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Get a Skill, Get a Job, Get Ahead? Evaluating the Effects of Virginia's Workforce-Targeted Free College Program

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Tuition-free college programs are gaining momentum as policymakers address rising college costs and workforce readiness. Despite their growing adoption, limited research examines how workforce-focused eligibility criteria impact student outcomes beyond enrollment. This pre-registered study employs two within-study quasi-experimental designs—regression discontinuity and difference-in-differences— to estimate the causal impact of Virginia's Get a Skill, Get a Job, Get Ahead (G3) initiative on financial aid and academic outcomes for community college students. Launched as a pandemic recovery effort, G3 aimed to reverse enrollment declines and address labor shortages by leveraging simplified 'free college' messaging and offering last-dollar scholarships and additional advising support for students in high-demand workforce programs. The initiative increased total financial aid and grant aid, with gains concentrated among middle-income students. While certificate completion rose by 2 to 6.6 percentage points, these effects were not robust across specifications. Similar to other tuition-free programs, G3 significantly increased FAFSA completion and enrollment in aid-eligible workforce programs. These findings offer valuable insights into how targeted tuition-free programs can expand financial aid access, promote educational attainment, and align higher education with workforce demands.

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Evaluating the Effects of Virginia's Workforce-Targeted Free College Program

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March 28, 2025

Abstract

Tuition-free college programs are gaining momentum as policymakers address rising college costs and workforce readiness. Despite their growing adoption, limited research examines how workforce-focused eligibility criteria impact student outcomes beyond enrollment. This pre-registered study employs two within-study quasi-experimental designs—regression discontinuity and difference-in-differences— to estimate the causal impact of Virginia's Get a Skill, Get a Job, Get Ahead (G3) initiative on financial aid and academic outcomes for community college students. Launched as a pandemic recovery effort, G3 aimed to reverse enrollment declines and address labor shortages by leveraging simplified 'free college' messaging and offering last-dollar scholarships and additional advising support for students in high-demand workforce programs. The initiative increased total financial aid and grant aid, with gains concentrated among middle-income students. While certificate completion rose by 2 to 6.6 percentage points, these effects were not robust across specifications. Similar to other tuition-free programs, G3 significantly increased FAFSA completion and enrollment in aid-eligible workforce programs. These findings offer valuable insights into how targeted tuition-free programs can expand financial aid access, promote educational attainment, and align higher education with workforce demands.

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Keywords: tuition-free college, workforce development, community college outcomes, financial aid policy

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1 Introduction

Rising college costs and structural barriers— such as financial aid and application complexities, inadequate academic preparation, and challenges selecting and persisting through a program— pose significant obstacles to increasing educational attainment, particularly for students who enroll in community college (Scott-Clayton, 2015; Dynarski, Page, & Scott-Clayton, 2023; Dynarski et al., 2023). These challenges are especially pronounced for students from low-income backgrounds, first-generation college students, and adult learners returning to school. Key economic trends, such as technological advancements, automation, and the rise of the gig economy are reshaping labor demands, making it increasingly important for community colleges to prepare students adequately (Stanford, 2017; Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2019). In response, tuition-free college programs have emerged as a promising approach to address these barriers by improving affordability and aligning educational programs with the demands of a rapidly changing labor market. However, a fundamental challenge in evaluating the causal effects of such programs lies in their substantial impact on student enrollment behavior (Gurantz, 2020; House & Dell, 2020; Nguyen, 2020). Because these initiatives can dramatically reshape who enrolls, they induce compositional shifts that obscure downstream effects on academic and labor market outcomes. This selection bias complicates causal inference, making it difficult to isolate program effects from changes in the student population.

Existing research on tuition-free programs has focused largely on early enrollment effects, with more limited findings on completion rates (Gurantz, 2020; House & Dell, 2020; Nguyen, 2020). The findings on completion rates remain mixed, likely due to differences in program eligibility requirements, varied funding structures, and levels of student support. Virginia's Get a Skill, Get a Job, Get Ahead (G3) initiative, launched in 2021, provides a unique opportunity to overcome some of these challenges and rigorously assess the causal effects of a workforce-oriented tuition-free program. G3's design, which prioritizes workforce needs, includes both first- and last-dollar grant aid components, and to a lesser extent, advising supports, prioritizing students pursuing career-aligned credentials. Critically, the program's eligibility structure allows for two complementary quasi-experimental approaches. First, G3's income-based eligibility threshold enables a regression discontinuity design (RD), allowing for the estimation of causal effects at the income cutoff. Second, because only certain academic programs qualified for G3 funding, we leverage this variation in a differences-in-differences (DID) framework, comparing outcomes for students in eligible and ineligible programs before and after the policy's introduction. By leveraging both income-based thresholds and academic program eligibility, our study provides new insights into how tuition-free programs impact financial aid, enrollment behavior, and educational attainment.

A key policy concern surrounding workforce-focused tuition subsidies is their potential to divert students from four-year degree pathways, which typically confer greater economic returns over a lifetime. However, with significant labor market shifts creating growth in both low-wage and high-wage jobs with fewer middle-skill opportunities, programs like G3 may provide an immediate pathway for students to access stable, middle-skill employment (Autor, 2014; Deming, 2017; Goos, Manning & Salomons, 2014). Whether such programs improve educational attainment and financial aid access without unintentionally tracking students into lower-return pathways remains an open question. By examining G3's impact on financial aid, enrollment behavior, and early academic attainment, this study contributes to the broader debate on the role of workforce-focused interventions in postsecondary education policy.

In this study, we provide quasi-experimental evidence of G3's early impacts on students' financial aid and academic outcomes using complementary regression discontinuity (RD) and innovative panel-based estimation strategies. Specifically, this pre-registered study evaluates the program's effects on three confirmatory outcomes: FAFSA completion, total financial aid received, and early measures of degree completion. We find that the G3 initiative significantly increased FAFSA completion rates and total financial aid received, driven primarily by an increase in grant aid— a result confirmed by both within-study estimation approaches. RD estimates at the income eligibility cutoff suggest that program adoption had impacts on degree and credential completion, corresponding with findings from panel-based DID estimators that capture impacts for the broader population of community college students. Together, these results indicate that G3 increased educational attainment, despite the compositional changes observed in student enrollment induced by the policy.

2 Background

2.1 Get a Skill, Get a Job, Get Ahead

The G3 initiative emerged from a bipartisan effort to promote workforce education at community colleges in response to a rapidly evolving economy. Proposed in 2019 and enacted in 2021 as part of the state's pandemic recovery strategy, G3 aimed to address workforce shortages in high-demand sectors while recovering enrollment losses—which dropped by over 7 percent between 2019 and 2021. Unlike broad tuition-free programs, G3 is restricted to workforce programs in five key areas: health care, information technology and computer science, manufacturing and skilled trades, early childhood education, and public safety. Program eligibility is determined by the Virginia Office of Education Economics (VOEE), which evaluates current and projected job availability in various regions.[1]

Over its first three years, the program invested $45 million to strengthen connections between education and the labor market by providing direct student aid. A defining feature of G3 is its last-dollar scholarship, which covers tuition for community college students with incomes up to 400 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), adjusting for family size. As of 2022, over 50 percent of Virginians fell within this income threshold, indicating broad program accessibility. In addition to tuition support, the state allocated $5 million for hiring 60 additional advisors to reduce information barriers for current and prospective students by providing holistic support services.[2] These advisors assisted students in identifying eligible programs and navigating the application and financial aid process. Additionally, advisors provided support in program selection and requirement completion.

Ultimately this small portion of G3 funding—10 percent— provided colleges with 60 additional staff to boost take up of the workforce-targeted free college program. Prior research has highlighted low FAFSA completion rates among lower-income families due to lack of awareness and program complexity (Bettinger et al., 2012; Bhargava & Manoli, 2015). Recognizing this chal-

[1] For the 2023-24 school year health and hospitality programs were added to the list of eligible programs, however, this study examines the early implementation period and only includes the five stated program areas.

[2] SB1100 legislative amendment retrieved from https://budget.lis.virginia.gov/amendment/2021/1/SB1100/Introduced/MR/220/3s/

lenge, G3 advisors provided potential students with information and assistance in selecting a program, applying and enrolling, and filing a FAFSA. Because the FAFSA is a requirement for receiving G3 aid in credit-bearing programs, efforts to increase FAFSA completion were critical to the program's success. However, communicating the complexity of the financial aid process remained a challenge for college advisors. A qualitative implementation study found that advisors scaled back "free college" messaging due to uncertainty about whether applicants would ultimately qualify (Cormier et al., 2024).

To further reduce information gaps, the VCCS developed G3 marketing materials and a toolkit for adaptation by the state's 23 community colleges. This effort emphasized simplified messaging that highlighted the five eligible program areas and high-demand for related jobs through media advertising and college-sponsored websites (Cormier et al., 2024). According to the qualitative implementation study, many colleges created G3-focused websites with contact forms, connecting prospective students to advisors for personalized application and financial aid guidance. However, qualitative evidence from eight of the 23 colleges revealed that many institutions did not limit G3-funded advisors to G3 students, instead assigning them to serve students across all programs. These implementation details suggest that while the marketing component was uniformly implemented, academic advising may have been diluted by offering targeted support to a broader student population.

The vast majority—90 percent— of G3 funding was earmarked for financial aid, addressing structural barriers through last-dollar scholarship and living stipends. In addition to covering remaining tuition costs after federal financial aid, G3 provided Student Incentive Success Grants (SSIG) of up to $900 per semester for full Pell-eligible students enrolled in at least 12 credits. These stipends targeted the lowest-income students, whose tuition was already covered by other sources, to help offset living expenses.

Although G3 involved some curricular changes, they were relatively minor. The original legislation specified eligible programs by CIP codes, with the VCCS implementing an approval process for colleges to submit individual programs for consideration. To qualify programs had to meet three criteria. First, they needed to be associated with eligible CIP codes codified in the original legislation. Second, they had to specify whether they allowed students to earn multiple levels of credentials, 'stackable credentials,' enabling participants to enter the workforce and return for further training as needed. Lastly, they were required to be eligible for federal financial aid, requiring at least 18 credits hours. In practice, all programs meeting these criteria were approved by the VCCS.[3]

G3 aimed to achieve several goals for low- and middle-income students by addressing three key behaviors. Importantly, it sought to increase enrollment in the high-demand occupational training programs identified by VOEE, (e.g., healthcare and technology). Second, the program attempted to improve access by addressing financial, informational, and logistical barriers that often hinder prospective students through simplified and tailored 'free college' messaging for targeted programs. Lastly, it sought to improve completion rates by offering dedicated counseling to help students select a program and assist in obtaining financial aid. By combining tuition-free access with a workforce-aligned structure, the program sought to meet student needs and employer demands.

2.2 Related Literature

This study contributes to two strands of empirical literature: the first examines the effects of statewide free college initiatives on college access and success, while the second evaluates state and institutional efforts to align college programming with local workforce needs. A majority of states have implemented free college initiatives as part of a grassroots effort to improve college affordability (Miller-Adams, 2021). Some initiatives impose means-testing or merit-based requirements, while others require recipients to work in-state post-graduate, maintain academic progress, apply to only 2- or 4-year college students, or enrollment in specific programs (Perna & Leigh, 2018). To date, most statewide free college initiatives operate as last-dollar scholarships, covering tuition and fees only after existing grant aid–such as Pell Grants–has been applied, and are typically limited to community college students who are state residents.

Empirical studies suggests that these programs demonstrate positive short-term impacts on

[3] Personal communication with VCCS administrator October 6, 2023.

community college enrollment, reduce loan borrowing, and improve financial aid access (Gurantz, 2020; House & Dell, 2020; Lowry & Li, 2022; Nguyen, 2020; Odle et al., 2021). However, research on programs in Tennessee and Oregon also indicate the potential for diversionary effects, shifting some students opting away from four-year colleges (Gurantz, 2020; House & Dell, 2020; Nguyen, 2020). Studies examining educational attainment, such as credential completion, is limited and shows mixed results. Some initiatives show improvements (Bartik et al., 2021) while others report modest or unclear effects (Bell & Gándara, 2021; Li & Lowry, 2022; Ratledge et al., 2021). These findings suggest that while tuition-free initiatives expand access, their effects on long-term educational attainment remain uncertain–particularly in the context of eligibility restrictions for workforce-aligned programs.

