

# Persistent Inequalities in College Education: Policy Implications

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[with contributions by Alexander Janus, Kim Voss, & Kristin George]

**Income Inequality or Lack of Opportunity?**

**Columbia University**

**2 May 2019**

Follow the money.

— “Deep Throat” to Bob Woodward, 1973

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Intuition supports “follow the money”

Evidence challenges it

Rising tuition — like rising health care premiums — tells us about **how** we pay for professional services

**Not** about **why** the benefits of those services are so unequally distributed

"Good old days" rhetoric pervades discussion of inequality of educational opportunity

“Good old days” weren’t all that good for poor, working class, and lower middle class Americans

>> **Students from low SES homes had lower college attendance & graduation rates than high-SES Americans as far back as data reach**

# Long term trends

1930-1999 (Hout & Janus 2011)

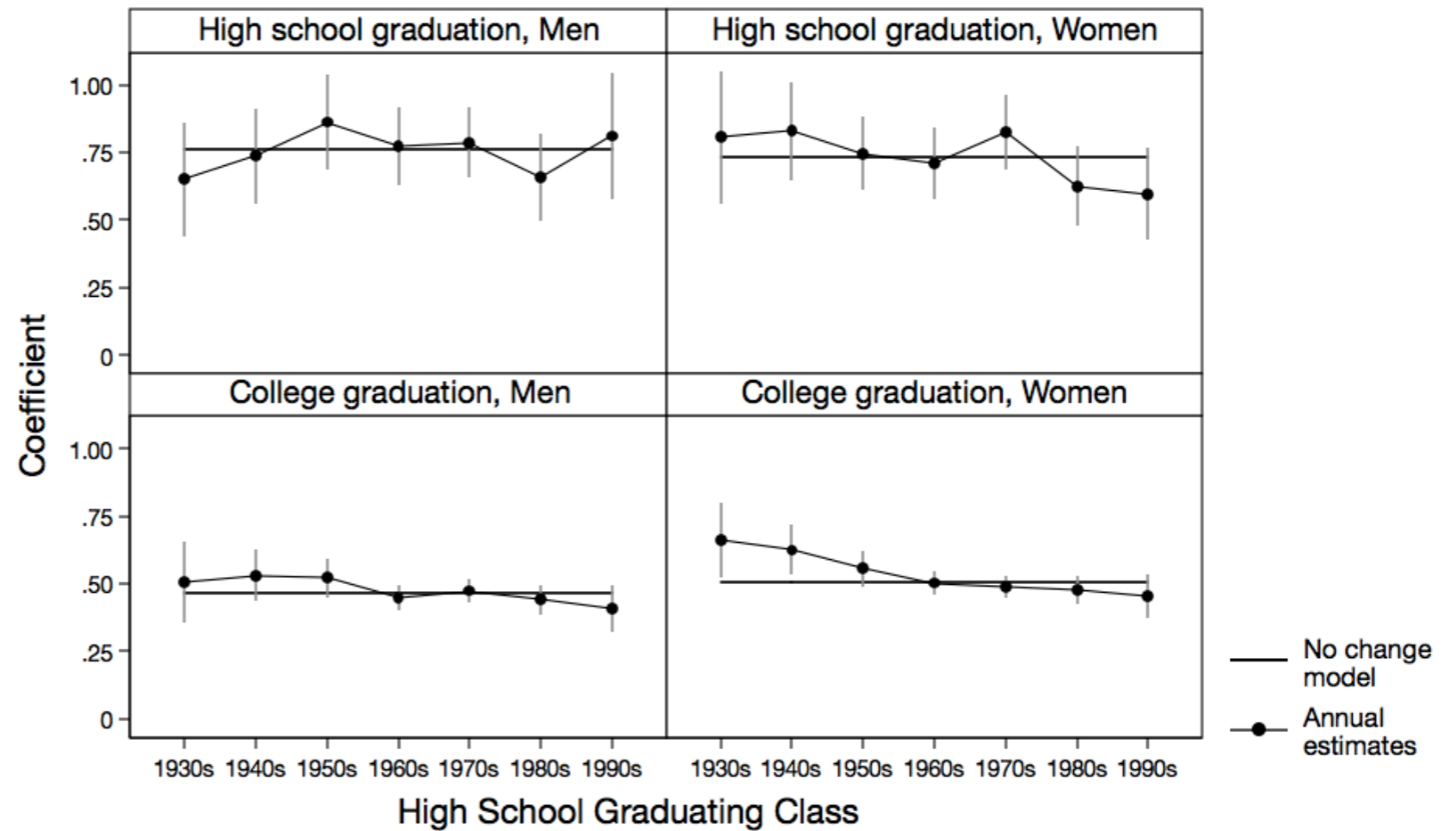
Regressed high school and college graduation on:

