

Over the past two decades, student loans have grown to play a significant role in how students pay for college. From 1995-96 to 2011-12, the share of undergraduates borrowing a loan increased from 26% to 43%, with the average annual loan amount growing from \$5,600 to \$7,100.¹ Today, college graduates have an average debt load of approximately \$29,000, and outstanding student loan debt in the United States now exceeds \$1 trillion (TICAS, 2016; Federal Reserve Bank of New York, 2017). These trends have led to a concern that debt will affect students' career choices after college. In order to meet their repayment obligations, students with significant debt may be discouraged from taking lower-paying positions that are vital to society, such as teaching or public service jobs (Rothstein & Rouse, 2011; Minicozzi, 2005).

With rising student loan debt, state policymakers have to grapple with how to create financial aid programs that will assist students in paying for college while reducing the reliance on student loans and, at the same time, propose policies that address the state's projected workforce needs. Two financial aid programs that attempt to meet these goals are loan forgiveness and conditional grant programs, which provide debt relief to borrowers who work in specific occupations that are in high demand. This brief provides a description of these two financial aid programs, the states that provide them, and what research tells us about their effectiveness.

ATTRIBUTES OF LOAN FORGIVENESS AND CONDITIONAL AID PROGRAMS

In general, loan forgiveness and conditional grant programs have one or more of the following four objectives: to provide financial

¹Author's calculations using data from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey (NPSAS). All dollar amounts are adjusted for inflation.

KEY INSIGHTS

- This brief examines two types of state service-contingent aid programs: conditional grants/loans and loan forgiveness. Conditional grant or loan programs provide a financial award to currently enrolled students and, in exchange for receipt of the award, students must fulfill certain service or work requirements after graduating from college. Loan forgiveness programs also have service or work requirements but provide forgiveness for student loans that were initially awarded without service-related conditions.
- Nearly 80% of service-contingent aid programs target teaching and healthcare occupations. On average, less than 5% of state financial aid budgets supported service-contingent programs.
- Research suggests that individuals in both conditional grant and loan forgiveness programs stay in their respective high-need area after fulfilling the service requirements compared to individuals who did not receive any financial incentive.
- Compared to loan forgiveness programs, conditional grants have a greater impact on the recruitment of individuals to high-need occupational areas. However, relatively small awards (e.g., \$1,500) appear to be ineffective in promoting recruitment and retention. States should ensure that the size of the award accounts for the average cost of education, projected wages, and a "service premium" for working in a high-need area.
- The retention of program participants within high-need areas may frequently depend on awareness of eligibility criteria as well as non-financial incentives that are difficult to control, such as family proximity, job opportunities, and the overall attractiveness of rural and underserved areas. States should take proactive steps to ensure that service criteria and procedures are easily understood and widely disseminated.

assistance for students to pay for college by reducing individuals' dependency on student loans; to persuade individuals to choose a specific college major or occupation; to attract individuals to work in an underserved region for a specific period of time; or to retain individuals in high-need occupations or regions (Hegji, et al, 2016). Both types of programs can be collectively described as *service-contingent programs* due to their service requirements that need to be fulfilled. However, loan forgiveness and conditional grant/loan programs can be distinguished by how they are operated and administered. Conditional grants or loans provide financial assistance while the student is enrolled, whereas loan forgiveness helps students once they have graduated and entered the workforce.²

With a conditional grant or loan, the program provides a financial award to a currently enrolled student and, in exchange for receipt of the award, the student must fulfill certain service or work requirements after graduating from college (NASSGAP, 2010). If the recipient fails to fulfill the service obligations, the recipient pays back the award to the state or federal government. Conditional grants are functionally equivalent to conditional loans that are cancelled upon service completion, though conditional loans can create present debt as recipients may be subjected to interest charges during college enrollment. An example of a conditional grant is Kansas's Teacher Service Scholarship, which provides college students with an award of up to roughly \$5,500 annually. Students sign a promissory note with the state of Kansas agreeing to teach in a high-demand discipline or an underserved geographic region for each year the recipient received an award. Should the recipient not fulfill the service obligation, the grant converts to a loan (with accrued interest) that is to be repaid back to the state. Another example is Wisconsin's Nursing Student Loan program wherein students can receive an award of up to \$3,000 annually (\$15,000 maximum) while enrolled in college. For each of the first two years the student works as a nurse, 25% of the award does not need to be repaid. If the student does not fulfill the service requirements (in part or in whole), the remaining award amount is to be paid back to the state with interest (5%).

