

# The influence of study program characteristics on college enrollment intentions: Evidence from a factorial survey experiment

Carina Toussaint, Hans Dietrich, Alexander Patzina, Tobias Wolbring

E-Mail: carina.toussaint@iab.de

## Background

- Characteristics of study programs  
→ barriers and opportunities  
→ important component of addressing SES diff. in college enrollment intentions

## Previous findings

- Distance from home, academic reputation or provided information → relevant for students' enrollment intention  
e.g. Finger (2016)

## Theory → Sociological RC-Theory

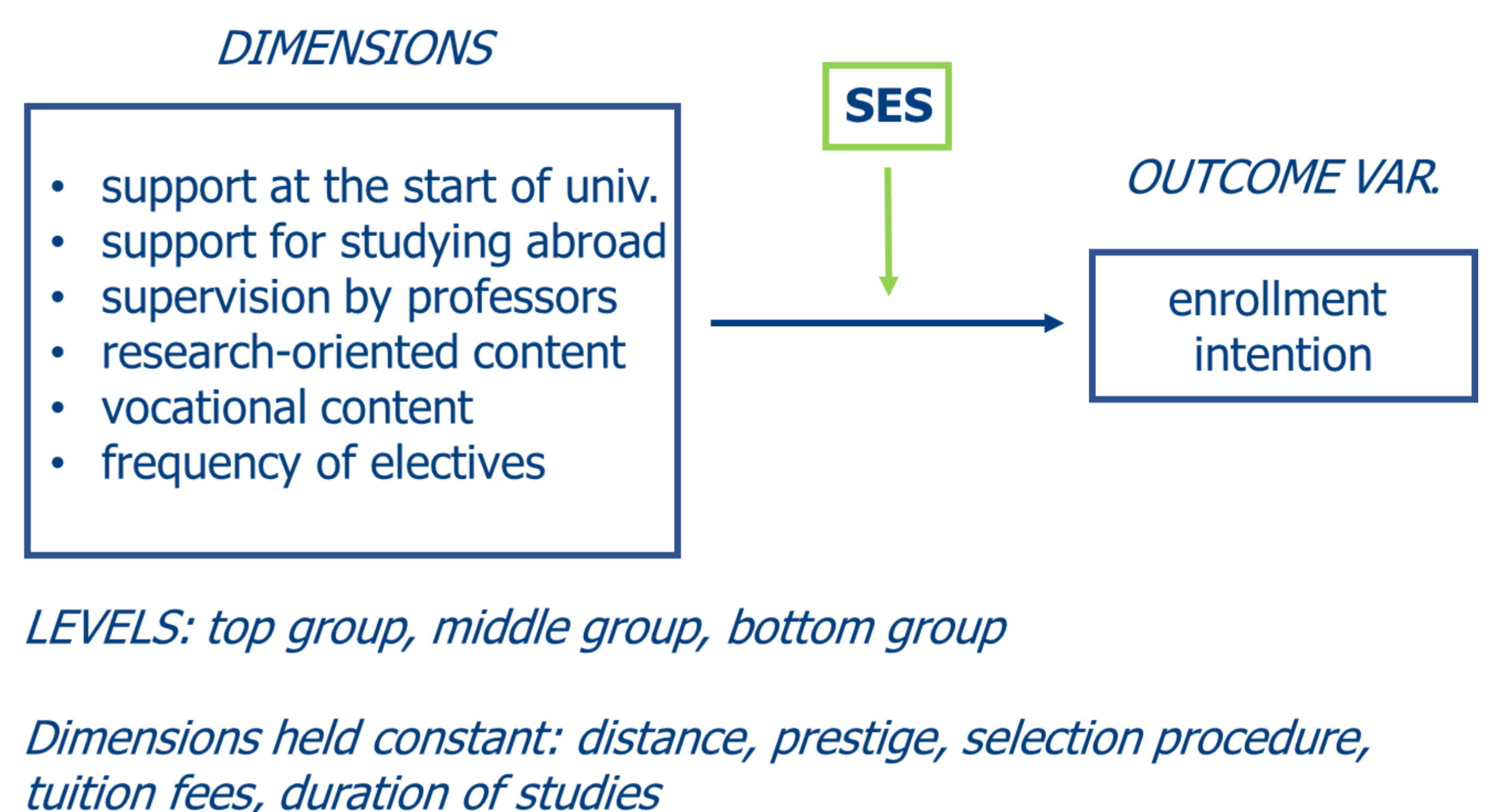
Breen & Goldthorpe (1997), Breen & Yaish (2006)

- **Risky choice assumption** → dimensions of study programs affect perception of how risky a study decision is
- **Loss aversion assumption** → college enrollment more beneficial for high SES students than for low SES students

