

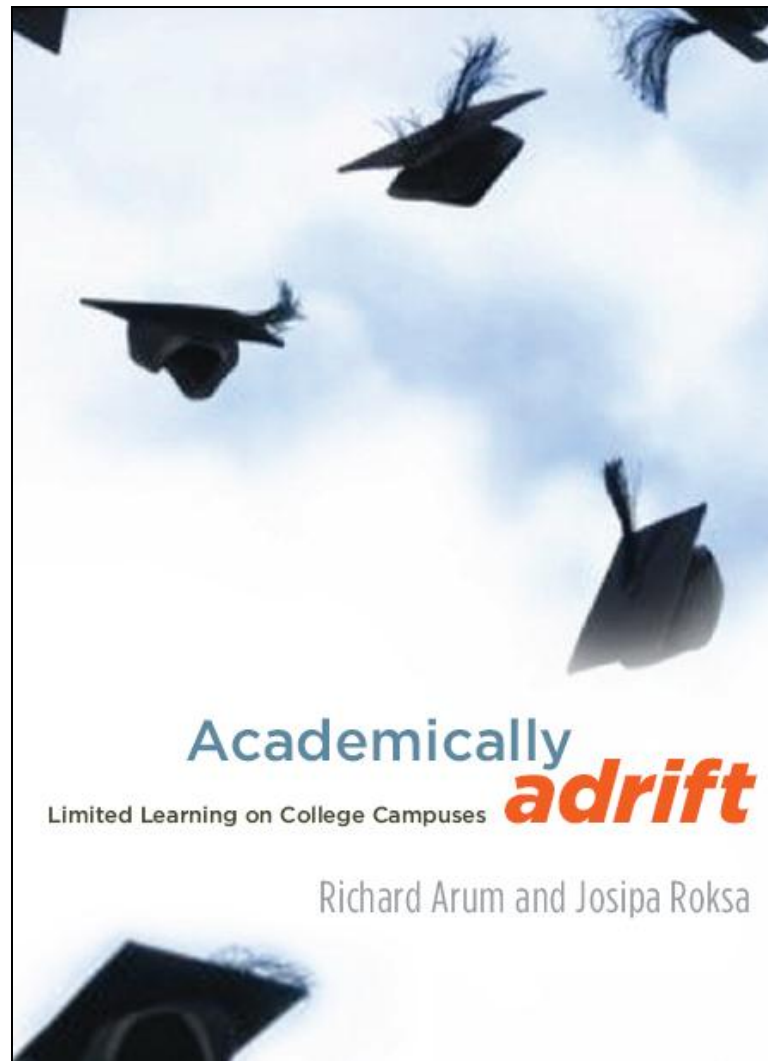
Are We “Academically Adrift” and What is Accreditation’s Responsibility

Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa


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CHEA Annual Conference

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Source (University of Chicago Press, January 2011):



Presentation Topics

- ▶ What is the state of undergraduate education with respect to academic rigor and student learning as demonstrated by improvement on an assessment of critical thinking, complex reasoning, and writing skills during college?
 - ▶ What specific experiences and college contexts are associated with improved student learning outcomes? To what extent does inequality in learning outcomes occur across campuses?
 - ▶ How are recent graduates faring after completing college? To what extent are postgraduate outcomes associated with collegiate academic performance?
 - ▶ What is the role of accreditation in improving academic conditions and student learning outcomes?
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Determinants of College Learning Dataset

▶ Longitudinal Design

- College surveys and CLA Assessment: Fall 2005, Spring 2007, Spring 2009
- Post-college surveys: Spring 2010 and Spring 2011

▶ Large Scale

- 2005–2007: 24 diverse four-year institutions; 2,341 students (*Academically Adrift*)
- 2005–2009: 29 diverse four-year institutions, 1,666 students
- 2010 post-college follow-up: 976 respondents
- 2011 post-college follow-up: 967 respondents

Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA)

- ▶ Dimensions of learning assessed
 - critical thinking, complex reasoning, and written communication
- ▶ Distinguishing characteristics
 - Direct measures (as opposed to student reports)
 - NOT multiple choice
 - Holistic assessment based on open-ended prompts representing “real-world” scenarios
- ▶ Used in other contexts
 - One of the measures of learning used by VSA
 - Will be utilized in 2016 by OECD-AHELO project

Performance Task (example)

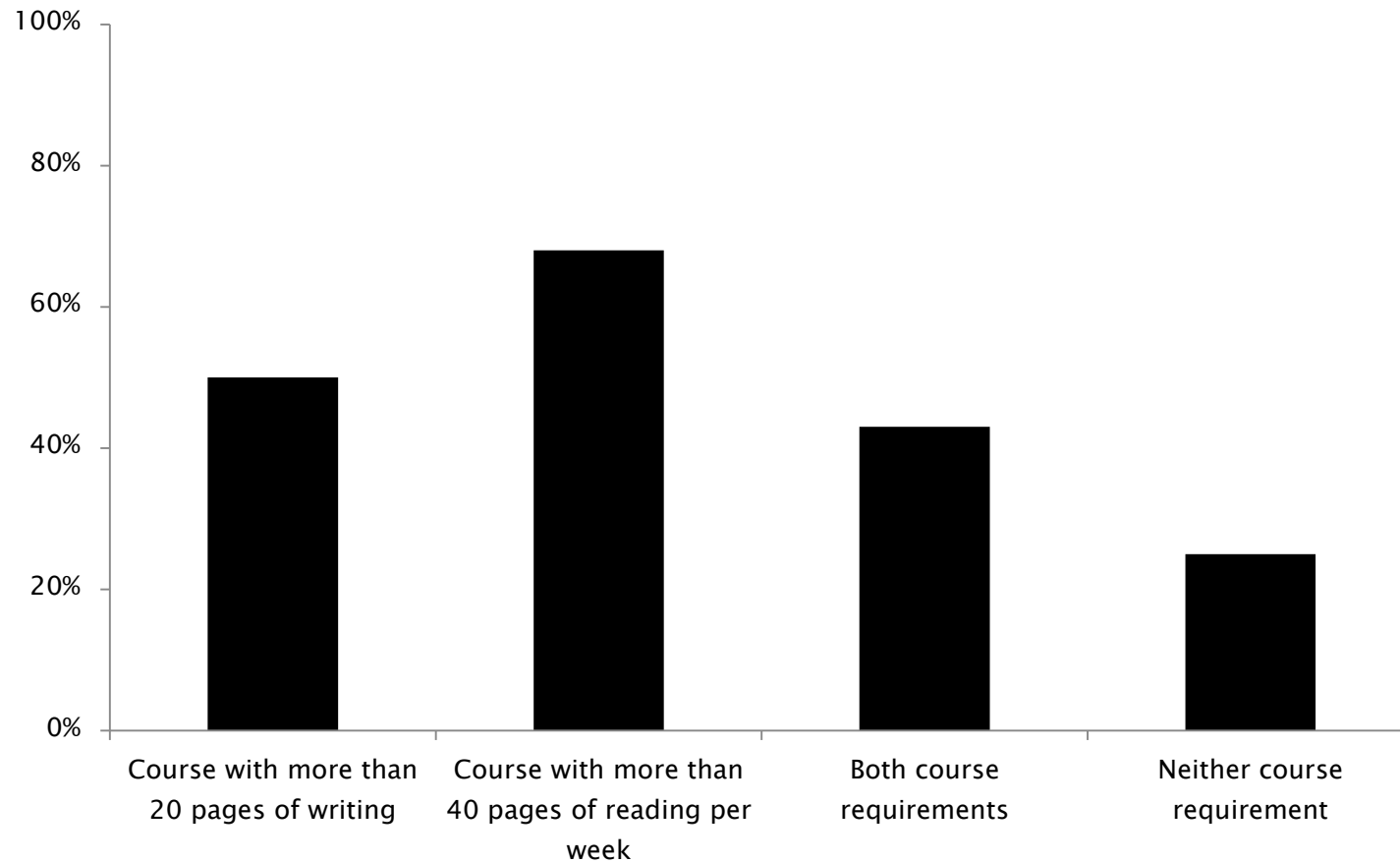
You are the assistant to Pat Williams, the president of DynaTech, a company that makes precision electronic instruments and navigational equipment. Sally Evans, a member of DynaTech's sales force, recommended that DynaTech buy a small private plane (a SwiftAir 235) that she and other members of the sales force could use to visit customers. Pat was about to approve the purchase when there was an accident involving a SwiftAir 235.