The broader financial aid literature underscores that reducing uncertainty about college costs is a key mechanism for increasing postsecondary enrollment and persistence (Dynarski et al., 2021; Dynarski, Page, & Scott-Clayton, 2023). Free college programs with transparent messaging and simple eligibility criteria tend to have higher take-up rates, whereas programs with complex requirements–such as New York State's Excelsior Scholarship– have experienced limited participation due to administrative hurdles like the in-state work requirement (Scott-Clayton et al., 2022). However, limited research has examined how program-specific eligibility, such as those in workforce-oriented free college programs affect student outcomes. This study extends the literature by examining the effects of Virginia's G3 initiative–one of a growing number of programs explicitly tied to workforce needs–on community college student enrollment, financial aid access, and early academic outcomes.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

A key motivation for tuition-free community college initiatives is that financial constraints may limit students' ability to enroll in and complete postsecondary education. While credit constraints are a well-documented barrier (Carneiro & Heckman, 2002; Sun & Yannelis, 2016), tuition-free programs like G3 function primarily as last-dollar scholarships, meaning their direct financial benefits accrue most to students who do not already qualify for full tuition coverage through existing programs. This structure suggests that middle-income students–who face significant tuition gaps but are less likely to qualify for Pell Grants–are likely to benefit the most. However, recent evidence suggests that informational and logistical barriers, rather than direct financial costs, play a critical role in shaping college access and completion (Bettinger et al., 2012; Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2006). G3's investment in additional college advisors is intended to address these frictions, particularly by supporting FAFSA completion and helping students navigate program requirements.

At the same time, tuition-free programs may introduce substitution effects that alter postsecondary choices. Research on similar initiatives suggests that while eliminating tuition costs increases two-year college enrollment, increases in overall college enrollment may be partially offset by reductions in four-year college enrollment (Gurantz, 2020; Nguyen, 2020). G3's workforce-oriented structure raises additional concerns that restricting aid to specific fields may not only guide students toward high-demand sectors but also limit their broader educational and career flexibility. If financial incentives for degrees in high-demand fields redirect students toward high-demand industries, they may reduce information asymmetries and align postsecondary training with workforce needs. This may be welcome given previous studies that find students often misjudge labor market returns, leading to low participation in high-return fields (Baker et al., 2018).

Our study also contributes to research evaluating state and institutional efforts to align community college programming with local workforce needs. Workforce development has driven community colleges' mission since their inception, and policymakers increasingly leverage these institutions to address current and projected worker shortages (D'Amico, 2016). Strohl et al. (2024) estimate that half of the certificate and associate degrees awarded would need to shift to different fields to meet projected labor market demand over the next decade. By incentivizing enrollment in specific workforce-aligned programs, tuition-free initiatives like G3 may yield substantial economic returns and better align credentials with local employer needs (Bartik et al., 2021). Again, such policies may also introduce trade-offs, particularly regarding bachelor's degree attainment.

While workforce-oriented tuition programs may be designed to expand access–such as for high school graduates on the margin of college entry or adults considering a return to school–evidence suggests that inducing these students to enroll remains a challenge (Bonilla & Thim, 2025; Cellini, 2006; Gurantz, 2020; House & Dell, 2020). Instead, some portion of students who respond to these workforce-oriented initiatives could be diverted from higher-return associate or bachelor's degree pathways to shorter-term credentials.

Finally, this study contributes to the literature on the role of academic advising in community colleges. While the vast majority–90 percent– of G3 funds was allocated to financial aid, the remaining funds supported additional college advisors to assist students in navigating college admissions, financial aid, and program requirements (LIS, 2021). College advisors play an important role in supporting student goals and influencing student-decision making around program selection, enrollment intensity, and career choices (McKinney et al., 2024; Scott-Clayton, 2015). Experimental evidence from Bettinger & Baker (2014) and quasi-experimental evidence from Bahr (2008) highlight the potential for college coaches and advisors to improve student persistence and degree completion, particularly for nontraditional students in higher education and students attending community colleges. Increased exposure to college advising as a result of G3 may similarly work to improve student decision-making and observed academic and career outcomes.

3 Data & Analytic Sample

Our data come from the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) for academic years 2016-17 through 2023-24. The data include information on student demographics, course and program enrollment, financial aid receipt, and degree completion records. Eligibility for G3 program designation was determined by state workforce and income criteria established by the Virginia legislature and other governmental agencies. Initially, the legislature defined G3 eligibility based on regional workforce needs assessments conducted by the Virginia Office of Education Economics (VOEE, 2023). We identify G3-eligible programs by their corresponding 6-digit CIP codes from the VCCS-approved list, and whether each program received G3 program approval through the State Board for Community Colleges (SBCC) application process. Additionally, students are flagged as income-eligible for G3 if they (1) completed the FAFSA and (2) reported a family income of less than 400 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), adjusted for family size.

The analysis focuses on financial aid and academic outcomes, with five designated as pre-registered confirmatory outcomes. FAFSA completion and total grant aid are the primary financial aid outcomes of interest (confirmatory), while G3 and SSIG aid, as well as total loans, are considered exploratory outcomes. We include additional results that examine federal, state, and institutional grant aid to complement our confirmatory findings. Academic outcomes include any degree and certificate completion within 2 years of entry (confirmatory). Any degree credentials besides certificates include associate and applied associate degrees.

To construct our analytic sample, we make several important exclusions. First, we excluded students who enrolled exclusively in a Virginia community college through dual enrollment or other programs that allow high school students to complete college-level coursework at community colleges, as these students are ineligible for the focal treatment. Second, we exclude non-resident students, who are either ineligible to file a FAFSA (due to non-permanent resident or non-citizen status) or do not qualify for G3 financial aid. Finally, we exclude students missing critical administrative records, such as FAFSA completion, transcripts, program of study, or entry cohort data.

The full analytic sample comprises nearly 175,000 first-time-in-college (FTIC) students from seven entry cohorts, all of whom enrolled in either short-term credential or associate degree programs at one of Virginia's 23 community colleges. We present summary statistics for the full sample in Column 1 of Table 1. The sample is both racially and socioeconomically diverse: approximately 50 percent identify as a person of color, 57 percent received grant aid, and 55 percent of FAFSA filers reported a family income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level (i.e., 0.367/0.662).

Columns 2 and 3 provide summary statistics for students who completed a FAFSA and students who are in our regression discontinuity sample (i.e., completed a FAFSA, in the 2021 or 2022 entry cohorts, and enrolled in a G3-eligible program), respectively. In contrast to the full sample, a larger proportion of students in the RD sample enrolled in (and completed) certificate programs (47 versus 10 percent). Demographically, the RD sample has a higher proportion of Black students (24 versus 19 percent) fewer White students (47 versus 51 percent), and more students from lower income backgrounds (60 versus 37 percent) relative to the broader VCCS population. Nearly 1 in 2 students in the RD sample received G3 or SSIG aid, and relatively few students took out loans (8.5 percent). While students in the RD sample had marginally higher degree completion rates overall compared to the full sample and FAFSA completers, they are still indicative of low completion rates at community colleges: only 19 percent of students earned any degree within 2 years, and most of these students earned certificates as opposed to associate or applied associate degrees.

4 Methods

4.1 Pre-Registration

Understanding causal impacts is crucial for informing policy decision-making, particularly as advancements in quasi-experimental methods have heightened awareness of issues such as specification searching or "p-hacking" (Brodeur et al., 2020). In light of this issue, we pre-register our analysis plan and confirmatory outcomes to enhance transparency and credibility of our research findings (Bonilla & Sparks, 2024; Nosek et al., 2018). By pre-registering, we aim to reduce the risks associated with researcher discretion in design choices and particularly, in outcome selection. Our primary identification strategy is a regression discontinuity (RD) design, which estimates the causal effect of G3 on our confirmatory outcomes, FAFSA completion, grant aid received, and academic attainment. To complement our RD approach, we implement difference-in-differences (DID) and triple difference-in-differences (DDD) models as robustness checks. Additionally, we apply Synthetic difference-in-differences (SDID) to address potential violations of the parallel trends assumption.

4.2 Regression Discontinuity

Our baseline specification employs a RD design to estimate the local average treatment effect of G3 eligibility on financial aid and academic outcomes for students near the 400 percent federal poverty level (FPL) eligibility threshold. This approach leverages the sharp income-based eligibility rule, comparing outcomes for students just above and below the threshold in the 2021 and 2022 entry cohorts. The RD model is specified as 1:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \beta I(FPL_{it} \leq 400) + f(FPL_{it}) + \eta_t + \boldsymbol{X}_i + \epsilon_{it} \tag{1}$$

where Y_{it} represents a series of financial aid and academic outcomes for student i in entry cohort t, including G3 receipt, total grant aid, total financial aid (including loans), and degree or certificate completion within two years. The term $I(FPL \leq 400))$ is a binary indicator equal to one if reported family income falls at or below the 400 percent FPL threshold. The function $f(FPL)$ represents a smooth polynomial function of the assignment variable, allowing for flexibility in modeling the relationship between income and outcomes. The coefficient of interest, β, captures the discontinuous change in outcomes at the income eligibility threshold. To assess sensitivity to functional form, we estimate specifications with both linear and quadratic polynomials, vary the bandwidth around the threshold, and implement alternative weighting approaches (e.g., kernel, uniform). Our preferred models include a vector of student-level baseline covariates ($\boldsymbol{X}$) and entry cohort fixed effects (η_t). Standard errors are clustered at the FPL percentile level, though we estimate results with robust standard errors, yielding qualitatively similar results.

For the RD design to yield unbiased estimates, several key assumptions must hold. First, we must believe that students just above and just below the threshold are as "good as randomly assigned." In other words, in the absence of G3 implementation, the relationship between income and student outcomes would be smooth across the 400 FPL threshold. We assess this assumption by testing the smoothness of baseline covariates. Second, students must not be able to manipulate their treatment status by systematically sorting just above or below the threshold to qualify for aid. We employ density tests to detect potential heaping or discontinuities in income (Figure 1a) and find no evidence of manipulation. We also consider institutional details in addition to the empirical evidence. The structure of the FAFSA application process, which determines financial aid based on prior-prior year income, further supports the validity of the RD design. Since income eligibility was determined from tax records from two years before enrollment, students had limited ability to strategically adjust their reported income. Additionally, while the G3 income threshold was publicly advertised as "around $100,000 for a family of four," the exact dollar amount varied by household size and was not explicitly disclosed in recruitment materials. These factors reduce the likelihood of strategic income adjustments to qualify.

To further assess robustness, we estimate a placebo RD model using students in non-G3 programs to test whether similar discontinuities are present at the 400 percent FPL threshold in unaffected program areas. We extend this analysis using a "difference-in-discontinuity" (RD-DID) approach (Grembi et al., 2016), which incorporates a pre-treatment period to account for potential unobserved confounders. In this framework, we build on the cross-sectional RD estimator, which originally focuses on post-period G3 students, by incorporating three additional groups: (1) contemporaneous cohorts that did not enroll in G3 programs, (2) pre-intervention G3 students, and (3) pre-intervention non-G3 students. This specification modifies the RD model in equation 1 by differencing out the corresponding threshold effects from the non-G3 comparison groups. Specifically, it modifies the baseline RD model by interacting each term with indicators for enrollment in a G3 program and for being in the post period:

$$Y_{it} = \alpha + \delta I(FPL_{it} \leq 400) \cdot I(G3_{it}) + f(FPL_{it}) \cdot I(G3_{it}) + \eta_{st} + \boldsymbol{X}_i + \epsilon_{it} \tag{2}$$

where δ captures the differential effect of income-eligibility among G3 students in the post-period versus ineligible students. This specification includes institution-by-cohort fixed effects and clusters standard errors at the institution-cohort level. By comparing threshold effects across treated (G3 post-intervention) and untreated (non-G3 and pre-intervention) students, the RD-DID framework strengthens causal identification by verifying that non-G3 post-intervention students received no additional financial aid at the threshold. Moreover, baseline characteristics at the 400 percent FPL threshold remain smooth, mitigating concerns about compositional changes that could threaten internal validity. Importantly, the contemporaneous non-G3 comparison group faces similar labor market conditions and enrolls at the same institutions, where they experience identical campus-level policies. The pre-intervention G3 students also choose similar fields and programs of study prior to G3 aid availability, guarding against concerns that selection bias may influence estimated effects. Finally, the absence of shifts in total financial aid and grant aid received further supports the interpretation that G3 aid was exclusively targeted at students in G3 programs with incomes below the 400 percent FPL threshold.

