

Reducing Frictions in College Admissions: Evidence from the Common Application

Brian Knight¹ Nate Schiff²

¹Brown University

²Shanghai University of Finance and Economics

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Outline

- 1 Common Application
- 2 Analysis
- 3 Applications (College Board)
- 4 Applications (HERI Freshman Survey)
- 5 Student Choice (College Board)
- 6 Student Choice (HERI Freshman Survey)
- 7 Market Integration
- 8 Sorting
- 9 Conclusion
- 10 Additional Evidence

Overview

- College admissions in the U.S. is decentralized: historically students had to apply separately to each school, creating frictions (e.g., time costs)
- If substantial, these frictions might limit student applications and ultimately student choice
- Given the local nature of higher education, frictions might also lead to:
 - a less intergrated market from a geographic perspective
 - less sorting according to ability

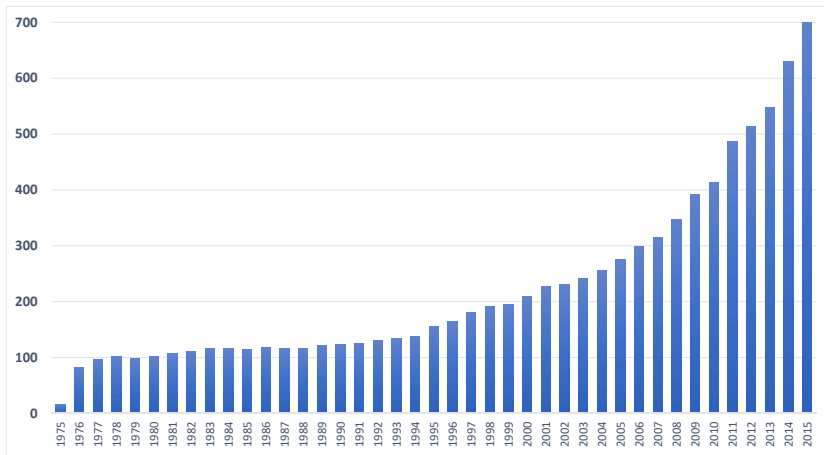
Overview

- The Common Application (CA) platform allows students to complete one application for multiple institutions, reducing frictions
- In this paper, we investigate the effects of the introduction of the CA
- By reducing frictions, has the CA:
 - increased student applications?
 - increased student choice?
 - integrated the market geographically?
 - increased sorting according to ability?

History

- 15 private colleges in the Northeast started the Common Application in 1975.
- Public institutions began joining in 2001.
- Substantial growth in membership over time.

Number of Members



Anecdotal Evidence

- “I had to apply separately to most of all the schools I had applied to. They all had different essay components, and then I had to get my transcripts and test scores sent to every school.” Lauren Boulding, a senior at Ohio University.
- “If the student does the Common App, she’s done most of her work for several applications if she chooses to apply to diverse set of schools. It’s a good idea; anything that reduces barriers for students to apply is a good thing” said Eric Grodsky, UW-Madison.
- “By adding the Common Application we are now able to reach a significantly larger cohort of potential applicants from around the country and beyond,” said André Phillips, Director of Admissions Recruitment, UW-Madison.

Related Literature on CA

- Smith (2013)
- Smith, Hurwitz, and Howell (2014)
- Liu, Ehrenberg, and Mrdjenovic (2007)

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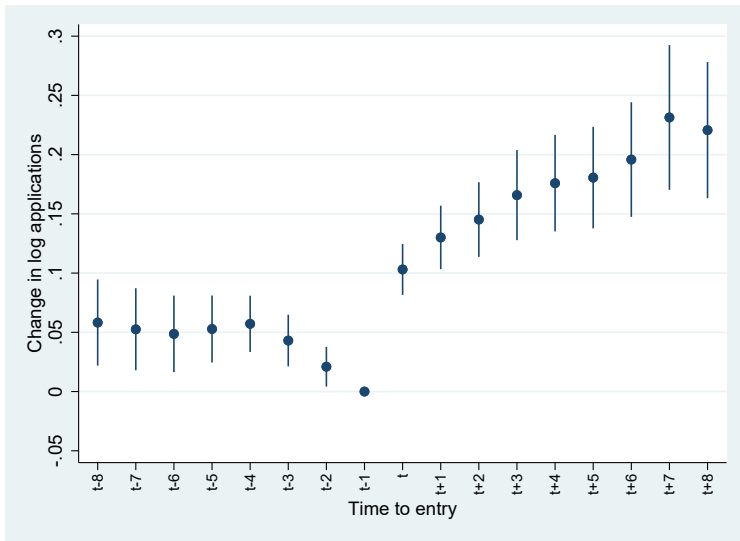
Analysis