Performance Task (example, cont.)

Students are provided with a set of materials (e.g. newspaper articles, Federal Accident Report, e-mail exchanges, description and performance characteristics of AirSwift 235 and another model, etc.) and asked to prepare a memo that addresses several questions, including what data support or refute the claim that the type of wing on the SwiftAir 235 leads to more in-flight breakups, what other factors may have contributed to the accident and should be taken into account, and their overall recommendation about whether or not DynaTech should purchase the plane.

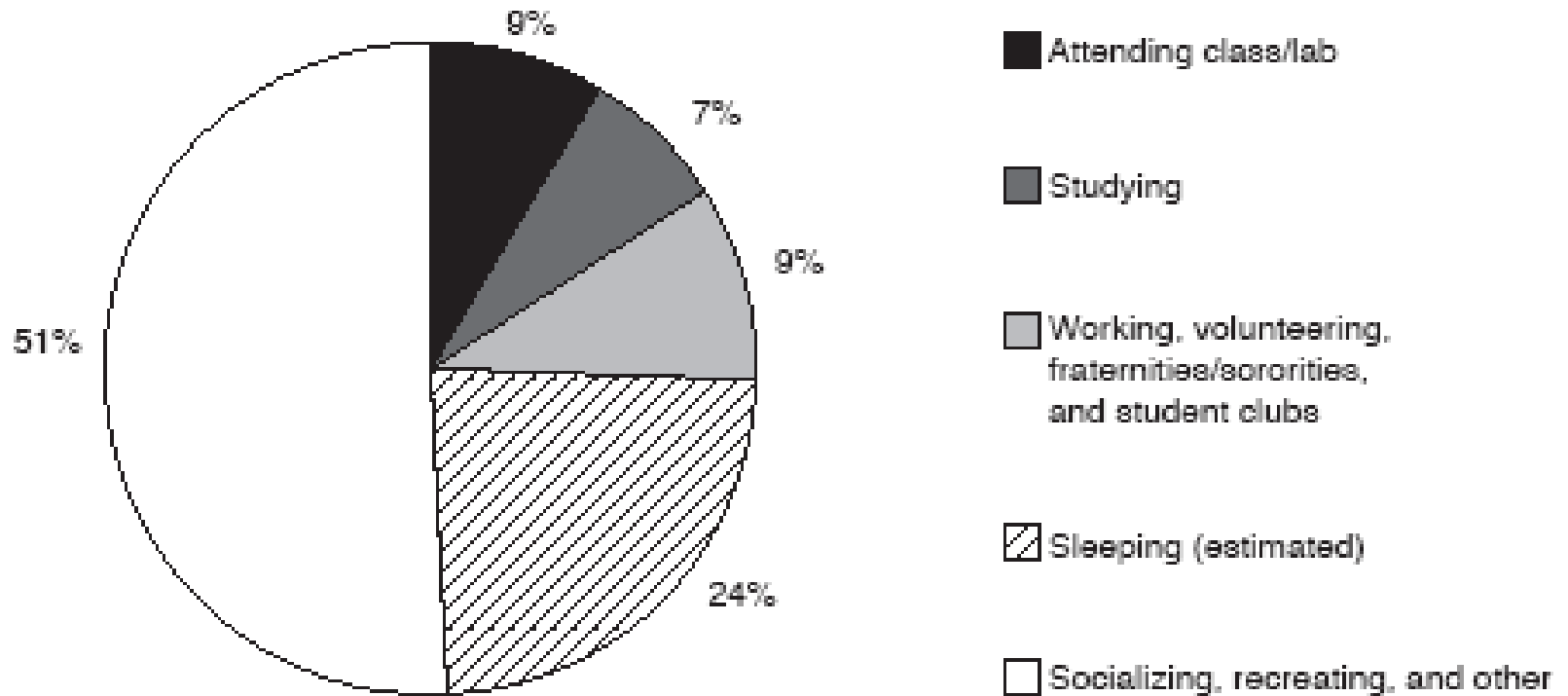
<http://www.collegiatelearningassessment.org/>

Course Requirements



Note: Based on Spring 2007 survey.

