

THE ECONOMICS OF MATCHING

Our Thesis at Work!

And, More College Campus Tours to Come!

In both his *Politics* and also *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle establishes the household (*oikos*) as the vital unit of the polis. By extension, *oiko-nomia* is concerned with acquisition and use of property to effectively and efficiently manage the household. This natural form of management was aimed at human flourishing and relied heavily on the idea of matching skills and pursuits.

Today, a large part of our economy is concerned with matching – dating and social, service and task matching, healthcare and wellness, real estate, and career planning. Indeed, even as a college sophomore I’ve already confronted professional vetting and matching in the form of pymetrics assessments and AI interviews via HireVue through which I and tens of thousands of others will be interviewed without the presence of another human.

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Perhaps because of the lack of financial incentive, an area which has been woefully *underserved* in terms of large-scale, “economic” matching has been higher education. This lack of an economy of support, i.e., efficient, widespread and transparent, is deeply evidenced with

first-generation, low-income students (FGLI) and college decision-making. The resources and information available are modest, disparate and or incomplete; few are known or distributed on a wide-scale basis. Under-resourced high school students, especially first-generation college students, are disproportionately impacted by lack of effective college matching.

During my junior year of high school I was struck by the contrast with which different students learned about college decision making, i.e., where one might be interested in attending, the reasons why, and, the published cost versus net-cost. Far too many FGLI high school students lack information about the college application process, financial aid, and, the fit/feel of various schools. There are no economics of matching for this group. On a micro level, this group rarely participates in the things others take *for granted*, e.g., college campus visitation or discussions about what college might be a good match.

In part through an internship at Bloomberg Philanthropies I started research into a simple premise – would college campus visitation increase the rate of college application and matriculation? The non-profit I founded, [GrantedUSA.org](#), has resoundingly demonstrated that truth.

Through nearly 20 college campuses visited with over 600 student-campus visits, my initial instincts and research were confirmed – when any student visits a college campus they become more motivated to apply, become more familiar with what type of environment suits them best, and, they become better informed about financial aid. The economics of matching is sparked. This matching process is even more impactful for FGLI students.

Research indicates that only 20% of students without a college-educated parent will achieve a bachelor’s degree or higher. Further, median household income when a parent holds a college degree is 35% higher than those without a college degree; median wealth of households with at least one bachelor’s degree is more than twice households without any bachelor’s degrees.

Finding the proper match for college – proper academic profile, social support, financial need – will necessarily improve FGLI outcome across a range of measures, most notably likelihood of graduation, debt burden and future income potential.

Where the economy of matching fails FGLI students is also in terms of the consistency of measured data. At a high degree of difficulty, [GrantedUSA.org](#) was able to match the number of students who toured colleges (through its tours with one partner organization) with the number of students who then applied to the colleges they toured and then were accepted.

The impact of college campus visitation (albeit from just one GrantedUSA.org partner organization) was astoundingly positive:

College	# Visits	#Students	Applications	Acceptances	Acceptance	Attendances	Yield Rate
SUNY Binghamton	1	27	6	4	67%	1	25%
SUNY Oneonta	1	28	11	11	100%	1	9%
SUNY Albany	1	28	7	7	100%	1	43%
SUNY Cortland	1	27	11	9	82%	3	22%
Ithaca College	1	27	5	5	100%	2	0%
Cornell	1	27	5	1	20%	0	100%
Siena	1	28	1	1	100%	1	0%
Mount Saint Mary	1	28	1	1	100%	1	0%
TOTAL	8	464	50	41	82%	9	38%

The students who accepted their offers felt good about where they were going. All of them received significant financial aid through a process of education which began during college campus tours.

For [GrantedUSA.org](#) it took a fair degree of trial and error to discern which colleges/universities might provide a better overall match. For example, though GrantedUSA.org relies on a spoke-and-wheel form of tours (leave from the partner organization’s base and then cluster tours to proximate colleges), it was discovered that for many FGLI students staying closer to home felt like more of a match. Additionally, the more pronounced the financial aid education was the more comfortable and likely FGLI students were to apply and then attend. Indeed, certain schools, esp. the ones above, did a superb job of discussing the robust nature of their financial aid offerings.

The right match in terms of financial aid reduces reliance on out-of-pocket costs. Many of those on the [GrantedUSA.org](#) tours did not know that nearly 79% of the lowest-income students at selective public universities received enough support to cover their full tuition and fees, much higher than the roughly 55% of low-income students at other public 4-year schools who had their tuition fully covered.

By way of example, at very selective private universities, the average net tuition paid by the low-income undergraduates is ~\$13K despite high published costs (as of 2019–2022). At very selective public universities, low-income in-state students paid an average of ~\$1.8K in net tuition which is basically a full-tuition scholarship after aid. Said differently, the right college match, even one perceived to be more expensive or out of reach can in reality be more affordable than a less-resourced school.

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Matching also spurs higher retention and higher graduation rates. Shockingly, 90% of FGLI students do not graduate within 6 years of matriculation.

The major forces which contribute to FGLI not graduating within the anticipated amount of time are: falling behind academically, financial stress, lack of social comfort, and, outside family stresses or obligations (caring for relatives or having to work for income).

[GrantedUSA.org](#) began with the premise that if a FGLI student visited a college campus they would be able to paint themselves into the picture of that campus life in a good fit or match. When that matching takes place the economy of the household and the process is affirmed where everyone benefits.

Sources Cited: Pew Research, College Board Research, The Atlantic, College Advisor (Note: full citations exist for all sources, but have been removed given format constraints).