- Data sources include:
 - College Board Annual Survey of Colleges 1990-2016
 - UCLA HERI Freshman Survey 1982-2014
 - CA entry year for each member
- To answer our research questions, we provide TWFE event study analyses around the year of CA entry by institutions
- To address pre-trends, we also compare joiners to future joiners

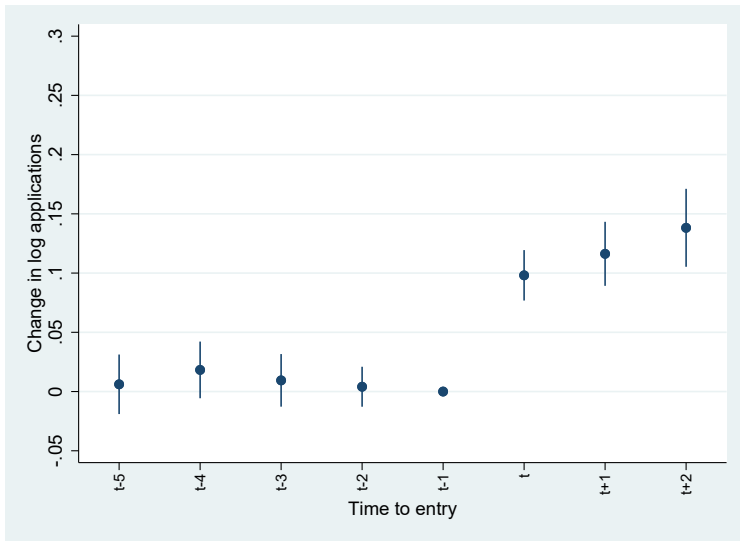
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Full Sample (log applications)



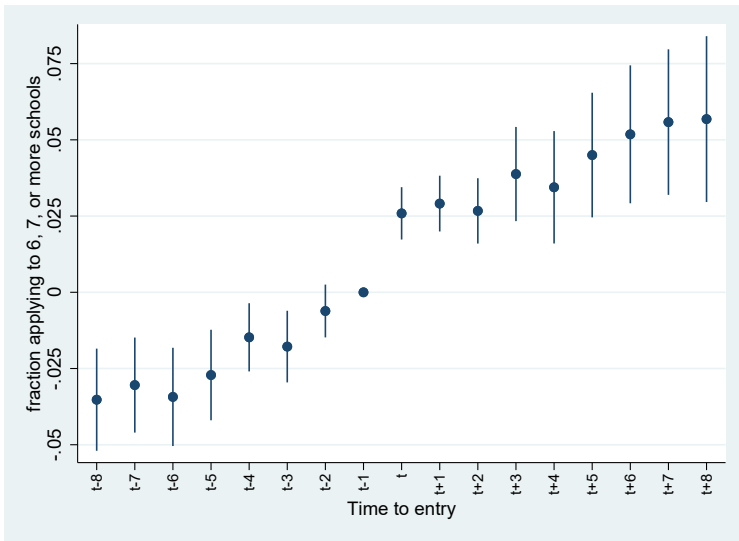
Future Joiners Comparison (log applications)



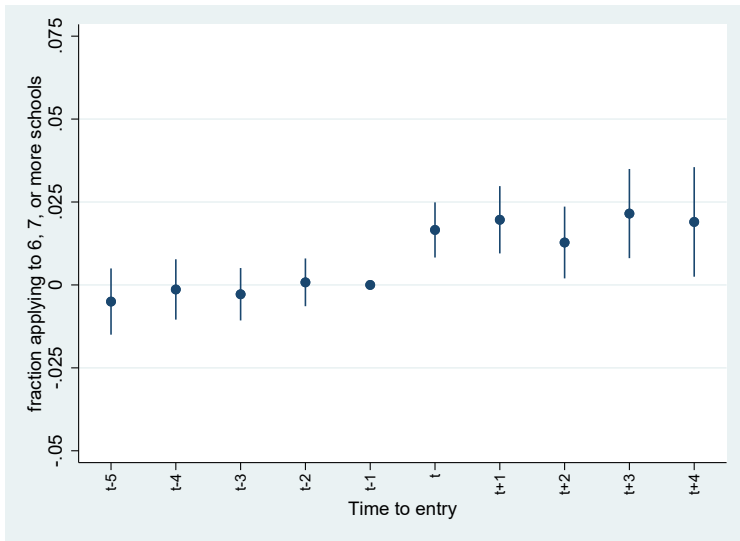
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Full Sample (6+ applications)



