



Does High School Poverty Matter?

An Examination of College Academic Achievement and Satisfaction

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Objective:

We examine the consequences of high school poverty on students' **academic outcomes** and **social experiences** in college.

Background:

We draw on previous work that documents the following:

- A growing achievement gap by family income^[3]
- A leveling off in college completion rates, despite an increase in college enrollment^[1]
- The importance of high school characteristics in predicting college application and enrollment^[2]

Hypothesis:

We posit that college enrollees from high-poverty high schools will be more likely to experience academic difficulties and will be less likely to enjoy college than their counterparts from low-poverty high schools.

Data:

The Wisconsin Scholars Longitudinal Study has followed approximately 3,000 students who matriculated in public universities in Wisconsin beginning in September 2008.



WSLS data is supplemented with information from the Office of Federal Student Aid and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Methods:

We utilize **OLS regression** to examine the association between high school poverty and post-secondary **academic outcomes** (GPA) in the second (Fall 2009, Spring 2010) and third year (Spring 2011) of college .

To understand the relationship between high school poverty and collegiate **social experiences**, we rely on **logistic regression**. We ask students whether they have enjoyed college (yes/no) at their first (Spring 2009) and second (Spring 2010) year of college.

Academic achievement and college enjoyment are modeled as a function of:

- **Individual characteristics** such as prior achievement as well as race, gender, age etc.
- **Family attributes** including parental income and level of education
- **High school characteristics** such as percentage of student body eligible for free/reduced price meals and FAFSA completion rates

Schools designated as “high-poverty” are those where 40 percent or more of students are eligible for free/reduced price meals.



Results:

Figure 1: OLS Regression Estimates of the Association between College GPA and High-Poverty High School Attendance