4.3 Generalizability and Robustness Checks

While the RD design provides the most internally valid estimates of G3's impact near the income eligibility threshold, its scope is limited to FAFSA completers who selected into G3-eligible programs. To examine FAFSA completion itself–one of our confirmatory outcomes–and to assess broader generalizability of our findings, we turn to event study and DID models. We implement a differences-in-differences (DID) design, which compares changes in outcomes for income-eligible students enrolled in G3-eligible programs (treatment group) to those in ineligible programs (comparison group) before and after the policy's adoption. Given that the policy is implemented at a single point in time, this approach does not rely on variation in treatment timing but instead assumes that, in the absence of G3, outcomes for treatment and comparison students would have followed parallel trends. Our main DID model is specified in Equation 3:

$$Y_{it} = \delta(G3_{it}) + D_i + \omega_t + \boldsymbol{X}_i + \alpha_s + \epsilon_{it} \tag{3}$$

where Y_{it} represents financial aid and academic outcomes of interest for student i in entry cohort t, D_i is a binary indicator for enrollment in a G3 program, and ω_t represents fixed effects for entry cohort year. The parameter of interest, δ, represents the ITT effect of post-policy enrollment in a G3 program. Institution-level fixed effects, α_s, in equation 3 control for time invariant institutional factors such as resources, capacity, faculty quality and labor market conditions that differ across institutions and ensure that any observed effects are not driven by differences across institutions. Standard errors are clustered at the institution-by-year level. We can also estimate the impact of the non-financial aid components of G3 for income-ineligible students by applying equation 3 to the subpopulation that is income ineligible (i.e., placebo students who did not complete FAFSA or had a reported family income $>$ 400 percent FPL). This approach leverages variation in the timing of the policy rollout, as well as the G3-program eligibility criteria.

We use event study analyses to assess the key assumption that in the absence of the G3 policy, changes in outcomes among treatment and comparison students would have evolved similarly over time. We consider additional assumptions relevant to DID identification in turn. First, no anticipatory effects requires that institutional responses to the G3 policy did not alter student behavior before its formal implementation. However, institutional responses—including adjustments to curricular and programmatic offerings, and administrative processes—may have taken place following the policy announcement. We document evidence that institutions increased the number of G3-eligible programs and that student enrollment in these programs grew in the lead-up to the policy's roll out (Sparks & Bonilla, 2024). Second, stability in the composition of treatment and comparison groups over time is necessary to ensure that observed effects do not reflect selection dynamics (Stable Unit Treatment Value Assumption: SUTVA). Our empirical evidence confirms that no G3 financial aid was administered before program's adoption, partially satisfying this assumption. We also assess this assumption using balance tests on student demographics and enrollment patterns suggesting the observed effects may, in part, reflect selection dynamics rather than causal impacts.

To address concerns about internal validity, we estimate a triple difference-in-differences (DDD) model that leverages variation in income eligibility, G3 program enrollment, and policy timing (see the Methods Appendix A for more details). Importantly, income-ineligible students can enroll in G3 programs of study, allowing the DDD model to isolate the financial aid component of the G3 policy while holding constant institutional and time-specific factors such as campus curricula, advising, and local labor market conditions. Because income-ineligible students in G3 programs form part of the counterfactual in the post-treatment period, the estimated effect reflects only the financial aid component of the policy, excluding any impacts from non-financial elements such as advising or curricular changes. Additionally, we implement SDID as a further robustness check, which corrects for pre-trend violations by optimally reweighting treatment and comparison units, ensuring a more credible counterfactual (See Methods Appendix A for more details). Given concerns about the internal validity of the DID framework, we rely primarily on the RD estimates but complement them with DID, DDD and SDID estimates to contextualize the broader policy impact of G3.

5 Results

5.1 Evidence from Regression Discontinuity Design

We first present results from our RD design, which estimates the effect of G3 eligibility on financial aid and academic outcomes for students at the income eligibility threshold. Table 2 reports first-stage reduced-form estimates on G3 aid receipt for the full RD sample and a subsample within one standard deviation of the income eligibility threshold. These results confirm a large and discontinuous 94 percentage-point increase in G3 aid receipt at the 400 percent FPL threshold. These results remain robust to demographic controls and various bandwidth restrictions. Figure 1a confirms no evidence of manipulation at threshold, while figure 1b illustrates high compliance, with no students above the 400 percent FPL threshold receiving G3 aid. Auxiliary RD models in appendix tables A1 and A2 indicate no statistically significant differences in baseline demographics–including gender, age, race, dependency status, family size and income–at the eligibility threshold. Together, these findings confirm the RD design meets key assumptions for internal validity, with no evidence of sorting or systematic pre-treatment differences and high compliance with G3 eligibility criteria.

Table 3 presents reduced-form RD estimates for confirmatory financial aid and academic outcomes for the full RD sample and within one standard deviation of the assignment variable. G3 increased total grant aid by $1,800 and total financial aid by roughly by $1,200, with the $600 discrepancy reflecting a reduction in student borrowing. These figures translate to a 20 to 30 percent increase in total grant aid (mean aid $5,500). We also illustrate these financial aid results visually in panels (a) and (b) of figure 2. For academic outcomes, G3 increased certificate completion within two years by approximately 2 percentage points, though this effect is not statistically significant. Robustness checks across various bandwidth restrictions and model specifications (Table A3; panels (c) and (d) of figure 2) affirm these findings.

A potential concern in RD designs is whether other policies or structural factors at the 400 percent FPL threshold confound the estimated effects. Placebo tests on non-G3 students at the 400 percent FPL threshold (Appendix Figure A1) reveal no discontinuities in financial aid, strengthening our causal interpretation that the observed effects are driven by G3 eligibility rather than other income-related policies or institutional practices. The placebo tests for degree completion are somewhat negative indicating a reduced probability in degree and certificate completion at the 400 percent threshold for non-G3 students (panels (d) and (d), Appendix Figure A1).

To extend the RD framework, we estimate a difference-in-discontinuity (RD-DID) model comparing students at the income threshold in G3-eligible versus ineligible programs before and after the policy was implemented. Table 4 presents the RD-DID results, which affirm a substantial increase in grant aid ($1,469) and reductions in borrowing ($483). Unlike the primary RD estimates, the RD-DID results reveal a more pronounced (5.1 to 6.6 percentage point) increase on certificate completion, and these findings are robust to alternative model specifications and bandwidth restrictions (see Appendix Table A4). Differences in certificate and degree completion between the RD and RD-DID models reflect that students in G3 programs near the income cutoff were more likely to earn a certificate, while students in non-G3 programs near the cutoff were slightly less likely to complete a certificate. Differencing these divergent completion rates results in a statistically significant and positive result for G3 eligible enrollees. These RD-DID findings suggest that G3 increased certificate completion rates while having no detectable effect on applied associate or associate degree completion.

Taken together, the RD results provide the most credibly causal estimates of G3's effect on our pre-registered outcomes. The magnitude and consistency of the financial aid findings across bandwidths and specifications provide strong evidence of G3's impact at the income eligibility threshold. However, the RD estimates for academic attainment indicate inconsistent impacts among students near the upper bound of eligibility, with null or modest effects on degree and certificate completion, respectively, despite clear increases in aid. A key limitation of the cross-sectional RD design is that treatment status relies on students choosing G3-eligible programs and completing the FAFSA, potentially limiting generalizability. In contrast, the RD-DID framework incorporates untreated students enrolled in non-G3 programs and students in the pre-policy period to isolate the causal effect of financial aid eligibility under G3. These findings show that completion rates in G3 programs have risen over time relative to non-G3 programs. However, we cannot rule out potential spillover effects among students enrolled in G3 programs who were ineligible for aid. We next examine the broader effects of G3 on our confirmatory outcomes using event study models.

5.2 Evidence from Event Study and DID Analyses

While RD results provide unbiased internally valid local treatment effects, these effects may not generalize to students with lower incomes–those further from the eligibility threshold. We therefore use panel-based estimators primarily as robustness checks and to explore the generalizability of the findings, capturing broader policy effects following G3 implementation in 2021.

FAFSA Completion & Compositional Changes

The internal validity of the DID estimation strategy relies on the untestable assumption that, in the absence of G3 policy adoption, outcomes for treated and control groups would have evolved in parallel. In addition to testing pretrends, we examine whether the treated cohort experienced compositional changes inconsistent with those of the control group (Table A5). The findings from a DID specification and event study models (Table A6) suggest that the G3 policy resulted in increased FAFSA completion among students enrolled in G3-eligible programs and shifted the sociodemographic profile of enrollees–specifically, increasing the share of students identifying as Black, decreasing the share identifying as White, and raising the proportion of students from middle-income households. These changes are salient for policymakers, as FAFSA completion was required to access G3 aid and to increase take-up of existing federal aid for eligible students. However, these compositional changes raise concerns about the internal validity of the DID approach, as they may violate the parallel trends assumption and introduce bias, though the direction of this bias remains uncertain.

Financial Aid & Educational Attainment

Figure 3 presents event study estimates for financial aid and educational attainment, showing no significant pre-trends and sharp increases in financial aid and certificate completion following G3 implementation (See Figure 4). Total grant and total financial aid increased by \$768 and \$626, respectively, with grant aid driven by G3 funds rather than other federal, state, or institutional grant aid (see Figure A2).[4] Degree completion rose by 3.5 percentage points for the first cohort and 5 percentage points for the second cohort, largely due gains in certificate completion.[5]

We next report findings from additional panel-based estimators, including our main DID specification, triple DID, and synthetic DID. Table 5 presents our main estimates for financial aid outcomes, showing that students in G3-eligible programs received the targeted aid as intended. The DID specification in the top panel of Table 5 uses a DID specification and shows increases in total grant aid of nearly $600 from a baseline amount of $4,795 — a 13 percent increase in total grant aid. Students who were inelgibile for aid but enrolled in G3 programs saw smaller increases (about $90), suggesting that G3 may have freed up resources for higher income students.[6] The triple difference estimate–combining aid-eligible and ineligible students–shows a newt gain in grant aid between $450 and $485 (Row 3, Table 5). Results from the synthetic DID model, which aggregates data by campus and cohort, corroborate these findings (Row 4,Table 5). The SDID approach mitigates pre-treatment trend violations though it does not mitigate compositional changes. Our exploratory estimates of borrowing, inferred from the difference between total grant and financial aid, suggest small but consistent reductions. At baseline, only 10 percent of students relied on loans, and average borrowing was $483. While the decline in borrowing was modest, the magnitude of the implied effect is large consistent with reduction in borrowing observed in the RD framework.

Table 6 presents our main estimates for educational attainment for corollary samples and specifications. The DID specification shows that degree completion increased by 4.9 to 5.1 percentage points, from a baseline rate of 15 percent, primarily driven by certificate completion. This intent-to-treat sample includes students eligible for both aid and non-aid components of the G3 intervention. The "placebo" group–students ineligible for G3 aid but enrolled in G3 programs–experienced increases in completion of about 3 percentage points, though these effects were not

[4]Joint F-tests for pre-trends and corresponding p-values presented in the appendix confirm that there are no significant differences in year-over-year changes in total grant aid, total financial aid, any degree completion, and certificate completion prior to policy implementation for students enrolled in G3-eligible versus ineligible programs (Table A7)

[5]Increases in financial aid are statistically significant at the ($p < .001$) level, whereas increases in degree completion are significant at conventional levels of ($p < .01$) and ($p < .05$). Our pre-registration plan specified ($p < .01$) for our confirmatory outcomes to adjust for examining multiple outcomes.

