

Access to Higher Education: The US Perspective

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“Matching in Practice” Conference

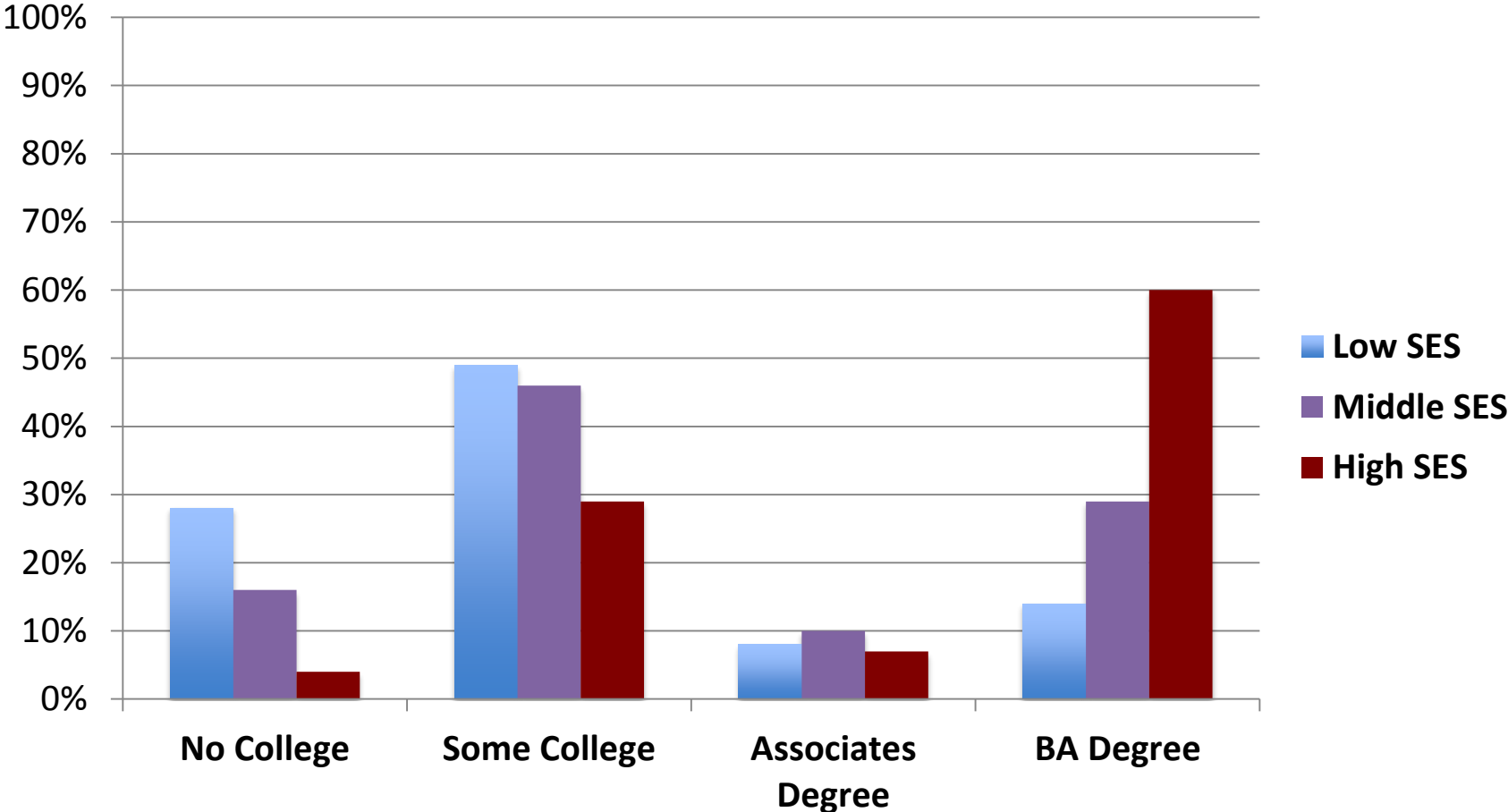
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Overview

The US fails both of the Bologna Process standards for college access:

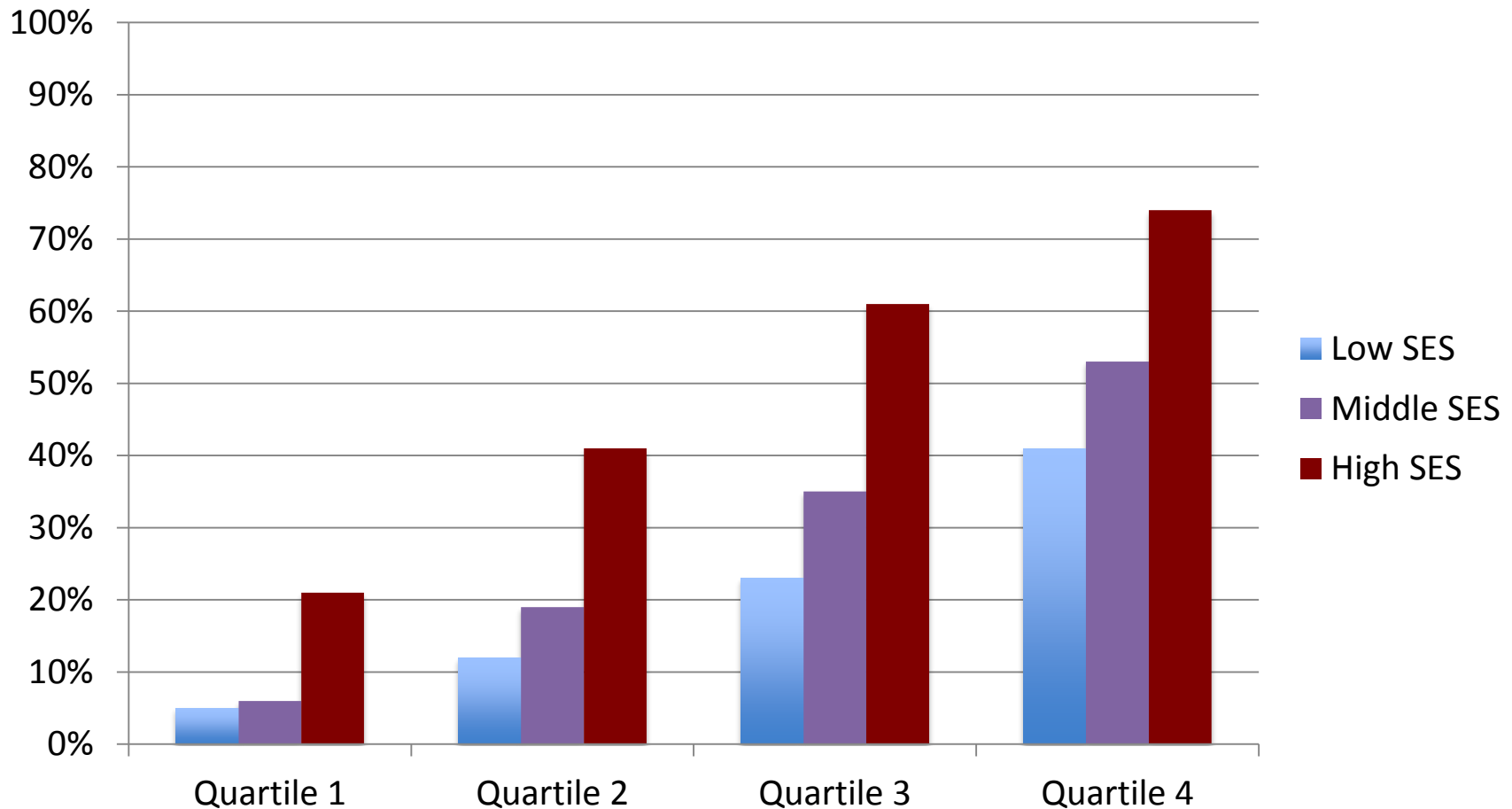
- 1. “The student body ... should reflect the diversity of our populations.”*
- 2. “Students should be able to complete their studies without obstacles related to their social and economic background.”*

Educational Attainment in the US (ELS 2002)



Source: "Postsecondary Attainment Differences by Socioeconomic Status. http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_tva.asp