Students' Time Use

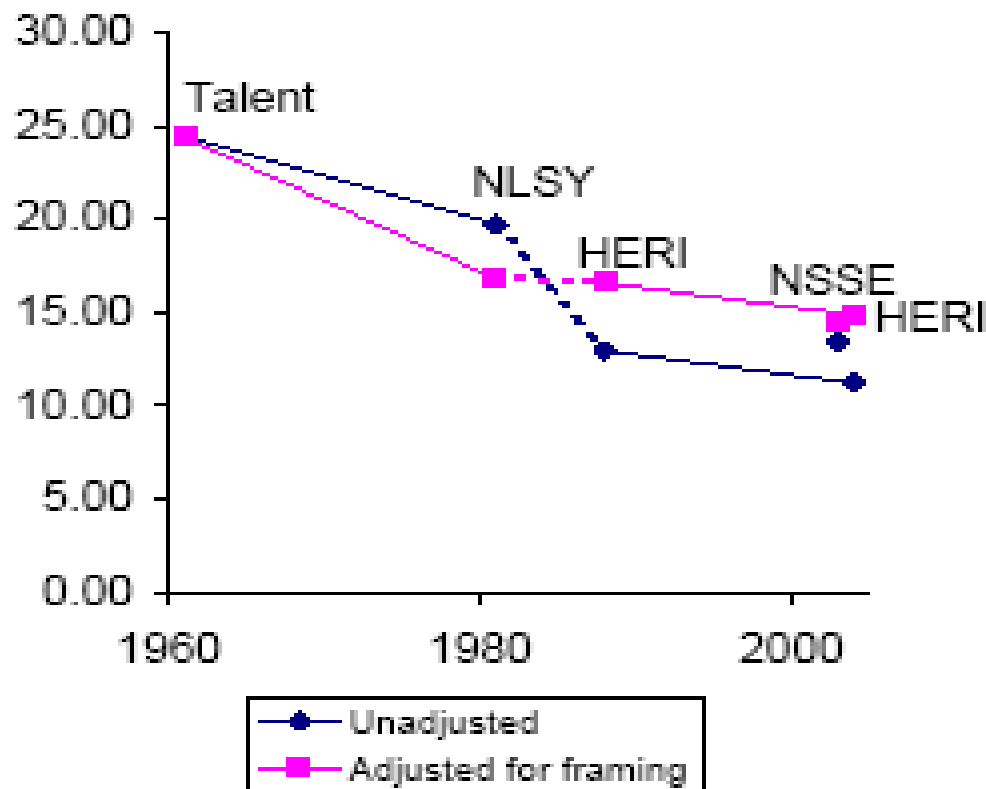


Note: Based on Spring 2007 survey.

Academic Commitment Over Time

(source: Phillip Babcock and Mindy Marks, *forthcoming* 2010)

Average Study Hours

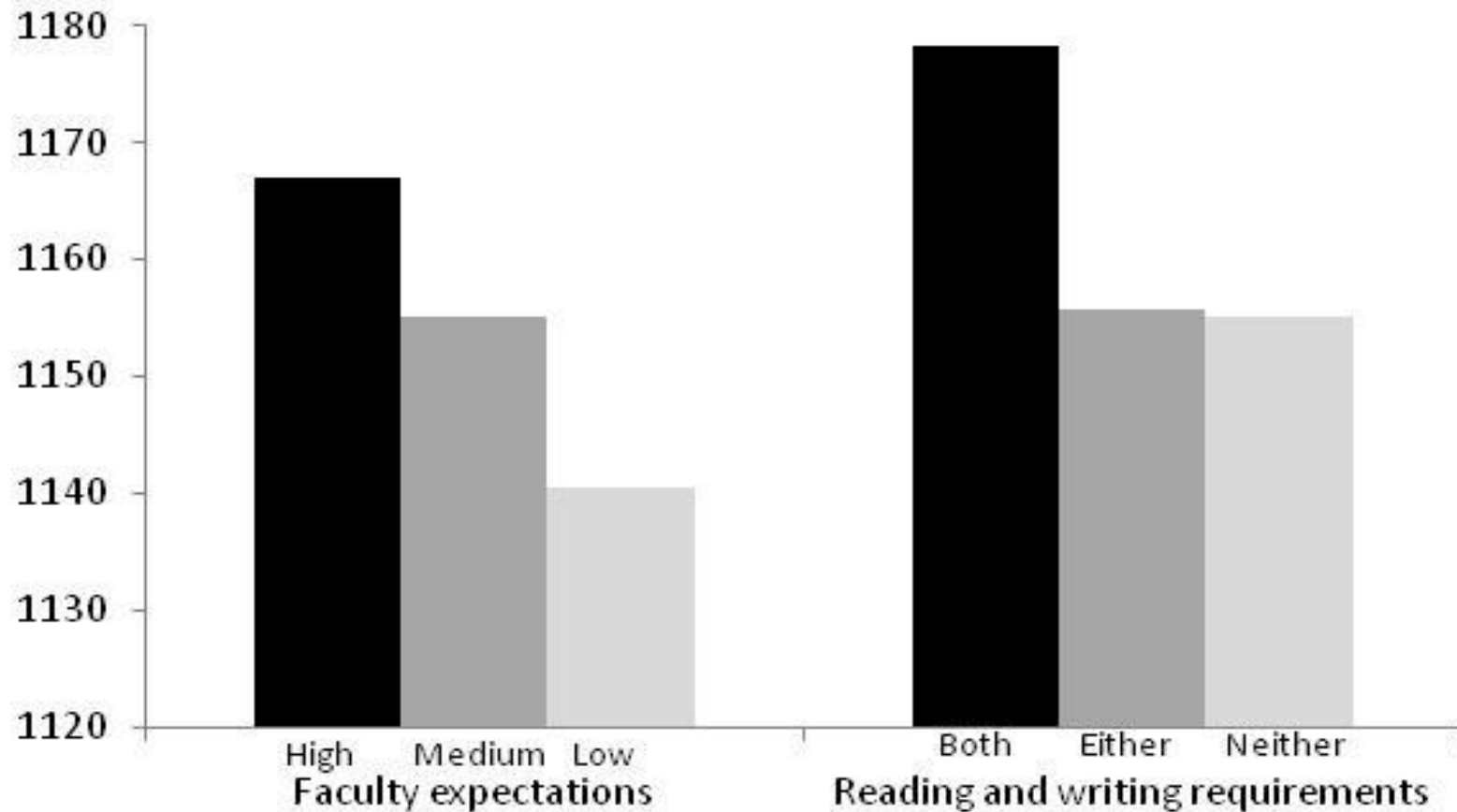


Academic time from 1925-1965 in time diaries relatively constant (39.2 to 34.1)

CLA Gains 2005–2007 (performance task)