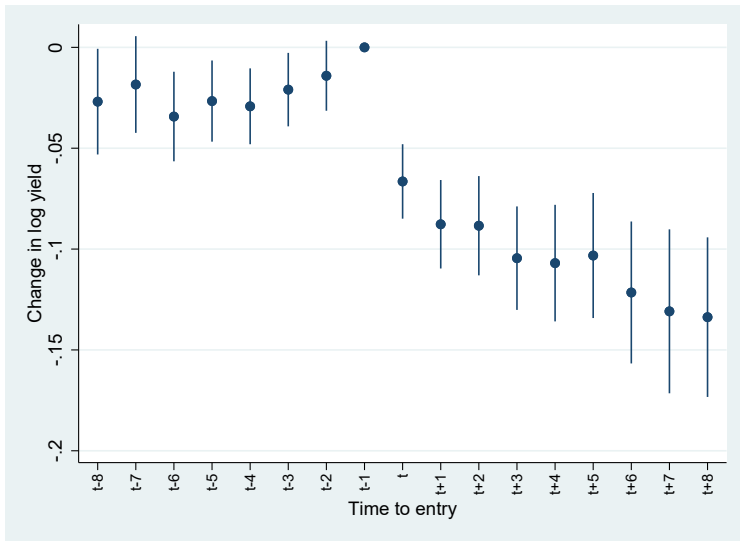
Future Joiners Comparison (6+ applications)



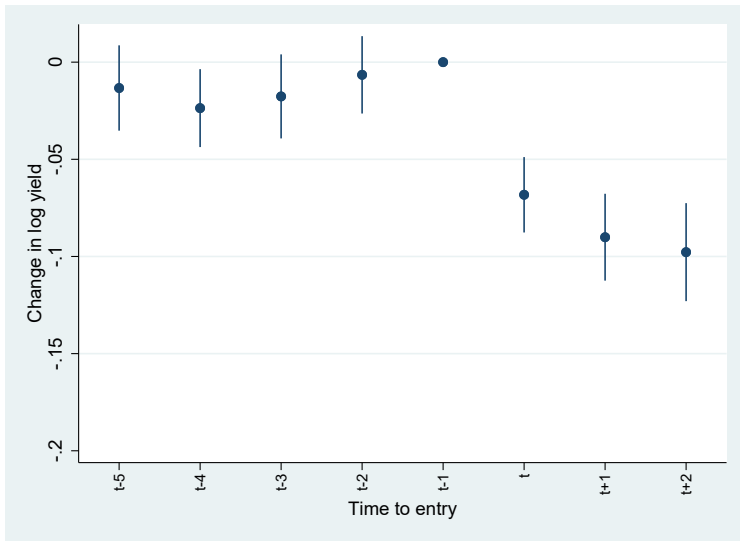
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Full Sample (log yield)



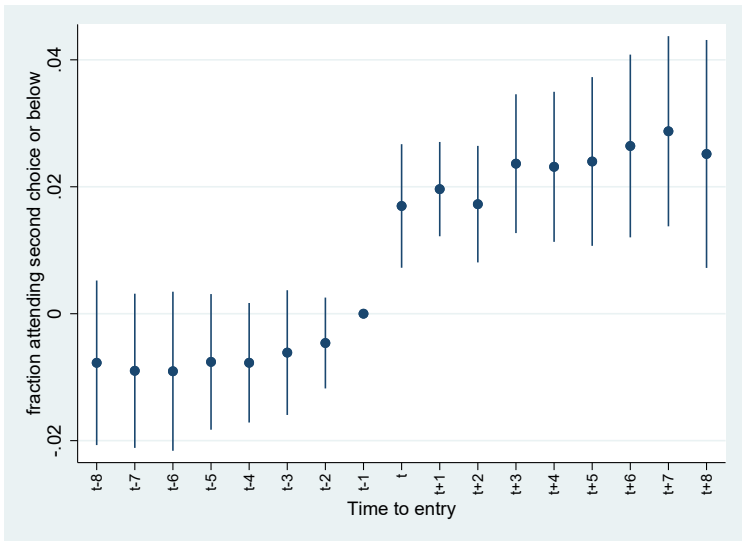
Future Joiners Comparison (log yield)