BA Completion Rates in ELS (2002) by SES and 10th Grade Math Quartile

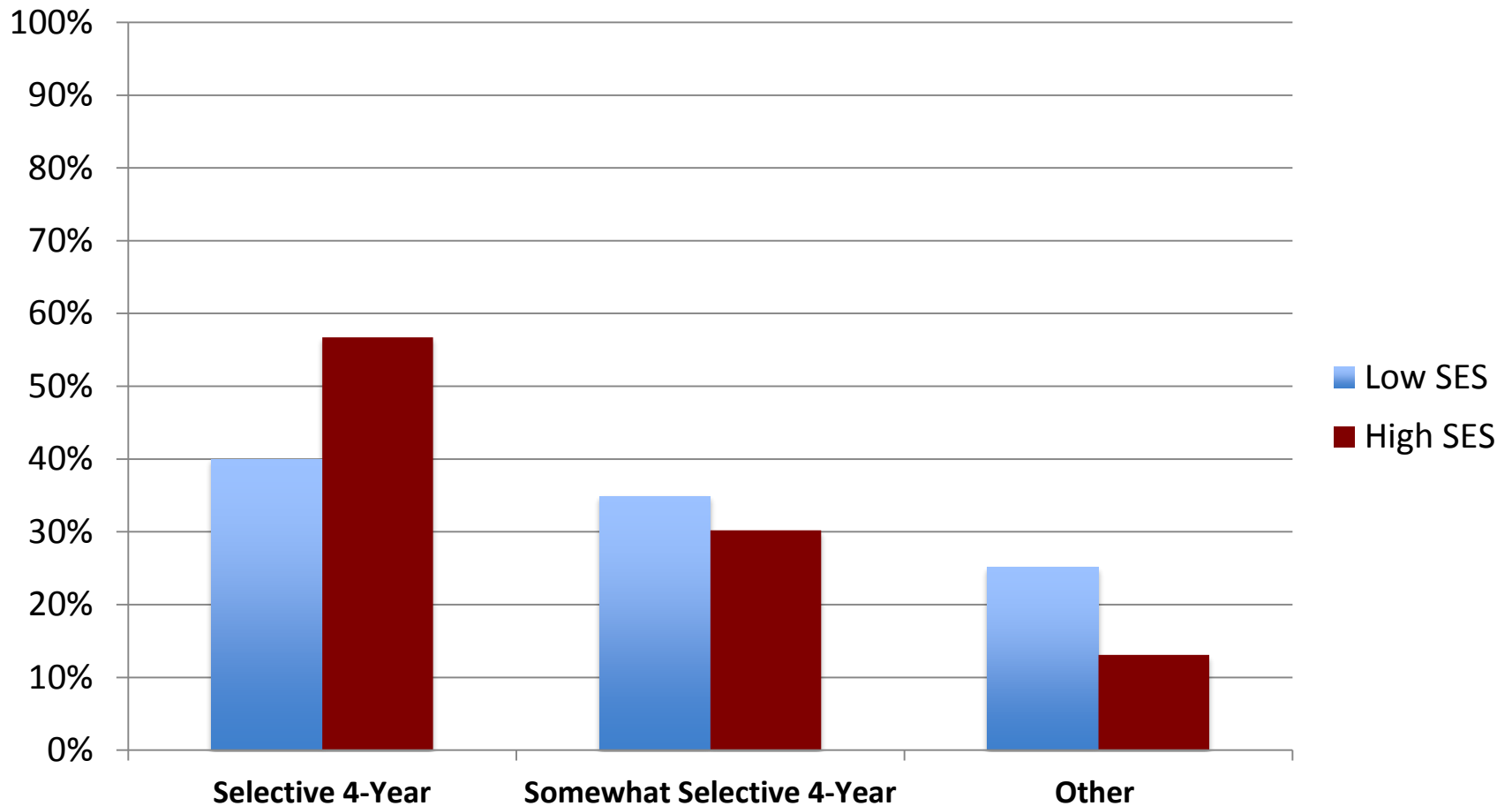


Source: "Postsecondary Attainment Differences by Socioeconomic Status." http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_tva.asp

