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# Campus Visits as Predictors of Postsecondary Enrollment in Low-Income, Rural School Districts



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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between visits to college campuses by middle school and high school students and postsecondary enrollment rates, where campus visits are classified as both formal college visits and also informal campus visits. Specifically, Traditional Campus Visits and Educational Campus Field Trips are categorized as two distinct service types sponsored by the GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) grant program in 11 rural, western North Carolina school districts. The participants were 2,274 students who started the GEAR UP program in 7th grade and remained enrolled at a participating GEAR UP school through high school graduation. Using logistic regression analyses to estimate the effects of two different campus visit types, and the year in which the visits occurred, the results indicated that both informal (Educational Campus Field Trip) and formal (Traditional College Visit) campus visits had an association with postsecondary enrollment rates, with formal campus visits collectively having a stronger impact than informal campus visits. We also found that visits taken earlier in a student's academic career had an important association with postsecondary enrollment rates.

**Keywords:** college visits, postsecondary enrollment, college-going culture

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**T**he value of a postsecondary degree has been studied as the economic needs for an educated workforce increase (Carnevale et al., 2013).

As such, a review of factors that underlie differential postsecondary enrollment rates is of interest. Research by Fraysier et al. (2020) showed that secondary school engagement, and in particular future goals and aspirations, are significant predictors of postsecondary enrollment. Their review suggests that student engagement is a construct made up of demographic, achievement, behavioral, and cognitive/affective components, and that student engagement is predictive of postsecondary enrollment and retention. There are multiple frameworks for the college decision making process, including those



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described in Chapman (1984), Conley (2008), Jackson (1982), and Litten (1982). Each framework describes the decision-making process as having distinct stages, and while the focus of each framework is a bit different, exposure to colleges by visiting campus has a role in each of them. Programs that provide access to college for secondary students are important in helping shape their view of themselves as college students (Hooker & Brand, 2010; Swanson et al., 2021). These programs may also include early college coursework and other rigorous learning opportunities.

College visits are recognized as an important component of a student's college choice, as described in King (2012), Secore (2018), and Swanson et al. (2021). Campus facilities are an important part of that selection, particularly academic facilities related to a student's intended major (McDonald, 2019).

Okerson (2016) found that students' impressions of college are affected by a college visit, and that several aspects of a college visit that are noteworthy to students during a college visit are somewhat intangible, such as campus aesthetics and a general feeling of comfort on the campus. Okerson (2016) also found that some aspects of students' impressions of a campus visit were not directly under the college's control relative to the visit, such as weather, bulletin board material, and construction projects. Students from rural high schools face significant challenges related to college access.

Morton et al. (2018) identified concerns among rural students about attending college through a series of interviews, and suggested that a lack of resources for college planning and research existed as a barrier to college for rural students. Providing services such as college and career counseling, learning resources, and access to college-level coursework for students in rural districts is associated with increased college enrollment rates and some other academic measures of college readiness, but not all outcome measures had statistically significant changes associated with the services offered (Mokher et al., 2019). High school students from low-income backgrounds or whose parents did not attend college face challenges in college access and may benefit from additional support services to increase college access (Choy et al., 2000).

### **GEAR UP Background and Grant Program**

Administered by the U.S. Department of Education, GEAR UP is a competitive grant program authorized by Congress under Chapter 2 of the 1998 amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965. In 2014, Appalachian State University was awarded two 7-year GEAR UP partnership grants to support 11 rural school districts, staff, students, and families in western North Carolina. Using a cohort model that follows students over the course of seven years, GEAR UP aims to expose students to a variety of career and college options starting in sixth

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grade and seventh grade and supports them on their journey through their first year of college. With the goal of improving student access to and preparation for postsecondary education, our GEAR UP program has established partnerships with Institutions of Higher Education to provide services to over 15,000 students, in particular college campus visits. Though North Carolina has experienced rapid population growth in recent years, the state ranks second in the U.S. for having the largest rural population, after Texas, signaling the growth has not taken place uniformly across the state (State of Demographer of North Carolina, 2020; Tippett, 2016). The 11 school districts in the GEAR UP program in western North Carolina are considered rural districts, consisting of 55 total schools (24 high schools and 31 elementary/middle schools). According to the rural locale code definitions of National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (NCES, 2006), all districts in the GEAR UP program are classified as either rural fringe ( $n = 5$ ), rural distant ( $n = 3$ ), or rural remote ( $n = 3$ ). Students from rural school districts have been studied frequently with regard to college access and postsecondary education, and their rates of enrollment in college are often lower than students from nonrural areas according to the NCES (2015). Research suggests this difference may be due to socioeconomic reasons, cultural factors, and a lack of resources and programs designed to expose students to opportunities for postsecondary enrollment (e.g., Morton et al., 2018; Scott et al., 2015; Webber & Boehmer, 2008). For

students in rural and low-income areas, there are barriers to college access, such as limited access to nearby colleges and varied rates of parental involvement, resulting in low exposure to college campuses at a younger age (Beamer & Steinbaum, 2019; Morton et al., 2018).