In contrast, loan forgiveness programs are for borrowers who have unconditional student loan debt (i.e., student loans awarded without service-related conditions). Borrowers can have their loan repaid or forgiven after fulfilling certain service or work obligations (NASSGAP, 2010). If the service obligations are not fulfilled after a pre-determined period of time, the recipient becomes ineligible to have the loan forgiven. For example, Iowa's Rural Nurse Practitioner and Physician Assistant Loan Repayment program pays up to \$20,000 to borrowers' federal Direct Loan servicer in exchange for 5 years of service in rural areas (\$4,000 forgiven annually). Other service-contingent programs in the Midwest are listed in the Addendum.

Although this brief focuses on state service-contingent programs, federal policymakers have also developed programs over the past two decades to recruit individuals to work in high-need areas (see Hegji et al., 2016). In 1998, Congress created a loan forgiveness program that allowed teachers to have \$5,000 of their federal loans forgiven after five years of teaching in a low-income school. In 2004, the federal government supplemented the teacher loan forgiveness program by raising the forgiveness amount to \$17,500 for teachers in mathematics, science, or special education. Congress approved of another loan forgiveness program in 2007 that relieved students' loan debt in exchange for a 10-year employment term in the public or non-profit sector. Congress also created a conditional grant in 2007 called Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH), which provides up to \$4,000 annually in grants to students who intend to teach full-time in high-need subject areas at low-income schools. If the student does not fulfill the service obligations within eight years after graduating from college, the grant converts to an unsubsidized loan.

