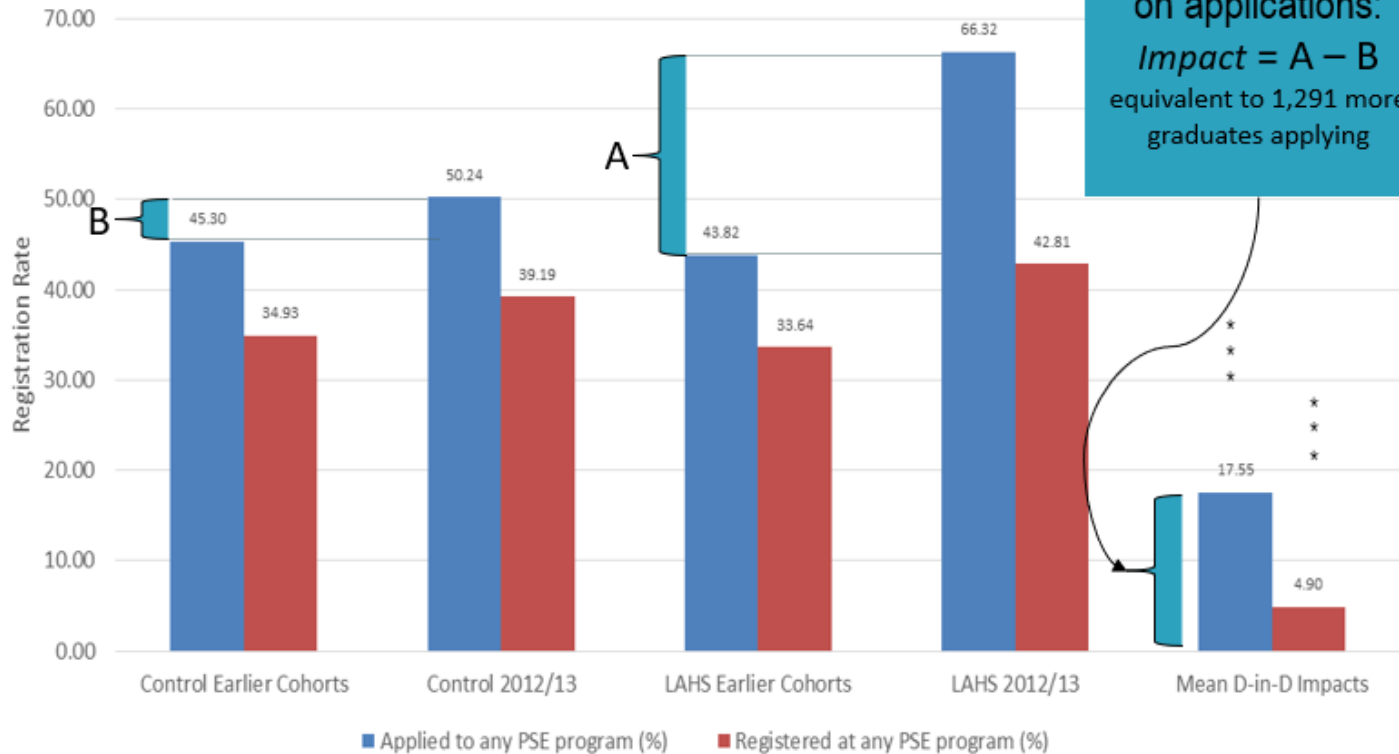
- Large impacts (23-29 percentage points) on postsecondary applications
- No overall significant impact on PSE participation or graduation.
- Significant 2.1 percentage point increase in university enrollment and 1.9 percentage points in student financial aid receipt

ON Phase 1 (2011-12)

- Large impacts (13.5 percentage points) on postsecondary applications
- Significant 3.0 percentage point increase (4.9 percentage points among graduates) on registering in PSE
- New destination typically community college programs

ON graduates' PSE access

Application and registration rates at university and college



Take aways from Life After High School

Increasing applications to university and college produces significant changes in behaviour and outcomes, even with lower compliance than hoped for and no changes in secondary or postsecondary education programs on offer:

- *Nearly all the extra applicants in Ontario received offers, not rejections.*
- *One in every three extra applicants enrolled in PSE*

Engaging all youth: changing defaults while simplifying processes

- *can ensure many more young people get to receive critical information about their future options before leaving high school;*
- *appears able to change the life chances of some of them as a result.*

Popularizing planning for the future: changing social norms on whom postsecondary education is for. Also possibility for peer effects, spillover.

Empowering: supporting students' own activity and investment leads to encouragement, interest, and motivation. Leave school with more options open.

LAHS: Other take-aways to date

Simplifying: accessible messaging and step-by-step decisions through workshops in class with opportunities for catch up through video tutorials.

- If program choice is not simplified, more applications may not yield more offers.

Reassuring: guidance from trusted partner/agent provides reassurance that the full process of PSE application and student aid application will be covered

- If one-to-one follow up is offered, more applications convert to registrations
- Also if matching student to program choice is made simpler

Policy lessons

There is scope for improvements to support the program choice process and ease completion of the student financial aid application.

- Waive or reposition application fees
- Automate aid application
- Differences between models suggests shortfalls in use of existing career planning software to make effective program choices relatively quickly.

Aligning student choices with future labour market realities -> a new in-class, evidence-based program

Engage all youth in a series of annual high school classes focused on online career exploration...

- to explore, make and record key decisions on their postsecondary aspirations,
- leading up to submitting applications without a fee barrier, and
- for lower-income students with the reassurance/automation of an aid guarantee.

Featuring

- Mandatory participation
- Earlier scheduling of determination of assistance
- Implementation of a central web site and database
- Automated applications
- Continuous availability for revisits and revision
- Feedback to planning

Questions -> rford@srdc.org

Thank you!



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