[6]We find modest increases in state and institutional grant aid for G3 non-aid students (Table A8); increases for ITT=1 students are driven by G3 aid (Table A6).

statistically significant (Row 2, Table 6). The triple difference shows positive but non-significant effects for the aid component alone. The SDID estimates corroborate the DID estimates, indicating that certificate completion increased, while associate degree completion was largely unaffected. In sum, panel-based estimates corroborate the RD findings: G3 increased financial aid and certificate attainment but had minimal impact on associate degree completion. These effects appear driven by both increases in aid and exposure to G3 curricula and programmatic supports.

Treatment Heterogeneity

We explore treatment heterogeneity across G3 sectors and student sociodemographic groups, including income level, gender, and age. We find that there are sector-specific differences in educational attainment driven by the male-dominated manufacturing programs of study (Figure A3). Analysis by gender specific subgroups shows that the educational attainment increases are driven by males and those younger than 25 years old. As a last dollar scholarship, the increase in total grant aid accrued to middle income students with household incomes from 200 to 400 percent of FPL, an additional $1,100 in total grant aid. However, degree completion rates increased at comparable rates for these students compared to students with lower reported family income who received less additional aid from G3 on average ($482). We find no differences for students from different racial/ethnic groups, and effects on degree completion within two years were broadly positive and driven by increases in certificate completion (see Figure A4).

6 Discussion

We provide quasi-experimental evidence that Virginia's G3 program expanded financial aid access, increased grant aid and reduced student borrowing while improving short-term credential completion in targeted high-demand fields. RD estimates, which provide the most credibly causal evidence, indicate that G3 eligibility led to a substantial increase in grant aid–approximately $1,800 on average–and a reduction in borrowing of about $600. These gains were concentrated near the 400% FPL income eligibility threshold.[7] Given that students in this income range are typically ineligible for full Pell support, G3 addressed a notable affordability gap among middle-income

[7]This is roughly equivalent to an annual income of $60,000-120,000 for a family of 4.

students. These findings are consistent with economic theory predicting that last-dollar aid programs will have the greatest financial impact on students who are not fully subsidized by federal aid, reducing credit constraints and improving college affordability.

Consistent with G3's design, RD-based estimates show no evidence of aid receipt among ineligible students and no discontinuities in financial aid among non-G3 students, reinforcing the credibility of the findings. While financial aid impacts are clear, academic effects at the threshold are more mixed: certificate completion increased by approximately 2 percentage points, but these results fall short of conventional significance thresholds. This pattern reinforces the view that while financial aid may improve access it is not always sufficient to move academic outcomes on its own, particularly in communtity college settings where other structural and information barriers are salient (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2006; Bettinger et al., 2012; Dynarski et al., 2023).

The RD design provides strong internal validity, though estimated effects are local in nature which limits external validity to students further from the income threshold and relative to students in non-G3 programs. Muted effects from our main RD model stand in contrast to stronger impacts observed using the difference-in-discontinuity (RD-DID) approach, which compares students in G3 and non-G3 programs across cohorts at the income eligibility threshold. This model yields a more pronounced 5 to 6.6 percentage point increase in certificate completion and suggests G3 had a meaningful effect on short-term certificate completion. Robustness checks using panel-based methods (DID, DDD, and SDID) add additional insights into whether these effects generalize to a broader set of students, including those further from the income threshold, and suggest that financial aid impacts for upper middle income students were the most pronounced while certificate completion effects were similar across the income distribution and comparable to those reported from our RD DID design. The convergence of findings across estimation strategies strengthens the interpretation that G3 had broad financial aid impacts, whereas differences in observed effects on certificate completion may be explained by several factors.

First, larger estimated effects on certificate completion from the RD DID and panel-based estimators may reflect the value of non-financial aid program components such as advising, targeted messaging and labeling of G3 programs as 'high-demand.' For instance, we found suggestive, though statistically insignificant, gains in certificate completion among aid-ineligible students who enrolled in G3 programs and may have benefited from these non-aid components. These findings are in line with the existing literature suggesting that simplified information and program structure–such as signaling high-return career paths–can shape student behavior even in the absence of financial incentives (Baker et al., 2018). Second, evidence from our panel-based estimators suggests that students responded to the G3 policy by shifting enrollment into eligible programs. These compositional shifts could inflate estimated effects on certificate completion from panel-based methods if student groups with higher average baseline completion rates were more likely to enroll in G3-eligible programs after policy implementation. This does not appear to be the case necessarily, as some some student groups with lower than average baseline completion rates were most likely to shift into G3 programs. Importantly, at baseline students in G3 programs were about twice as likely to complete a certificate within two years of entry compared to students in non-G3 programs. Larger observed effects from panel-based estimators may, in part, reflect this shift of students into programs that have historically had more success in ensuring students complete short-term certificate programs.

Still, across all models, effects on any degree completion beyond certificates remained negligible. These patterns reflect G3's design and intent: to expand workforce credentialing rather than promote vertical transfer to four-year institutions. Incentivizing and supporting students to complete shorter-term credentials may offer a low-barrier entry point to the labor market for students not otherwise on track to complete an associate degree. However, the economic returns to certificates are typically lower than associate degrees, both in the short and longer term (Minaya & Scott-Clayton, 2022).

Several factors may help explain the limited effects on degree completion beyond certificates and relative to the size of the aid increases. First, many students may have been unaware of the G3 aid receipt, limiting the salience of financial incentives (Cormier et al., 2024). Second, research has shown that financial aid alone, especially when complex or opaque, may not be insufficient to substantially shift postsecondary attainment (Dynarski et al., 2023). This is particularly relevant in community college contexts, where significant structural barriers loom beyond tuition costs. Finally, it is also possible that some G3 participants were diverted from longer-term associate or transfer programs into shorter-term certificates–a potential substitution effect that has implications for whether targeted workforce programs improve or constrain students' long-run educational and economic trajectories.

The G3 program's design–restricted to high-demand workforce programs–narrowed its scope but likely enhanced its political and fiscal sustainability. By explicitly tying tuition-free access to labor market needs, the policy garnered bipartisan support, and had staying power after a shift in party control of the state legislator and governor's office (Collum, 2022). Notably, several states, such as Kentucky, Arkansas, and Indiana have adopted similar workforce-targeted free college policies. These initiatives have the potential to support greater alignment between community college programming and local labor market needs. Early evidence from G3 suggests that such programs can meaningfully expand access to aid and improve short-term credentialing outcomes, particularly for middle-income and underserved students.

These findings carry several implications for policymakers. First, simple and well-targeted financial aid programs appear most effective when paired with implementation support– such as proactive advertising and application assistance. In the case of G3, Virginia provided marketing toolkits and 10 percent of funds to advising, helping students complete FAFSA and navigate requirements. Given the recent challenges with FAFSA administration, these wraparound supports may have been critical. Second, workforce-aligned free college initiatives must be carefully designed to ensure they do not unintentionally divert students from higher-return degree pathways. Our findings underscore the need for clearly articulated pathways for students to transition to longer-term programs with higher-returns.

Overall, Virginia's G3 program significantly increased financial aid and reduced borrowing among income-eligible students, with suggestive evidence of gains in certificate completion. These results align with G3's emphasis on quick transitions from community college into the labor market. Our study's time frame limits the ability to fully assess whether G3 promotes optimal (or sub-optimal) human capital accumulation, especially as associate degrees generally take over 5 years to complete on average (Shapiro et al., 2016). Furthermore, due to the lack of data on student transfer outcomes, we cannot estimate the effect of the G3 program on subsequent enrollment at four-year institutions. While effects on associate degrees were negligible, the program may have helped bring new students into postsecondary education. Future research should examine the labor market returns to G3 credentials, track longer-term academic attainment, and assess whether the program improved alignment between community college training and workforce participation.

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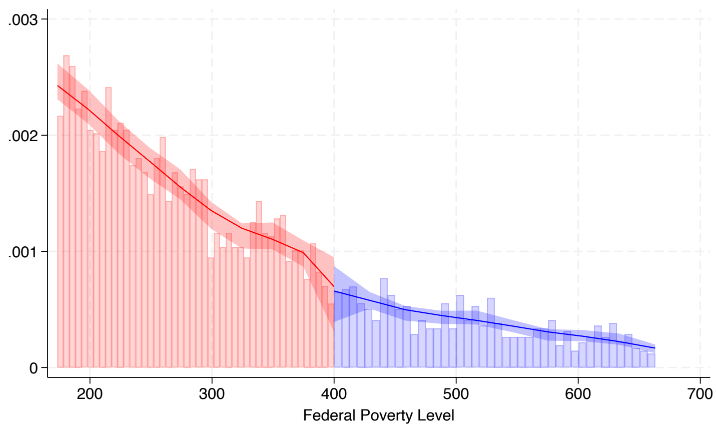
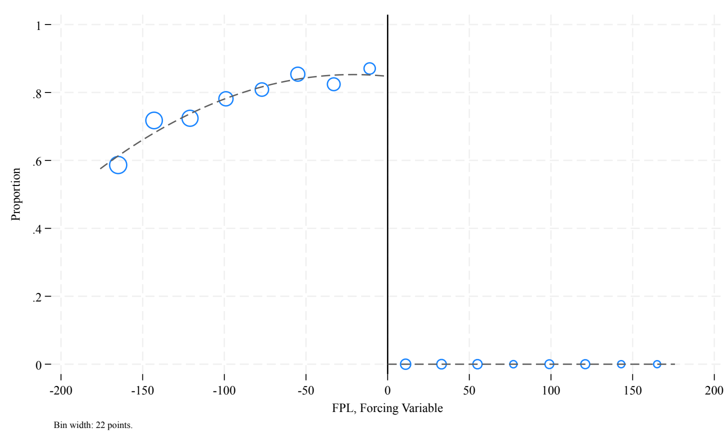
Figures

Figure 1: RD: Density Test and First Stage



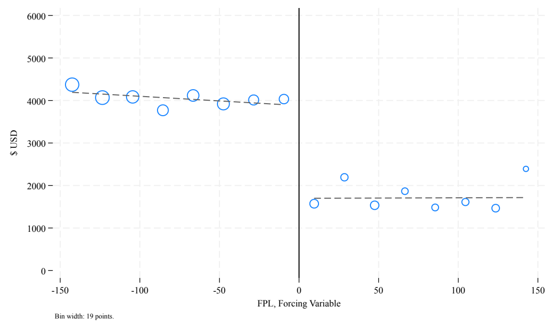
(a) FPL Density



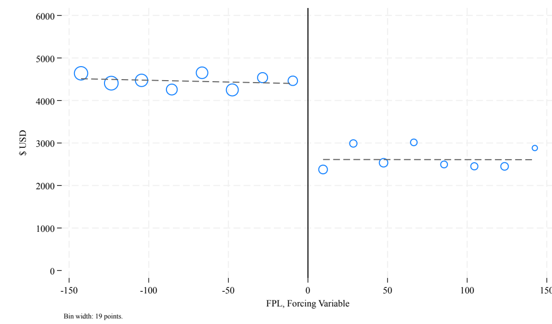
(b) G3 Receipt

Notes: Panel (a) displays a histogram of the assignment variable, FPL, with confidence intervals estimated using the local polynomial density estimator from Cattaneo, Jansson, and Ma (2020) at the FPL $\leq$ 400 assignment threshold. The density point estimate is 0.00023 (SE= $0.00021, p = 0.99$). Panel (b) shows the probability of G3 grant aid receipt as a function of the FPL assignment variable, centered at 400. Bin width: 22, Sample: $\mid 1SD \mid$ of FPL.