GEAR UP services in other states have been studied and shown to be effective in increasing postsecondary enrollment rates. In particular, Bowman et al. (2018) showed that GEAR UP in Iowa was associated with higher postsecondary enrollment rates for students in lower-income high schools, although not with college persistence. Some additional research by Kim et al. (2018) explored which GEAR UP services were associated with higher postsecondary enrollment rates. Among the services associated with higher enrollment were college visits and college campus activities, but information about the timing of those particular services were not analyzed.

Within our GEAR UP partnership grant in western North Carolina, two specific types of services offered to rural students in the GEAR UP program occur on college campuses. The first are official campus tours, which are district-sponsored visits to colleges and universities in North Carolina and beyond. For purposes of this study, we will refer to these as Traditional College Visits. These tours are facilitated by admissions staff or other college departments (e.g. financial aid, academic departments, athletics, residence

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life, multicultural affairs) traditionally responsible for recruiting students to the institution. These Traditional College Visits are specifically designed to help students learn more about their options for postsecondary enrollment at the host institution. A second type of service offered to students is what we refer to as Educational Campus Field Trips. Educational Campus Field trips are district-sponsored field trips that take place on a college campus but are not intended to recruit students to the host institution; rather, they are meant to expose students to new academic experiences and broaden their views on career opportunities. For example, attending a STEM Expo event on a college campus, where students are exposed to a variety of faculty, staff, and community partners each hosting different experiments, demonstrations, and discussions, is classified as an Educational Campus Field Trip rather than as a Traditional College Visit.

Each of these services may encourage rural students toward postsecondary enrollment in somewhat different ways. Traditional College Visits are generally aimed at students who are closer to their high school graduation and are likely thinking about educational plans after high school. This service allows those students to visit schools that may be a good fit for them and to learn very specific things about each school regarding its size, academic programs, and culture. Often, the purpose of these visits is to help high school students make a decision on which college to attend,

and often assumes they have made the decision to attend at all.

Educational Campus Field Trips are more common in middle school but can be taken throughout middle school and high school. These visits can be impactful by allowing students to begin developing a college-going mindset at an early age. They may plant seeds in students' minds about possibilities for their future education, and can also help students have positive educational experiences on campus. Familiarity with college campuses earlier in a student's academic career may provide motivation for a student to engage more fully with their high school's guidance process to help them complete coursework and to engage in other experiences to help increase their chances of acceptance into postsecondary schools of interest. This is particularly important for students in rural areas where access to college campuses is minimal.

In summary, Traditional Campus Visits and Educational Campus Field Trips could help enhance students' self-determination regarding college going and postsecondary enrollment rate. However, little research discusses how these two types of campus visits are linked to rural students' postsecondary enrollment. In addition, prior college visit studies have primarily focused on formal college visits and tours. However, to the extent that the student impressions from these visits are somewhat intangible, exposure to college campuses in different

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settings beyond formal campus visits may be important in a student's aspirations to attend college.

Okerson (2016) pointed out the need for additional research in the field, such as examining if different types of college campus visits influence students' postsecondary enrollment. Also, in consideration of the collective impact of campus visits, it is critically important to understand if timing and quantity of each type of campus visit may help predict these students' postsecondary enrollment. Therefore, our study aims to explore the relationship between rural students' campus visits and postsecondary enrollment while considering visit type, visit timing, and other demographic variables. Our research question is:

*What is the relationship between rural student campus visits and postsecondary enrollment while considering visit type, visit timing, and other demographic variables?*

### Method

The GEAR UP program at Appalachian State University focused on providing multiple services (e.g., FAFSA application, college and career exploration) to students in rural, high-need school districts in which all feeder schools represent a greater than 50% population receiving free and reduced lunch. These services aimed to help rural students to be college and career ready as well as to

enhance their college-going mindset and postsecondary enrollment. While rural school districts are not homogeneous, increasing the likelihood of college access among rural high school students is nevertheless an important step as more jobs require college degrees in the future.

