Making It through College while Juggling Work, Marriage, and Parenthood*

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*This project is supported by the Spencer Foundation.*
College participation/completion by age 23

Source: Sarah Turner, “Going to College and Finishing College” (2004). Based on October CPS.

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College Enrollment and Bachelor’s Degree Completion (within 8 Years of HS graduation)

Note: The NLS72 and NELS:88 samples are restricted to those who attend college within two years of cohort high school graduation (June 1972 for the NLS72 sample and June 1992 for the NELS:88 sample.)
Bachelor’s Degree Completion, by Race/Ethnicity (BPS, within 5 years of entry)

Bachelor’s Degree Completion, by Parental Education (BPS, within 5 years of entry)

College Completion – A National Priority

- “...by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.”
  
  President Barack Obama, February 2009

- “...increase the percentage of Americans with high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by the year 2025.”
  
  Lumina Foundation for Education
College Completion – A National Priority

“...the only way to substantially improve overall levels of educational attainment is by improving graduation rates for the rapidly growing Hispanic population, for underrepresented minority students in general (with black men requiring special attention), and for students from low-SES backgrounds.”

*Crossing the Finish Line*
Bowen, Chingos and McPherson
Inequality in Degree Completion: Traditional Approach

Social Background
- SES
- Race/ethnicity
- Gender

Academic experiences

Social and cultural capital

Where students enter higher education and how they interact with those institutions

Degree completion

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Inequality in Higher Education

- Traditional models ignore a unique context of higher education:
  - A phase of the life course characterized by transitions into roles typically associated with adulthood
  - Students are rarely only students, they are also often workers and at times spouses and parents
  - Overlap of social roles
Life Course Transitions

- Employment
  - Extensive: 80% of undergraduates work; 32 hours per week on average
  - Negative association with degree completion (especially beyond certain thresholds)

- Marriage/Parenthood
  - Deemed incompatible with the student role
  - Research focusing on non-traditional students; evidence of negative relationships to degree completion
Life Course Transitions

- Examining schooling in the context of other life course transitions implies that:
  - Educational success will in part reflect the complex processes of adopting and managing multiple social roles
  - Students from disadvantaged groups will follow less educationally beneficial life course patterns → specific patterns of life course transitions will serve as an important source of inequality in higher ed
Data and Methods

  - 8,984 students ages 12–16 as of Dec. 31 1996
  - Annual follow-ups through 2007
  - Detailed information on schooling and life course transitions (work, marriage, and parenthood)
Analysis

- DV: Bachelor’s degree completion
- Discrete time hazard model

\[
\text{logit } h(t_{ij}) = \sum \alpha D_{ij} + \sum \beta_n \text{SOCIAL BACKGROUND}_{nij} \\
+ \sum \beta_m \text{LIFE COURSE}_{mij} + \sum \beta_p \delta_{ pij}
\]
Variables

- **SOCIAL BACKGROUND**
  - Family background (education and income)
  - Race/ethnicity
  - Gender

- **LIFE COURSE** (time-varying)
  - Work
    - Low intensity (up to 20 hours per week), medium intensity (21–35 hours per week), and high intensity (over 35 hours per week)
  - Marriage/Cohabitation
  - Parenthood
Variables

- **CONTROLS**
  - Demographic (number of children in the household, two-parent household, age at entry)
  - Academic preparation (test scores, grades, high school track, entered a two-year institution)
Results: Life Course Transitions

Source: NLSY97, college entrants.
Results: Marriage and Parenthood (approximately 4 years after entry)

Source: NLSY97, college entrants.
Results: Employment
(cumulative, approximately 4 years since entry)

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### Results: Bachelor’s Degree Completion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transitions to Adulthood</th>
<th>Family Baseline Transitions</th>
<th>Employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Transitions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married/cohabitating</td>
<td>-0.497**</td>
<td>-0.416**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.085)</td>
<td>(0.091)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>-0.726**</td>
<td>-0.677**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.134)</td>
<td>(0.138)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment (cumulative)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low intensity</td>
<td>0.024**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medium intensity</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>High intensity</td>
<td>-0.020**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Controls | Yes | Yes | Yes |

*p<0.05, **p<0.01

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## Results: Bachelor’s Degree Completion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Family Transitions</th>
<th>Employment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parental Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td>0.012</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.090)</td>
<td>(0.089)</td>
<td>(0.089)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>0.299**</td>
<td>0.242**</td>
<td>0.107</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.092)</td>
<td>(0.092)</td>
<td>(0.093)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate/professional</td>
<td>0.347**</td>
<td>0.295**</td>
<td>0.151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.094)</td>
<td>(0.093)</td>
<td>(0.096)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>-0.204*</td>
<td>-0.208*</td>
<td>-0.241*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.093)</td>
<td>(0.095)</td>
<td>(0.099)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>-0.264*</td>
<td>-0.250*</td>
<td>-0.253*</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.105)</td>
<td>(0.106)</td>
<td>(0.106)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other non-white</td>
<td>0.276*</td>
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<td>0.057</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(0.121)</td>
<td>(0.127)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td>0.220**</td>
<td>0.305**</td>
<td>0.185**</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(0.060)</td>
<td>(0.061)</td>
<td>(0.065)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Employment</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Transitions</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controls</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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## Results: Bachelor’s Degree Completion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Months Enrolled</th>
<th>Restricted Sample: Enrolled Only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Transitions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married/cohabitating</td>
<td>-0.177</td>
<td>-0.176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.100)</td>
<td>(0.096)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>-0.100</td>
<td>-0.157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.154)</td>
<td>(0.149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employment (cumulative)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low intensity</td>
<td>0.009*</td>
<td>0.019**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium intensity</td>
<td>-0.006</td>
<td>-0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
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<tr>
<td>High intensity</td>
<td>-0.003</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.004)</td>
<td>(0.003)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Months enrolled</strong></td>
<td>0.125**</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.006)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controls</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Conclusion

- Importance of understanding degree completion in the context of the life course
  - Conceptualize schooling as a social role and place it in the context of other life course transitions (see also Pallas 1993; 2004)
  - Understand educational success and inequality in educational attainment within the context of students’ lives
Inequality in Degree Completion: Traditional Approach

Social Background
- SES
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Degree completion

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Life Course Model

Social Background
- SES
- Race/ethnicity
- Gender

Life Course Transitions
- Work
- Marriage
- Parenthood

Where and how students pursue higher education

Academic experiences and social and cultural capital

Degree completion

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Conclusion

Policy implications

- Flexible system – facilitating access but posing challenges for completion
- Limiting and/or managing flexibility?
  - Financial aid
  - Course scheduling
  - Childcare services
  - Counseling/advising
  - Information
Conclusion

- Limitations
  - Traditional age students
  - On-time completion
  - Descriptive, not causal

- Future research
  - Intermediate educational outcomes
  - Decision-making
Thank you!

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