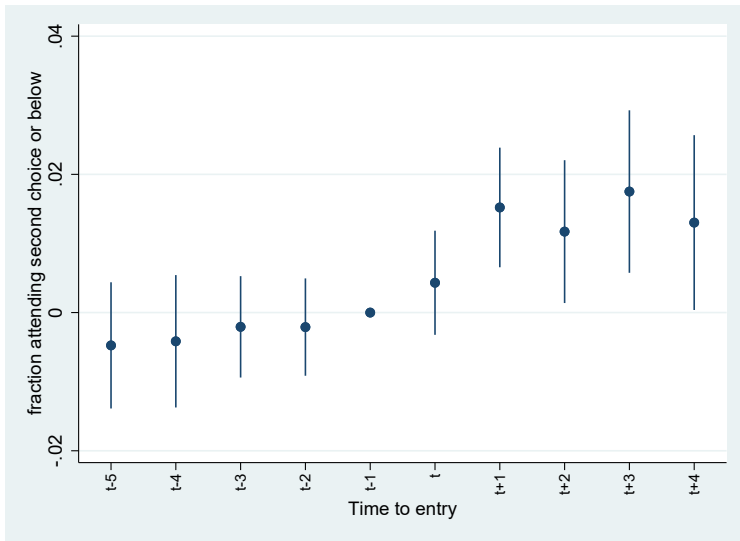
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Full Sample (not first choice institution)



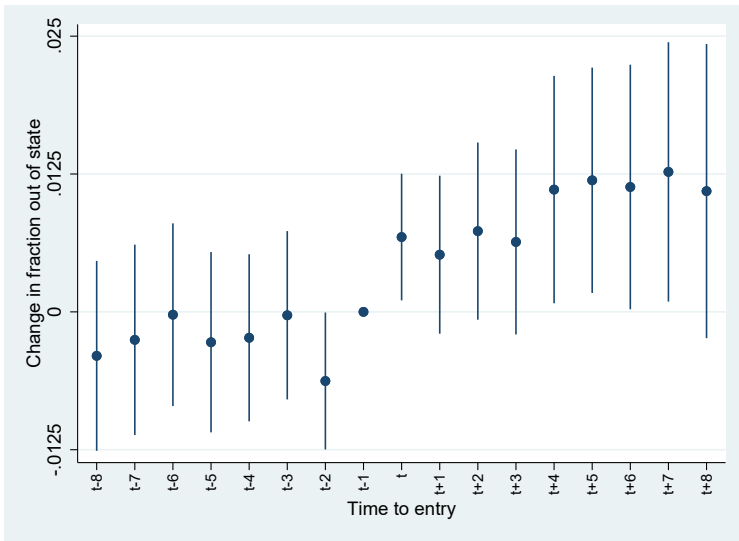
Future Joiners Comparison (not first choice institution)



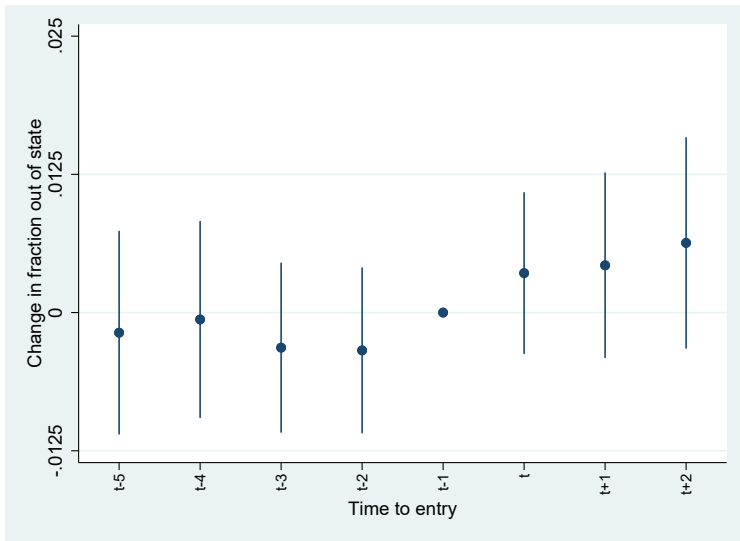
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Full Sample (fraction out-of-state)