### Participants

Our program used a cohort-sequential design, with four cohort groups of students:

- Cohort 1: 2020 high school graduating class
- Cohort 2: 2021 graduating class
- Cohort 3: 2022 graduating class
- Cohort 4: 2023 graduating class.

Cohort 1 was the first group of students who had access to GEAR UP services, and was the focus of our analysis (7th graders in the 2014-2015 academic year;  $n = 3539$ ). These students received services, including access to sponsored Traditional Campus Visits and Educational Campus Field Trips, from their seventh-grade year through their senior year. More specifically, we aimed to focused on the 'True' student who did not move into or out of the partner schools, or who did not otherwise receive services until high school began. The final sample size was 2,274 ( $n = 1,216$  male students;  $n = 1,058$  female students).

### Data Collection

Two types of data were collected: GEAR UP campus visits and postsecondary enrollment.

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### GEAR UP Campus Visits

The GEAR UP services data collected during the project describes the type of service and the date the service was received. From this information we created a profile for each student that includes the number of each type of service received by grade level. Of particular focus for us was determining how many services occurred on college campuses and in what grade level they occurred on a student level. Our study looks at the relationship between the type and timing of campus visits for Cohort 1 and postsecondary enrollment rates.

The college choice process is multi-faceted, as suggested by the established literature in the field. Traditional College Visits and overall familiarity with college campuses through Educational Campus Field Trips expose students to environments that familiarize them with postsecondary educational options and foster discussion among faculty and students on the trips. This discussion, though it may seem minimally impactful, is known as “College Talk” and represents one of the nine critical interrelated elements of establishing a College Going Culture as identified by McClafferty and colleagues (2002). These experiences on college campuses can help students from rural communities increase their college exposure. This was the intent with GEAR UP college campus experiences; to increase exposure so that students can first begin to imagine themselves as college students, an important step in the early years before a student can begin asking and

answering questions about which institution they will attend.

### Postsecondary Enrollment

Students’ postsecondary enrollment data were retrieved from the National Student Clearinghouse to determine their postsecondary enrollment status for the graduating classes of 2020. For students in Cohort 1, our outcome measure of enrollment was defined similarly for the Summer 2020, Fall 2020, or Spring 2021 semesters. We did not differentiate between full-time and part-time enrollment, nor did we differentiate between the different types of postsecondary schools. This decision was influenced partly by the COVID-19 pandemic and its potential impact on student decisions for that cohort group.

### Data Analysis

We focused on postsecondary enrollment as an outcome measure for this study period. Over time, our data collection will allow us to measure persistence toward and eventual achievement of postsecondary degrees for each of the groups and assess the role that Traditional College Visits and Educational Campus Field Trips and their timing had in predicting those levels of achievement.

To answer our research questions, we used logistic regression as the main analysis method. The primary goal of this analysis was to determine whether the type and timing of each of the two types of campus visits was

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predictive of postsecondary enrollment for the first GEAR UP cohort group.

Additionally, we considered whether there were effects for demographic variables such as race and gender.

### Results

We conducted three sets of logistic regression

#### Table 1.

Summary Statistics of Traditional College Visits and Educational Campus Field Trips by Year for Cohort 1

analyses to estimate the effects of the two different visit types and the year in which the visits occurred for Cohort 1, the class of 2020. For Cohort 1, services began in the academic year of 2014-15. In our analysis, we counted the number of Traditional College Visits sponsored by GEAR UP during each academic year for six years between 2014-2015 and 2019-2020, and the number of Educational Campus Field Trips for the same set of academic years as well. Summary statistics for these different visit counts are given in Table 1. From these summary statistics, we note that the visit counts of both types for most students is fairly low in a given

