

Bright Future award retention dynamics: Event history analysis

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Abstract

This project examines how the loss of the Bright Futures Award affects college students' ability to remain enrolled and complete their degrees. Because many students rely on Bright Futures funding to cover tuition and other educational expenses, losing this support can create significant financial strain that may disrupt academic progress. Understanding not only whether students leave school but when they are most at risk after losing the award is central to this study. To address this question, we use event history analysis, a method designed to examine changes in risk over time. This approach allows us to analyze the timing of enrollment disruption following the loss of Bright Futures funding and identify critical periods when students may be especially vulnerable. In addition, we conducted a review of existing research on financial aid, merit-based scholarships, and student retention. While prior studies consistently demonstrate that financial aid improves persistence, fewer focus specifically on the timing and dynamic effects of losing merit-based aid. By combining prior research with event history methods, this project aims to better understand the retention dynamics associated with Bright Futures Award loss and its impact on students' pathways to graduation.

Introduction

This study examines the academic consequences of losing the Bright Futures Award, focusing on how the loss of this merit-based scholarship affects students' continued enrollment and progress toward graduation. For many students, Bright Futures funding plays a critical role in making higher education financially accessible by covering a substantial portion of tuition costs. When that support is removed, students often face increased financial strain, which may require them to take on additional work, reduce course loads, or reconsider their ability to remain enrolled. These challenges can ultimately disrupt academic momentum and delay or prevent degree completion.

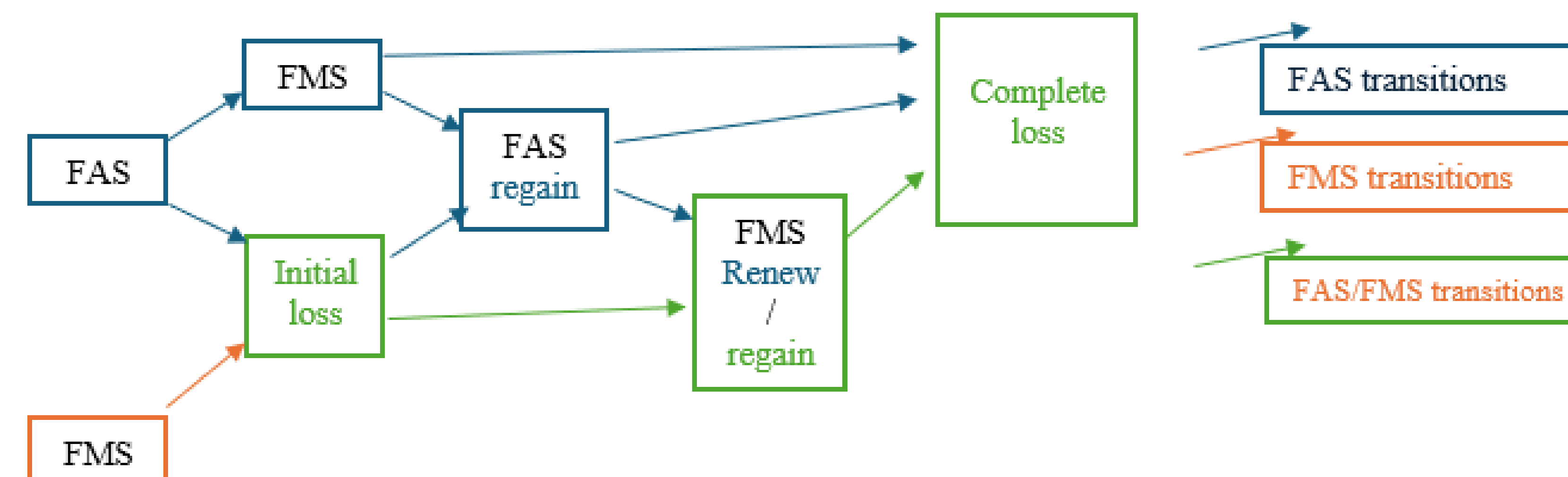
Rather than focusing solely on whether students withdraw, this project emphasizes when withdrawal becomes most likely. Using an event history analysis framework, we examine how the risk of enrollment disruption evolves over time following the loss of financial aid. This approach allows for a more dynamic and time-sensitive understanding of student persistence by identifying specific periods—particularly immediately after aid loss—when students may be most vulnerable to attrition. By focusing on the timing of these outcomes, the study captures patterns that traditional static analyses may overlook and provides deeper insight into how financial shocks influence student behavior across semesters.

