

## Research Roundup 2023 - Edition 2

Welcome to the second Thrive Scholars Research Roundup, which will be shared quarterly with you! We thought you might like to see what we are reading as we continually learn about the work that we are doing.

*"People sometimes ask: Within the broad scope of trying to increase social mobility and address inequality in America, why is it important to spend your time focusing on 12 colleges that educate less than half a percent of Americans? Surely this can't be important by the numbers...That is right. But if you look at the people in positions of great influence—leading politicians, scientists, journalists—an incredibly disproportionate number come from these 12 colleges. To the extent those folks have a big influence on lots of other people's lives, diversifying who is in those positions matters." – Dr. Chetty in [The Atlantic](#)*

### The Importance of Top Colleges

New [research](#) from Dr. Raj Chetty and his team at [Opportunity Insights](#) highlights exactly why we focus on top schools. Compared to attending flagship public universities, students who attend Ivy-Plus colleges are 60% more likely to earn in the top 1%, two times as likely to attend a top 10 graduate school, and three times more likely to work at prestigious employers in medicine, research, law, finance, and other fields. Grads of Ivy-Plus institutions become leaders that shape society. We focus on top colleges because we want to see our Scholars become the diverse leaders this country needs. This research builds on the team's previous [research](#), which underscored why highly selective colleges are important for our Scholars' economic mobility. That research emphasized that these schools have the highest rates of substantial economic mobility for economically disadvantaged students. Together, these findings underscore why focusing on top colleges achieves our dual mission: for Scholars to attain economic mobility for our country's leadership to be diverse.

### A Shake Up in College Rankings

At Thrive Scholars, we care not just about the institutional prestige of a university but also the ability of that college to boost economic mobility for our Scholars. This year, the [WSJ/College Pulse 2024 Best Colleges in the US](#) ranking took a new [approach](#) to scoring top colleges, bringing in new data on college graduation, graduate salaries, and debt payoff (similar to [Forbes'](#) recent methodological changes). Some colleges remained at the top of the list, like Princeton, MIT, and Yale. Other typical top schools fell. For economically disadvantaged students like ours, this matters. We're exploring how these new rankings impact our recommendations to Scholars. But no matter the rankings, we know the decision is highly individual, and we coach Scholars to pick schools that best fit their academic pursuits, career interests, and financial needs.

### Taking Stock of The Value of College

Back in November, Strada released their "Value Beyond a Degree" [report](#) based on a nationally representative survey of 3,200 alumni. The report underscores the importance of developing a key set of skills, both general and industry-specific, which are strongly associated with economic and non-economic benefits of college. Alumni who reported strong skill development were earning more money and were more likely to feel their education helped them achieve their goals, was worth the cost, and had a positive impact on their career and life. In our coaching, we support our Scholars to develop these general and industry-specific skills that will ultimately support them to achieve their career and financial goals.

### Internships are Pivotal for Post-Graduate Outcomes

The Center for Research on College-Workforce Transitions (CCWT), led by internship expert Dr. Matt Hora, released a [report](#) summarizing the three wave College Internship Study's key findings about internship participation, access, and outcomes. Three key outcome results that matter for us include: 1) graduates who participated in at least one paid internship have the highest rate of employment after graduation; 2) those who completed at least one internship during were about three times more likely to be in the mid-to-high income group rather than the lowest income group; and 3) graduates with an internship experience were almost three times more likely to enroll in graduate school than participate

in the labor market. Internships matter—and we focus on supporting our Scholars to them each summer, with 73% of the upcoming college class of 2024 and 69% of the college class of 2025 having participated in an internship this summer.

### **STEM Disparities Start Early**

A new [study](#) extends previous research finding that STEM disparities may start as early as kindergarten. Ed Trust also published a [brief](#) about the necessity of middle school STEM course access to support Black and Latino students to enter STEM-related careers. These findings suggest that policies need to start in early childhood if we truly want to increase diversity in STEM. Until then, we need programs like Thrive Academies—during which we provide Scholars with two college-level summer math courses taught by top professors. Our past research has shown that there is a statistically significant relationship between the number of Academies summer sessions a Scholar attends and their overall academic performance in college. Now that all Scholars attend two summer sessions, we've seen our average college GPA rise from 2.9 to 3.4 and STEM persistence rise from 20% to 75%. Our Scholars' persistence will diversify STEM fields long-term.

### **Summer Program Impacts and the Need for More Research**

Acendium Education Group recently shared a case study [report](#) on how summer programs impact retention and persistence, featuring examples of successful interventions at universities across the country. Key highlights include how summer programs can provide students with academic preparation for college-level work, introduction to college terms and processes, access to services that the university provides, and a sense of belonging on campus, all of which impact the persistence of students on campus through graduation and beyond. Interestingly, there isn't much published on how summer bridge programs affect students' long-term outcomes, so as we continue to grow Thrive Academies and conduct rigorous research on our impact, we will be able to add to the field's broader understanding of impact.

### **Research on Balance Independent and Interdependent Norms in Supporting Students**

New [research](#) by Dr. Rebecca Covarrubias and Ibetta Valle focuses on the paradoxes that Latino students face in the transition to college. One of the paradoxes that students named was that some of the interdependent actions of teachers and mentors they had—motivation and support that felt like hand-holding—undermined their ability to grow their independence and prepare for college. Yet, another paradox they experienced was that being too independent—by not asking for help or building relationships with teachers—could also be undermining. Our Thrive Scholars staff strive for that ideal balance between interdependence and independence in every interaction with Scholars.

### **A Simple Belonging Intervention that Improves Student Outcomes**

This short belonging intervention, published in [Science](#) and reported on in [Inside Higher Ed](#), improved retention and persistence in college, most dramatically among historically underrepresented students. The study was big—involving 26,900 students at 22 diverse institutions across the US—but the intervention was simple: in their pre-semester checklist of forms, students were prompted to identify and reflect on their feelings about starting college. Our team has already integrated some of the material from this intervention and applied it in our course modules for future students.

### **Rising Educational Attainment, Persistent Racial Gaps**

New [data](#) from the Lumina Foundation show that more Americans have a college degree, but racial gaps persist, especially for Black and Latino adults. Hechinger Report also summarizes [NCES data](#) showing that the gaps between Black and white college degree holders has widened over the last 20 years. The Chronicle of Higher Education [reports](#) that although the Hispanic/Latino population will continue to rise, gaps will continue to persist without intervention. We meet the needs of almost 1,000 Scholars through our holistic programming, and our expansion through Thrive Academies means we are poised to serve thousands more—all with the goal of reducing these persistent racial gaps in college outcomes.

