



# The Impact of the Rappaport Public Policy Fellows Program on Career Trajectories

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## Executive Summary

The Rappaport Public Policy Fellows program has given graduate students the opportunity to serve in greater Boston for 11 years, with the goal of providing assistance to local and state government and experience to promising young people.<sup>1</sup> One added objective of the program is to encourage public service, especially in the Boston area. While it is hard to quantify the benefits that the program has had on governments, or the full range of experience that it provides, we can empirically quantify the impact that the program has had on public service by comparing the career trajectories of Rappaport Fellows with other comparable students.

In this evaluation note, we examine 11 years of data on the Rappaport Public Policy Fellows and their subsequent careers. To provide a reasonable comparison group, we have also gathered data on applicants to the program who made it to the final selection round but did not receive the fellowship. This comparison group is extremely similar to the students who were selected to be fellows. Indeed, after seven years of running selection meetings where winners are culled from finalists, it is not too far from the truth to argue that within this group, the group actually chosen

for fellowship is quite close to being random.

Comparing these groups suggested that the program had significant effects both on public service and on staying in Boston. We know the employment for 102 former fellows who are not students or very recent graduates, and 41 of them or 40.2 percent are working for the government. Thirty-one former fellows (30.4 percent of the total) are working for non-profits and 30 are working for the private sector. (Another 31 former fellows, including 13 who were fellows in 2011, are still in or have returned to graduate school; and we lack information on five other fellows.)

We have managed to gather career information on 91 finalists who did not become Rappaport Public Policy Fellows. In this group, 24 or 26.4 percent are working in government. Almost 40 percent of this sample now works for a non-profit and the remainder work for the private sector. (Another 25 former finalists are in graduate school and we were unable to find information on 32 other finalists, due to their very recent graduation or other factors).

The data indicate that Rappaport Fellows are almost 14 percent more likely to work for government than

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comparable finalists who did not receive fellowships. This difference is statistically significant at the five percent level.

We also find a difference in the share of Rappaport Fellows who remain in greater Boston. Across all sectors, 47.1 percent of fellowship winners have remained in the Boston area, while 37.4 percent of finalists who didn't receive fellowship remain in greater Boston. Perhaps the most striking difference is that nearly 20 percent of Rappaport fellows now serve in the public sector in greater Boston. In contrast, less than five percent of

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finalists who didn't earn fellowship are in the public sector in Boston. This difference is strongly statistically significant at the one percent level.

While the group of finalists may not be a perfect comparison group for fellowship winners, the results are striking. Rappaport Fellowship winners are about 14 percentage points more likely to be in the public sector than other finalists and almost ten percent more likely to remain in Boston. These results suggest that the program is not only managing to target aid to students who are likely to serve, but also increasing their likelihood of working in government.

### **Fellows Program and Data Description**

The Rappaport Public Policy Fellows program began in 2001. The program has evolved somewhat over time, but its core structure has remained the same. Students in policy-related graduate programs throughout greater Boston

apply<sup>2</sup> and if they are selected, they receive a \$7,000 stipend for working full-time in a public-sector entity in greater Boston. (Almost all fellows work for a state or local entity; a handful have worked in the regional offices of federal entities such as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.)

Rappaport Institute staff work with the students to ensure good placement in an appropriate agency or institution. Institute staff and outside mentors work with the students throughout the summer to ensure that their experience is going well.

The students attend weekly meetings with other fellows, and these meetings usually include outings or outside speakers. Institute staff regularly connect with them and many of them talk to assigned mentors. The Institute's long experience with different officials and agencies has also enabled us to ensure that students end up working only for supervisors who have a good track record of delivering meaningful experiences. Typically, the best summer experiences are focused on a single primary project that can provide a clear sense of mission for the student.

Institute staff typically work to spread information about the program at various graduate schools and programs throughout the Boston area, and then students send in applications. The Institute's staff then culls approximately 25 finalists from the approximately 100 students that generally apply each year. These finalists are then sent to a selection committee typically made of six outsiders. This group generally includes members of the Institute's Advisory Board, and, in recent years, former Fellows, individuals who have supervised fellows, and others with experience working in the public sector.<sup>3</sup>

The outside evaluators read the applications and then come to a multi-hour meeting, during which we choose the set of fellowship winners. The selection process reflects the judgment

of the selection committee, subject to the constraint that winners are chosen to ensure a reasonable distribution of interest areas and schools.

