



NATIONAL STUDENT
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Tutor-to-Teacher Pipeline

The Effect of Working as a Tutor
through Teach For America Ignite on
Applications to the Corps Teaching
Program

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Introduction

This study provides causal evidence that tutoring through the Teach For America (TFA) Ignite can spark interest in applying to teach through the TFA Corps program. Using TFA's application data on tutoring and teacher training programs, we find that Ignite tutoring experience nearly triples the likelihood of applying to the TFA Corps teaching program, with the largest effects among men, students of color, and non-education majors.

These results suggest that tutoring could serve as both a learning intervention and a scalable strategy to address teacher shortages and diversify the workforce.



Background

The U.S. faces a severe teacher shortage—roughly 400,000 positions nationwide are vacant or filled by uncertified staff (Tan et al., 2024). At the same time, there is a growing mismatch between the increasingly diverse U.S. student population and a teaching workforce that has not kept pace demographically (Gopalan et al., 2025). This study examines whether exposure to tutoring work can address both challenges by encouraging more—and more diverse—college students to pursue teaching careers. We asked:

- 1 Does working as a tutor in the TFA Ignite Fellowship increase interest in applying to the TFA Corps teacher program?
- 2 Do effects differ for groups historically underrepresented in teaching?

To this end, we leveraged a unique setting at Teach For America (TFA), which operates both a national tutoring fellowship (Ignite) and a teacher training program (Corps). This overlap makes it possible to track whether tutoring experience influences later applications to teaching.



To identify the effect, we compared applicants just above and just below the tutoring admissions cutoff, using a regression discontinuity design. Because these applicants are otherwise very similar, this cutoff creates a natural experiment that isolates the causal impact of tutoring itself. The analysis uses application data from seven tutoring cycles between 2021 and 2024, covering roughly 6,000 applicants. The present data do not allow us to rule out the possibility that applicants pursued teaching through other pathways.

Key Findings

➔ Tutoring has a powerful overall effect.

College students who tutored through the TFA Ignite fellowship were **12 percentage points more likely** to apply to TFA's teacher training program than their peers, rising from 6.7% to nearly 19%.

➔ Effects are especially strong for underrepresented groups.

Because HBCUs have strong teacher training programs, their students are more exposed to education-focused careers. We therefore also focus on Black students at non-HBCUs to examine the impact of tutoring on those with less exposure to teaching opportunities.

Gender

Men: Tutoring boosted teaching applications by 22 points—more than double the effect for women.

