Affording Degree Completion: How Accessible Public Universities Implement Completion Grants

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Participating Campuses

The Project

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Research Questions

Implementation Phase

- How do institutions implement completion grants?
- What are the commonalities and variances?
- Do they actually work?
- How much do they cost to implement?

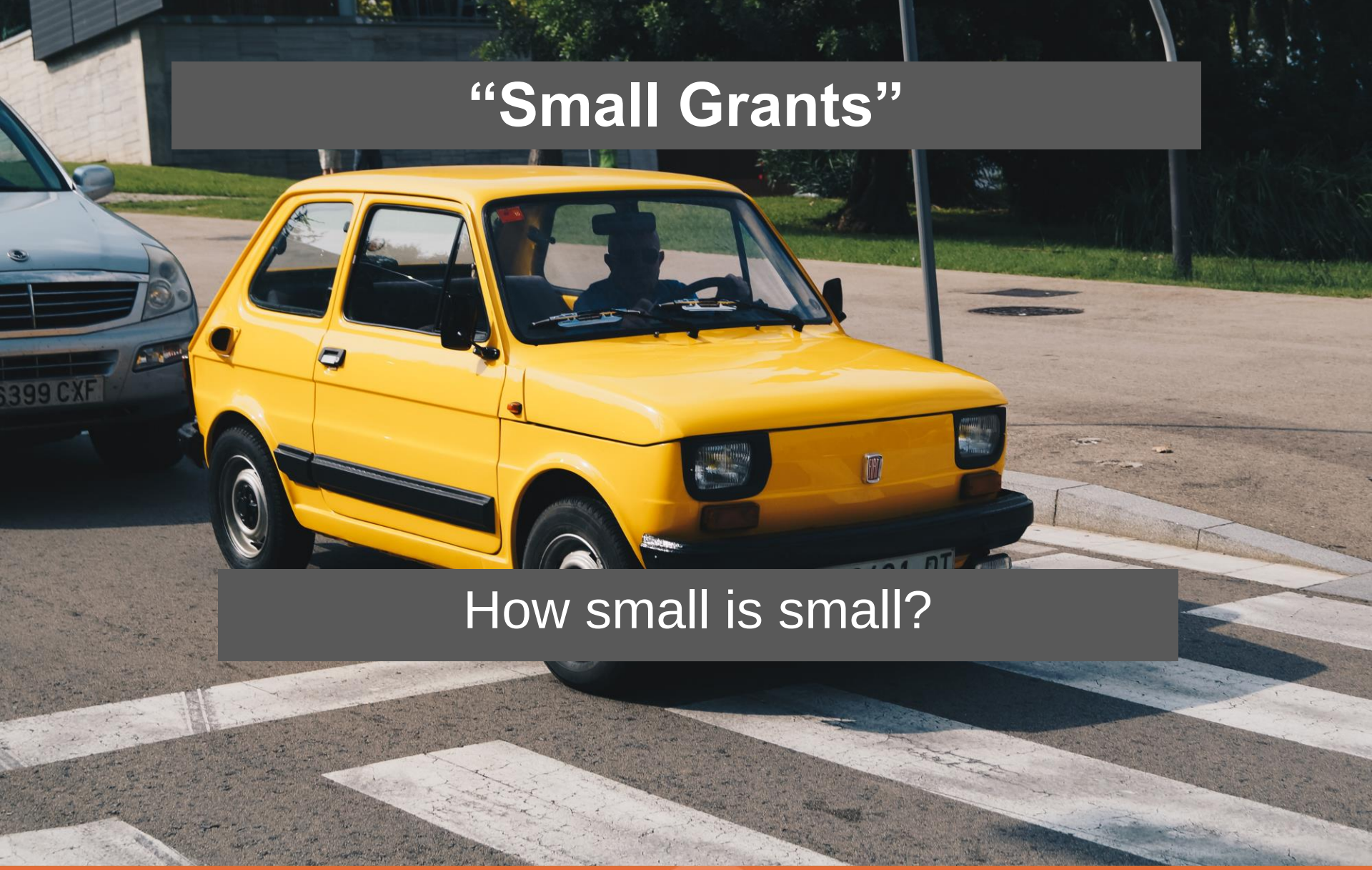
Analytic Approach

Implementation Phase

- Site visits and interviews with relevant program staff
- Assess efficacy with pilot RCT of completion grants with three universities
  - Student surveys
  - Administrative data
- Cost Analysis

What are Completion Grants?

- Small grants
- Provided to “near completers”
- Helping to remove financial barriers to graduation



“Small Grants”

How small is small?