Year (Grade)	Traditional College Visits				Educational Campus Field Trips			
	Mean (SD)			Max	Mean (SD)			Max
	Male	Female	Overall		Male	Female	Overall	
2014-2015 (7 <sup>th</sup> )	0.27 (0.67)	0.32 (0.71)	0.29 (0.69)	2	0.46 (0.75)	0.48 (0.80)	0.47 (0.77)	3
2015-2016 (8 <sup>th</sup> )	0.86 (0.99)	0.95 (1.08)	0.90 (1.03)	7	0.32 (0.72)	0.34 (0.75)	0.33 (0.73)	5
2016-2017 (9 <sup>th</sup> )	0.24 (0.44)	0.27 (0.46)	0.25 (0.45)	2	0.08 (0.45)	0.12 (0.57)	0.10 (0.51)	6
2017-2018 (10 <sup>th</sup> )	0.34 (0.73)	0.42 (1.05)	0.38 (0.90)	14	0.07 (0.33)	0.10 (0.41)	0.08 (0.37)	3
2018-2019 (11 <sup>th</sup> )	0.15 (0.46)	0.31 (0.83)	0.22 (0.67)	9	0.04 (0.25)	0.06 (0.46)	0.05 (0.36)	5
2019-2020 (12 <sup>th</sup> )	0.21 (0.67)	0.20 (0.70)	0.21 (0.68)	8	0.03 (0.23)	0.09 (0.62)	0.06 (0.46)	11



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year. Although not listed in the table, the median visit count of both types is zero for all years, and the third quartile is 0 or 1 for all years as well. In looking at the maximum values in Table 1 for each variable, in the first year of services as the grant was being launched, overall visits were lower before increasing in the years afterward as the grant progressed. In the 2017-2018 year the maximum number of Traditional College Visits was 14 due to previously mentioned visit events that stopped at multiple campuses, which led to a larger maximum value in that academic year. No limits were placed on the number of visits that a student could take. However, the vast majority of students took five or fewer visits that academic year.

For our first logistic regression modelling process, we included 12 potential predictor variables, specifically yearly visit counts for each visit type across the six-year span. We used Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC) and a backward selection process to determine which of the individual predictors should be included in the chosen model. From that selection process, the predictors in the model chosen by AIC were Traditional College Visit counts in the years 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020, along with the Educational Campus Field Trip count in the year 2015-2016. Each of these predictors had a positive association with enrollment probability.

Because the visit counts in some years varied a bit and showed some right skewness, we conducted the same model selection process, but with each predictor transformed to the square root scale to reduce the right skewness in the distribution of the predictors. From the AIC model selection process on this transformed scale, we ended up with the same set of predictors in the final model that we mentioned previously, and again all of them were positively associated with postsecondary enrollment rates. With this verification that our results were not affected by the skewness of the predictor variables, we built our models on the original variable scale to allow for an easier interpretation of the resulting model.

In the second logistic regression modeling process, we added race and gender as potential predictor variables to the previously chosen model. We found that gender had a statistically significant association with enrollment rates, with female students having a higher likelihood of postsecondary enrollment. A summary of the logistic regression coefficients, standard errors, and Z statistics for this model are listed in Table 2. In the third logistic regression modeling process, we focused strictly on first visit timing by recording the year of each student's first Traditional College Visit, and the year of their first Educational Campus Field Trip for Cohort 1, and used these variables as categorical predictors of postsecondary enrollment. This approach allowed us to focus on the effect of the timing of the first college

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**Table 2.**  
Logistic Regression Output for Counts of Traditional College Visits and Educational Campus Field Trips Predicting Postsecondary Enrollment.

baseline of students who did not take Traditional College Visits or Educational Campus Field Trips, statistically significant increases in postsecondary enrollment rates occurred when students took their first

Predictor	Traditional College Visits			Educational Campus Field Trips		
	Estimated Effect	SE	z	Estimated Effect	SE	z
Intercept	0.09	0.08	1.06	.	.	.
2014-2015 (7 <sup>th</sup> )	0.24*	0.06	3.69	.	.	.
2015-2016 (8 <sup>th</sup> )	0.09*	0.04	2.16	0.14*	0.06	2.33
2016-2017 (9 <sup>th</sup> )	.	.	.	.	.	.
2017-2018 (10 <sup>th</sup> )	0.10	0.05	1.79	.	.	.
2018-2019 (11 <sup>th</sup> )	0.05	0.07	0.73	.	.	.
2019-2020 (12 <sup>th</sup> )	0.12	0.07	1.76	.	.	.
Gender: Male	-0.75*	0.09	-8.69	.	.	.

*Note.* . = not significant in our first analysis so we did not include in this logistic regression analysis.  
\* $p < .05$ .

visit of both types, and their predictive effect on postsecondary enrollment. We also included race and gender as potential predictors in this modeling process, and we used AIC with a backward selection approach to select the best model from the candidates.

