First Cohort of Tennessee Promise:
Evaluating Outcomes
TBR The College System Of Tennessee

- Alexander Gorbunov
- Melissa Hunter
- Amy Moreland
- Chris Tingle
1. TN Promise: Context & features
2. Cohort characteristics
3. Cohort outcomes after 5 terms
4. Impacts & issues
5. Take-aways & next steps
Tennessee Promise:
State Context & Program Features
TN is known for several landmark initiatives:

- Funding Formula
- Drive to 55
- Transfer Pathways & Reverse Transfer
- HOPE scholarship
- TN Reconnect
- **TN Promise (2015)**
TN public higher education comprises:

- **TBR - College System of TN**
  
  13 community colleges (~88k)
  
  27 colleges of technology (~30k)

- 6 independent universities

- University of TN System
TN Promise features:

- Tuition-free attendance
  Community college
  College of Technology
- Last-dollar scholarship
- 5 semesters of eligibility
- Guidance from mentors
TN Promise requires that students:

- Enroll full-time and submit FAFSA
- Graduate from high school recently
- Engage in community service 8 hours a term
- Demonstrate academic progress GPA: 2.0+
First Cohort of TN Promise Students: Demographic & Academic Characteristics
# Freshmen at community colleges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014 First-time freshmen*</th>
<th>2015 First-time freshmen*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Headcount</td>
<td>18,185</td>
<td>22,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Full-time</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. ACT Score</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>18.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. High School GPA</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes full-time and part-time students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014 First-time freshmen*</th>
<th>2015 First-time freshmen*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. ACT</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOPE Grant</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes full-time and part-time students.
Greatest increase in headcount occurred at the lower end of ACT.

- 2014 avg. ACT = 19.2
- 2015 avg. ACT = 19.0

*Full-time students*
Promise award recipients fall into 3 major groups.

- **Group A**
  - Award: $0
  - N: 5,788

- **Group B**
  - Avg. Award: $532
  - N: 3,715

- **Group C**
  - Avg. Award: $2,015
  - N: 2,169

N: 13,287 students
Study of TN Promise Outcomes:
Methodology & Key Findings
We set out to:

- Focus on community colleges
- Track students over time
- Re-define student success
  
  New metrics
- Use data from TN & Clearinghouse
  
  Other sectors & states
Comparison groups:

- Recent HS grads not on Promise
  4,791
- Non-recent HS grads
  2,301
- Pre-Promise recent HS grads
  13,341

Promise: 13,287
We define **student success** as:

- Earning a credential
  - Associate degree
  - Certificate connected to funding formula
- Transferring out
- Remaining in school
We track Promise students for 5 terms:

- Promise cohort: 13,287
- Persistence
- Awards
- Transfer
- Drop Out
Promise students show higher retention rates.

- Spring 2016: 81.3% Promise, 66.3% Non-Promise, 0% Not recent HS grads
- Fall 2016: 68.9% Promise, 60.5% Non-Promise, 34.9% Not recent HS grads
- Spring 2017: 68.9% Promise, 43.1% Non-Promise, 43.1% Not recent HS grads
- Fall 2017: 42.0% Promise, 34.9% Non-Promise, 29.9% Not recent HS grads
Promise students show higher retention rates.

- **Term 2**: Promise students - 81.3%, Pre-Promise recent HS grads - 78.4%
- **Term 3**: Promise students - 60.5%, Pre-Promise recent HS grads - 54.8%
- **Term 4**: Promise students - 52.5%, Pre-Promise recent HS grads - 46.7%
- **Term 5**: Promise students - 42.0%, Pre-Promise recent HS grads - 37.6%
Promise students demonstrate improved outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Promise</th>
<th>Non-recent HS grads</th>
<th>Promise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Received an award</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferred out</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still enrolled</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Success rate</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tracking fall 2015 freshmen over 5 terms

First-time
full-time
freshmen
20,379
Tracking fall 2015 freshmen over 5 terms

- Promise Students: 13,287
- Non-Promise
  - Recent HS grads: 4,791
  - Non-recent HS Grads: 2,301
- First-time full-time freshmen: 20,379
Promise students outperform non-Promise groups.