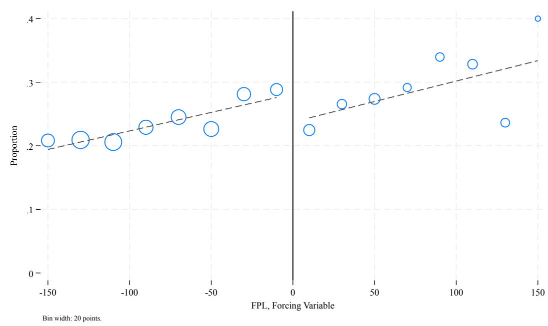
Figure 2: RD: Financial Aid and Degree Completion Outcomes



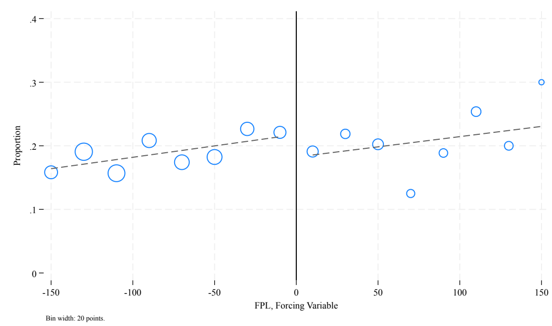
(a) Total Grant Aid



(b) Total Financial Aid



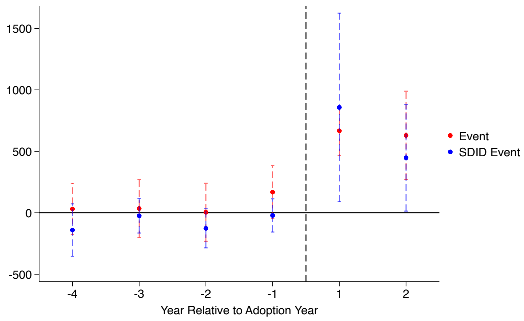
(c) Any Degree



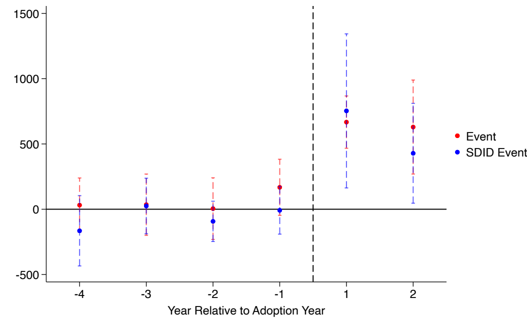
(d) Certificate

Notes: The graphs show the assignment variable (baseline FPL) and key financial aid and academic outcomes: (a) total grant aid in year 1, (b) total financial aid in year 1, (c) any degree earned by year 2, and (d) certificate earned by year 2. Each graphs includes a sample restricted to 1 SD of the FPL assignment variable above and below the assignment threshold, with bins of 20 FPL percentiles. The circles represent the average outcome for students in each bin, weighted by the number of student observations. The dashed line represents the fitted regression with separate splines above and below the assignment threshold.

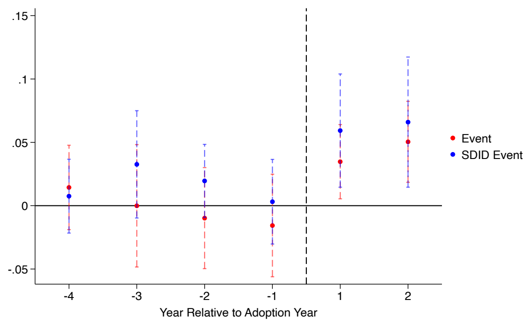
Figure 3: Event-Study Estimates of G3 on Financial Aid and Academic Outcomes



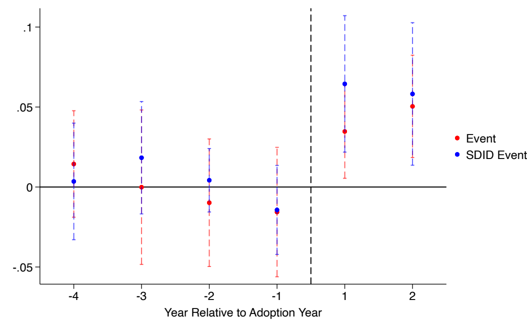
(a) Total Grant Aid



(b) Total Financial Aid



(c) Any Degree



(d) Certificate

Notes: The graphs display event-study point estimates and 95% confidence intervals from two designs estimating the effects of G3 on financial aid and academic outcomes: difference-in-differences (DID) and synthetic difference-in-differences (SDID). Outcomes include (a) total grant aid in year 1, (b) total financial aid in year 1, (c) any degree earned by year 2, and (d) certificate earned by year 2. The DID estimates are based on individual student observations (N = 96,187) and the SDID estimates are based on average outcomes at the school-by-year-by-G3 program eligibility level (N = 322).

Tables

Table 1: Summary Statistics for the Full Sample, FAFSA Completers, and RD Sample

	Full Sample (1)	Completed FAFSA (2)	RD Sample (3)
Demographic Characteristics			
Female	0.521	0.559	0.489
Asian	0.069	0.072	0.063
Black	0.185	0.222	0.241
Hispanic	0.157	0.163	0.140
White	0.505	0.462	0.464
Race: Missing	0.024	0.021	0.029
Age: 18-24	0.778	0.780	0.709
Age: 25-34	0.062	0.068	0.121
Age: 35 and over	0.045	0.038	0.067
0-200 FPL	0.367	0.554	0.594
200-400 FPL	0.184	0.278	0.280
Above 400 FPL	0.111	0.168	0.125
Enrollment			
Full time	0.648	0.710	0.594
Certificate	0.100	0.105	0.469
G3 Program	0.148	0.164	1.000
Health	0.073	0.085	0.374
Skilled Trades	0.058	0.060	0.277
Information Technology	0.181	0.182	0.239
Education	0.018	0.018	0.053
Public Safety	0.024	0.026	0.057
Financial Aid Outcomes			
Completed FAFSA	0.662	1.000	1.000
Received Grant Aid	0.565	0.816	0.846
Received G3	0.009	0.014	0.244
Received SSIG	0.008	0.012	0.209
Received Loans	0.118	0.176	0.085
Educational Attainment			
Earned Any Degree	0.150	0.170	0.186
Earned Certificate	0.088	0.100	0.154
N	174691	115627	6646

Notes: Full sample characteristics are for first-time-in-college (FTIC) Virginia community college students entering between 2016 and 2022. Income bands correspond to reported family income within 0–200%, 200–400%, and above 400% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Column (2) includes only students who submitted a FAFSA. Column (3) includes the Regression Discontinuity (RD) sample consisting of students in the 2021 and 2022 entry cohorts who enrolled in G3-eligible programs and completed the FAFSA. G3 Program indicates whether students enrolled in a G3-eligible program. Any degree includes completion of a certificate, applied associate, or transfer-oriented associate degree within two years of entry. Certificate completion is also measures within two years of enrollment. Abbreviations: Federal Poverty Level (FPL), Get a Skill, Get a Job, Get Ahead (G3), Student Support Incentive Grant (SSIG), First-Time-in-College (FTIC), Information Technology (IT).

Table 2: First-stage Reduced-Form Regression Discontinuity Estimates of Receiving G3 Aid

	Full Sample		$\|FPL\| \leq$ 1SD	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Dependent Variable				
I(FPL) $\leq$ 400	0.938***	0.938***	0.922***	0.911***
	(0.034)	(0.032)	(0.022)	(0.023)
N	6,646	6,646	2,068	2,068
R^2	0.446	0.464	0.462	0.488
AIC	3,716	3,539	1,702	1,639
Linear Splines	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes

Notes: Each cell contains the result of a separate regression estimating the effect of having a family income below 400% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) eligibility threshold on G3 aid receipt in the first year of enrollment. The sample includes the 2021 and 2022 FTIC cohorts and is limited to students in G3-eligible programs who completed the FAFSA. All models include linear splines and control for FTIC cohort. Demographic controls include student age, sex, race/ethnicity, dependency status, and family size. FPL is centered at 400. Standard errors, clustered by FPL percentile, are reported in parentheses. (*p<.05 **p<.01 *** p<.001).

Table 3: Reduced-Form Regression Discontinuity Estimates of Financial Aid and Academic Outcomes

	Full Sample		$\|FPL\| \leq$ 1SD	
Dependent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Financial Aid Outcomes				
Total Grant Aid	1805.206***	1789.762***	2030.541***	2003.185***
	(163.734)	(145.152)	(218.836)	(215.519)
Mean	5,087	5,087	3,515	3,515
N	6,646	6,646	2,068	2,068
Total Financial Aid	1225.752***	1158.102***	1715.486***	1698.927***
	(180.990)	(173.442)	(263.581)	(267.694)
Mean	5,520	5,520	4,045	4,045
N	6,646	6,646	2,068	2,068
Academic Outcomes				
Any Degree	-0.004	0.005	0.026	0.012
	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.042)	(0.042)
Mean	0.186	0.186	0.244	0.244
N	6,646	6,646	2,068	2,068
Certificate	0.011	0.020	0.029	0.013
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.039)	(0.038)
Mean	0.154	0.154	0.193	0.193
N	6,646	6,646	2,068	2,068
Linear Splines	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes

Notes: Each cell contains the result of a separate regression of the effect of having a family income below the 400% FPL eligibility threshold on financial aid receipt in the first year enrolled. The sample includes the 2021 and 2022 FTIC cohorts and is limited to students in G3-eligible programs who completed the FAFSA. All models contain linear splines and control for FTIC cohort. Demographic controls include student age, sex, race/ethnicity, dependency status, and family size. FPL is centered at 400. Standard errors, clustered by FPL percentile, are reported in parentheses. (*p<.05 **p<.01 *** p<.001).

Table 4: Reduced-form Difference-in-Discontinuity Effect of G3 on Outcomes

	RD Estimates	Difference in Discontinuity Estimates		
Dependent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Total Grant Aid	1789.762***	1731.489***	2484.857***	2462.912***
	(145.152)	(168.376)	(148.986)	(152.720)
Total Financial Aid	1158.102***	1096.177***	1843.781***	1882.588***
	(173.442)	(193.192)	(173.467)	(183.941)
Loans	-631.659***	-635.312***	-641.076***	-580.325***
	(121.061)	(76.044)	(90.904)	(103.602)
Degree, 2 years	0.005	0.055*	0.051*	0.054*
	(0.027)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.027)
Certificate, 2 years	0.020	0.065**	0.066**	0.051*
	(0.025)	(0.023)	(0.021)	(0.024)
N	6,646	113,974	113,974	39,487
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Quadratic Spline	No	No	Yes	No
Bandwidth Restrictions	None	None	None	$\lvert FPL \rvert \leq$ 1SD

Notes: Each cell contains the result of a separate regression of the effect of I(FPL $\leq$ 400) interacted with an indicator for enrolling in a G3 program in the post-period (ITT=1) on financial aid and academic outcomes. Previously reported RD estimates are presented for ease of comparison. Difference in discontinuity models estimate the reduce-form effect of G3 eligibility while conditioning on a placebo jump among students in non-G3 programs in the post-period and G3 and non-G3 students in the pre-period (i.e., a difference-in-discontinuity). All models include a linear spline of the forcing variable (FPL) unless otherwise noted, in which case a quadratic spline is included. Models include an indicator for FPL $\leq$ 0, and interactions of these regression discontinuity (RD) specification variables with a G3 program enrollment indicator. Additionally, all models control for cohort fixed effects, G3 program enrollment, and a full set of baseline demographic characteristics. If bandwidth restrictions are specified, they are within 1 standard deviation of FPL. FPL is centered at 400. Standard errors, clustered by institution and cohort year, are reported in parentheses. (*p<.05 **p<.01 *** p<.001).