To provide context for this analysis, this study incorporates a structured literature review of existing research on financial aid, merit-based scholarships, and student persistence. Prior research consistently demonstrates that financial aid improves retention and degree completion, while merit-based scholarships can enhance both financial stability and academic engagement by incentivizing performance. However, relatively little research explores the consequences of losing such aid, especially in terms of the timing of student withdrawal and the periods of heightened risk that follow. By integrating these findings with an event history framework, this study offers a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how the loss of Bright Futures funding can significantly alter students' academic trajectories and increase the likelihood of attrition during critical transition periods.

Methods

This study uses a structured literature review guided by an event history framework to examine how the loss of financial aid influences students' academic pathways over time. Rather than collecting original data, we focused on identifying and synthesizing existing empirical research on scholarship retention, financial aid loss, and student persistence. We searched peer-reviewed articles using Google Scholar and Florida State University's library databases, with additional support from AI tools such as Copilot and Google Gemini to help identify relevant sources. Key terms included "financial aid loss," "merit-based scholarships," "Bright Futures," "student retention," "time to degree," and "event history analysis," along with related terms such as "survival analysis" and "hazard modeling." Selected articles were organized, tagged, and annotated using Zotero, with a total of seven core sources reviewed in depth. We prioritized studies that examined the timing of outcomes, particularly those using discrete-time or continuous-time event history methods to model changing risk across semesters or academic years. Selected studies were compared based on their theoretical frameworks, definitions of persistence, measurement of scholarship loss, and analytic strategies. Special attention was given to how researchers conceptualized financial aid loss as a time-dependent transition and how they identified periods of heightened vulnerability following aid disruption. By synthesizing these findings through an event history lens, this approach provides a clear, time-sensitive foundation for understanding the retention dynamics associated with losing financial aid.

Visualization



This diagram illustrates the process of losing financial aid, showing the different pathways a student may go through from maintaining eligibility to experiencing initial and complete loss. It highlights how academic performance (FAS/FMS status) and potential regaining or renewal steps influence whether financial aid is ultimately retained or lost.

Results

- The risk of losing the Bright Futures Award is highest during the first academic year, particularly following the first spring term when renewal GPA and credit-hour requirements are evaluated.
- Regaining the Bright Futures Award is statistically rare, with fewer than 10% of students successfully reinstating funding after initial loss.
- Students maintaining uninterrupted eligibility show consistently lower probabilities of withdrawal compared to those experiencing any scholarship disruption.
- The results confirm that the timing of financial aid loss is as important as the occurrence of loss itself in predicting student outcomes.

Conclusion

At its core, this project shows that losing the Bright Futures Award can be more than just a financial inconvenience — it can be a turning point in a student's college experience. While merit-based aid like Bright Futures helps students stay enrolled and focused on their goals, the loss of that support often creates immediate and concentrated pressure that can disrupt academic progress. One of the most important takeaways from this study is that timing matters. The risk of leaving school does not slowly build over time; instead, it tends to spike during key renewal periods and in the semesters right after funding is lost. This suggests that students are especially vulnerable during these transition points, when financial stress and academic expectations collide. The research also highlights that regaining aid is uncommon, and even when students do regain funding, their academic path may already have been affected. Those who experience a loss face greater instability compared to students who maintain uninterrupted eligibility. Overall, this study reinforces the idea that policies surrounding merit-based scholarships shape student outcomes in powerful ways. Bright Futures can open doors and support persistence, but its renewal requirements can also create high-stakes moments that influence whether students stay on track. By focusing on when students are most at risk, this project points to the importance of early intervention and targeted support to help students navigate these critical periods and ultimately reach graduation.

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