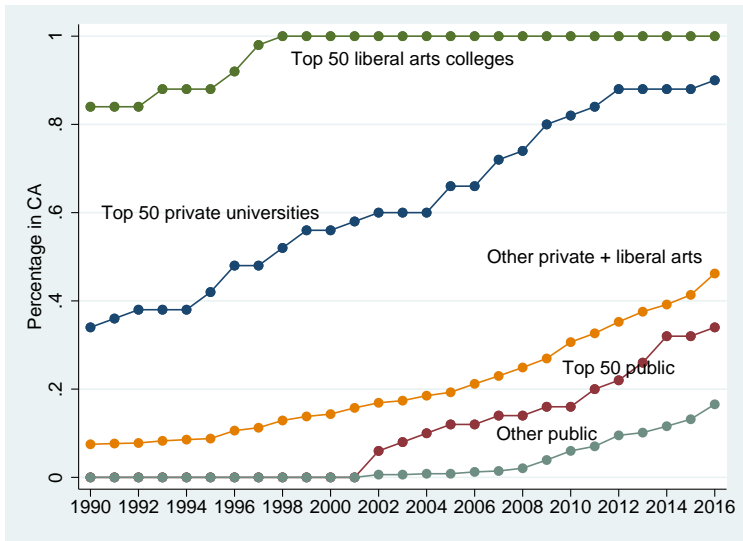
Future Joiners Comparison (fraction out-of-state)



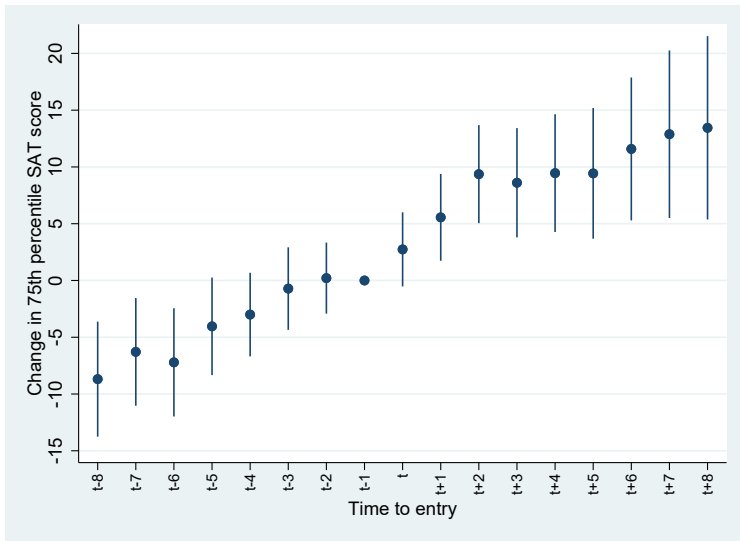
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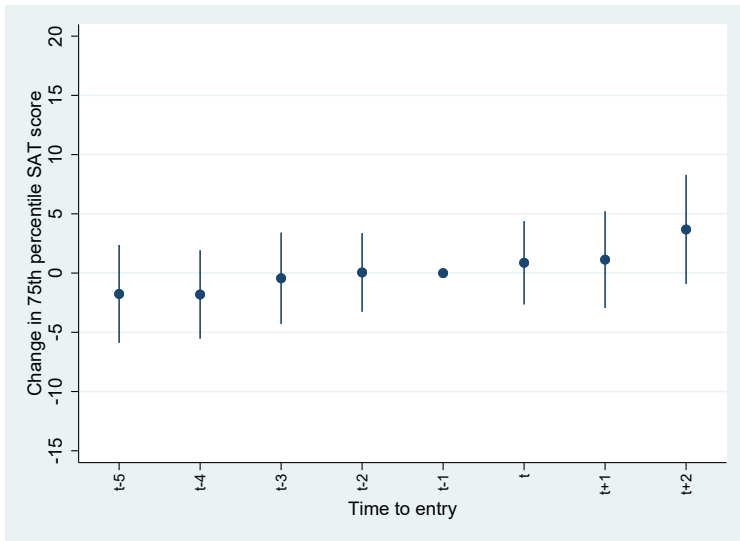
Membership by Type



