



## Large Scale Outreach to Promote Early FAFSA Submission and Informed College Search Project Summary

### **Project purpose:**

Despite decades of investment to improve college access and success for economically-disadvantaged populations, socioeconomic inequalities in postsecondary educational attainment have actually widened over time (Bound, Lovenheim, & Turner, 2010; Bailey & Dynarski, 2012). These gaps in college success persist even after controlling for students' academic achievement (Belley & Lochner, 2007; Long & Mabel, 2012).

Our project builds on a growing body of research that indicates that sending students targeted and behaviorally informed messages at critical points in the college and financial aid process can help them make active and informed decisions that lead to improved postsecondary outcomes. For instance, a text messaging campaign to remind college-intending high school graduates about required pre-matriculation tasks increased successful matriculation by over 10 percent for some populations (Castleman & Page, 2015; Castleman & Page, in progress). And encouraging current college students to refile their financial aid applications can lead to substantial increases in the share of students that successfully renew their financial aid and that continue on in college (Castleman & Page, forthcoming; ideas42, 2015).

We have partnered with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, several Texas universities and community college districts, and The Common Application to support hundreds of thousands of students in Texas and across the country to maximize how much financial aid they receive and make informed choices about college enrollment.

### **Project design:**

With Kresge Foundation and Greater Texas Foundation support we will reach out to several student populations of students: high school seniors; current college students; rising college students; transfer students; students who accumulated substantial credits but withdrew before completing a degree; and students who applied to college but did not enroll. Our project will reach substantial shares of priority populations for the Foundation, including Latino students and students from rural settings.

We will tailor messages for each population to assist students as they navigate their specific stage of the college-going process. We are designing the outreach to address barriers and obstacles that underrepresented students frequently face, including informational and advising barriers as well as doubts or anxieties about whether they belong in college. Text message content will provide a combination of simplified information about important financial aid and college processes and reminders and encouragement to complete tasks before important deadlines. Our outreach will also include media messages that are designed to increase students' motivation for and engagement in college. Our outreach aims to reduce informational, behavioral, and psychological barriers that students, particularly those who come from underrepresented populations in higher education, face as they transition to and through college.

### **Project evaluation**

We will evaluate the impact of our outreach on financial aid receipt and college enrollment and persistence, and over time will examine the impact of the outreach on college completion.