**Parents' education**

Gender

Race

Time



Note: No change model fit to all data with dummies for high school graduating class; annual estimates fit to each class separately. Vertical lines show 95% confidence intervals of annual estimates.  
Source: General Social Surveys, persons 25-64 years old, 1972-2008.

# Recent trends

1982, 1992, 2004  
(Voss, Hout, & George 2017)

Regressed college graduation

## Parents' education

Parents' income

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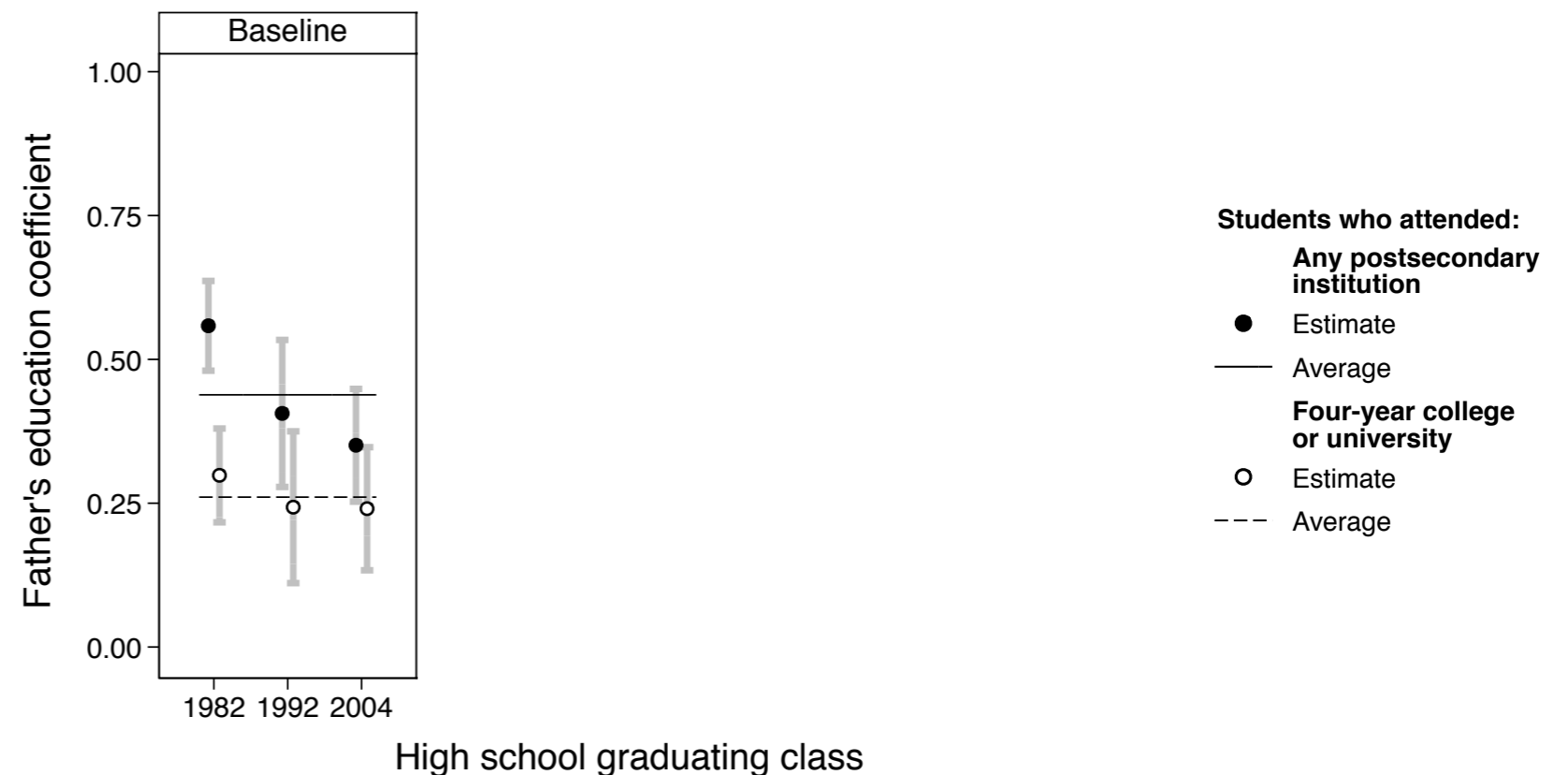
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## Added

