



NEW STUDY: Connecting Community College Students to Supports for Their Basic Needs Yields Big Payoff

Connecting Texas community college students to resources addressing their basic needs for food, housing, childcare and more offers big dividends, according to a new experimental study from [The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice](#). Nudging students with simple emails more than doubled use of the Amarillo College basic needs center and increased their odds of completing developmental education by 20%.

The award-winning rural Texas community college is widely known for its culture of caring and a strategy of loving its students to success. The Hope Center described these efforts in a [2019 report](#), and leaders at Amarillo have provided support to institutions around the nation that seek to improve student success. Now, for the first time, the impact of that important work has been quantified with a rigorous evaluation.

“We were impressed by Amarillo’s efforts to treat students as humans first and we wanted to know if that translated into academic improvements. Recognizing that the campus’s [Advocacy & Resource Center \(ARC\)](#) was underutilized, we designed a study to test whether we could boost the use of that support and whether in turn, students were more successful in school,” said Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab, President & Founder of The Hope Center.

With support from the [Trellis Foundation](#), college staff partnered with The Hope Center to identify low-income students and those in developmental education for targeted personalized email outreach. The messages simply urged students to visit the ARC. Researchers then compared targeted students to a randomized control group. They found:

- Nudging boosted students’ odds of visiting the ARC from 22% to 56%.
- Before the evaluation, very few male students visited the ARC; nudging increased their odds of seeking that support.
- Passage rates of developmental education coursework—a critical milestone towards a community college degree—increased by 20%.

However, this light-touch intervention did not produce evident changes in grades or retention rates.

“Meeting basic needs for our students is critical to improving their chances at success. One of the biggest barriers for students accessing support is understanding their need for it and trusting us to deliver. The

Advocacy and Resource Center is the foundation for our college’s commitment to love each and every student to success,” Russell Lowery-Hart, President of Amarillo College, noted.

As Congressional and state policymakers, as well as college presidents, seek new ways to keep college students on track during a global pandemic, this study provides some hope. Basic needs supports, including emergency aid, should continue to be expanded and evaluated as higher education learns to effectively educate #RealCollege students.