The minimum AIC value occurred with predictors based on the first year of a Traditional College Visit, along with gender. In this particular model, compared with a

Traditional College Visit in the academic years of 2014-15, 2017-18, or 2019-20. These correspond to the students' seventh grade year, the sophomore year, and the senior year for Cohort 1. We also note that while the year of the student's first Educational Campus Field Trip was not in the model with the minimum AIC value, when it is added as a predictor to the model, a statistically significant positive effect on postsecondary enrollment rate is seen when the student's first Educational Campus Field Trip occurred in 2014-2015 (7th grade), early in the student's academic career.

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Otherwise, the effect of the year of the student's first Educational Campus Field Trip was not statistically significant, leading to the factor overall not being chosen in the final model. Gender was again associated with postsecondary enrollment rates, with males being less likely to enroll than females. In this step, we explored the possibility of interaction between gender and first visit years, to allow for the possibility that visits for males and females have different yearly predictive effects on postsecondary enrollment. When we added potential interaction terms between gender and year of first Traditional College Visit, and gender and year of first Educational Campus Field Trip, only one of the interaction terms was statistically significant at the 5% significance level, and the overall AIC for this model increased, indicating that the simpler model without interaction terms was preferred by AIC.

### Discussion

This study aimed to explore the influence of two types of college visits with rural students' postsecondary enrollment (Traditional College Visits and Educational Campus Field Trip). Overall, our results showed that both types of visits were associated with higher postsecondary enrollment rates. This

indicated that rural students with higher participation in these campus visit services, and especially students who participate in these services earlier in their academic careers, might have a higher possibility of enrolling in college. This finding is consistent with King's study (2012) that college visits could help rural students understand the college environment and campus life, and could enhance their self-determination for college going, which in turn helps increase

postsecondary enrollment rates.

In terms of participation rates, our results presented that Traditional College Visits were collectively more positively associated with postsecondary enrollment than Educational Campus Field Trips. One exception to this tendency in Table 2 should be noted, in that Traditional College Visits in 2016-17 were not

significantly associated with enrollment rates, although this year was fairly early in the student's academic career. During this particular year when fewer college visits were being taken overall, Cohort 1 was just transitioning to high school, and campus visit services were being offered through the high school for the first time. This led to fewer Traditional College Visit services being offered in the first year of high school and likely contributed to the lack of significance of the college visit count in that particular year.



**“Our results showed that both types of visits were associated with higher postsecondary enrollment rates. This indicated that rural students with higher participation in these campus visit services, and especially students who participate in these services earlier in their academic careers, might have a higher possibility of enrolling in college.”**

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To sustain the linkage between rural students' Traditional College Visits and future postsecondary enrollment, rural high schools are strongly suggested to collaborate with middle schools and colleges to ensure that college visits can be continuously offered to these students in a systematic and tangible way (Radcliffe & Bos, 2011).

The fact that the number of Traditional College Visits was a more consistently significant predictor of postsecondary enrollment than Educational Campus Field Trips is another finding in our analyses. For Traditional College Visits, we see the impact of both the quantity and timing of these visits on predicting rural students' postsecondary enrollment. These visits have a direct academic focus, and thus participants experience the campus more deliberately as a potential student. We found that the number of Traditional College Visits per year was also significant with the exception of one academic year. In terms of timing, we found that first visits in the student's seventh grade year, and sophomore or senior years of high school were significant predictors of postsecondary enrollment. These findings suggest that a large number of Traditional College Visits is associated with increased postsecondary enrollment rates. The impact of timing is a little less clear. Students who take Traditional College Visits early may also have ample time to take a larger number of them, but also students who take Traditional College Visits for the first time in their high school career (specifically their senior year) are strongly

considering postsecondary education. Less clear is that first Traditional College Visits in a student's junior or freshman year are less predictively impactful than the total number of visits at those stages. This combination of findings is plausible in that a larger number of Traditional College Visits is an important predictor of enrollment, but when we look at a student's first visit date, those who start early are likely engaged in the college selection process, while those who start late may indicate that a decision is still being carefully considered. Both factors may be important because a student who starts visiting colleges as a senior may not have sufficient time to take many visits, but those individual visits may be more impactful given the student's upcoming high school graduation.