Secondary school experiences

Test scores

College characteristics



Notes: Each panel shows the estimates from a different model. *Baseline* includes race-ethnicity and gender controls, *secondary* adds English and math courses to the baseline, *test-scores* adds verbal and math test scores to the the secondary model, and *full* adds college selectivity and college type (two-year or four-year) to the test-scores model. The vertical gray lines show 95% confidence intervals for each estimate. Scales for estimates made comparable by the Karlson, Holm, and Breen (2012) method.

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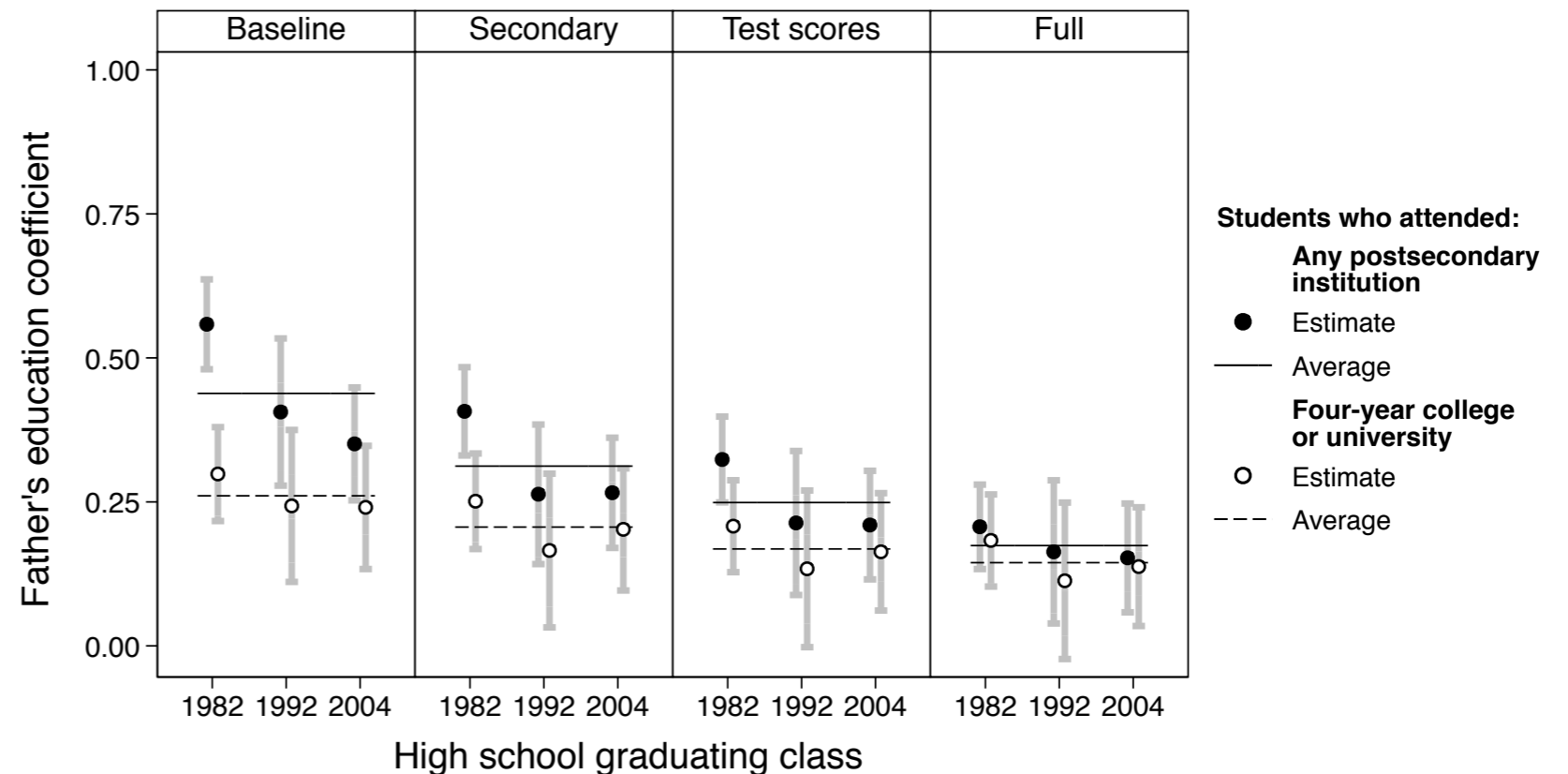
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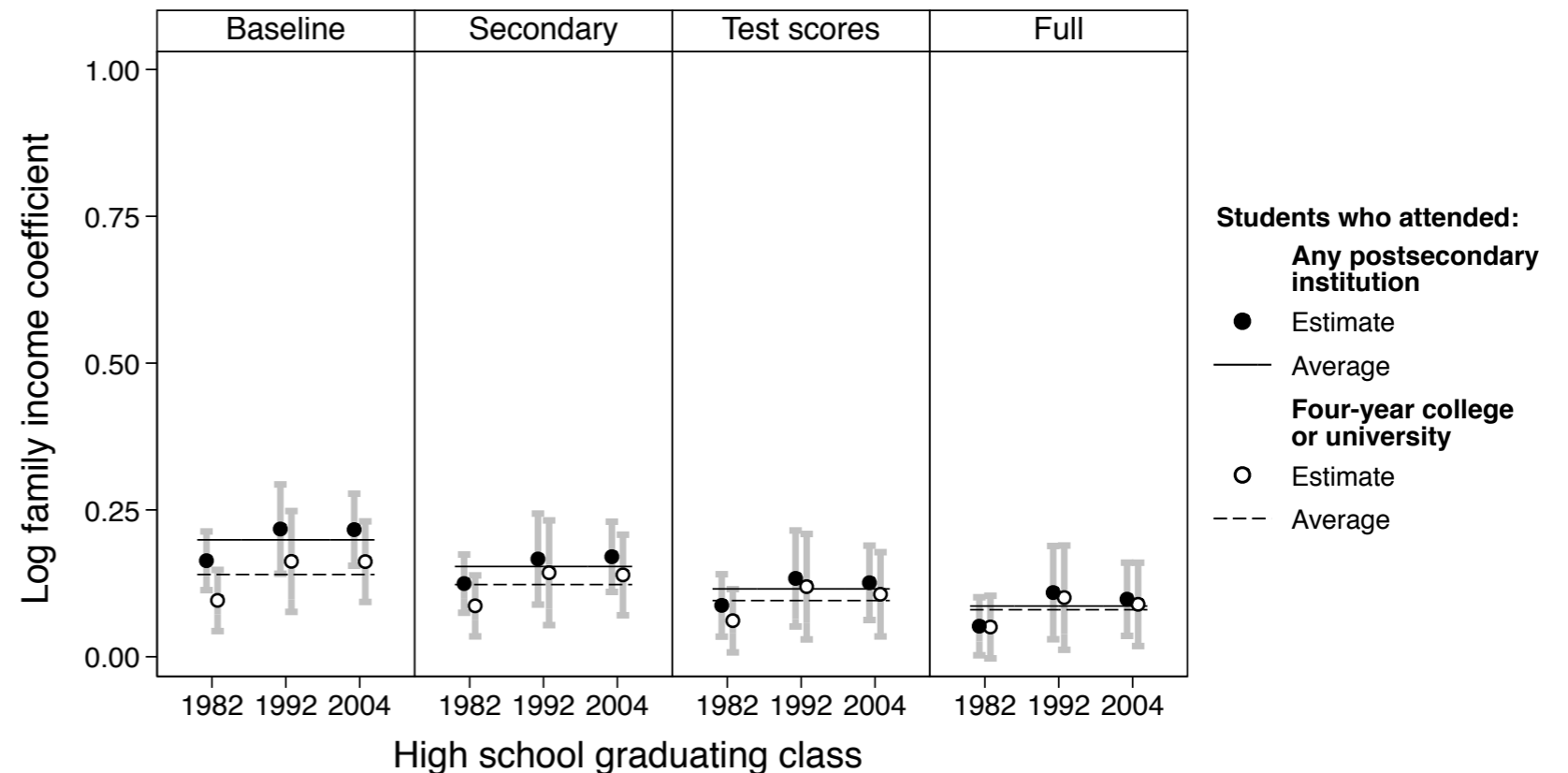
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# Conclusions