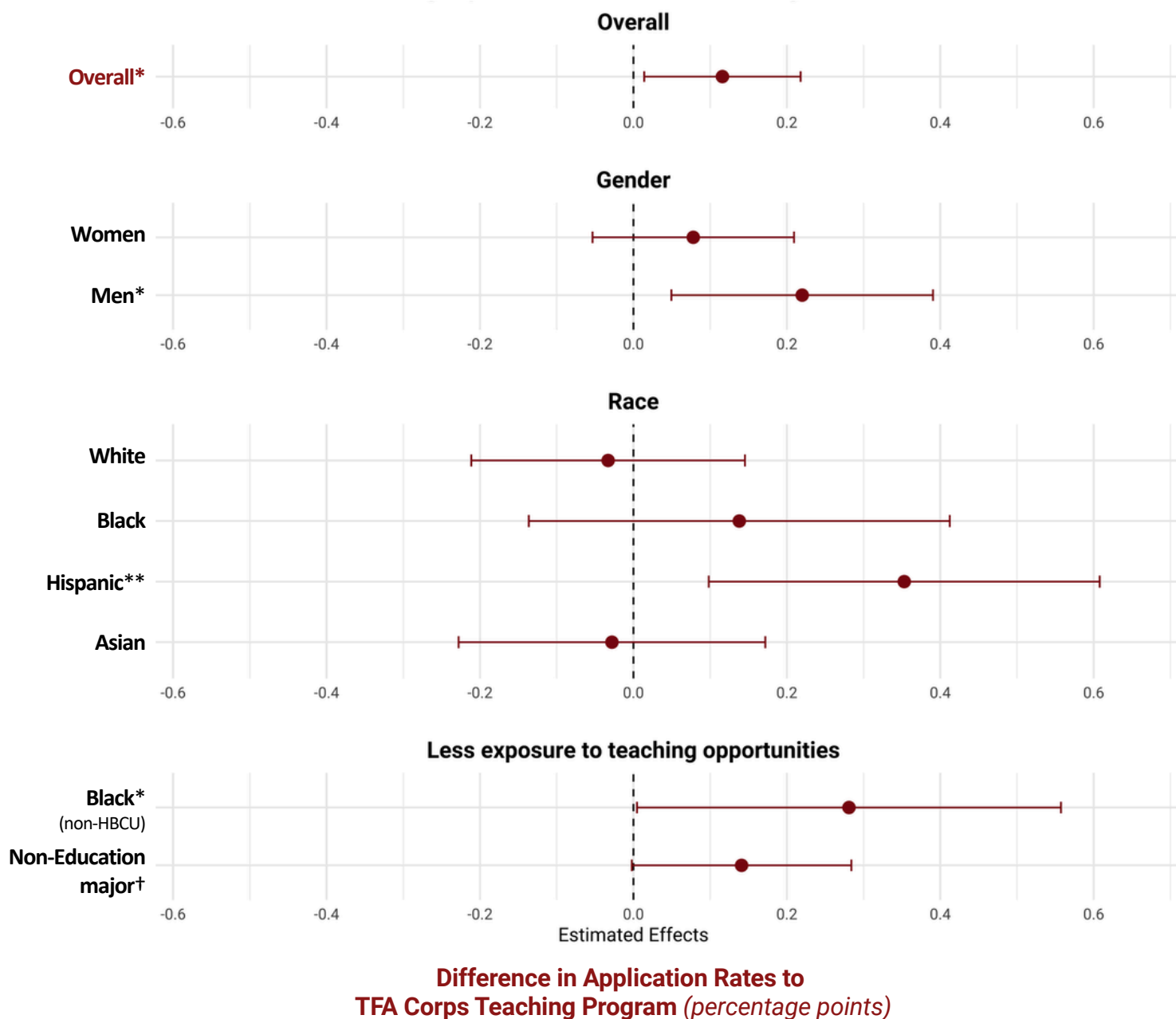
Race/Ethnicity

Students of color: Overall gains of 19 points, with especially large effects for Hispanic (+35 points) and Black students at non-HBCUs (+28 points).

➔ Impact is concentrated among non-education majors.

Tutoring raised applications by **14 percentage points for students outside education fields**, while having little effect for education majors who had already committed to teaching. This indicates tutoring works as a “first exposure” experience for students with limited prior contact with the profession.

Figure 1: Effects of Tutoring Experience with the TFA Ignite on Applications to the Corps Teaching Program



The bars represent a 95% confidence interval around the estimated effect.

Significance levels: † $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Policy and Practice Implications

Tutoring programs may serve not only as interventions to boost student learning but also as potential workforce recruitment tools. This dual role has several important implications for policy and practice:

- 1 Maximize the dual return on tutoring investments.**
Federal and state funding for high-impact tutoring may serve two purposes at once: addressing unfinished learning and creating a pathway into teaching. Recognizing this potential dual return can make tutoring initiatives more sustainable over time.
- 2 Build intentional tutor-to-teacher pipelines.**
Tutoring experiences can be connected directly to teaching pathways through partnerships with teacher preparation programs, streamlined credentialing opportunities, and guaranteed interviews or placement preferences. Doing so lowers entry barriers and signals a clear trajectory from tutoring to teaching.
- 3 Target recruitment to diversify the workforce.**
Because tutoring sparks an increased interest in teaching—particularly among men, students of color, and non-education majors—expanding tutoring roles can help diversify the future teacher workforce.
- 4 Use tutoring as a career exploration tool.**
Tutoring serves as a low-cost, low-stakes career trial. For some, the experience affirms that teaching is not the right path. For others, it is a pivotal exposure that crystallizes interest in teaching. Policymakers can view tutoring as a scalable way to help college students “test drive” teaching, with benefits for both individuals and the education field.



References

Gopalan, M., Jung, J., & Hanselman, P. (2025). Historical Patterns and Trends in Teacher-Student Demographic Changes in the United States. *Socius*, 11, 23780231251321323.

Tan, T. S., Arellano, I., & Patrick, S. K. (2024). *State Teacher Shortages 2024 Update: Teaching Positions Left Vacant or Filled by Teachers Without Full Certification*. Learning Policy Institute.
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