It would be easiest to evaluate the program if fellowships were randomly allocated across finalists. If the fellowships were truly random, then we could just compare outcomes for fellowship winners and other recipients and be done with it. This selection process is not random, but it isn't obvious that it disproportionately picks finalists who are particularly likely to remain in either public service or in Boston.

**This comparison is clearly imperfect, but nonetheless it is the best available and we believe that the results remain informative.**

All of the applicants have shown some interest in public service just by applying. Among this group, the finalists are particularly likely to display some degree of seriousness about government and passion for public service. But among the finalists, the passion for the public sector is more likely to be uniform. Selection into the fellows program often hinges on signs of energy or ability, which may be as likely to lead to careers in the private or non-profit sectors as careers in the public sector. Discussions rarely mention whether the fellow has extensive experience or interest in greater Boston.

Our approach will be to compare the outcomes for fellowship winners and other finalists. This comparison is clearly imperfect, but nonetheless it is the best available and we believe that the results remain informative.

The Institute regularly maintains a database on fellowship winners. We have records on 136 fellowship winners who have been through the program since 2001. We are missing data on

only two fellowship winners since that date. Of the remaining fellows, 102 currently have full or part-time jobs; 31 are still students; and 3 are in transition (i.e. they graduated in June 2011 but, as best we know, do not have a job at this time). We will not include students, fellows in transition, or the two missing fellowship winners in our analysis.

Before performing this analysis, the Institute did not maintain records on finalists who did not receive fellowship. In order to create a comparison group, we performed Internet searches on the 148 finalists who did not receive fellowships since 2001. We were unable to find data on 29 finalists (or 20 percent of the applicant pool). Of the remaining finalists, 91 currently have full or part-time work; another 25 are in school; and three are in transition.

The fact that we have not managed to find current employment for all of the finalists is not intrinsically a problem, unless our data collection has proven to be selective. For example, if we have been better at finding employment for people in the public sector, then there will be a bias induced by selective data collection. While we think that this is a potential issue, we believe that it is easier to find people who are working around Boston and easier to find people who are working in the public sector.

If that is the case, then imperfect data collection will lead to a bias against the program. For example, if we tend to miss finding those non-fellowship winners who work in the private sector, then it will look as if non-fellowship winners are more likely to work in the public sector. If we tend to miss those non-fellowship winners who work outside of Boston, then it will look as if fellowship winners are more likely to work in Boston. Imperfect data collection is an issue, but we doubt that it is particularly driving our results.

## Comparison of Fellowship Winners and Other Finalists

Our first statistical approach is quite simple. We sample compare the mean outcomes for fellowship recipients with the outcomes for finalists who did not receive fellowships. Table 1 shows our core results. The first column shows the mean of the variable for the fellowship recipients; the second column shows the mean for the finalists who didn't earn fellowships. The third column calculates the difference between these two means. The fourth column shows the probability that the means are the same—this is estimated from a univariate linear regression where the variable is regressed on a dummy variable that takes on a value of one if the applicant won a fellowship (as well as a control variable for year of fellowship application). The final column shows the level of significance.

The first two rows are pre-determined variables: gender and whether or not the student was a Harvard graduate student.

Most of the Harvard students who have received fellowship have been at the Kennedy Schools (36 plus seven more from the joint programs with the Harvard Business School, Harvard Law School or other non-Harvard law and business schools). The only other school or program that has provided more than ten fellowship winners (26) is the MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning. We show these variables to test whether selection into the program is correlated with these preexisting factors.

We find that there is no statistically significant difference in the means for the gender variable (percent of fellowship winners and non-winners who are male), but we do find Harvard students were less likely to win fellowships, conditional upon becoming a finalist. Half of Fellowship winners were from Harvard, while 69.2 percent of finalists who didn't win fellowships were at Harvard. Given this difference, we will control for Harvard association in our later empirical work.