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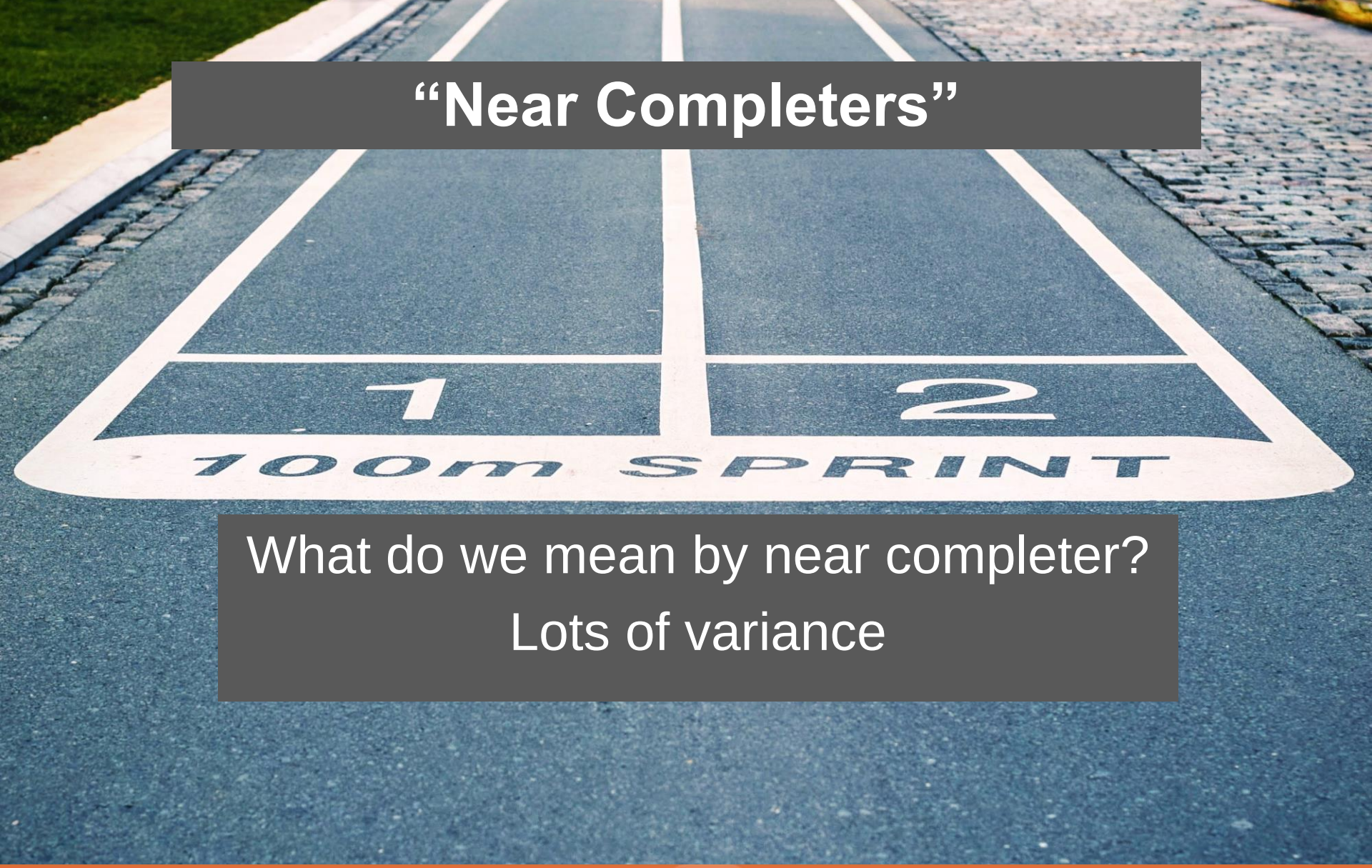
“Near Completers”



What do we mean by near completer?

Lots of variance

“Financial Barriers”

What financial barriers are institutions attempting to overcome?

Findings

Why are Institutions Using Them?

Economic incentives to ensure students are completing

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Why are Institutions Using Them?

Pressures to meet performance based funding goals

Why are Institutions Using Them?

It is more cost effective to retain and graduate than it is to recruit

Why are Institutions Using Them?

Students running out of funding near the end of their degrees

Why are Institutions Using Them?

Finding ways to care about students very real financial challenges

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Who Runs This?

- Most of these programs are being run by Financial Aid

Or

- A different office within the Enrollment Management Division, Strategic Planning etc.
- Student Academic Success units

Similarities

- GPA: 2.0 or higher
- Must be meeting SAP
- Maximum EFC and minimum calculated Financial Need
- Students must have utilized all other financial aid available to them

The Challenge of Loan Acceptance

- Not requiring loan acceptance might be a negative
- Equity issues around forcing loan acceptance
- Access concerns of requiring loans:
  - Cultural aversion to borrowing
  - Undocumented students
  - Parents that don’t complete FAFSA

Biggest Challenges

- Determining Eligibility
- Degree audit process
- Distributing a scarce resource

Pilot RCT

- Modest positive effect on degree attainment and units attempted the following semester
- Not statistically significant due to the small sample
- Now that we have scaled up to 11 institutions in the RCT, we hope to have enough power to show statistical significance.

Research Questions

Efficacy Phase

- Is the common model effective?
- Do they actually work?
- How much do they cost to implement?

What's next?

Efficacy Phase

- RCT-with 11 campuses-in process currently
  - Student surveys
  - Administrative data
- Site Visits and Interviews with campus partners
- Cost Analysis
- Assess Efficacy based on RCT data

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