

# Supporting Low-income Students in Community College: The Opening Doors Project

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Strategies for Improving Economic Mobility  
of Workers Conference

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# Benefits of Community Colleges

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- Affordable, accessible institutions
- Offer programs to address a wide range of student needs and interests
  - Developmental and English as a Second Language instruction
  - Occupational certificates and degrees
  - Traditional academic programs leading to Associate's degrees and transfer to four-year colleges and universities
- Community college degrees lead to better quality jobs and higher wages

# Community Colleges and TANF

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- Several evaluations of the effectiveness of education versus work first in welfare reform context
- Lessons:
  - Mixed findings
  - Difficult to combine work assignments with education
  - Post-employment programs to support education and training have had little take-up
- Relatively few current or former welfare recipients who begin college classes end up completing a certificate or degree

# Low-wage workers' Experiences in Community College Are Not Unusual

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- Nearly half of students who begin at community college do not earn a degree and are not enrolled in *any* institution 6 years later. Why?
  - Not everyone wants a degree (but most do)
  - Poor academic preparation
  - Competing demands of work, family, school
  - Students feel unsupported on campus
  - Difficulty paying for school

# Opening Doors: Programs Designed to Increase Persistence & Achievement

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## ■ Program strategies:

- Strengthened developmental instruction
- Improved guidance and support services
- Increased financial aid

## ■ Desired results:

- Increased course completion and persistence
- Higher rates of graduation or transfer
- Increased employment and better jobs

# Opening Doors Enhanced Services (Ohio)

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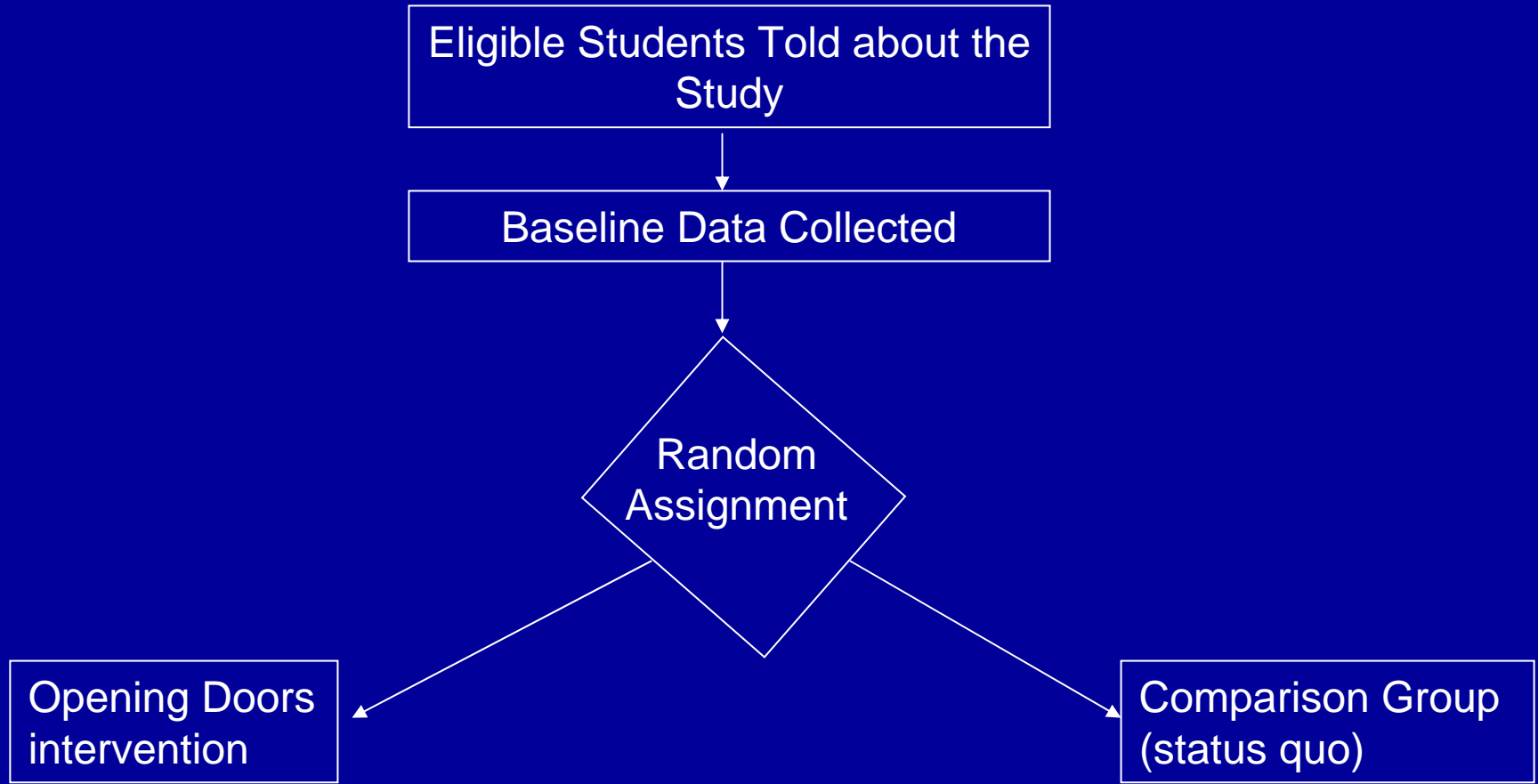
- Students in Opening Doors assigned to an academic advisor with a maximum caseload of 150 (vs. 1000)
- Proactive, team-oriented counseling approach:
  - Minimum 2 meetings with students each semester
  - Referrals to and follow-up with other student services staff
  - Evening hours
- \$150 scholarship for each of two semesters, tied to meetings with the academic advisor