**Table 1: Mean Comparison for Fellowship Recipients and Non-Recipients**

|   | Means      |               | Difference | Probability that the means for the two groups are the same | Significance Level |
|---|------------|---------------|------------|--|--------------------|
|   | Fellowship | No Fellowship |            |  |                    |
| 1. Percent Male   | 34.3%      | 37.4%         | -3.1%      | 59.50%   |                    |
| 2. Percent Harvard Graduate Student                                   | 50.0%      | 69.2%         | -19.2%     | 0.29%  | p<.01              |
| 3. Percent Working in the Public Sector                               | 40.2%      | 26.4%         | 13.8%      | 3.07%  | p<.05              |
| 4. Percent Working in the Non-Profit Sector                           | 30.4%      | 39.6%         | -9.2%      | 20.20%   |                    |
| 5. Percent Working in the Private Sector                              | 29.4%      | 34.1%         | -4.7%      | 37.90%   |                    |
| 6. Percent Staying in Greater Boston                                  | 47.1%      | 37.4%         | 9.7%       | 12.30%   |                    |
| 7. Percent Staying in Greater Boston and Working in the Public Sector | 19.6%      | 4.4%          | 15.2%      | 0.04%  | p<.01              |

Note: These probability calculations contain a control variable for the fellowship year.

The next three rows show current sector for employed persons. We have separated individuals in public sector, not-for-profit private sector and the for-private public sector. The third row shows that 40.2 percent of fellowship winners are in the public sector, as opposed to 26.4 percent of non-fellowship winners, and this difference is statistically significant. The probability that these two figures reflect an identical underlying propensity to work in the public sector is less than five percent.

The fourth row shows results on the not-for-profit private sector. Almost 40 percent of finalists without fellowships ended up in non-profits, as opposed to 30.4 percent of fellowship winners. This distinction is also not statistically significant at normal significance levels.

Since the percentages have to add to 100, a much higher proportion of people in the public sector must mean a reduced share of people in other sectors and it appears that the bulk of the offsetting reduction is in the non-profit sector.

The fifth row shows the proportion of people in the private sector, with 29.4 percent of finalist winners are in the private sector, as opposed to 34.1 percent of finalists who don't win fellowships. Again, this reduction represents the flip side of more fellowship winners working for the government.

Rows six and seven examine location. Row six shows the proportion of people in greater Boston across all sectors. About 47 percent of Rappaport Fellowship winners remain in Boston, compared to the 37.4 percent of other finalists who remain in Boston. This difference is not quite statistically significant at the ten percent significance level, but it is still a fairly dramatic difference.

Row seven is focused just on government service in greater Boston. We find that 19.6 percent of Fellowship winners fit in this

category, while only 4.4 percent of finalists who didn't win fellowship are in this group. This is an extremely sizable difference both in terms of objective magnitude and statistical strength.

### Regression Results

The previous results included no other controls for individual characteristics. We now examine the same outcomes, but control for both pre-existing characteristics and number of years since application. These results are shown in Table 2. Our key predetermined or independent variables are gender and being a Harvard student at the time of application. Our regression approach controls for these variables and asks whether there is an independent effect of being a fellowship recipient holding other characteristics constant.

Since our outcomes are binary variables (e.g. public sector or not), we follow standard procedures and estimate "probit" regressions. We present the estimated marginal effects of the variable; these marginal effects are estimated by Stata for an average person in the sample. We also report the estimated probability that these estimates would have been generated if true effect of the variable is zero.

In the first two regressions, the outcome is working in the public sector. The first regression includes only the control for fellowship year, which is insignificant, and the binary variable for winning a fellowship, which is estimated to have an effect of 14.8 percent. This estimated coefficient is unsurprisingly nearly equivalent to the difference in means shown in Table 1.

The second regressions shows the estimated coefficient, when we also control for our three other variables. Neither control variable is statistically significant.

But controlling for these variables does relatively little to the key estimated coefficient on winning a fellowship. In this specification, it

Table 2: Regression Results

|                                    | (1)                          | (2)                 | (3)                       | (4)                    | (5)  | (6)                   |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|--|-----------------------|
|                                    | Working in the Public Sector |                     | Staying in Greater Boston |                        | Staying in Greater Boston and Working in the Public Sector |                       |
| Fellowship Indicator               | 0.148**<br>(0.0314)          | 0.147**<br>(0.0367) | 0.111<br>(0.125)          | 0.0655<br>(0.380)      | 0.153***<br>(0.00102)                                      | 0.128***<br>(0.00468) |
| Fellowship Year                    | 0.0169<br>(0.1666)           | 0.0169<br>(0.174)   | 0.0238*<br>(0.0650)       | 0.0176<br>(0.182)      | 0.0189**<br>(0.0144)                                       | 0.0157**<br>(0.0364)  |
| Harvard Graduate Student Indicator |                              | -0.0115<br>(0.875)  |                           | -0.222***<br>(0.00369) |  | -0.102**<br>(0.0256)  |
| Gender Indicator (Male=1)          |                              | 0.0328<br>(0.651)   |                           | 0.0168<br>(0.828)      |  | 0.0185<br>(0.676)     |
| Observations                       | 193                          | 193                 | 193                       | 193                    | 193  | 193                   |

## Notes:

(1) Regression results are from a probit model, where the dependent variable is equal to 1 or 0.