Finally, we observed that the number of Educational Campus Field Trips from 2015-16 (the eighth-grade year for Cohort 1) had a statistically significant association with postsecondary enrollment. 2015-16 was the one academic year where the number of Educational Campus Field Trips during eighth grade had a significant association with students' later postsecondary enrollment. These findings indicated that Educational Campus Field Trips could be one of the services provided for rural students for enhancing their college-going mindset. While Educational Campus Field Trips may help rural students gain exposure to college campuses, they appear to be less associated with postsecondary enrollment rates unless they occur early in a student's academic

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career. This corresponds with Raudenbush and Bloom's (2015) and Swanson et al's study (2021) that eighth grade may be a year when students are thinking about the next phase of their life when they will enter high school, making an Educational Campus Field Trip more impactful at that time. In our results, we also see some additional evidence of this assertion, because the model that focused on the timing of the student's first Educational Campus Field Trip showed a significant effect when the first visit occurred in the seventh grade year, although the effects of first Educational Campus Field Trips for the other years were not significant.

Taken together, our data provide evidence that Educational Campus Field Trips, when taken in middle school, play a critical factor in predicting rural students' possibility of postsecondary enrollment.

### **Educational Implications**

Our study suggests that providing early access opportunities to college campuses can be beneficial for students as early as their middle school years. From a practical standpoint, Traditional College Visits are stronger predictors of postsecondary enrollment for most grade levels, but Educational Campus Field Trips do have a positive relationship with postsecondary enrollment in the middle grades. For both types of visits, timing is important because students who take their first Traditional College Visit or their first Educational Field Trip in middle school may have higher

postsecondary enrollment rates. An additional benefit of Educational Field Trips is that they may be easier to organize for large groups of middle-school students, allowing more students to be exposed to college campuses and providing a strong foundation for future postsecondary enrollment.

### **Limitations**

There are three limitations in this study. First, an important consideration in our data is the potential for confounding factors to exist. Educational Campus Field Trips in middle school are often taken by all students in a particular grade level or school. At the high school level, students who participate in both types of visits may simply be interested in college if they are from families that prioritize postsecondary education or have higher academic achievement rates. Hence, higher raw visit numbers may not directly impact postsecondary enrollment but may simply signal a student's interest in postsecondary options. However, early Educational Campus Field Trips are less likely to be self-selected by the participants, and hence their significance suggests that they are a valuable part of a student's college selection process.

Second, we do not know how many Traditional College Visits and other informal campus visits the students took outside of the GEAR UP grant program. It is difficult to speculate exactly how independent college visits correlate with those offered through GEAR UP services, but more reliable data might be obtained by knowing about all

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college visits that students take.

Third, we did not include a control group of students due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' learning and their postsecondary enrollment. The emergence of the global COVID-19 pandemic impacted enrollment rates for the class of 2020, as stated in the NSC Blog (2021). Undergraduate enrollment experienced a 5.9% decline during the pandemic, with community colleges experiencing an even steeper decline of 11.3%. This is particularly applicable to our western North Carolina GEAR UP population given that students from our participating schools aspire to attend a community college at higher rates than the overall student population of North Carolina. Thus, a direct comparison of postsecondary enrollment rates between the two graduating classes (the class of 2019 for the control students; the class of 2020 for the Cohort 1 students) is unlikely to be informative as to the predictive ability of college visits on postsecondary enrollment rates. For this reason, we chose to focus in our analysis on Cohort 1 and on the rates of the two different visit types as differential predictors of postsecondary enrollment.

### Conclusion

Overall, our research suggests that offering middle school students opportunities for Traditional College Visits and Educational Campus Field Trips has benefits. The students in our cohort group are from rural school districts, and early visits may provide an

important opportunity to increase college knowledge and begin developing a college-going mindset. Our work also shows that sponsoring college visits throughout high school may be beneficial for students who are still deciding on their options during their senior year.

Collectively, we believe that the college decision-making process is multifaceted, but also that exposure to college campuses helps students with important parts of this process, beginning with helping students decide that they want to go to college. This exposure may be more important for students from rural school districts, for whom having sponsored visits may play a bigger role in the decision-making process than students who are from non-rural parts of the country.

It is important to note that our study focuses on enrollment as an outcome measure. We have not yet collected data regarding college persistence or degree attainment, but those will also be important measures of postsecondary success. At this stage, we focused on a simple outcome measure (postsecondary enrollment, the first year of college) due to the likelihood of the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the location of enrollment. Students who at other times may have chosen a four-year university after graduation may not have done so in 2020. Therefore, we suggest that future studies should focus on a longer-range view of a student's college career (e.g., the predictive impact of campus visits on college retention or persistence, as well as degree attainment).

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