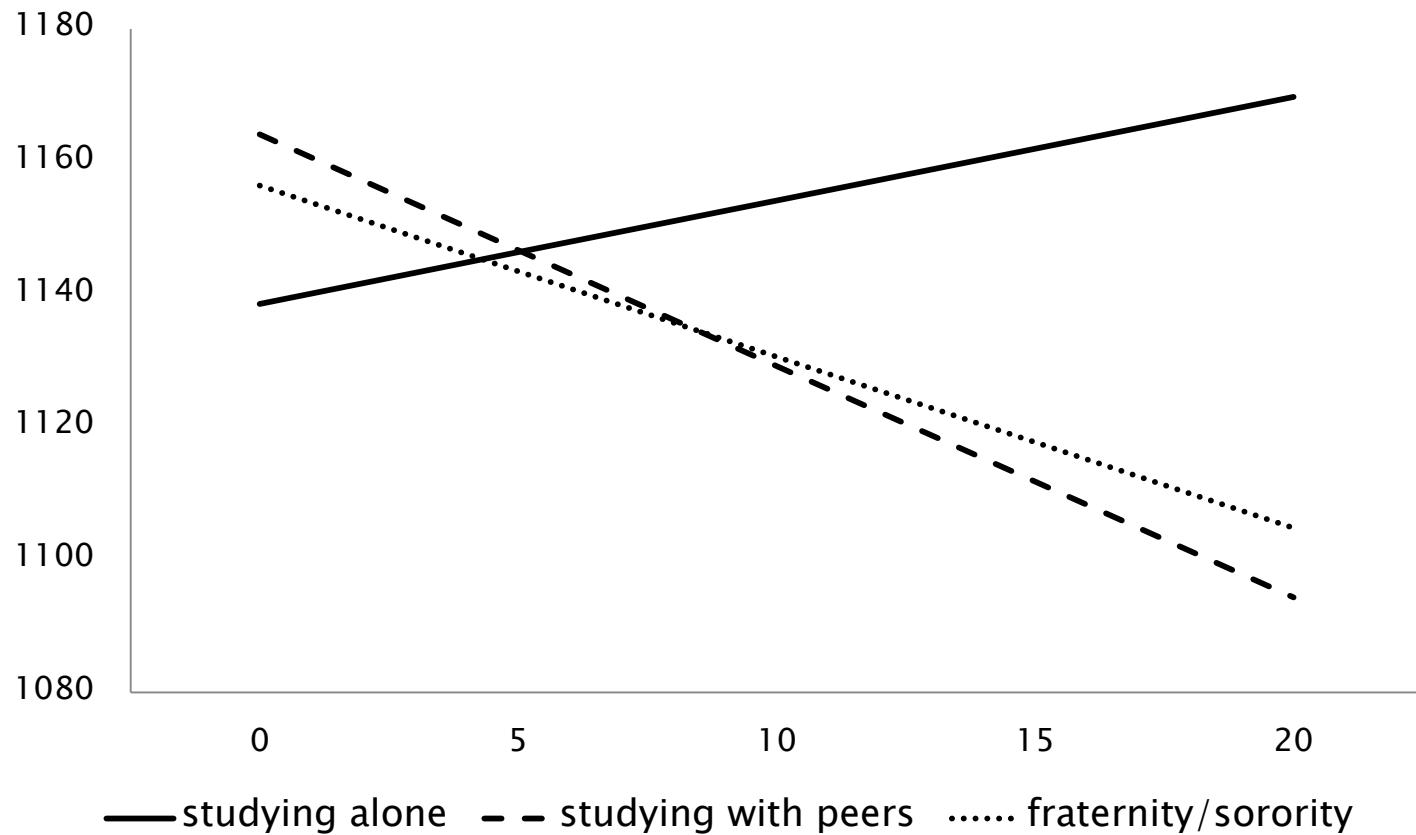
- ▶ 0.18 standard deviations – 7 percentile point gain (0.47 sd, 18 percentile points, 2005–2009)
- ▶ No statistically significant gains in critical thinking, complex reasoning and writing skills for 45 percent of the students in the sample (36 percent, 2005–2009)

CLA Performance: Faculty Expectations and Reading/Writing Requirements



Note: Predicting 2007 CLA scores while controlling for 2005 CLA scores, student characteristics, and institutions attended.

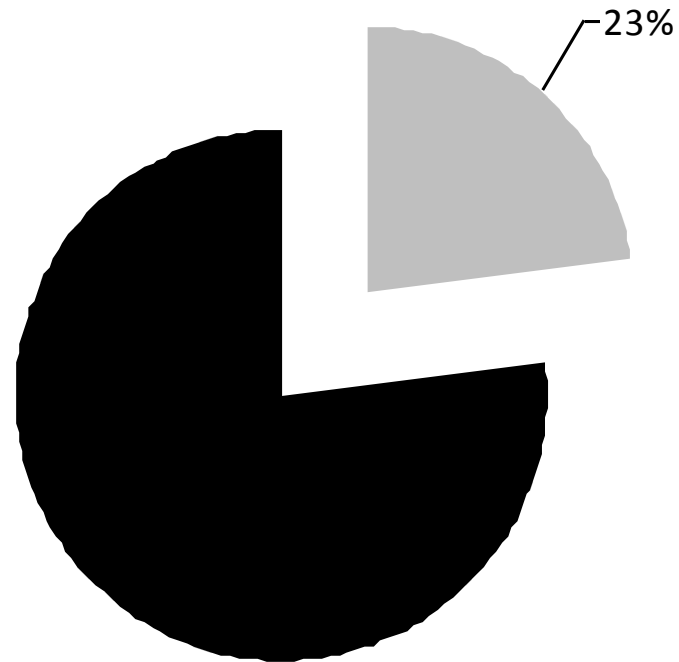
CLA Performance: Studying and Fraternities/Sororities