(2) Coefficients indicate marginal effects.

(3) All regressions include a control for fellowship year.

(4) Pvalues in parentheses (\*\*\*p<0.01, \*\*p<0.05, \*p<0.1)

(5) Pvalues are equal to the estimated probability that the variable has no effect.

is estimated to increase the probability of being in the public sector by 14.7 percent.

Regression (3) and (4) look at geographic locale. The third regression includes only the fellowship winner dummy. In this case, we estimate an 11 percent marginal effect on staying in greater Boston of winning the fellowship. Again, this is unsurprisingly close to the estimate from the means. This coefficient is insignificant however, slightly missing the cutoff of a 10 percent level of significance.

The fourth regression includes our controls. The gender control is also insignificant, but we do find that there is a significant coefficient on the Harvard student variable. People who are a Harvard graduate student at the time of application are less likely to remain in greater Boston. The greater Boston marginal effect drops to 6.55 percent and remains insignificant when we add the controls. Nonetheless, a 6.55 percent marginal effect remains sizable in magnitude.

Finally, the fifth and sixth regressions look at working in the public sector in greater Boston. The estimated coefficient without controls is

15.3 percent, and quite significant. With the controls, the coefficient is 12.8 percent, and remains strongly significant.

The gender variable control remains insignificant, but once again we find that being a Harvard graduate student at the time of application reduces the likelihood an individual will choose to work in public service in the greater Boston area.

Overall, these findings support the hypothesis that receiving a fellowship increases the probability to work in the public sector, stay in Boston and working in the public sector in Boston.

We have also used to the data to examine whether receiving a fellowship has a larger impact for different gender groups or for Harvard students. We find that the impact on public sector employment is essentially identical for the different groups. While the impact of the fellowship on geographic location is roughly equivalent for men and women, the impact on geographic location appears to be smaller for the Harvard students.

## Conclusion

There are several potential problems with our results. The sample of finalists without fellowships is not completely identical to the sample of fellowship winners. We were not able to track down every finalist who did not win a fellowship. Yet, despite these concerns, we think that the data yields reasonably compelling results.

Fellowship winners are about 14 percent more likely to work in the public sector. They are nearly 10 percent more likely to stay in Boston, although some of this is driven by the lower likelihood of Harvard students winning the fellowship. They are over 15 percent more likely to work in government in greater Boston.

**These results do suggest that getting a Rappaport Fellowship appears to change the trajectories of people's lives. A relatively modest early investment seems to significantly tie people to greater Boston and to the public sector.**

Our results also belie the view that the fellowship program subsidizes people who typically later work in high-paying for-profit jobs afterwards. Only three-in-ten of our fellowship winners work in the private sector and many of these people work in firms that work closely with public-sector entities. As such, the program certainly seems to be targeting recipients who are trying to serve the world, perhaps because they are disproportionately likely to find the fellowship appealing.

There is no sense in which this work provides any sort of a cost-benefit analysis or a comparison with other interventions meant to encourage public service. This was not

our intention. But these results do suggest that getting a Rappaport Fellowship appears to change the trajectories of people's lives. A relatively modest early investment seems to significantly tie people to greater Boston and to the public sector.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> More information about the fellowship including information on where fellows have worked over the years is online at <http://www.hks.harvard.edu/centers/rappaport/student-opportunities/public-policy-summer-fellowship>.

<sup>2</sup> From 2001 to 2005, the fellowship was only open to students from graduate schools and programs at Harvard, MIT, Boston University, and Suffolk University. Since that time, the program is open to any graduate student studying in greater Boston and fellows have included students from Boston College, Brandeis, Northeastern, Tufts, UMass/Boston, and UMass/Dartmouth. While the program is not open to law school students, instead they can apply to a separate program, funded by the same donors, that is administered by Suffolk University Law School. (More information about that program is available at <http://www.rappaportcenter.org/fellows/>.)

<sup>3</sup> From 2001 to 2005, the selection committee generally included advisory board members and representatives from some or all of the schools whose students were eligible for the fellowship, but not former supervisors or fellows.

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