Announcing the
Final Examination of
Eunkyoun Park
for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Higher Education and Student Affairs
April 19, 2013, 15:00
W.W. Wright Education Building Room 4204

Dissertation: Low-Income Students’ Access To Selective Higher Education

The undermatch between low-income students’ academic achievement and college destinations has become increasingly important in discussions of higher education access and equity. To examine whether and why low-income students are undermatched in their college choice, the study examined low-income students’ access to selective higher education. Specifically, the study investigated the timing and reasons of low-income students’ attrition during the four stages of selective college access (i.e., qualification, application, admission, enrollment). The study used data from the Education Longitudinal Study 2002 (ELS: 2002) and the sample of this study were 12,270 seniors who attended a sample high school and have three years of transcript data. Given the focus of this study on the occurrence and timing of attrition, discrete time event history analysis was applied. Regardless of family income, the stage of qualification was the most hazardous followed by the stage of application and the stage of admission was the least hazardous. Low-income students were less likely to be qualified for, apply to, be admitted in, and enroll at a selective institution(s) compared to their high-income peers, and the largest gap among income groups was found in the stage of qualification. Gender, race/ethnicity, parental education, academic ability, the quality of high school attended, the proximity to a selective institution, and the number of peers aspiring to four-year college education were significantly associated with the attrition from selective college access. Disadvantages in these factors further limited low-income students’ access to selective higher education. Overall, the current research revealed the tendency of undermatching for low-income students and structural barriers directly or indirectly resulting in undermatching. As a way to resolve the structural barriers, the study recommends to create a comprehensive and uniform secondary school system with equal funding for public schools, to provide sufficient college guidance and counseling to the disadvantaged students, and to increase the opportunities of participating extracurricular activities.

Outline of Current Studies
Major: Higher Education & Student Affairs
Minor(s): Inquiry Methodology

Educational Career
B.A., Seoul National University, 2007
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Committee in Charge
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Committee members: Dr. Leslie Rutkowski, Dr. Vasti Torres, Dr. Victor Borden

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Donald Hossler

(Any member of the Graduate Faculty may attend. As a courtesy, please notify the Committee Chairperson in advance.)