PREVALENCE OF SERVICE-CONTINGENT PROGRAMS

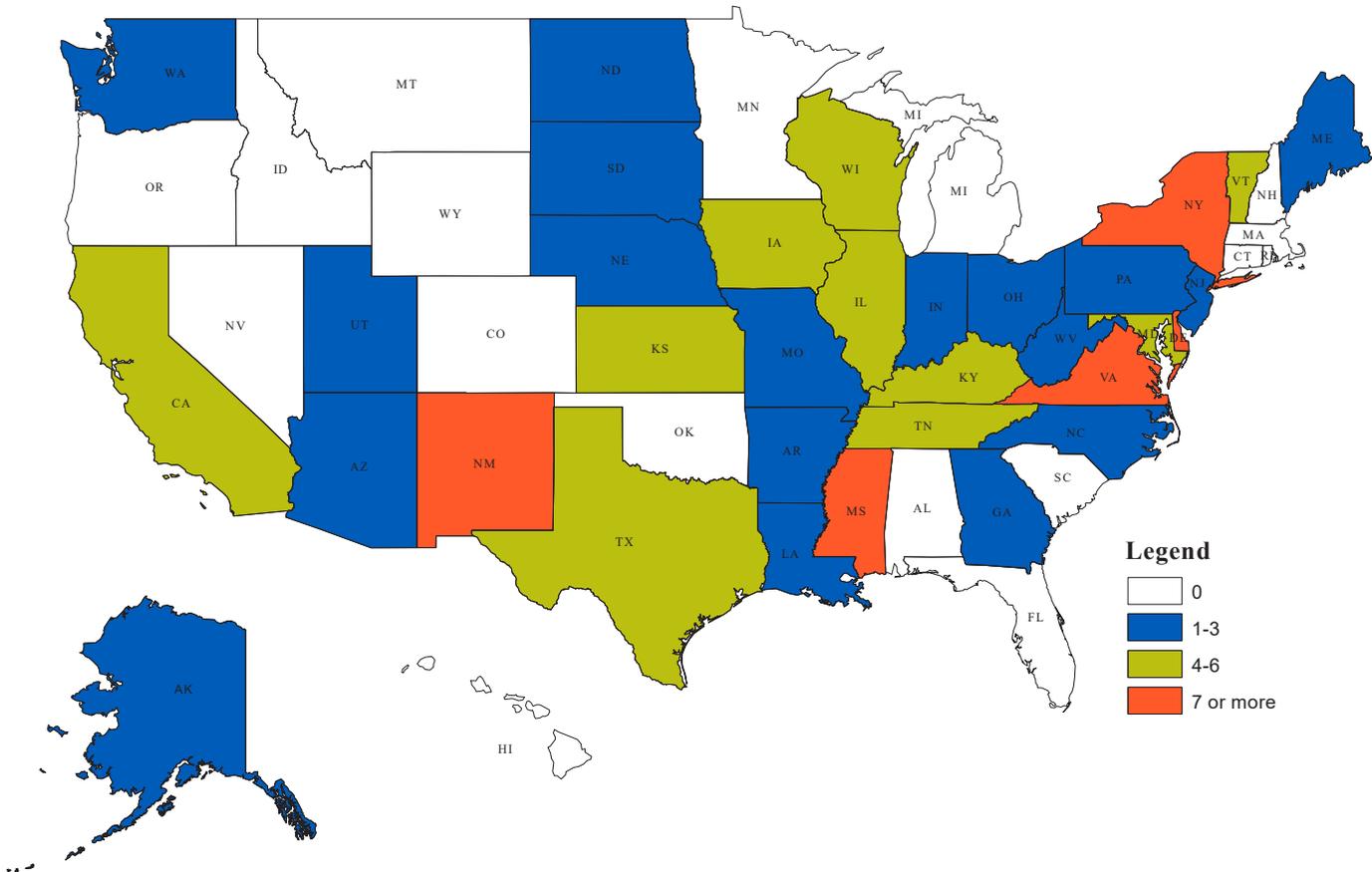
States differ in their provision of service-contingent aid programs and the share of state financial aid funding that is allocated to these programs. Figure 1 displays states with service-contingent

² The difference between loan forgiveness and conditional grant programs can be confusing, as researchers and policymakers have used different terms to describe these two programs. For example, "conditional grants" may sometimes be referred to as "loan forgiveness programs," and "loan forgiveness programs" may be labeled as "loan repayment programs" (McCallion, 2005). Conditional grants and loans are sometimes referred to as "groans."

aid programs during the 2014-15 academic year.³ Service-contingent programs are more popular in the East and West Coast regions, with fewer states in the Rocky Mountain and Midwest regions offering them. The majority of states had

between one and three programs, though four states had more than seven programs: Delaware, New Mexico, Mississippi, and Virginia.

FIGURE 1. Number of Service-Contingent Programs in 2014-15

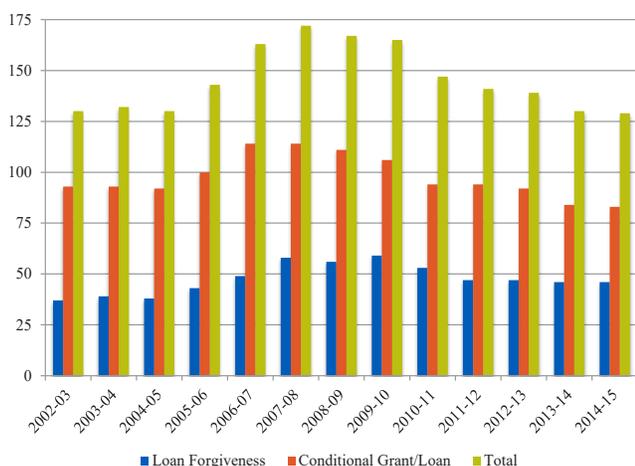


Source: NASSGAP [Database]

³ State service-contingent programs were identified using data from the National Association of State Student Grant & Aid Programs (NASSGAP), which is collected through annual surveys. This data identifies financial aid type – grant, loan, conditional grant, and loan forgiveness. To ensure consistency in reporting of financial aid programs and to identify the targeted occupation for the service-contingent aid program, additional research was performed through online searches of aid programs.