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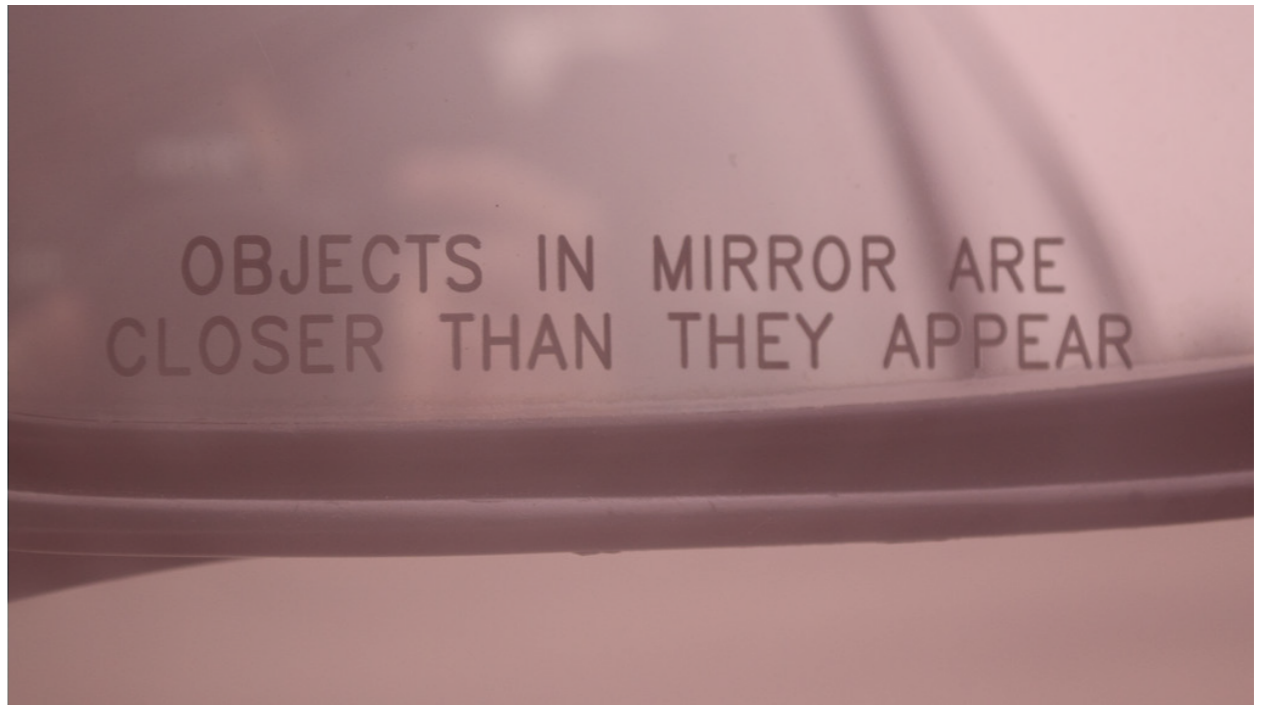
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Inequalities we see today excluded and disadvantaged non-traditional students even then

Their *numbers* increased dramatically in the 1960s and 1970s — all ***numbers*** did; ***rates*** showed persistent disparities

Implication:

**Less selection, more opportunity**



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