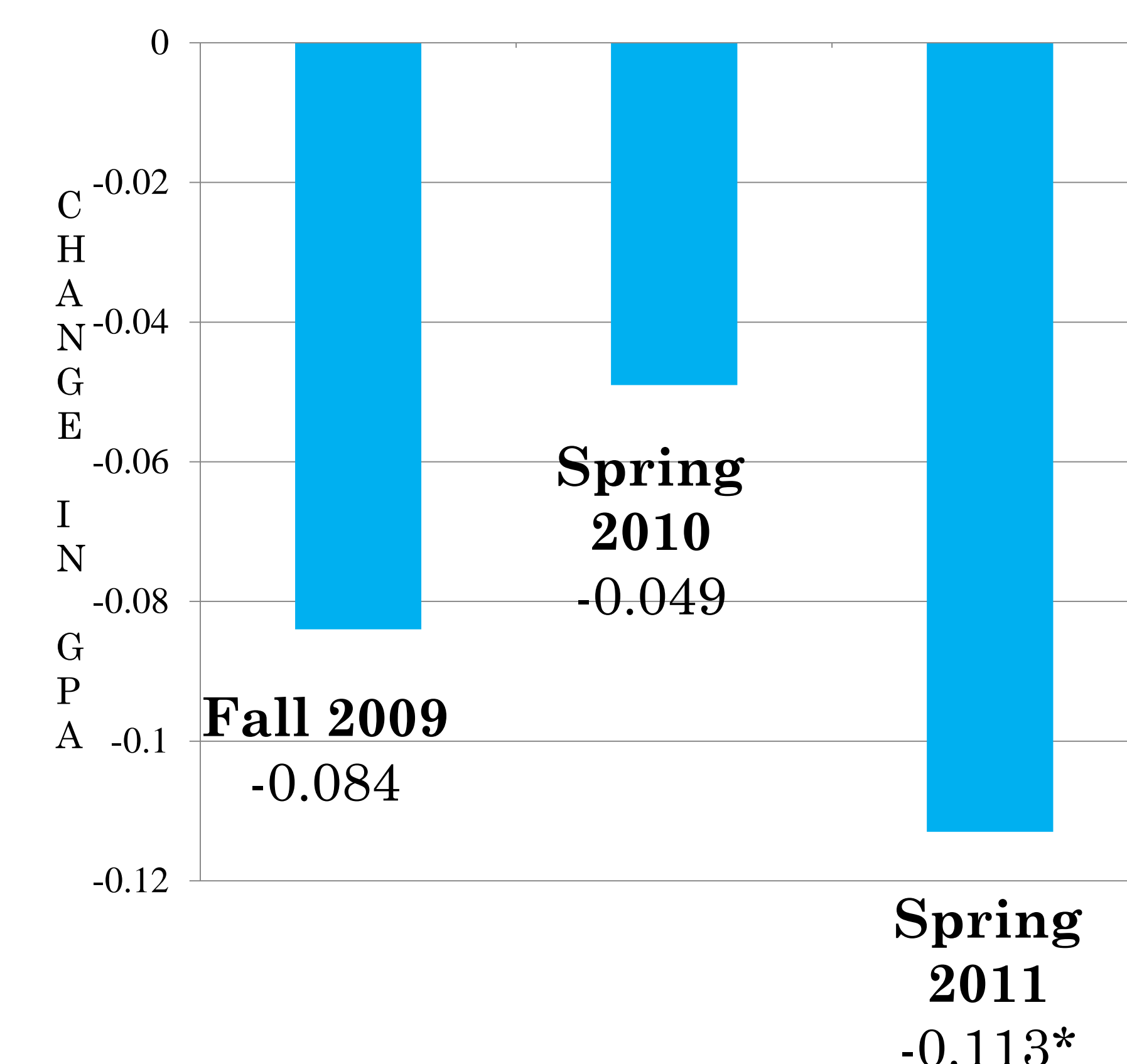
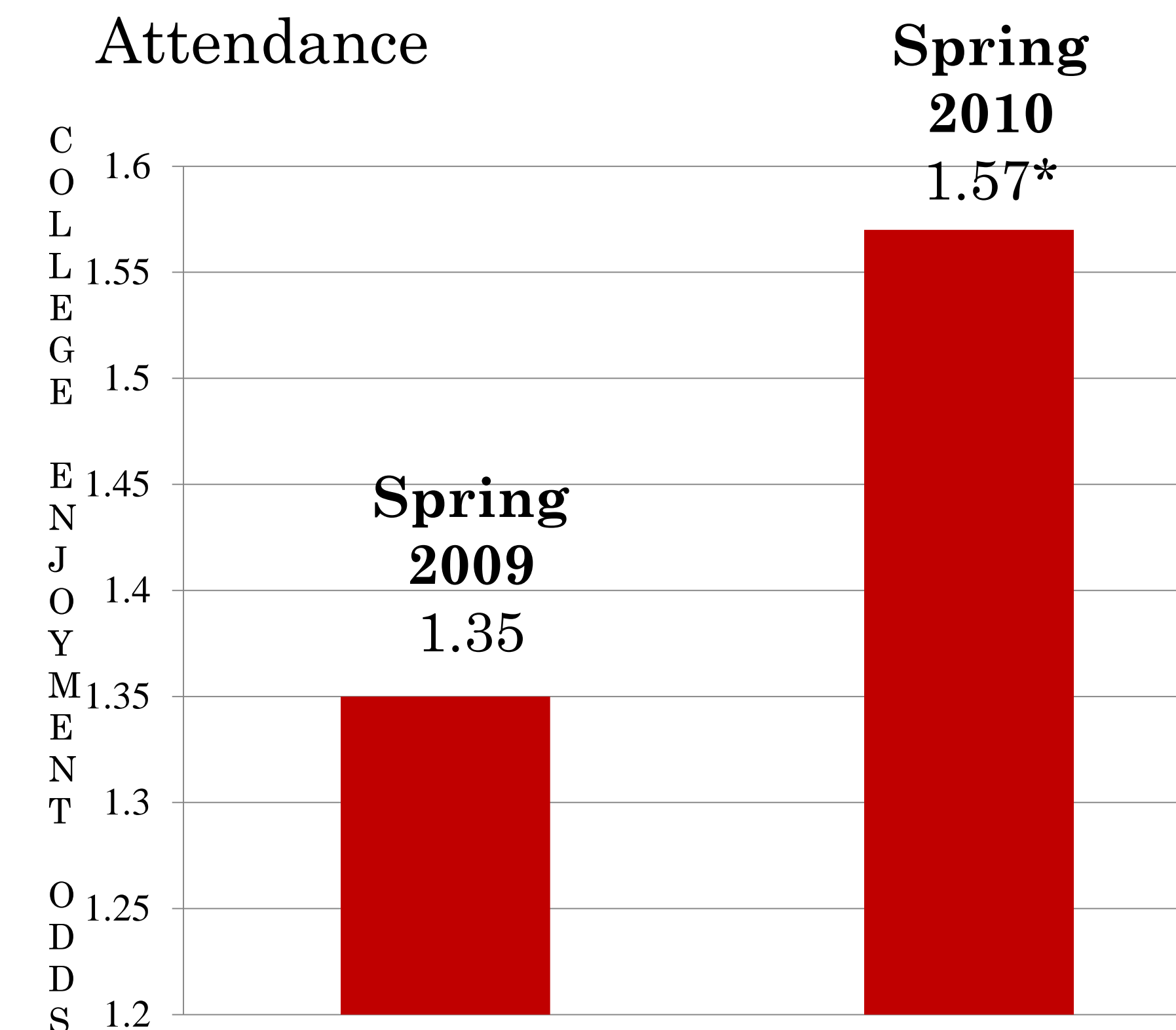


Figure 2: Odds Ratios from Logistic Regressions of the Association between College Enjoyment and High-Poverty High School Attendance



In Figures 1 and 2 (*) indicate significance at the p < 0.05 level

Conclusions:

Our hypothesis was partially supported:

- Having attended a high-poverty high school is negatively associated with a student's academic achievement. This difference is statistically significant in later semesters, but not immediately upon starting college.
- Having attended a high-poverty high school is associated with greater odds of college enjoyment. This difference is statistically significant in later years, but not on immediate college entrance.

While the mechanisms for the above findings aren't altogether clear, our future research will examine differential persistence as a driving force in creating these results.

Literature Cited:

- ¹Bailey, M. and S. Dynarski (2011). "Inequality in Postsecondary Education." *Whither Opportunity*:117-132.
- ²Fletcher, J. and M. Tienda (2010). "Race and Ethnic Differences in College Achievement: Does High School Attended Matter?" *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 627(1): 144-166.
- ³Reardon, S. (2011). "The Widening Academic Achievement Gap between the Rich and the Poor" *Whither Opportunity*: 91-116

For Further Information:

Please email mirakhur@princeton.edu or visit www.finaidstudy.org for more information about the Wisconsin Scholars Longitudinal Study