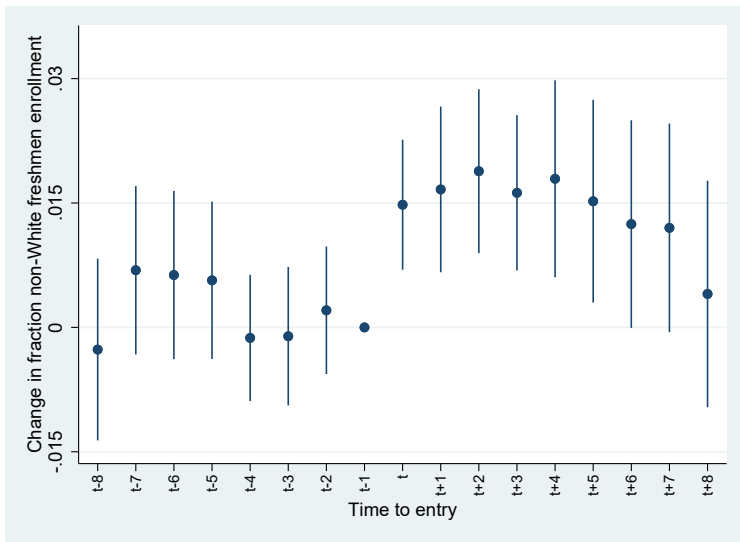
Full Sample (SAT75)



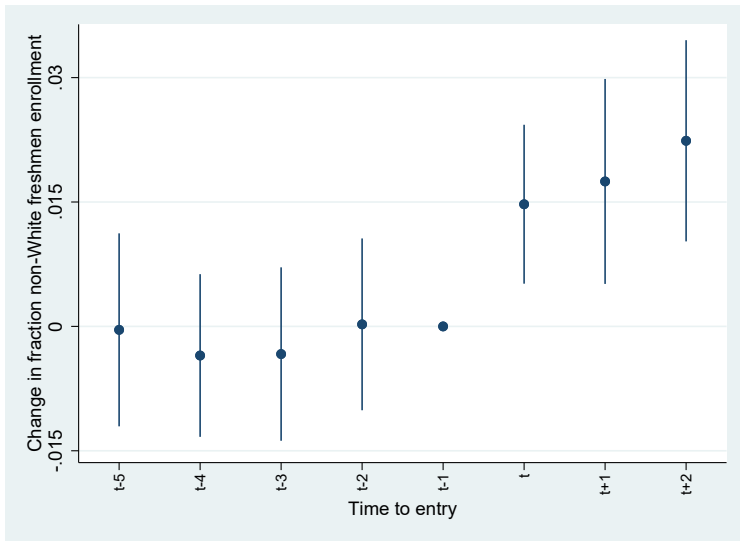
Future Joiners Comparison (SAT75)