## Research Questions

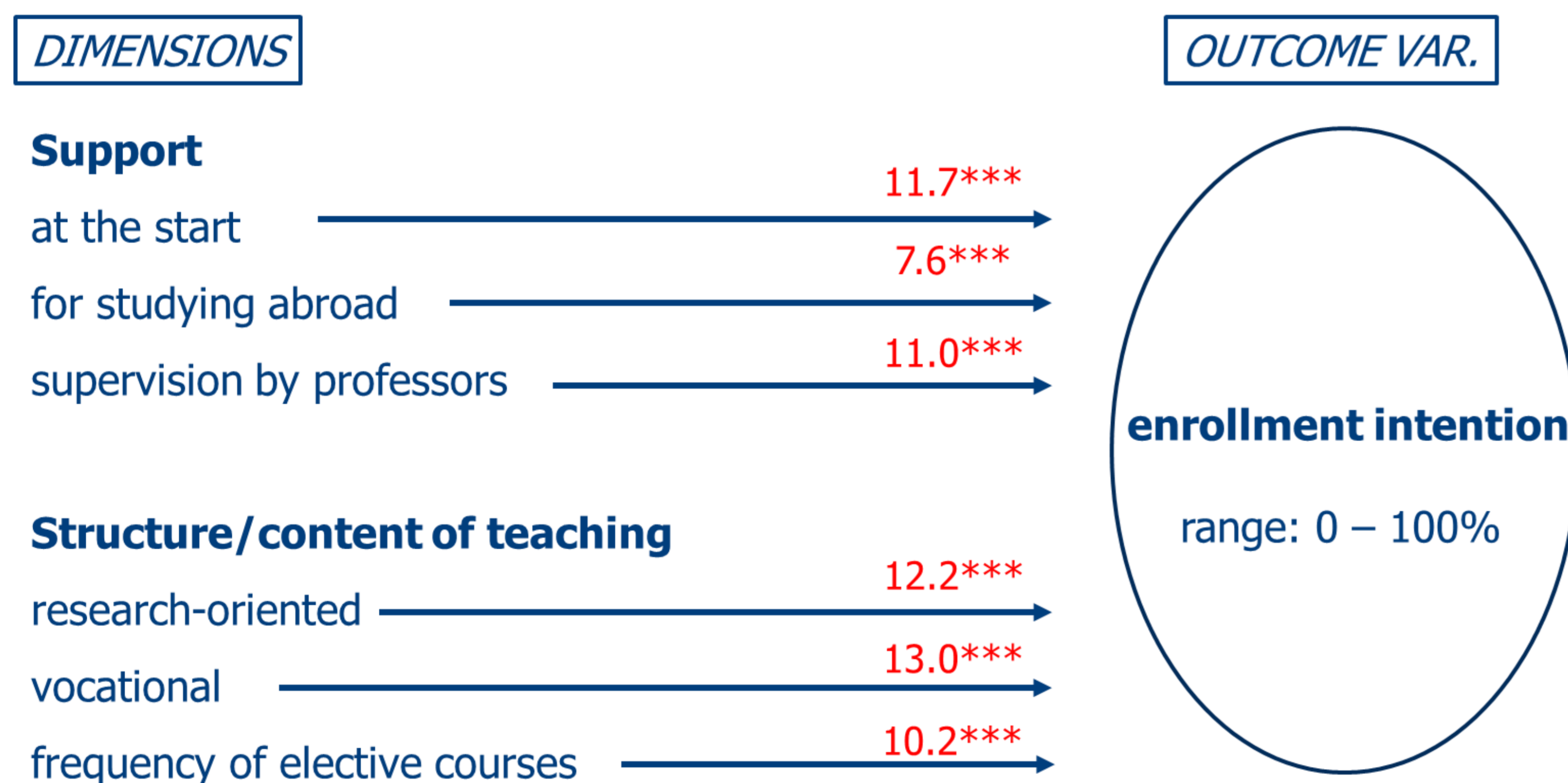
RQ 1. Which features of a study program influence college enrolment intentions?

RQ 2. Does the influence of certain features of study programs vary across SES groups?



## Key Findings

RQ 1: Influence of dimensions on enrollment intention (Random Intercept Models)



coefficients: probability of taking up the described study program if dimension takes on level „top group“ in comparison to level „bottom group“  
Mean of dependent var.: 47.9; SD of dependent var.: 24.7  
legend: \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

RQ 2: SES-differences in influence of dimensions (separate RI Models, Wald Test for group diff.)

- Higher impact of support for studying abroad for high SES students (9.3\*\*\* vs. 5.4\*\*\*)
- Higher impact of research-oriented content for high SES students (13.5\*\*\* vs. 9.9\*\*\*)

→ **Highly significant effects of all dimensions on college enrollment intention (RQ1)**  
→ **Support for studying abroad and research-orientation: higher impact for high SES stud. (RQ2)**

## Robustness Checks

- Distance as most important dimension held constant → investigated dimensions irrelevant?  
→ Separate analyses for individuals with/without a preference for small distance → results remain robust
- Further robustness checks (e.g. actual educ. decision, assessment of all dimensions, sep. analyses by GPA )

## Vignette Example

Imagine you see an university ranking on the internet. The ranking for the study program of your choice looks like this:

Supervision by professors	top group	●
Support at the start of university	middle group	●
Electives vs. obligatory courses	middle group	●
Research-oriented content	bottom group	●
Vocational content	top group	●
Support for studying abroad	bottom group	●

How likely is it that you would take up the study program described?

0% 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100%

## Data Basis and Vignette Design

- Sample of over 1,000 German students of grad. classes (~ 40% with academic fam. background)
- 6 vignettes for each respondent
- 6 dimensions with 3 levels each (varied randomly)
- D-efficient sampling design (D-efficiency: 99.59)

## References

- Breen, R. & Goldthorpe, J.H. (1997). Explaining educational differentials. Towards a formal rational action theory, *Ration. Soc.* 9(3), 275–305.
- Breen, R. & Yaish, M. (2006). Testing the Breen-Goldthorpe model of educational decision making. In: Morgan, S.L., Grusky, D.B., & Fields, G.S. (eds). *Mobility and Inequality. Frontiers of Research in Economics and Sociology* (p.232–258.). Stanford University Press: Stanford.
- Finger, C. (2016). Institutional constraints and the translation of college aspirations into intentions-Evidence from a factorial survey, *Res. Soc. Stratif.* 46, 112-128.