In general, states tend to support conditional grant programs more than loan forgiveness programs. As Figure 2 demonstrates, there were 77 conditional grant programs in 2002-03, which grew to 118 in 2008-09. There was a decrease in these programs from 2008-09 to 2014-15, not only in the number of conditional grant programs but also in the number of loan forgiveness programs. In 2014-15, there were 129 service-contingent programs in the nation that received state funding – 49 were in the form of loan forgiveness, and 80 were conditional grants.

FIGURE 2. Number of Service-Contingent Programs Nationwide



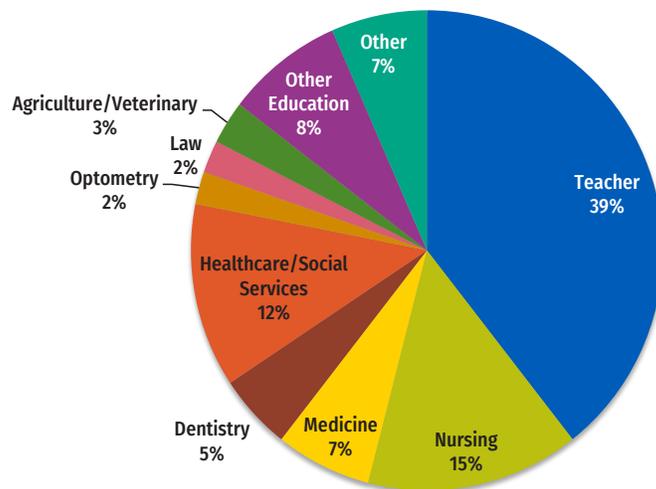
Source: NASSGAP [Database]

Targeted Occupations

In 2014-15, states targeted a wide range of occupations through their service-contingent programs. As Figure 3 illustrates, the majority of occupations were in teaching, nursing, medicine, and healthcare, which comprised 79% of programs. While some of the programs are very specific to particular occupations (e.g., veterinary science), other programs spanned multiple occupations. For example, Maryland’s Workforce Shortage Student Assistance Grant Program provides conditional grants for students who intend to work in child-care, teaching, nursing,

physical therapy, social work, or public service. In another example, North Dakota’s STEM Occupations Student Loan Program provides up to \$1,500 per year (\$6,000 maximum) in loan forgiveness to graduates of STEM programs who have been employed full-time in a STEM related occupation.

FIGURE 3. Distribution of Targeted Occupations in 2014-15



Source: NASSGAP [Database]

Funding Levels

While these programs seem appealing to many policymakers, one must ask whether these programs are being created at the expense of financial aid programs that could potentially provide assistance to the neediest students (IHEP, 2002). However, on average, less than 5% of state financial aid budgets supported service-contingent programs, a relatively low amount. For example, as displayed in Table 1, Illinois has five service-contingent programs, and the funding for these programs accounts for only 1% of the state’s total funding for financial aid programs. But for a few states, such as Mississippi, North Carolina, and Utah, the funding levels for these programs are greater than 10%.

TABLE 1. State Financial Aid Funding for Service-Contingent Programs in 2014-15

State	Number of Programs	Funding (in millions)	Percent of State Aid
Mississippi	20	9.20	23%
Utah	1	1.83	14%
North Carolina	3	25.31	12%
South Dakota	1	0.54	10%
Maine	3	1.45	9%
Alaska	3	1.74	8%
North Dakota	2	1.59	8%
Texas	5	70.50	7%
Kansas	5	1.47	7%
Delaware	7	1.52	6%
Maryland	6	5.27	5%
New Mexico	11	4.51	4%
West Virginia	3	2.11	2%
Vermont	4	0.36	2%
Iowa	4	0.94	1%
Arkansas	2	1.52	1%
Illinois	5	4.06	1%
Kentucky	4	2.31	1%
New York	7	7.71	1%
California	4	13.62	1%
Wisconsin	4	0.93	1%
Arizona	1	0.17	1%
Ohio	1	0.81	1%
Washington	3	2.22	1%
Tennessee	4	1.15	<1%
Indiana	3	0.85	<1%
Virginia	7	1.10	<1%
New Jersey	1	1.13	<1%
Georgia	1	0.93	<1%
Nebraska	2	0.65	<1%
Pennsylvania	1	0.32	<1%
Connecticut	1	0.27	<1%
Louisiana	1	0.06	<1%
Missouri	1	0.01	<1%