**Promise Students**
- Total: 13,287
- Awards: 21.5%
- Enrolled: 20.6%
- Transferred: 10.1%

**Non-Promise**
- Recent HS grads
  - Total: 4,791
  - Awards: 8.3%
  - Enrolled: 20.0%
  - Transferred: 12.5%

- Non-recent HS Grads
  - Total: 2,301
  - Awards: 9.3%
  - Enrolled: 20.8%
  - Transferred: 9.0%
**Promise students outperform non-Promise groups.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Promise Students</th>
<th>Non-Promise Recent HS grads</th>
<th>Non-recent HS Grads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13,287</td>
<td>4,791</td>
<td>2,301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-time full-time freshmen</td>
<td>20,379</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promise students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awards</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolled</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferred</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year graduation</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
52% of Promise students achieved success in 5 terms.

TN Promise students: 13,287

Awards: 2,857 (21.5%)
- Associate + Certificate: 1.2%
- Associate degree: 18.2%
- Short-term certificate: 1.6%
- Long-term certificate: 0.4%
- Both certificates: 0.05%

Still enrolled, no awards: 2,739 (20.6%)
- Transferred out: 10.1%
- Dropped/stopped out: 47.8%

Left the system: 7,691 (57.9%)
Still enrolled Promise students are close to earning a degree.

- **Promise**: 38%
- **Non-Promise**: 29%
- **Non-recent HS grads**: 23%

Cumulative credits earned by the 5th semester:

- < 12: 3%
- 12 - 23: 5%
- 24 - 35: 10%
- 36 - 47: 14%
- 48 - 59: 23%
- 60 +: 24%

Still enrolled Promise students are close to earning a degree.
2015 recent HS graduates receive awards at a higher rate.

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<tr>
<td>Received an award</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferred out</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still enrolled</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Promise students outperform all comparison groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Promise</th>
<th>Recent HS Grads</th>
<th>Non-recent HS Grads</th>
<th>2014 Recent HS Grads</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduation rate</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall success rate</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
<td>40.8%</td>
<td>39.1%</td>
<td>49.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TN Promise:

Impacts, Issues &

Next Steps in Research
Promise award recipients fall into 3 major groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Average Award</th>
<th>Average ACT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group A</td>
<td>5,788</td>
<td>$0</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group B</td>
<td>3,715</td>
<td>$532</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group C</td>
<td>2,169</td>
<td>$2,015</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1,615</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Students with small awards have higher success rates.

- Group A: 56.0% Returned in Fall 2016, 16.9% Received a Degree or Certificate by Fall 2017
- Group B: 71.5% Returned in Fall 2016, 32.3% Received a Degree or Certificate by Fall 2017
- Group C: 50.9% Returned in Fall 2016, 11.3% Received a Degree or Certificate by Fall 2017
FAFSA was a common barrier for non-Promise students.

1. Did Not Meet FAFSA Deadline (February 1, 2015)  
   10.7%

2. Did Not Attend Meetings (January-April 2015)  
   16.6%

3. Did Not Complete Community Service (August 1, 2015)  
   13.8%

4. Did Not Complete FAFSA Verification (August 1, 2015)  
   38.0%

Other Reasons for Ineligibility  
20.9%
TN Promise faces equity challenges.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>NON-PROMISE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recent HS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URM</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pell grant</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOPE grant</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Program faces some **challenges:**

- Failure to complete applications
- FAFSA verification
- Equity gaps
- Persistence
- First-year momentum
- Graduation rates
Topics of ongoing research:

- New Promise cohorts
- In-depth analysis of outcomes
  - Focus on equity gap
  - Return on investment
  - Retention & graduation issues
- Long-term policy impacts
Address **methodological issues:**

- Selectivity bias:
  
  Self-selection into Promise

- Treatment effect

- Student success metrics
TN Promise has produced:

- Accelerated enrollment
  - Increased college-going rate
- More full-time enrollment
- Changes in academic profile
  - Low ACT spectrum: Greatest increase
- Accelerated award rates
  - Doubled the number of graduates
By the 5th semester:

- Promise: 52% success rate
  Graduated, transferred, or remained in school
- 38% of still enrolled Promise students:
  60+ credits