Table 5: Panel-Based Estimates of the Effect of G3 on Financial Aid Outcomes

	Total Grant Aid		Total Financial Aid	
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
Model Specification				
DID	592.673***	598.718***	539.946***	548.402***
	(107.547)	(109.589)	(111.595)	(117.327)
N	96,187	96,187	96,187	96,187
Placebo	92.857**	82.648*	133.093*	114.990*
	(34.681)	(33.899)	(55.866)	(52.127)
N	78,504	78,504	78,504	78,504
Triple DID	447.778**	485.638**	349.924*	358.866*
	(160.369)	(153.897)	(172.210)	(165.832)
N	174,691	174,691	174,691	174,691
SDID	652.482*	706.735***	590.950*	603.907***
	(258.752)	(156.203)	(289.933)	(134.883)
N	322	322	322	322
Includes Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes

Notes: Each column presents results from separate regressions using various panel-based estimators. All analytic samples consist of FTIC students from the 2016–2022 cohorts. The sample for the DID estimator is restricted to students who completed the FAFSA and reported an income below 400% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In contrast, the placebo sample includes only students who either did not complete the FAFSA or reported an income above 400% of the FPL and were thus ineligble for G3 funds regardless of program enrollment. The Triple DID sample combines students from both the DID and Placebo samples. For SDID models, data are aggregated at the institution-by-year-by-G3 program eligibility level. All models include entry cohort and institution fixed effects. Models with controls include race, gender, and age. Standard errors are clustered at the institution-by-year level.
(*p<.05 **p<.01 *** p<.001).

Table 6: Panel-Based Estimates of the Effect of G3 on Degree and Certificate Completion

	Earned Any Degree		Earned Certificate	
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
Model Specification				
DID	0.049***	0.051***	0.048**	0.046***
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.013)
N	96,187	96,187	96,187	96,187
Placebo	0.030*	0.027*	0.028	0.026
	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.015)
N	78,504	78,504	78,504	78,504
Triple DID	0.016	0.021	0.021	0.020
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.010)
N	174,691	174,691	174,691	174,691
SDID	0.063	0.043	0.061***	0.032
	(0.033)	(0.024)	(0.017)	(0.025)
N	322	322	322	322
Includes Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes

Notes: Each column presents results from separate regressions using various panel-based estimators. All analytic samples consist of FTIC students from the 2016–2022 cohorts. The sample for the DID estimator is restricted to students who completed the FAFSA and reported an income below 400% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In contrast, the placebo sample includes only students who either did not complete the FAFSA or reported an income above 400% of the FPL and were thus ineligble for G3 funds regardless of program enrollment. The Triple DID sample combines students from both the DID and Placebo samples. For SDID models, data are aggregated at the institution-by-year-by-G3 program eligibility level. All models include entry cohort and institution fixed effects. Models with controls include race, gender, and age. Standard errors are clustered at the institution-by-year level.
(*p<.05 **p<.01 *** p<.001).

8 Appendix A

Detailed Methodology

This appendix provides a comprehensive overview of the methodological approaches used for robustness checks in our panel-based estimation strategies and the assessment of G3 program impact. We employ multiple identification strategies to strengthen causal inference, including an event study framework, a triple-differences (DDD) approach, and a synthetic difference-in-differences (SDID) estimator. These methods allow us to assess the plausibility of key assumptions, address potential threats to internal validity, and refine our estimates of overall program effects. Below, we outline each approach in detail, beginning with the event study specification.

Event Study Estimates

A critical assumption for obtaining credibly causal estimates is that changes observed along program-ineligible students provide a valid counterfactual for treated students. We assess its plausibility using the following specification:

$$Y_{it} = \sum_{\tau=1}^{2} \delta_\tau G3_{i,t+\tau} + \sum_{n=0}^{4} \delta_n G3_{i,t-n} + \alpha_s + \epsilon_i t \tag{4}$$

where the coefficients δ_n and δ_τ capture the effect of participation in G3 for student i in cohort t, relative to students who never enrolled in G3-eligible programs. Specifically, δ_n represents the estimated effect for students who enrolled in G3 programs n entry cohorts prior, while δ_τ measures the effect for students who enrolled post-policy adoption in year τ. The reference category consists of students who never enroll in G3-eligible programs. To provide evidence in support of the parallel trends assumption, we test whether the pre-treatment cohort-to-cohort changes in outcomes among G3 students systematically differ from those observed among the comparison students. If we fail to reject the null hypothesis (H_0) of no differential pre-treatment trends, we interpet this as evidence consistent with the parallel-trends assumption.

Although G3 funds were only disbursed after 2021, variation in treatment timing in our context may be influenced by differing institutional practices regarding the timing of advertising and advising students about the G3 program, potentially leading to anticipatory effects. We also include a vector X' of student characteristics, such as reported race, gender, and age (see Table 1), following Roth et al. (2023), due to slight evidence of pre-treatment trend violations for some outcome variables see Appendix Table A7).

Triple Differences

To further understand the impacts of the G3 program, we include higher-income individuals and non-FAFSA completers in the model to estimate the DDD as follows:

$$Y_{it} = \theta(G3Aid_i) + P_{it}I_{it} + P_{it}T_t + I_{it}T_t + X_i'\beta + \epsilon_{it} \tag{5}$$

In equation 5, the additional indicator I_{it} represents whether a student was income-eligible for the G3 program. This term is interacted with entry cohort (T_t) and G3 program enrollment (P_{it}) to construct the counterfactual. The three-way interaction of income eligibility (I_{it}), G3 program enrollment (P_{it}) and enrollment post-policy adoption, represents the ITT effect of G3 financial aid, denoted as (θ).

The DDD strengthens casual inference by addressing three potential threats to internal validity. First, it accounts for broader time trends that could affect student outcomes during the G3 policy rollout by incorporating a never-treated group—income ineligible students—before and after policy implementation. Second, the DDD model controls for unobserved differences between groups that remain constant over time but may vary between G3 program enrollees and non-enrollees. Third, by adding an additional dimension—income eligibility—the DDD model controls for unobserved factors that could influence selection into the treatment, mitigating potential selection bias. While we include higher-income individuals and non-FAFSA completers in the model to estimate the DDD we also estimate results with higher-income individuals only (i.e., FAFSA completers) and find qualitatively similar results.

Synthetic Difference in Differences

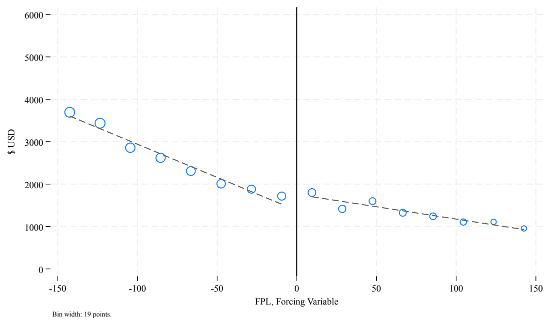
Unlike the synthetic control method, which is typically used for a single or small number of treated units, SDID accommodates a larger group of treatment units while incorporating institution and cohort fixed effects similar to a DID design. However, the SDID estimator also assigns weights to time periods, placing greater emphasis on pre-treatment periods that are most similar to the treated periods (Arkhangelsky et al., 2021; Clarke et al., 2023). By reweighting both units and time periods, SDID introduces a "double robustness" feature to the estimates, reducing the influence of potential specification errors and addressing threats to internal validity. This reweighting strategy can improve the precision of the estimates by removing systematic or predictable components of the outcome variable, particularly when there is sufficient heterogeneity in the outcome of interest (Clarke et al., 2023). Our SDID approach, incorporating this reweighting strategy, is specified as follows:

$$(\hat{\tau}^{SDID}, \hat{\alpha}, \hat{\beta}) = \underset{\tau,\alpha,\beta}{\text{argmin}}\{\sum_{i=1}^{I}\sum_{t=1}^{T}(\bar{Y_{it}} - \alpha_i - \beta_t - T_{it}\tau)^2 * \hat{w_i}^{SDID} * \hat{\lambda_t}^{SDID}\} \tag{6}$$

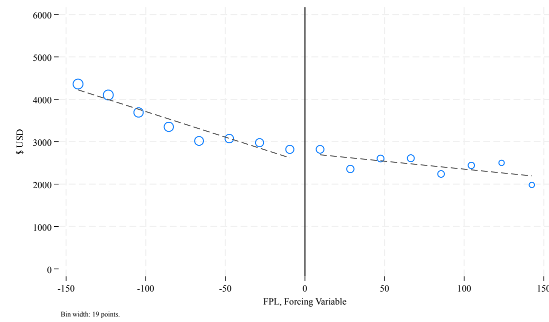
In this specification, $\bar{Y_{it}}$ represents the mean outcome for students at institution i in entry cohort t. Student participation in G3 in the period after its adoption is represented by $T_{it} \in [0, 1]$. The procedure requires a balanced sample of students at I institutions and T entry cohorts, so we average student outcomes and characteristics at the institution level. The main benefit of SDID is that the procedure optimally determines unit and time-specific weights ($\hat{w_i}^{SDID}$ and $\hat{\lambda_t}^{SDID}$), reducing reliance on the parallel trends assumption. The time period and institution fixed effects are represented by β and α, respectively. Following guidance from Clark et al. (2023), we also construct 95 percent confidence intervals using a block-bootstrap procedure and present SDID event-study estimates to further highlight pre- and post-policy adoption trends. This approach directly addresses the potential violations of the parallel trends assumption, improving the robustness and reliability of our findings. However, while SDID corrects for pre-trend violations, it does not eliminate bias from anticipatory impacts or compositional changes in the treatment group over time. To estimate the SDID model, a balanced panel is required. However, because individual students cannot be tracked across pre- and post-policy periods, we construct a balanced panel by averaging student outcomes and characteristics at the cohort-by-institution-by-G3 program eligibility level. Given this aggregation, the efficiency gains commonly observed in SDID models using student-level data are not present in our application.

Appendix Figures

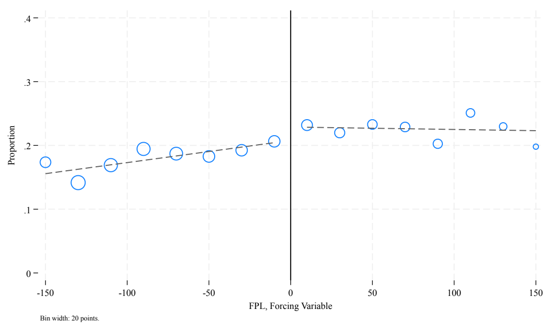
Figure A1: RD: Financial Aid and Degree Completion Outcomes for Placebo Group



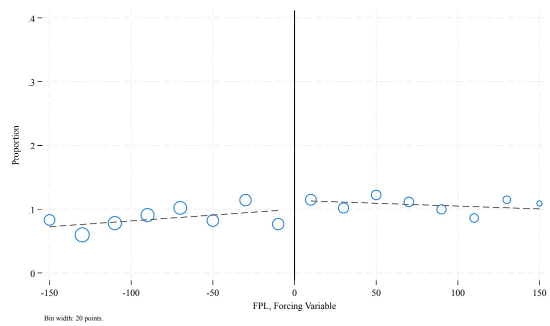
(a) Total Grant Aid



(b) Total Financial Aid



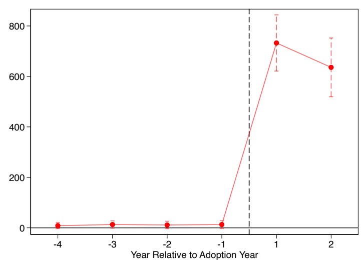
(c) Any Degree



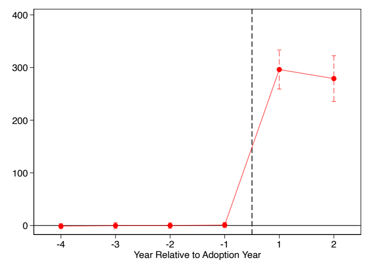
(d) Certificate

Notes: The graphs show the assignment variable (baseline FPL) and key financial aid and academic outcomes for a placebo sample (non-G3 students): (a) total grant aid in year 1, (b) total financial aid in year 1, (c) any degree earned by year 2, and (d) certificate earned by year 2. Each graphs includes a sample restricted to 1 SD of the FPL assignment variable above and below the threshold, with bins of 20 FPL percentiles. The circles represent the average outcome for students in each bin, weighted by the number of student observations. The dashed line represents the fitted regression with separate splines above and below the assignment threshold.