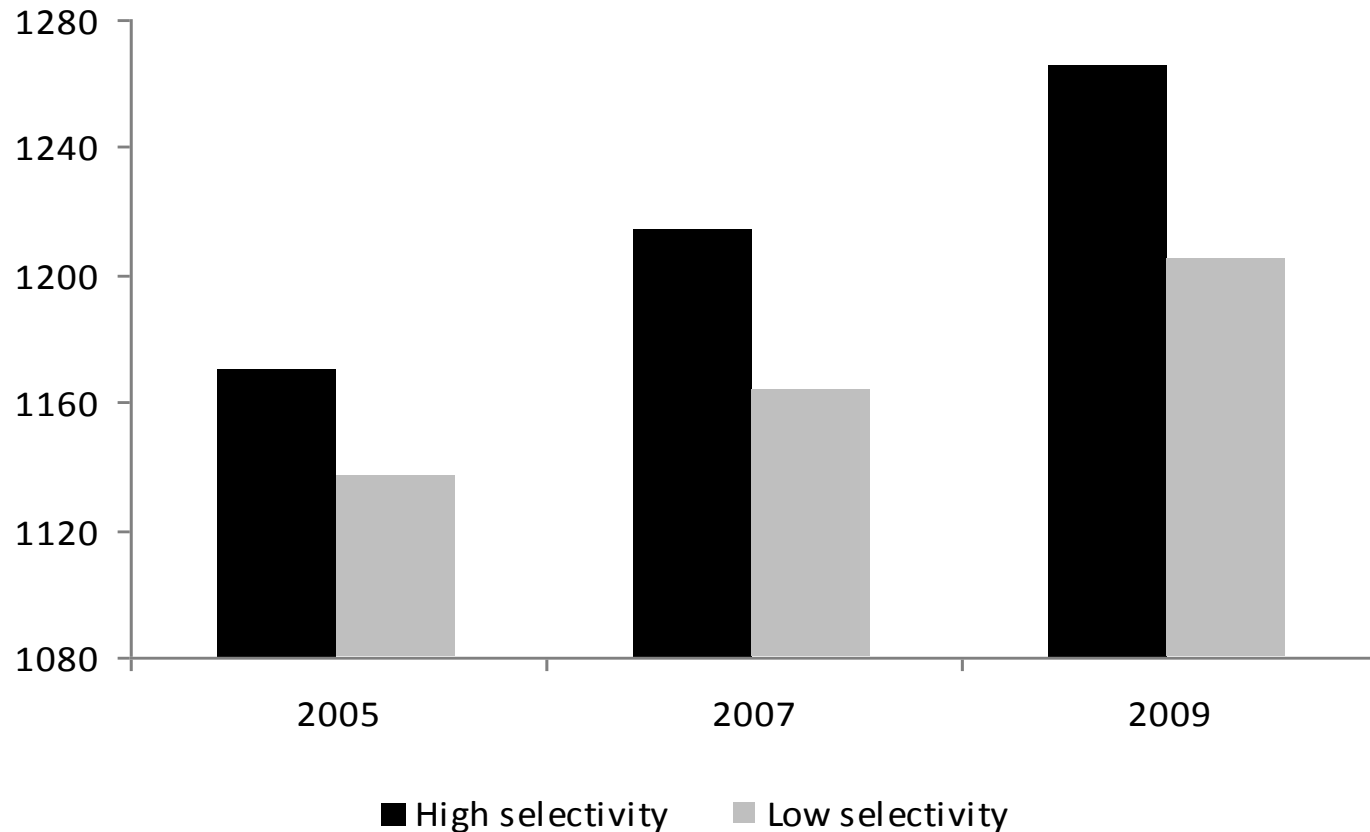
Note: Predicting 2007 CLA scores while controlling for 2005 CLA scores, student characteristics, and institutions attended.

Institutional Variation

23 percent of CLA growth between 2005 and 2009 occurs across institutions

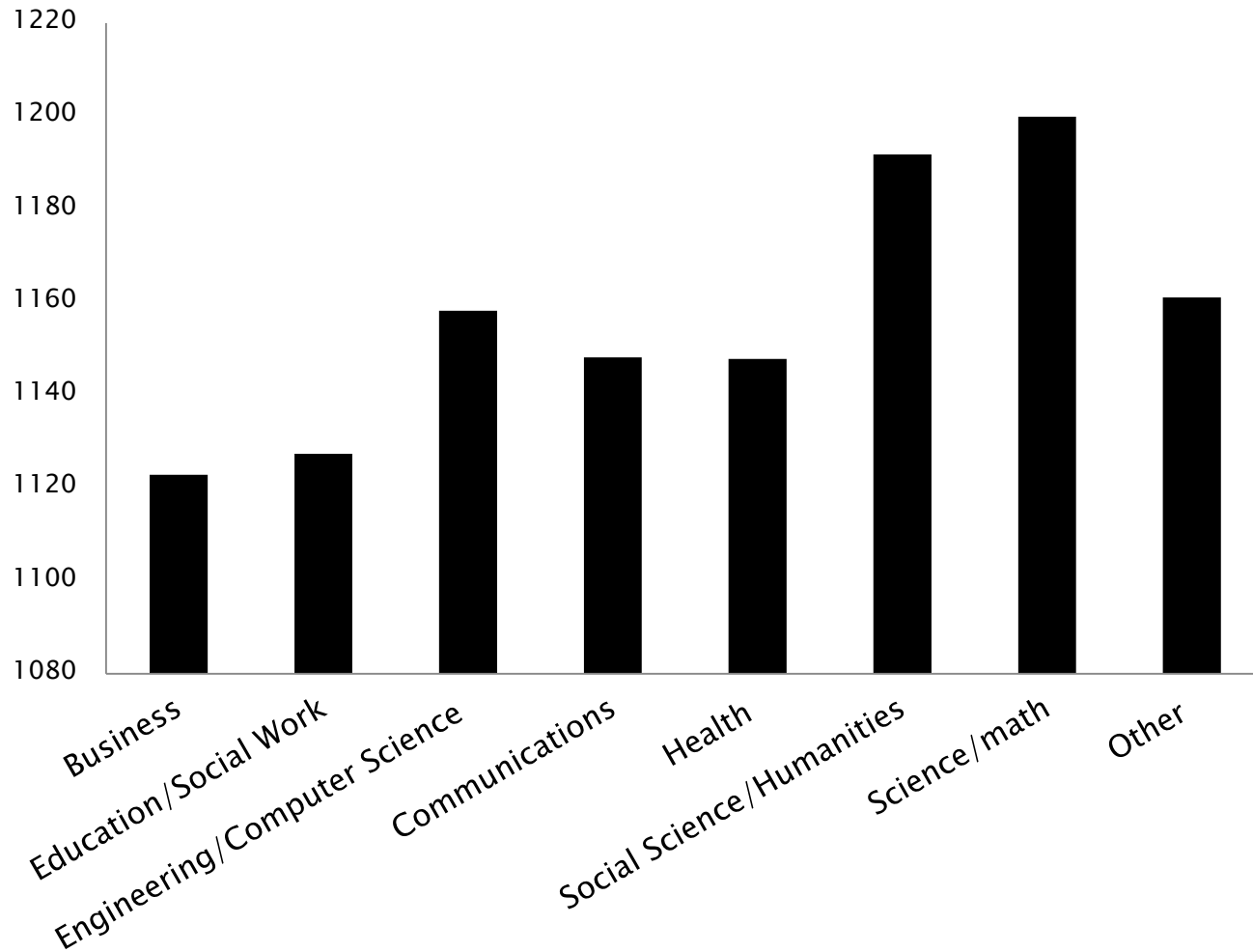


College Selectivity and CLA Performance



Note: Based on a 3-level HLM model, controlling for a range of demographic/family characteristics.

CLA Performance: College Major



Note: Predicting 2007 CLA scores while controlling for 2005 CLA scores.