Outline

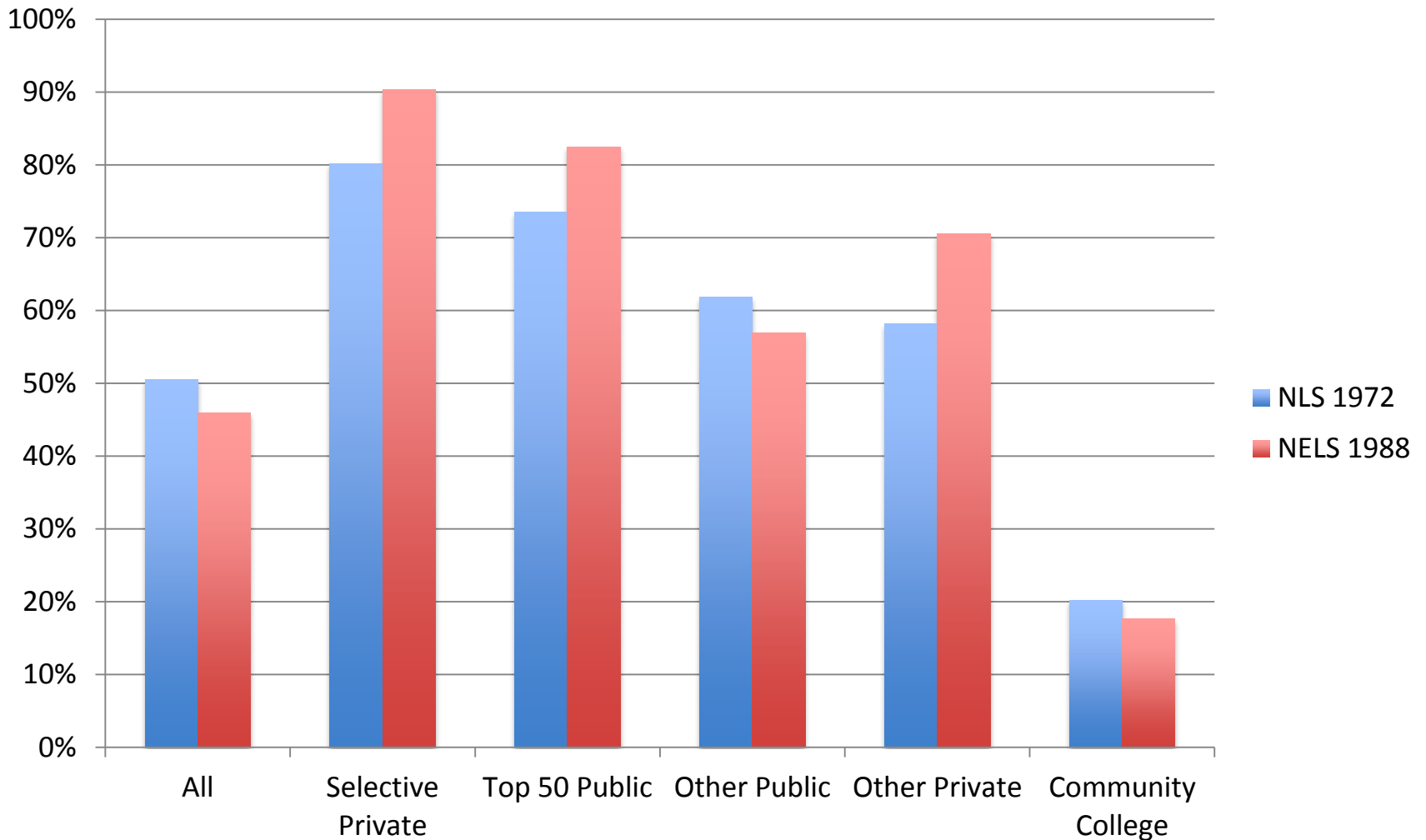
- 1. College Choice and “Undermatch”**
2. Hurdles in the Application Process
3. Policy Changes to Improve College Access

College Choices of Students with “Access to Selective Colleges” in ELS



Source: "The Full Extent of Academic Undermatch"
(Smith, Pender and Howell, 2013)

College Completion Rates over Time (Bound, Lovenheim, Turner, 2010)



Outline

1. College Choice and “Undermatch”
- 2. Hurdles in the Application Process**
3. Policy Changes to Improve College Access

The US College Choice Process

- Each college chooses its admissions rules.
 “Holistic review” is endorsed by law.
- Private colleges set tuition and financial aid:
 Price discrimination is based on income.
- Public colleges also charge tuition.
- Federal grant aid is based on the FAFSA form.

Inequality and College Applications

Optimal strategy suggests many applications, but low-income students face many hurdles.

- There aren't enough high school counselors.
- Application fee waivers are not easy to obtain.
- The FAFSA is unnecessarily challenging.

Fu (2014) estimates a cost of \$1,900 / 1st app.

Outline

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2. Hurdles in the Application Process
- 3. Policy Changes to Improve College Access**

Possible Policy Innovations

- Provide additional information (e.g. scorecard)
- Provide external guidance and support.
- Adopt structural changes (e.g. Common App) to simplify the application process.
- Adopt a centralized matching rule?

Critique of Policy Interventions

These comments have focused on inequality in college access in the US.

But there is a separate problem of low college completion rates overall, especially given the limited number of seats at selective colleges.

The policies described above are more likely to redistribute rather than increase attainment.