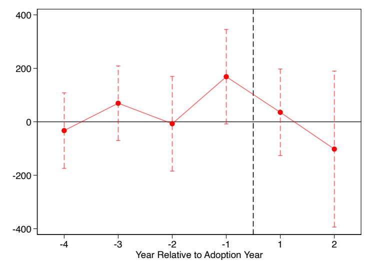
Figure A2: Event Study Estimates of Alternative Financial Aid Outcomes



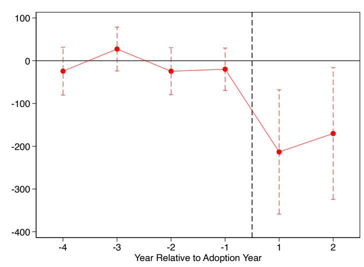
(a) G3 Aid



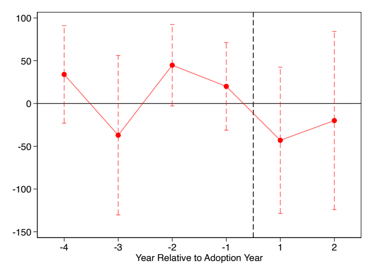
(b) SSIG Aid



(c) Federal Grant Aid



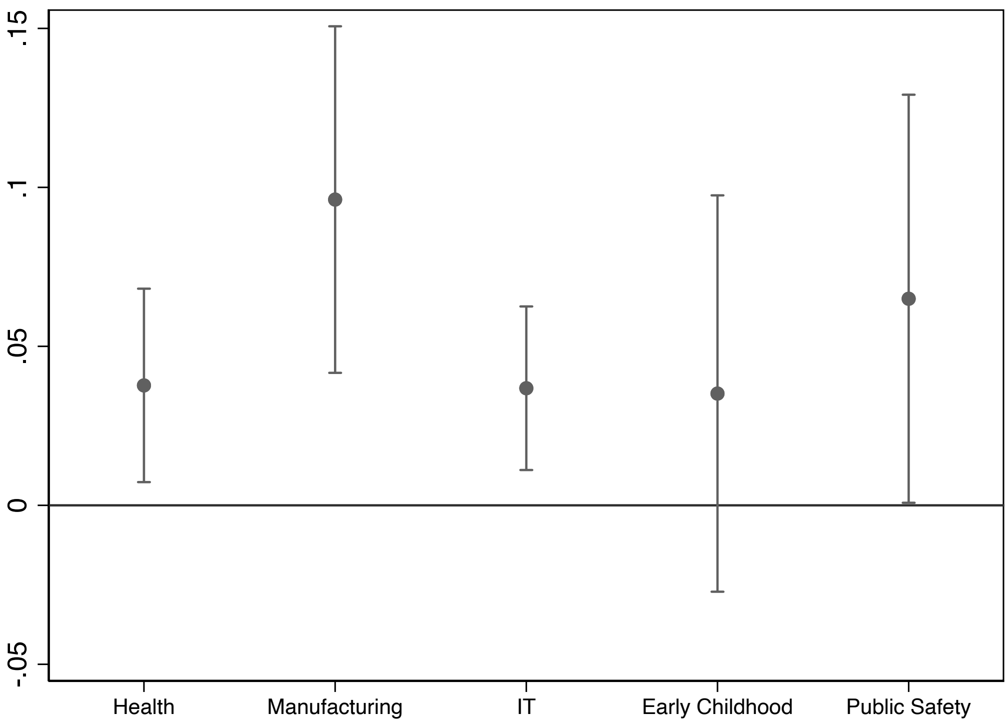
(d) State Grant Aid



(e) Institutional Grant Aid

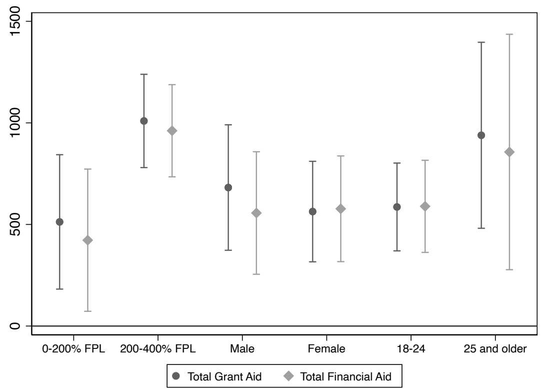
Notes: The graphs display event-study point estimates and 95% confidence intervals, estimating the effect of G3 eligibility on year-over-year changes in alternative financial aid outcomes. These exploratory outcomes include (a) G3 aid, (b) SSIG aid, (c) federal grant aid, (d) state grant aid, and (e) institutional grant aid. The sample consists of FTIC cohorts from 2016 to 2022 and includes only students who completed the FAFSA.

Figure A3: Estimated Effect of G3 on 2-year Certificate Completion, by G3 Program Area

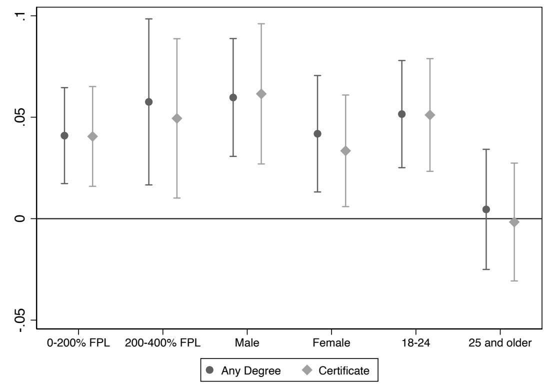


Notes: The graph displays point estimates and 95% confidence intervals from a difference-in-differences (DID) model estimating the effect of G3 eligibility on certificate completion within 2 years, by G3 program area. Analytic samples include FTIC cohorts from 2016 through 2022 and are limited to students who completed the FAFSA and had a reported income below 400 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

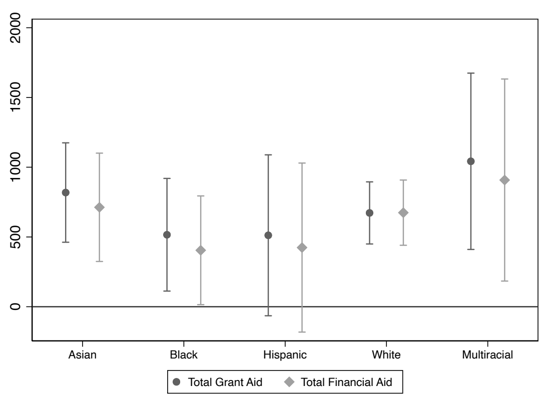
Figure A4: Effect of G3 on Financial Aid and Degree Completion from DID, by Student Subgroups



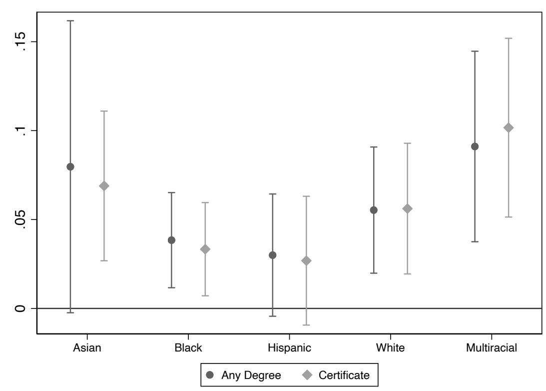
(a) Financial Aid, by Income, Gender, & Age



(b) Degree Completion, by Income, Gender, & Age



(c) Financial Aid, by Race/Ethnicity



(d) Degree Completion, by Race/Ethnicity

Notes: The graph displays point estimates and 95% confidence intervals from a difference-in-differences (DID) model estimating the effect of G3 eligibility on total grant aid, total financial aid, and degree and certificate completion within 2 years for each specified student subgroup. Analytic samples include FTIC cohorts from 2016 through 2022 and are limited to students who completed the FAFSA and had a reported income below 400 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.

Appendix Tables

Table A1: Auxiliary RD Estimates of Baseline Covariate Balance using Index Approach

Sample	Full (1)	1SD (2)	Placebo Full (3)	Placebo 1SD (4)
Aid Total Index	132.827	44.013	194.579	-11.204
	(72.257)	(44.747)	(110.843)	(22.624)
Grant Total Index	98.724	61.152	234.046	-26.879
	(91.657)	(58.022)	(145.945)	(31.692)
Degree Index	-0.010	0.015	-0.004*	-0.000
	(0.005)	(0.009)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Certificate Index	-0.008	0.017	-0.005***	-0.000
	(0.005)	(0.009)	(0.001)	(0.002)

Notes: Each cell contains the results of a two-stage regression: (1) in the first stage the outcome for the relevant sample is regressed on all baseline covariates (see table 1 for a description of covariates) and a predicted outcome composite is generated. (2) In the second stage the predicted outcome composite (i.e., portion of the outcome predicted by the baseline covariates) is then regressed on I(FPL $\leq$ 400) and a linear spline for the assignment variable. Standard errors, clustered by FPL percentile, are reported in parentheses. (*p<.05 **p<.01 *** p<.001).

Table A2: Auxiliary Regression Discontinuity Estimates of Baseline Covariate Balance

Sample	Full (1)	Full (2)	1SD (3)
Female	-0.073*	-0.054	-0.058
	(0.031)	(0.046)	(0.048)
Age	1.224***	0.490	0.465
	(0.328)	(0.495)	(0.525)
Dependent	0.000	-0.083*	-0.021
	(0.033)	(0.035)	(0.029)
Family Size	0.220	-0.271	0.179
	(0.215)	(0.208)	(0.121)
Total Family Income	1.224***	0.490	0.465
	(0.328)	(0.495)	(0.525)
Asian	-869.722	2016.669	2556.935
	(1467.852)	(2080.626)	(2150.909)
Black	-0.026	-0.081*	-0.084*
	(0.027)	(0.036)	(0.037)
Hispanic	0.064**	-0.051	-0.016
	(0.022)	(0.029)	(0.031)
White	-0.058	0.115*	0.070
	(0.041)	(0.047)	(0.048)
Multiracial	-0.005	0.012	0.032
	(0.013)	(0.018)	(0.020)
Race: Missing	0.005	-0.006	-0.014
	(0.012)	(0.018)	(0.019)
N	6,646	6,646	2,068

Notes: Each cell contains the result of a separate regression of the effect of having a family income below the 400 percent FPL eligibility threshold for G3 on baseline covariates. All models contain controls for FTIC cohort (i.e., 2021 and 2022) and linear splines. Column 2 contains quadratic splines. Standard errors, clustered by FPL percentile, are reported in parentheses. (*p<.05 **p<.01 *** p<.001).

Table A3: Reduced-Form Regression Discontinuity Estimates of Financial Aid Outcomes with Bandwidth Restrictions

Dependent Variable:	Total Grant Aid (1)	Total Financial Aid (2)	Loans (3)
Sample			
Full Sample, Linear Splines	1789.762***	1158.102***	-631.659***
	(145.152)	(173.442)	(121.061)
N	6,646	6,646	6,646
Full Sample, Linear and Quadratic	1389.202***	1080.725***	-308.477
	(207.330)	(258.226)	(173.989)
N	6,646	6,646	6,646
$\|FPL\| \leq 200$	1780.839***	1456.001***	-324.838
	(201.078)	(251.705)	(172.761)
N	2,440	2,440	2,440
$\|FPL\| \leq 150$	2178.005***	1799.351***	-378.655*
	(231.542)	(284.162)	(190.542)
N	1,709	1,709	1,709
$\|FPL\| \leq 100$	2234.463***	1921.006***	-313.456
	(293.122)	(361.678)	(235.157)
N	1,028	1,028	1,028
$\|FPL\| \leq 80$	2146.653***	1763.935***	-382.718
	(336.950)	(411.615)	(260.435)
N	831	831	831
Kernel Weights	2146.486***	1789.768***	-356.718
	(235.058)	(290.828)	(192.136)
N	2,068	2,068	2,068
CCT Optimal	2384.852***	2038.665***	-353.454
	(333.726)	(414.220)	(226.141)
N	1,019	989	1,314
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Each cell contains the result of a separate regression estimating the effect of having a family income below 400% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) eligibility threshold on financial aid outcomes. The sample includes the 2021 and 2022 FTIC cohorts and is limited to students in G3-eligible programs who completed the FAFSA. CCT refers to the Calonico, Cattaneo & Titunik (2014) optimal bandwidth and inference procedures. All models contain linear splines and control for FTIC cohort. Kernel and CCT estimates utilize triangular kernels, while all other estimates apply uniform weights. Demographic controls include student age, sex, race/ethnicity, dependency status, and family size. FPL is centered at 400. Standard errors, clustered by FPL percentile, are reported in parentheses. (*p<.05 **p<.01 *** p<.001).