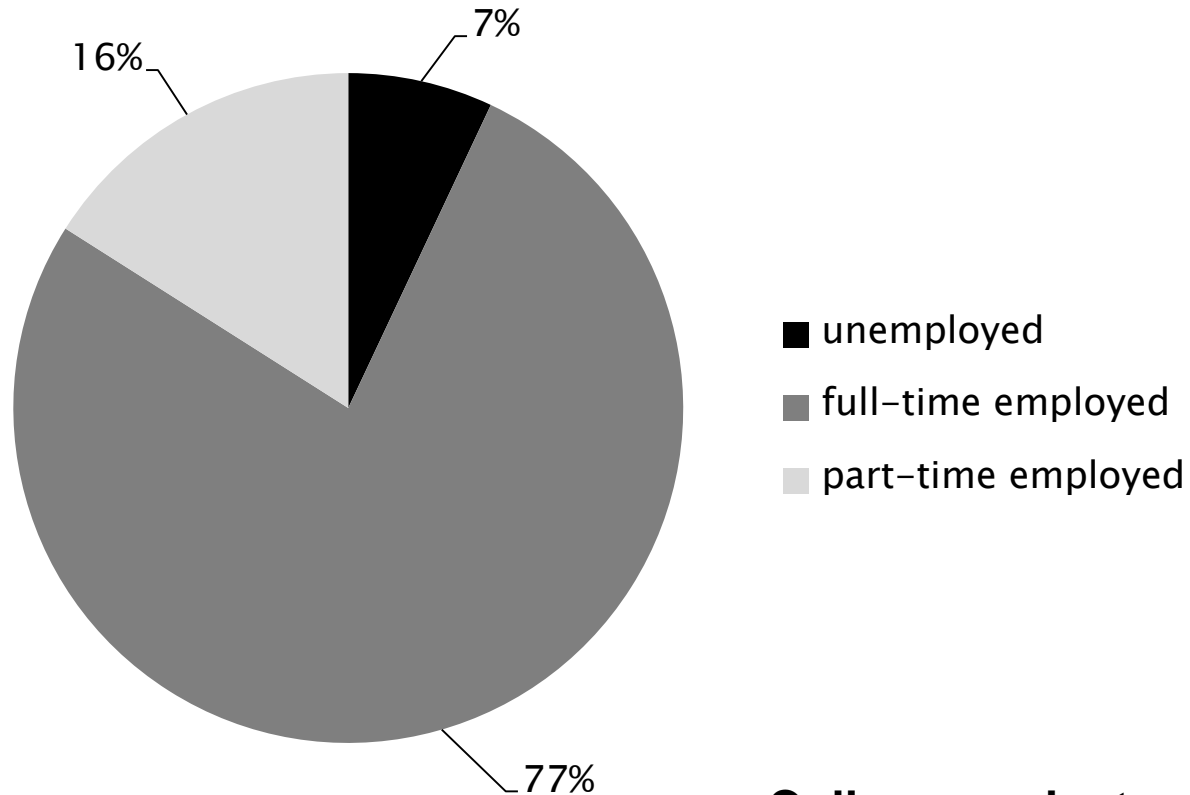
**Documenting
Uncertain Times:
Post-graduate
Transitions of the
Academically Adrift
Cohort**

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ESTHER CHO
JEANNIE KIM
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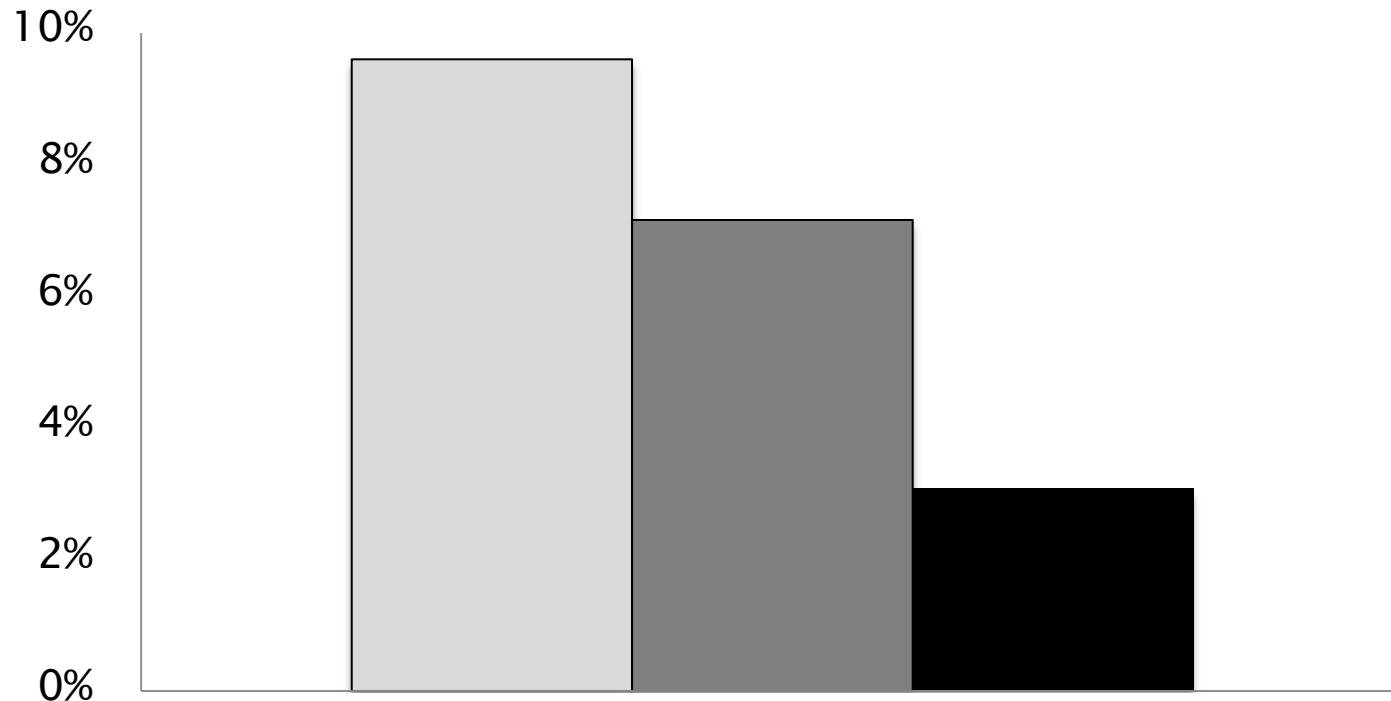
January, 2012