# Scholarship tied to academic performance (Louisiana)

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- \$1,000 on top of regular financial aid for two semesters, paid in increments:
  - \$250 on enrollment
  - \$250 on passing midterms
  - \$500 on passing courses
- Opening Doors counselors monitored academic performance and disbursed payments to students
- Counselors maintained caseloads of 125 students

# Evaluation Is Using an Experimental Research Design





# Characteristics of Opening Doors Sample

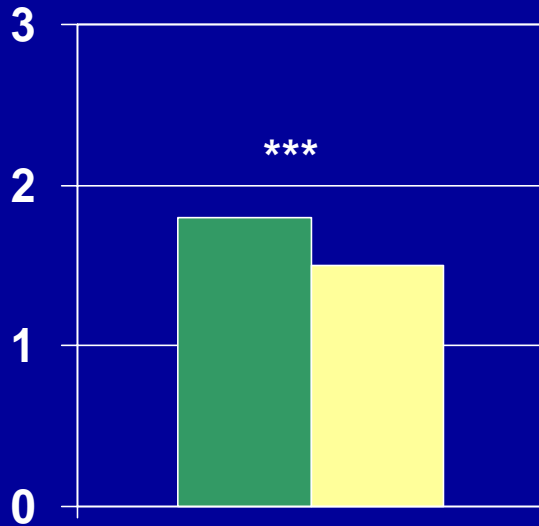
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<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Ohio sites</b>	<b>Louisiana sites</b>
Age	24	26
Financially dependent on parents	17	16
Employed (at RA)	55	51

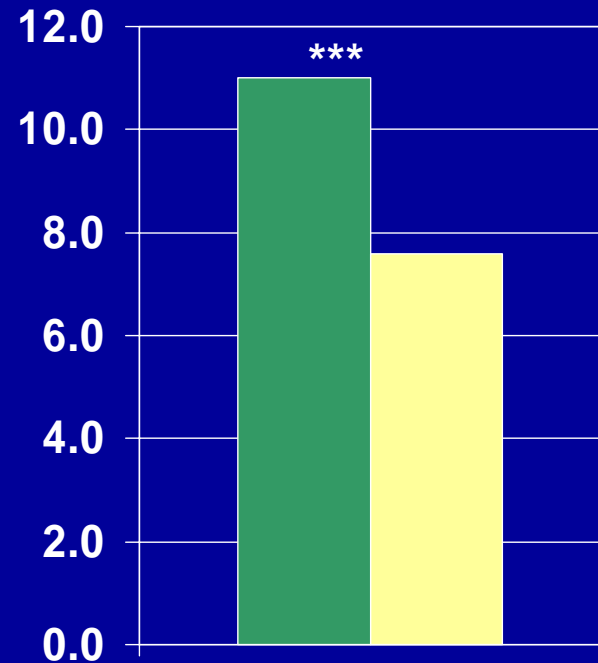
# Selected Findings

	Lorain Impact	Owens Impact	LA Impact
<b>Registration</b>			
First semester	0.7	1.7	4.5
Second semester	5.6**	10.5	18.2 ***
Third semester	3.2	3.6	11.2 ***
<b>Number of courses passed</b>			
First semester	0.1	0.1	0.4 ***
Second semester	0.1	0.2	0.4 ***
<b>Total credits earned</b>			
First semester	0.3	0.2	1.1 ***
Second semester	0.4	0.7	1.2 ***

# Cumulative Program Impacts after Three Semesters in Louisiana



Total semesters enrolled



Total Credits Earned

# Conclusions

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- Benefits of collaboration between Workforce, Employers and Community College Systems
- Scholarship based on academic performance is workable and seems to lead to large, positive effects
  - Academic achievement
  - Retention in college

# Future Work

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- 12-month reports in 2008
- Replication of incentive scholarship