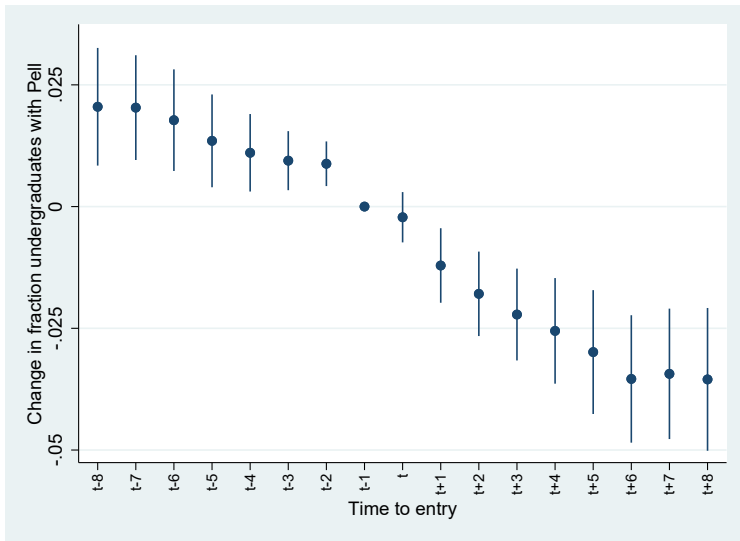
Fraction non-white



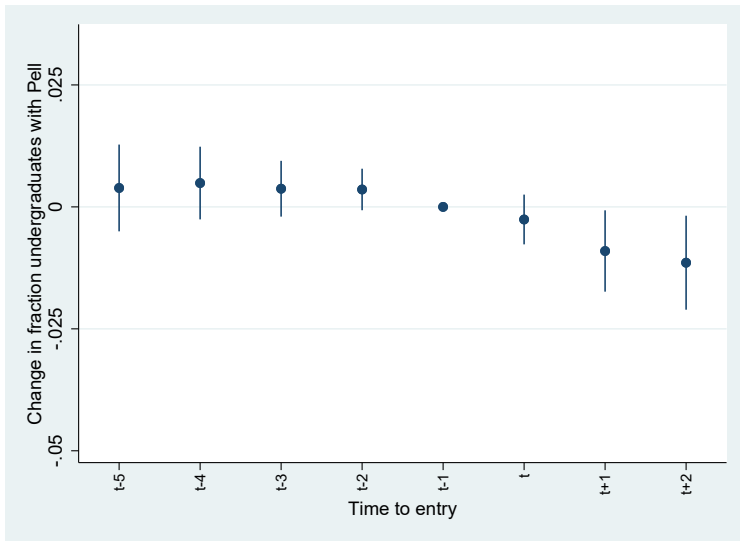
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Fraction Pell



Fraction Pell



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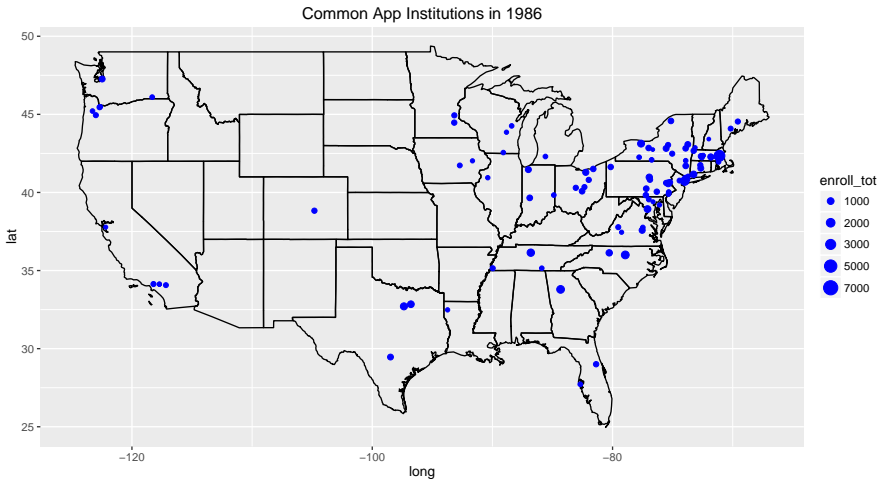
Summary of Findings

- 1 Applications increase
- 2 Student choice increases
- 3 Market integration increases
- 4 Inconclusive evidence regarding SAT stratification
- 5 More racial diversity but less income diversity