Employment Status (for respondents not enrolled in graduate school full-time, 2011)



**College graduates
working full-time earn
on average \$34,900**

Unemployment by CLA Performance

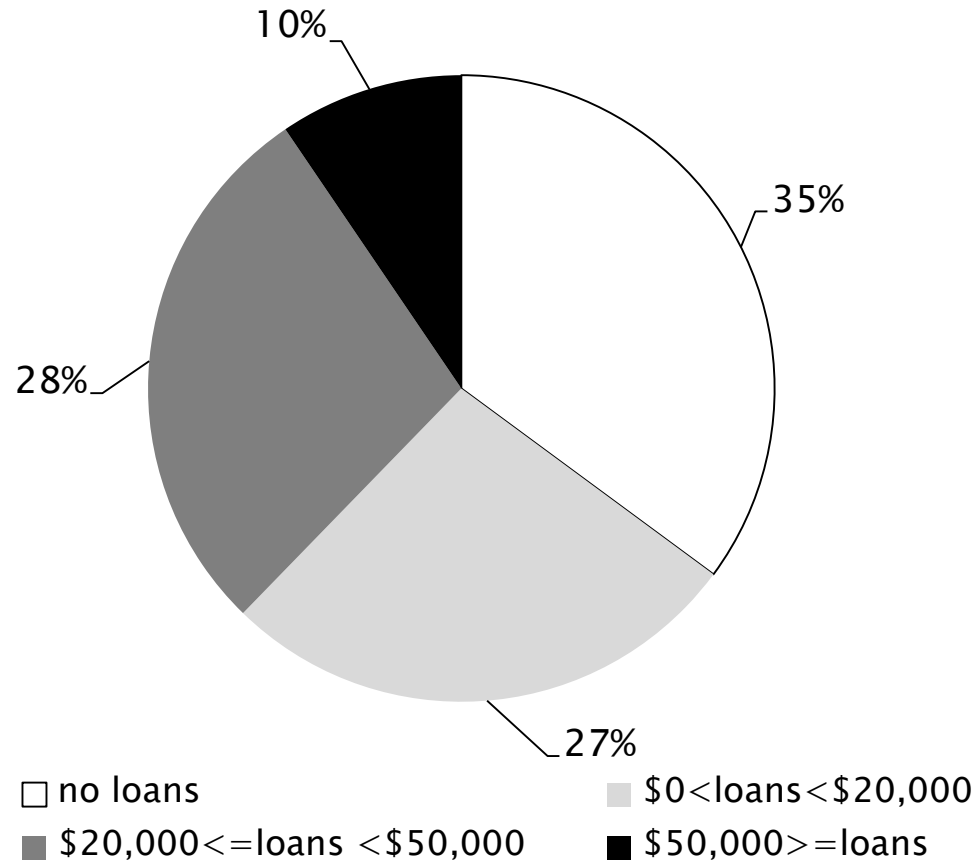


Unemployment of Graduates not Enrolled Fulltime in School

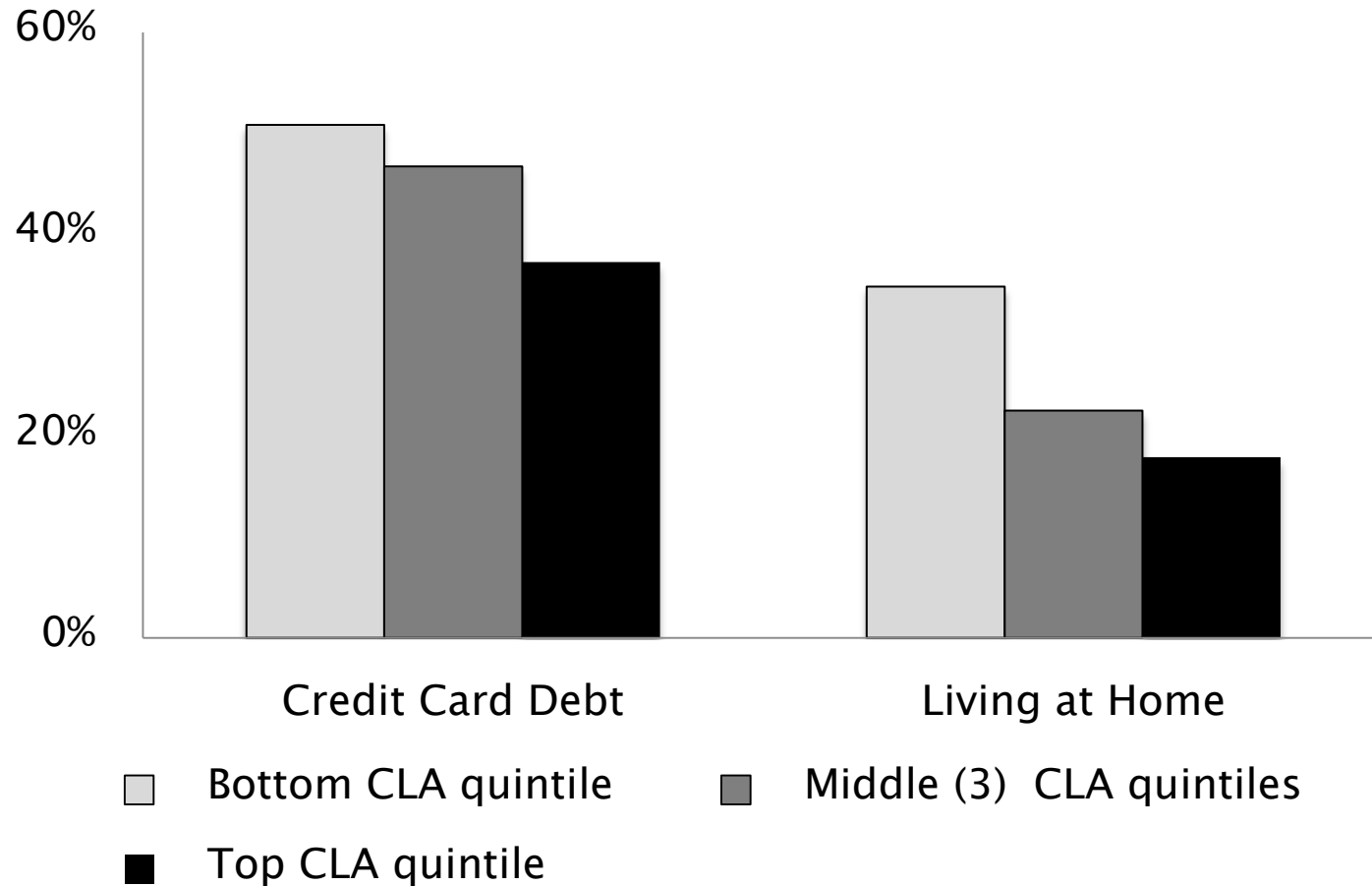
- Bottom CLA quintile
- Middle (3) CLA quintiles
- Top CLA quintile