Source: NASSGAP [Database]

⁴ There are very few studies that examine the effectiveness of service-contingent programs. Most of this research is limited to analyses of survey responses of program participants. Studies that examine contingent programs through survey data are more prone to bias, as the responses reflect ex-post decisions on whether to work in high-needs area. When a researcher can focus on the influence of these programs on decisions, such as Field (2009) and Steele et al. (2010), it appears that conditional grants, rather than loan forgiveness, have a larger effect on recruiting individuals to designated areas. However, it is still unclear how individual decisions are made when comparing service-contingent programs to no receipt of aid at all.

⁵ Most studies evaluating NHSC focus on the conditional grant portion of the program, and studies that do examine both NSHC service programs struggle to separate the impact between the two. Few studies examine whether one service-contingent program is more effective than the other.

⁶ Participation was based on medical schools receiving NHSC funding; whereas non-participation was based on medical schools not received NHSC funding.

PROGRAM COST AND EFFECTIVENESS

Past research provides some insight into the cost of program administration and whether service-contingent programs are effective in attracting students to particular occupations and recruiting and retaining individuals in high-need areas.⁴ Findings are presented below from key studies over the past two decades on the impact of institutional, state, and federal service-contingent programs. The majority of these studies have evaluated programs that target occupations in healthcare, law, and education.

Healthcare

Most studies examining healthcare service-contingent programs focus on the National Health Service Corps (NHSC). Established in the early 1970's, NHSC provides a conditional grant to eligible medical students in exchange for work in a medically-underserved area. NHSC introduced a loan forgiveness program in 1987, allowing physicians who did not receive the conditional grant an opportunity to have a portion of their medical school debt forgiven for each year of service (Holmes, 2004).⁵ Several studies have demonstrated that the NHSC contingent programs increased the number of health professionals working in underserved areas (Bärnighausen & Bloom, 2009; Robinowitz, et al., 2000; Robinowitz, et. al. 2001; Probst et al., 2003; Rittenhouse, et al., 2008). For example, using data from the American Medical Association, Rittenhouse, et al. (2008) found that NHSC physicians were nearly seven times more likely to work in a community health center after graduation than non-NHSC physicians.⁶ Although research suggests that NHSC has a low retention rate because many recipients leave their original placement site mid-service or immediately after service completion (Pathman et al., 1994; Singer et al., 1998), several studies found that NHSC recipients are more likely than non-recipients to continue working in underserved areas even after leaving their original placement site (Bärnighausen & Bloom, 2009; Rosenblatt et al, 1996; Cullen, 1997). Several non-financial factors appear to affect retention rates, such as family proximity, job opportunities, and the overall attractiveness of rural and underserved areas (Bärnighausen & Bloom, 2009).

In the context of state service-contingent programs, Pathman et al. (2004) investigated the satisfaction levels and retention rates of recipients from 69 state service-contingent programs operating in 1996 that were geared toward medical students, residents, and practicing physicians. Through the analysis of a survey that was sent to over 1,200 physicians (both recipients and non-recipients), Pathman et al. found that physicians participating in the programs were more likely to feel satisfied with their work and often felt a greater sense of belonging to their communities than physicians who did not participate in the programs. Physicians participating in the programs were also more likely to continue to work in underserved regions after the completion of their service obligations. Additionally, Pathman et al. discovered that participants in the loan forgiveness program had a higher rate of service completion compared to participants in the conditional grant/loan program.