Table A4: Difference-in-Discontinuity Estimates of G3 Effect on Outcomes with Bandwidth Restrictions

Dependent Variable:	Total Grant Aid (1)	Total Financial Aid (2)	Loans (3)	Degree, 2 years (4)	Certificate, 2 years (5)
Sample					
Full Sample, Linear Splines	1731.489***	1096.177***	-635.312***	0.055*	0.065**
	(168.376)	(193.192)	(76.044)	(0.024)	(0.023)
N	113,974	113,974	113,974	113,974	113,974
Full Sample, Linear and Quadratic	2484.857***	1843.781***	-641.076***	0.051	0.066*
	(234.841)	(235.051)	(103.072)	(0.031)	(0.029)
N	113,974	113,974	113,974	113,974	113,974
$\|FPL\| \leq$ 200	2457.139***	1862.900***	-594.239***	0.040	0.045
	(198.801)	(222.179)	(101.343)	(0.033)	(0.031)
N	44,685	44,685	44,685	44,685	44,685
$\|FPL\| \leq$ 150	2416.216***	1910.646***	-505.570***	0.065	0.054
	(202.022)	(242.774)	(117.204)	(0.039)	(0.036)
N	32,099	32,099	32,099	32,099	32,099
$\|FPL\| \leq$ 100	2322.463***	1829.504***	-492.959**	0.075	0.057
	(249.735)	(277.169)	(162.425)	(0.046)	(0.040)
N	20,941	20,941	20,941	20,941	20,941
$\|FPL\| \leq$ 80	2107.346***	1556.074***	-551.273**	0.073	0.074
	(274.217)	(317.083)	(188.067)	(0.047)	(0.041)
N	16,556	16,556	16,556	16,556	16,556
Kernel Weights	2388.347***	1886.201***	-502.146***	0.057	0.053
	(206.483)	(244.317)	(116.838)	(0.036)	(0.034)
N	41,688	41,688	41,688	41,688	41,688
CCT Optimal	2261.190***	1757.040***	-465.432*	0.064	0.069
	(326.265)	(344.908)	(194.950)	(0.037)	(0.037)
N	15,744	18,735	18,669	35,014	27,113
Demographic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Each cell contains the result of a separate regression estimating the effect of I(FPL $\leq$ 400) interacted with an indicator for enrolling in a G3 program (ITT=1) on financial aid and academic outcomes.These models estimate the reduced form effect of G3 eligibility conditioned on a placebo jump for those students in non-G3 programs (i.e., difference-in-discontinuity). As such, all models include a linear spline of the forcing variable (FPL), an indicator for FPL $\leq$ 0, and interactions of these regression discontinuity (RD) specification variables with the G3 enrollment indicator. Additionally, all models control for cohort-by-institution fixed effects, inital program level, and a full set of baseline demographic characteristics, including student age, sex, race/ethnicity, dependency status, and family size. CCT refers to the Calonico, Cattaneo & Titunik (2014) optimal bandwidth and inference procedures. Kernel and CCT estimates utilize triangular kernels, while all other estimates apply uniform weights. FPL is centered at 400. Standard errors, clustered at the institution-by-cohort level, are reported in parentheses. (*p<.05 **p<.01 *** p<.001).

Table A5: Estimated Effects of G3 Eligibility on Student Demographic Characteristics

	DID Sample (1)	Full Sample (2)
Completed FAFSA	0.000	0.054***
	(.)	(0.011)
0-200 FPL	-0.026**	0.015
	(0.010)	(0.010)
200-400 FPL	0.026**	0.035***
	(0.010)	(0.007)
Above 400 FPL	0.000	0.004
	(.)	(0.005)
Age: 18-24	0.006	0.023*
	(0.009)	(0.011)
Age: 25-34	0.003	-0.004
	(0.008)	(0.006)
Age: 35 and over	-0.007	-0.016*
	(0.007)	(0.007)
Asian	0.007	0.009
	(0.007)	(0.006)
Black	0.037***	0.028**
	(0.010)	(0.009)
Hispanic	-0.012	0.001
	(0.008)	(0.004)
White	-0.035**	-0.040***
	(0.012)	(0.011)
Multiracial	0.009*	0.007*
	(0.004)	(0.003)
Race: Missing	-0.009**	-0.009**
	(0.003)	(0.003)
Female	-0.002	0.008
	(0.041)	(0.038)
N	96,187	174,691

Notes: Each cell presents results from a separate regression, with coefficients representing the estimated effect of G3 eligibility from the DID model. The sample consists of FTIC students from the 2016–2022 cohorts. The income-eligible DID sample includes students who completed the FAFSA and reported a family income below 400% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), while the full sample includes all FAFSA completers, regardless of income, as well as non-completers. All models include institution and entry cohort fixed effects. Standard errors, clustered at the institution-by-year level, are reported in parentheses.
(*p<.05 **p<.01 *** p<.001).

Table A6: Panel-Based Estimates of the Effect of G3 on FAFSA Completion and G3 and SSIG Award Amounts

	FAFSA Completion		G3 Aid		SSIG Aid	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Model Specification						
DID	0.000	0.000	668.086***	671.163***	287.230***	287.372***
	(.)	(.)	(42.717)	(40.411)	(15.310)	(15.123)
N	96,187	96,187	96,187	96,187	96,187	96,187
Placebo	0.029*	0.022	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.014)	(0.012)	(.)	(.)	(.)	(.)
N	78,504	78,504	78,504	78,504	78,504	78,504
Triple DID	-0.040*	-0.036*	667.941***	670.392***	286.738***	286.989***
	(0.017)	(0.016)	(43.112)	(42.989)	(15.642)	(15.651)
N	174,691	174,691	174,691	174,691	174,691	174,691
SDID	0.024	0.000	501.310***	501.310***	196.846***	196.846***
	(0.013)	(0.000)	(109.394)	(109.394)	(21.716)	(21.716)
N	322	322	322	322	322	322
Includes Demographic Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Notes: Each column presents results from separate regressions using various panel-based estimators. All analytic samples consist of FTIC students from the 2016–2022 cohorts. The sample for the DID estimator is restricted to students who completed the FAFSA and reported an income below 400% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In contrast, the placebo sample includes only students who either did not complete the FAFSA or reported an income above 400% of the FPL and were thus ineligble for G3 funds regardless of program enrollment. The Triple DID sample combines students from both the DID and Placebo samples. For SDID models, data are aggregated at the institution-by-year-by-G3 program eligibility level. All models include entry cohort and institution fixed effects. Models with controls include race, gender, and age. Standard errors are clustered at the institution-by-year level.
(*p<.05 **p<.01 *** p<.001).

Table A7: Event Study Estimates of G3 on Financial Aid and Academic Outcomes

	Total Grant Aid		Total Financial Aid		Any Degree		Certificate	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Lead 5	104.661	134.409	202.538	271.151*	0.007	0.004	-0.007	-0.008
	(96.063)	(85.617)	(129.150)	(132.345)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Lead 4	28.092	36.724	-8.627	31.381	0.021	0.016	0.017	0.014
	(106.088)	(99.568)	(109.105)	(105.325)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Lead 3	61.035	80.491	-19.440	34.826	0.004	-0.000	0.002	-0.000
	(122.675)	(112.028)	(127.290)	(118.791)	(0.028)	(0.027)	(0.025)	(0.024)
Lead 2	12.947	35.015	-57.691	4.727	-0.009	-0.014	-0.007	-0.010
	(97.551)	(100.427)	(115.637)	(119.502)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Lead 1	178.158	205.719	90.935	167.959	-0.009	-0.015	-0.013	-0.016
	(103.738)	(107.843)	(109.863)	(108.778)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.021)	(0.020)
Year 1	768.334***	783.315***	626.411***	667.338***	0.035*	0.035*	0.035*	0.035*
	(91.031)	(91.758)	(98.799)	(101.425)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Year 2	625.657***	613.578***	583.016**	629.615***	0.066***	0.062***	0.052**	0.050**
	(177.167)	(166.057)	(187.072)	(182.277)	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.016)
F-statistic	0.707	0.948	0.838	1.247	0.406	0.462	0.362	0.364
p-value	.618	.451	.524	.289	.844	.804	.873	.872
N	96187	96187	96187	96187	96187	96187	96187	96187
Includes Demographic Controls	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

Notes: These estimates come from an event study analysis examining the effects of G3 eligibility. The sample is limited to FTIC students from the 2016–2022 cohorts who completed the FAFSA and had a reported family income below 400% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Each column presents results from separate regressions estimating dynamic effects over time. All models include program-level and institution fixed effects. Models with additional demographic controls account for race, gender, and age. Standard errors are clustered at the institution-by-year level. The reported F-test p-values assess the joint significance of Leads 1 through 5, testing the assumption that pre-treatment trends are equal to zero. (*p<.05 **p<.01 *** p<.001).

Table A8: Panel-Based Estimates of the Effect of G3 on Alternative Financial Aid Outcomes

	Federal Grant Aid (1)	State Grant Aid (2)	Institutional Grant Aid (3)	Other Grant Aid (4)	Federal Grant Aid (5)	State Grant Aid (6)	Institutional Grant Aid (7)	Other (8)
Model Specification								
DID	-66.489	-203.089***	-52.349	-40.716*	-78.662	-196.311***	-46.262	-38.582*
	(98.003)	(55.723)	(40.534)	(17.765)	(96.739)	(56.968)	(38.067)	(17.418)
N	96,187	96,187	96,187	96,187	96,187	96,187	96,187	96,187
Placebo	-5.610	26.048*	42.447	29.971	-5.886	24.697*	37.544	26.293
	(6.472)	(10.582)	(22.607)	(22.704)	(6.480)	(10.165)	(22.985)	(22.189)
N	78,504	78,504	78,504	78,504	78,504	78,504	78,504	78,504
Triple DID	-97.659	-241.059***	-105.748	-62.436	-91.439	-229.790***	-93.991	-56.523
	(135.801)	(62.574)	(73.771)	(39.707)	(133.175)	(62.755)	(73.014)	(39.549)
N	174,691	174,691	174,691	174,691	174,691	174,691	174,691	174,691
SDID	45.089	-13.894	-74.194	-17.984	85.153	-9.502	-84.018	-9.914
	(301.708)	(81.071)	(45.820)	(30.103)	(162.269)	(79.489)	(117.639)	(67.263)
N	322	322	322	322	322	322	322	322
Includes Demographic Controls	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: Each column presents results from separate regressions using various panel-based estimators. All analytic samples consist of FTIC students from the 2016–2022 cohorts. The sample for the DID estimator is restricted to students who completed the FAFSA and reported an income below 400% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). In contrast, the placebo sample includes only students who either did not complete the FAFSA or reported an income above 400% of the FPL and were thus ineligble for G3 funds regardless of program enrollment. The Triple DID sample combines students from both the DID and Placebo samples. For SDID models, data are aggregated at the institution-by-year-by-G3 program eligibility level. All models include entry cohort and institution fixed effects. Models with controls include race, gender, and age. Standard errors are clustered at the institution-by-year level.
(*p<.05 **p<.01 *** p<.001).