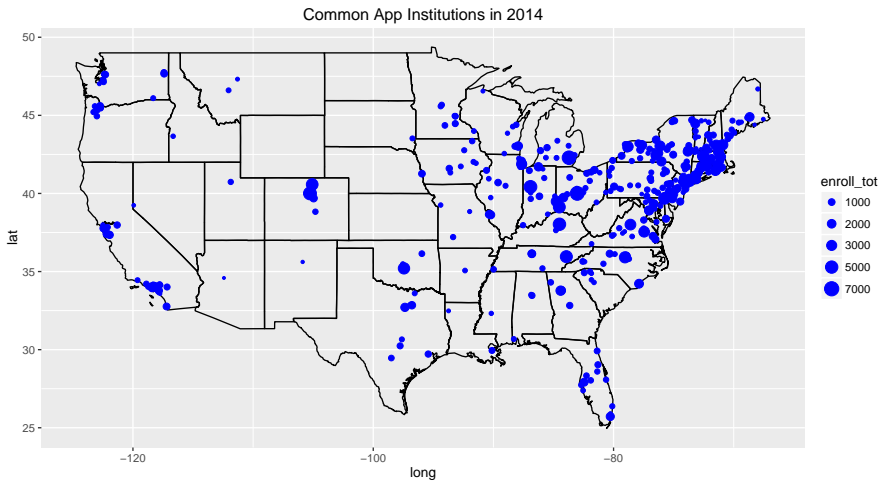
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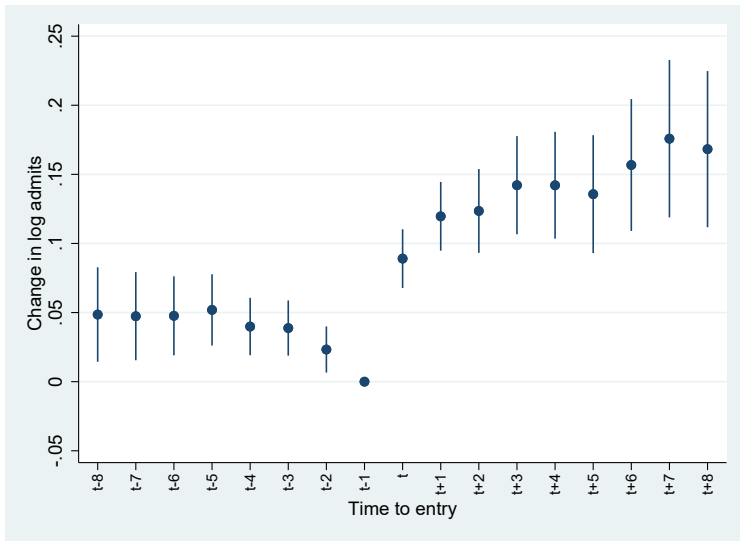
Spread of Common Application



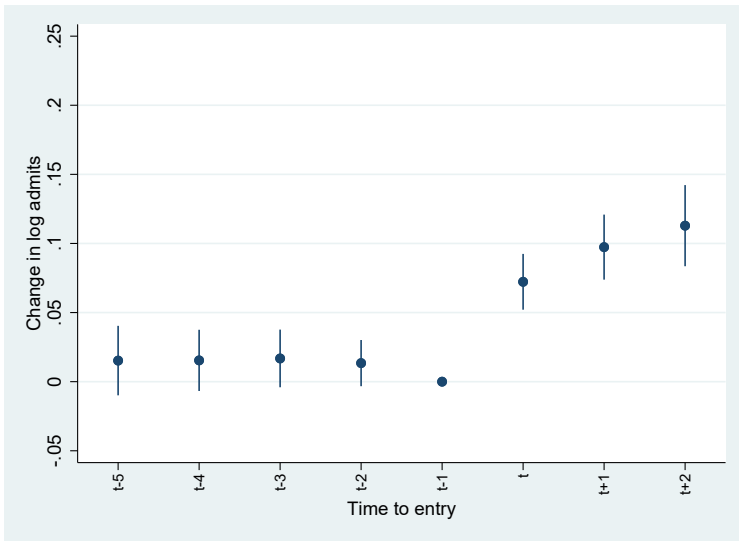
Spread of Common Application



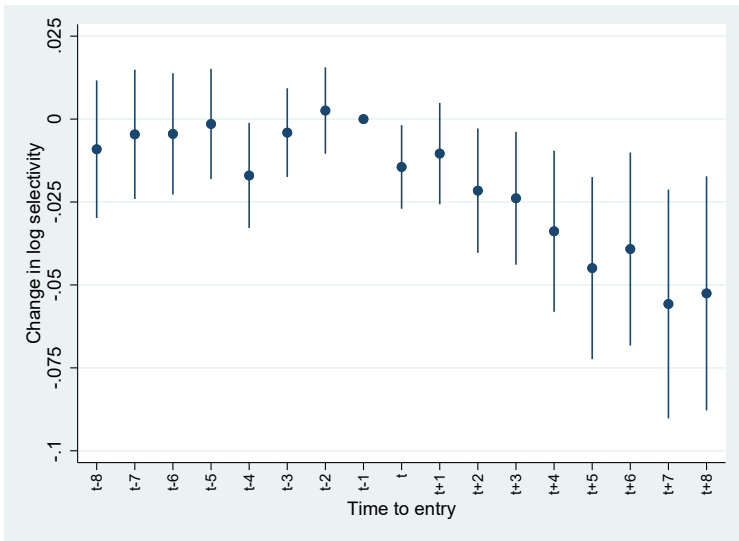
Full Sample (log admits)



Future Joiners Comparison (log admits)



Full Sample (log admissions rate)



Future Joiners Comparison (log admissions rate)