Law

Field (2009) examined the influence of financially-equivalent loan forgiveness and conditional grant programs randomly assigned to students at NYU Law School. She found that students who received a \$45,000 conditional grant as opposed to the loan forgiveness option were 36 percent more likely to work in public interest law two years after graduation. Field concluded that students' aversion to debt attributed to why conditional grants had a greater impact on students working in the public sector. These findings are consistent with recent research on labeling effects, wherein equivalent awards that are labeled as "loans" rather than "grants" decrease the probability of loan selection by 8 to 11 percentage points (Caetano et al., 2011; Evans et al., 2017). Interestingly, Field found that students across experimental groups had identical grade point averages for the first and second year of school, but in the third year, students receiving conditional grants had achieved significantly higher grade point averages. Field speculates that "the difference is likely driven by greater competition for the limited supply of prestigious and reasonably paid public interest jobs" (p. 18). Field suggests an additional explanation - students who take a job offer at law firms at the beginning of their third year have less incentive to maintain a high GPA.

Education

In comparing loan forgiveness to conditional grants, Steele, Murnane, and Willett (2010) used a quasi-experimental design to examine the impact of California's Governor's Teaching Fellowship (GTF), a conditional grant program that attempted to attract teachers to work in low-income schools. The grant was only given to teachers who were enrolled in accredited post-baccalaureate teacher licensure programs. Teachers were eligible to receive a \$20,000 grant in exchange for at least four years of work in low-income schools. To determine the effects of the GTF, the researchers used a comparison group of teacher-licensure candidates who had signed contracts for California's loan forgiveness program, the Assumption Program of Loans for Education (APLE), which forgives up to \$19,000 in loans for service in a low-income school. The researchers found that the GTF award, compared to APLE-eligible teachers, increased the probability of its recipients teaching in a low-income school by as much as 28 percentage points. Roughly two for every seven GTE awardees would have not taught in a low-income school if the scholarship had not been made available. The researchers also found that both programs combined had a high retention rate - 75% of GTF recipients and APLE participants remained in low-income schools for at least four years. In contrast, Government Accountability Office (GAO, 2015) found that almost one-third of TEACH recipients, a federal conditional grant, started but did not fulfill the service requirement of the grant. GAO suggested that the failure of individuals to fulfill the program requirements might be due to individuals' lack of knowledge of the service obligations and the required annual certification paperwork.

Liou and colleagues (2010) examined the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program, which is a conditional grant of \$10,000 per year that is intended to increase the number of STEM teachers in high-need areas. Through the analysis of a survey that was sent to recipients, the researchers concluded that the Noyce Program did help recruit teachers in a high-need area. In a follow-up study, Lou et al. (2011) examined the impact of the Noyce funding on college tuition and found that the higher the percentage of tuition

covered by the funding, the more influence the program had on individuals' decision to become a teacher.⁷ However, much smaller conditional grants appear to be ineffective for STEM recruitment. Bull and colleagues (1994) examined the Oklahoma Future Teacher Scholarship, which provides scholarships of up to \$1,500 to students in exchange for work in a science area at a public school for three consecutive years. Through an analysis of survey responses, the researchers determined that "students who were recruited into the scholarship program would have gone into teaching without the scholarship" (p. 75).

Feng and Sass (2015) used administrative data from the state of Florida to examine the state's loan forgiveness program, the Critical Teacher Shortage Program. The researchers examined retention rates among teachers who had recently completed their college degree and were in their first year of working in a teacher-shortage area. In examining the first six years of the program, loan forgiveness recipients were more likely than non-recipients to remain in designated shortage areas regardless of the service completion time period.