College Debt

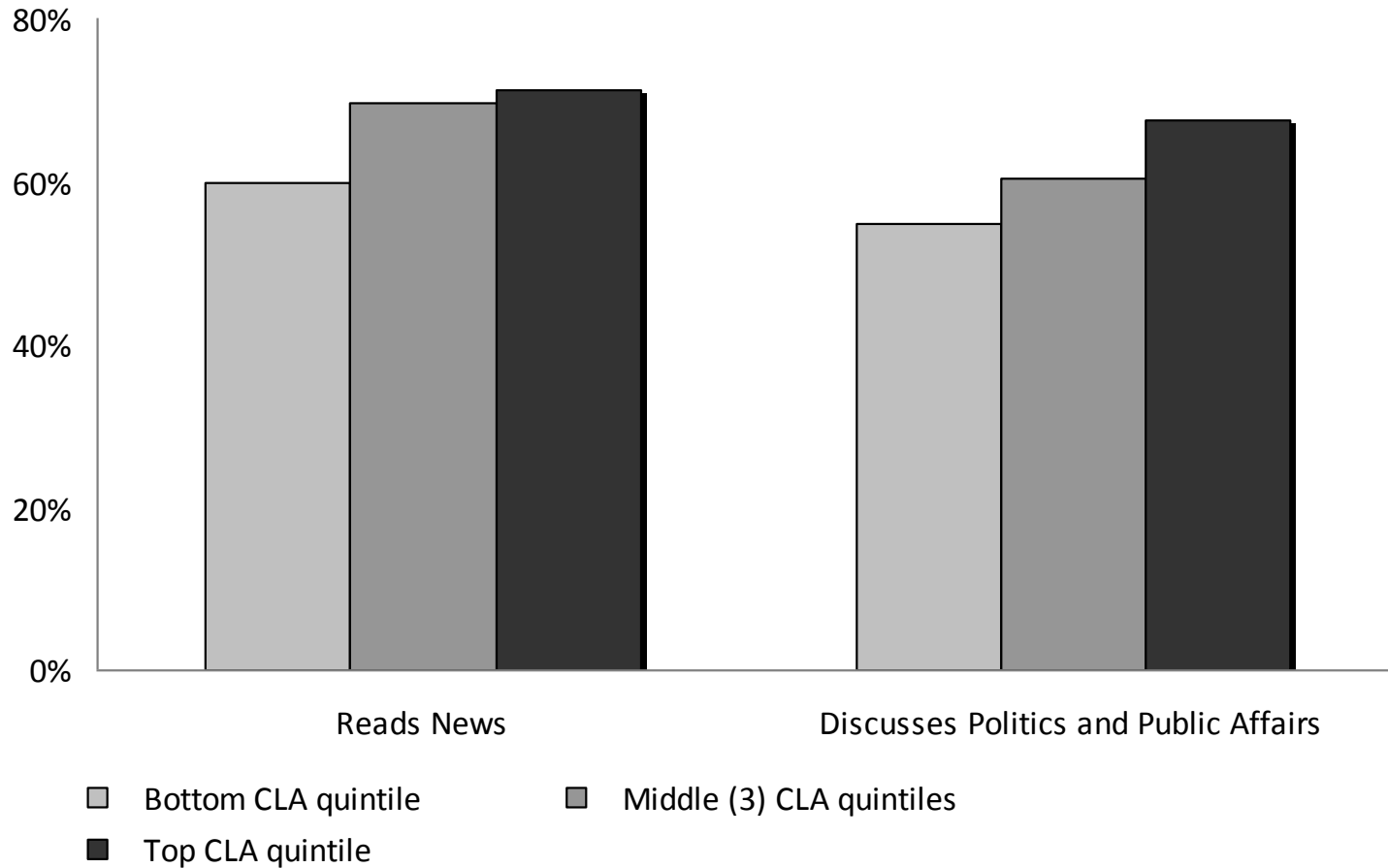
**65% have loans,
owing on average \$27,200**



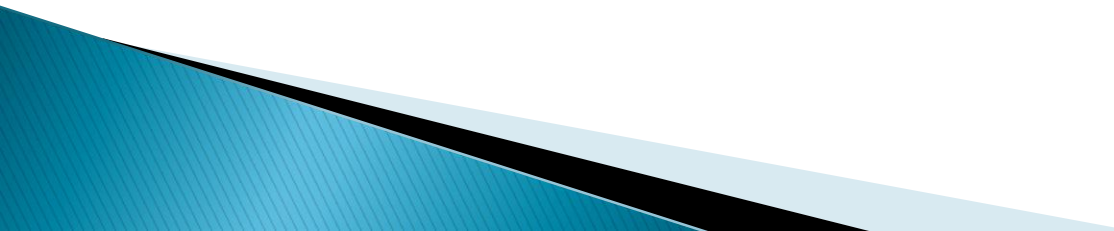
Forms of Support by CLA Performance



Civic Engagement by CLA Performance




College Accreditation and Federal Accountability

- ▶ Accreditation has attempted to address these problems, but has been largely inadequate
 - ▶ Federal imposed regulation – i.e., increased accountability – however, would be counterproductive
 - ▶ Accreditation is thus the mechanism for external regulatory pressure and needs strengthening to support broader efforts to enhance accountability at the organizational level.
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Enhanced accountability at the organizational level

- ▶ Trustees should ask administrators: How are you measuring learning? Where are areas that need improvement? How are problems being addressed?
- ▶ Administrators – symbolically and substantively should support undergraduate learning and academic rigor; organizational incentive structures require realignment
- ▶ Faculty must assume individual and collective responsibility for ensuring academic rigor
- ▶ Students could be evaluated on the basis of meaningful academic standards – e.g., (employers could demand) transcripts that included information on course difficulty

Lessons for Accreditation

- ▶ Do assessments at the college allow comparisons across units, so that areas that need improvement are identified and addressed?
 - ▶ Is there evidence that administrators are symbolically and substantively supporting undergraduate learning and academic rigor? For example, are organizational incentive structures aligned with promoting academic rigor and learning?
 - ▶ Is there evidence that faculty have assumed individual and collective responsibility for ensuring academic rigor?
 - ▶ Is there evidence that students are evaluated on the basis of meaningful academic standards? Do student transcripts include information on course difficulty?
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<http://higherred.ssrc.org/>

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