Program Cost

It is easier to determine the appropriation level for conditional grants than to estimate the outlays for loan forgiveness. Estimated funding levels for conditional grants are limited to the number of budgeted participants, whereas loan forgiveness funding depends on borrower participation and service over a period of time, which can be hard to precisely estimate (Hegji, Smole, & Heisler, 2016). Loan forgiveness costs could also be substantial depending on the state's forgiveness cap. Yet ultimately, it is unclear which type of program is costlier. In a 1995 report examining the costs associated with the NHSC service-contingent programs, GAO suggested that conditional grants are costlier than loan forgiveness programs because of the costs associated with up-fronting the direct awards to medical students and then having to track the fulfillment of the service requirement after graduation. In contrast, students participating in the loan forgiveness program did not need to be tracked, and the award was not provided until after service completion. However, since the release of that report,

federal and state governments have implemented certification processes to ensure students are maintaining loan forgiveness eligibility.⁸ There has also been substantial growth in student loan borrowers and debt. Consequently, the administrative costs to oversee the certification process, combined with the rise in debt, could result in loan forgiveness being a costlier initiative. Thus, states should take into account the program design and the forgiveness cap when estimating costs.

CONCLUSION

Rising tuition prices, coupled with a decline in the purchasing power of grants, have resulted in a financial aid system reliant on student loans. As a result, excessive loan debt could deter many students from seeking lower paid positions in high-need areas. Both federal and state policymakers have acknowledged this trend through the support of service-contingent programs. In 2014-15, there were 33 states funding service-contingent programs, a majority targeting individuals in the teaching and health professions. Despite their popularity, service-contingent programs account for a small portion of state funding.

Studies on service-contingent programs find that these programs do help in recruiting individuals to work in high-need areas. Although additional research is needed to understand which service-contingent program has a larger impact, the current evidence suggests that conditional grants, rather than loan forgiveness, have a larger effect on recruiting individuals to designated areas. The findings also suggest that individuals in both conditional grant and loan forgiveness programs stay in their respective high-need area after fulfilling the service requirements compared to individuals who did not receive any financial incentive. However, when comparing the two service-contingent programs, it is unclear whether one type of program is better than the other in promoting retention.⁹ In addition, there is no strong evidence to suggest individuals are enticed into choosing a particular occupation or college major because of the financial support from conditional grants or loan forgiveness programs, though more research is needed.

⁷ These results, however, should be cautiously interpreted, as the sample only consisted of individuals who had received the award and did not consider a comparison group of non-award individuals.

⁸ For example, the federal government encourages students to annually submit the PSLF employment certification form.

⁹ Several studies have indicated that loan forgiveness recipients, compared to conditional grants, are more likely to be retained after service. There are two possible explanations for this. First, individual decisions and preferences can change over time, so if a student receives a conditional grant, it is possible that the student changed their mind and no longer wants to work in a designated area. With loan forgiveness, on the other hand, working and staying in a designated area could reflect decision-making based on an awareness of what is expected. Second, differential impacts may reflect individuals' lack of knowledge of the service obligations.

Policy Considerations

- While a majority of states do not heavily invest in service-contingent programs, state policymakers should ensure that the goal of promoting college access through need-based aid programs is not undermined by policy that increases the supply of workers in high-demand occupations.
- Service-contingent programs hold promise in recruiting individuals to high-need areas, and some evidence suggests that service contingent programs can increase the supply of workers in targeted occupations. Compared to loan forgiveness programs, conditional grants have a greater impact on recruitment. However, conditional grants may be more administratively costly to implement, as conditional grants are given to students while in college and require continual tracking. States should take into account the program design and the forgiveness cap when comparing costs.
- Relatively small awards (e.g., \$1,500) appear to be ineffective in promoting recruitment and retention. States should ensure that the size of the award accounts for the average cost of education, projected wages, and a “service premium” for working in a high-need area.
- Service-contingent programs generally help in retaining individuals in designated areas, but it is unclear whether one type of contingent program is more effective. Retention rates may frequently depend on awareness of eligibility criteria as well as non-financial incentives that are difficult to control, such as family proximity, job opportunities, and the overall attractiveness of rural and underserved areas. States should take proactive steps to ensure that service criteria and procedures are easily understood and widely disseminated.

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ADDENDUM

LIST of Midwestern Service-Contingent Programs for 2014-15 AY

State	Program Name	Award Type	Occupational Target	Funding (in millions)	Percent of State Aid
IL	Golden Apple	Conditional grant or loan	Teacher	1.46	0.40%
IL	Minority Teacher Scholarship MTI	Conditional grant or loan	Teacher	1.79	0.49%
IL	Nurse Educator Loan Repayment Program	Loan assumption or forgiveness	Nursing	0.29	0.08%
IL	Teacher and Child Care Provider Loan Repayment Program	Loan assumption or forgiveness	Teacher	0.50	0.14%
IL	Veterans Home Nurse Loan Repayment Program	Loan assumption or forgiveness	Nursing	0.03	0.01%
IN	High Needs Stipend	Conditional grant or loan	Teacher	0.44	0.15%
IN	Minority Teacher Scholarship	Conditional grant or loan	Teacher	0.36	0.12%
IN	Minority Teacher Stipend	Conditional grant or loan	Teacher	0.05	0.02%
IA	Health Professional Recruitment Program	Loan assumption or forgiveness	Healthcare	0.20	0.29%
IA	Iowa Teacher Shortage Loan Forgiveness Program	Loan assumption or forgiveness	Teacher	0.60	0.89%
IA	Registered Nurse and Nurse Educator Education Loan Forgiveness Program	Loan assumption or forgiveness	Nursing	0.08	0.12%
IA	Rural Iowa ARN and PA Loan Repayment Program	Loan assumption or forgiveness	Nursing	0.07	0.10%
KS	Kansas Nursing Service Scholarship	Conditional grant or loan	Nursing	0.27	1.26%
KS	Kansas Optometry Service Scholarship	Conditional grant or loan	Optometry	0.17	0.78%
KS	Kansas Osteopathic Service Scholarship	Conditional grant or loan	Medicine	0.05	0.21%
KS	Kansas Teacher Service Scholarship	Conditional grant or loan	Teacher	0.92	4.28%
KS	Nurse Educator Scholarship	Conditional grant or loan	Nursing	0.06	0.29%
MO	Missouri Minority Teaching Scholarship	Conditional grant or loan	Teacher	0.01	0.01%
ND	STEM Occupation Loan Forgiveness	Loan assumption or forgiveness	STEM	1.17	6.01%
ND	Teacher Shortage Loan Forgiveness Program	Loan assumption or forgiveness	Teacher	0.42	2.17%
NE	Nebraska Rural Health Student Loan Program	Conditional grant or loan	Healthcare	0.16	<0.01%
NE	Nebraska Loan Repayment Program	Loan assumption or forgiveness	Healthcare	0.49	<0.01%
OH	Nurse Education Assistance Loan Program	Conditional grant or loan	Nursing	0.81	0.63%
SD	Veterinary Student Tuition Assistance Grant	Conditional grant or loan	Veterinary	0.54	9.96%
WI	Minority Teacher Loan	Conditional grant or loan	Teacher	0.13	0.10%
WI	Nursing Student Loan	Conditional grant or loan	Nursing	0.44	0.34%
WI	Teacher Education Loan	Conditional grant or loan	Teacher	0.26	0.20%
WI	Teacher of the Visually Impaired Loan	Conditional grant or loan	Teacher	0.09	0.07%

Source: NASSGAP [Database] and state agency websites.



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Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC)

Legislatively created, the Midwestern Higher Education Compact’s purpose is to provide greater higher education opportunities and services in the Midwestern region. Collectively, the 12 member states work together to create solutions that build higher education’s capacity to better serve individuals, institutions, and states by leveraging the region’s expertise, ideas, and experiences through multi-state: convening, programs, research, and contracts.

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The National Forum exists to support higher education’s role as a public good. In this pursuit, the Forum utilizes research and other tools to create and disseminate knowledge that addresses higher education issues of public importance. This mission is expressed in a wide range of programs and activities that focus on increasing opportunities for students to access and be successful in college, college’s responsibility to engage with and serve their communities, institutional leadership roles and practices in promoting responsive policies and practices to address the student success and community engagement.

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**About this
 Policy Brief Series**

This brief examines a critical state policy issue identified through the College Affordability Research Initiative, a collaboration between the Midwestern Higher Education Compact and the National Forum on Higher Education for the Public Good at the University of Michigan.