Transition to College

Center Note: Many students participate at our Center as part of their experiences at UCLA.* As one facet of her work with the Center, Irene Sumampouw chose to do a personal project focusing on the challenges moving on to college. The following is what she wrote (with some edits).

My concern about facilitating students transition to higher education comes from my experience and hope that the process is improving. My transition involved simply applying to whichever public colleges that I had an application fee waiver for and longed for an acceptance letter. If I had been provided more information or guidance about scholarships, financial aid, and the standards for college admission, I would have been better prepared. I walked into my first college orientation and saw pre-medicine, pre-health, and pre-law organizations recruiting new members, but I had no idea what any of this meant. It did not occur to me that others had already been planning for graduate school even before beginning their undergraduate education.

Given my experience, the special project I chose to pursue reviewed what high schools offer in facilitating student transition to college, and I did a brief, informal survey of what students experienced. Here is what I learned.

College decisions are largely affected by factors such as cultural identity, finances, family considerations, and experiences in high school and the community. Poor decisions, poor preparation, and an inadequate transition process are highly correlated with poor college performance (e.g., low grades, changing majors because of lack of awareness about the field, dropping out).

Current Transition Support

Of the free and accessible assistance offered in high schools, the most common is contacts with high school counselors. Counselors stress graduation requirements, maintaining grades, and higher education options. They do, however, vary in availability and degree of knowledge (and sometimes act on their biases).

Teachers and other staff often make time to provide information, give advice, or provide additional forms of preparation. High schools also offer Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses to prepare students for college, as well as providing college credit.

For students who are eligible, other programs are available in many high schools that provide rigorous academic support and guidance to facilitate transition into post-secondary education. The intent is to supply information and experiences that familiarize students with colleges and universities and engender hope and feelings that college is a realistic goal for them. Enrichment activities, including college visits, expose them to a college setting, majors, dorm experiences, extracurricular activities, and more. Application assistance may include test preparation, financial aid workshops that provide step-by-step guidance in filling out financial aid and fee waiver forms (e..g., FAFSA – Free Application for Federal Student Aid). Examples of such programs include AVID and the various federal programs bundled as TRIO programs.

AVID stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination. It is a "nonprofit college-readiness program designed to help students develop the skills they need to be successful in college. The program places special emphasis on growing writing, critical thinking, teamwork, organization and reading skills" (https://www.avid.org/what-avid-is). The course teaches students about college, provides peer collaboration on classwork, demonstrates organizational methods, and much more. The program prioritizes an inquiry-based classroom for students to ask questions and gain knowledge about preparation and admission to college. AVID is one of the most common accredited educational advancement programs.

With respect to federally funded programs, it should be noted that Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965 to enhance equity of opportunity for success at school as part of President Johnson's War on Poverty. Over the years, federal efforts have included a strong focus on increasing low income students access to higher education. The Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) provide prominent examples.

As described on the U.S. Department of Education website:

"These programs are Federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for ... low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to postbaccalaureate programs. ... The recipients of the grants, depending on the specific program, are institutions of higher education, public and private agencies and organizations including community-based organizations with experience in serving disadvantaged youth and secondary schools. Combinations of such institutions, agencies, and organizations may also apply for grants. These entities plan, develop and carry out the services for students. While individual students are served by these entities, they may not apply for grants under these programs. Additionally, in order to be served by one of these programs, a student must be eligible to receive services and be accepted into a funded project that serves the institution or school that student is attending or the area in which the student lives."

The following eight are listed as TRIO programs:
- Educational Opportunity Centers – https://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioeoc/index.html
- Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement – www2.ed.gov/programs/triomcnair/index.html
- Student Support Services – https://www2.ed.gov/programs/triostudsupp/index.html
- Educational Talent Search – https://www2.ed.gov/programs/triotalent/index.html
- Training Program for Federal TRIO Staff – https://www2.ed.gov/programs/triotrain/index.html
- Upward Bound – https://www2.ed.gov/programs/trioupbound/index.html
- Upward Bound Math/Science – https://www2.ed.gov/programs/triomathsci/index.html
- Veterans Upward Bound – https://www2.ed.gov/programs/triovub/index.html

Below are brief descriptions of Upward Bound, Educational Talent Search, and Student Support Services:

Student Support Services Program directly funds institutions of higher education to implement programs that assist students in meeting basic college requirements and promote completion of postsecondary education. Examples include academic tutoring, advice and assistance in post-secondary course selection, financial aid assistance, academic enrichment and development. This program is reported to have a positive effect on student success, persistence, and retention; participants are reported as more likely to remain enrolled in higher education, earn more college credits, and attain higher grade point averages. Peer tutoring, cultural enrichment, workshops, and instructional courses were the most effective aspects of the program.

Upward Bound was designed to help first generation students transition into postsecondary education. The program targets low-income and minority high school students who are working to improve academic achievement for succeeding in higher education. Academic instruction and tutoring in math, science, English, and foreign languages are provided. Also provided are support services such as counseling, mentoring, cultural enrichment, and work-study programs to improve the financial and economic literacy of students. There is opportunity to attend a 4-6 week summer program to acquire transition support and knowledge. Reports indicate that, compared to non-participants, Upward Bound students are more likely to enroll in college, apply for financial aid, and complete a college degree. It also has been suggested that the program enhances student and parent academic aspirations, increases enrollment in challenging courses, and increases credits earned in core academic subjects.

Educational Talent Search Program provides support to disadvantaged students who have demonstrated the ability to academically succeed. The program includes support services such as tutoring, career exploration, aptitude assessments, and financial aid counseling to improve awareness of financial assistance options related to enrolling in postsecondary schooling. As compared to non-participants, findings indicate that participants were more likely to apply for financial aid and enroll in higher education.

For updates about federal efforts to support access to and retention in higher education, see the U.S. Department of Education's website for the Office of Postsecondary Education – https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/programs.html.

Irene's Informal Survey of College Student About Their Preparation

I surveyed 56 females and 46 males, aged 18-22. Over half were Asian (65%), (24%) identified as Hispanic/Latinx, and the rest varied across ethnicities. The majority were the first in their families to attend college.

Most respondents reported their transition supports had primarily been high school counselors, AP/IB classes, and AVID. A smaller proportion also indicated they had concurrent enrollments and involvement in programs such as Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA). With respect to academic assistance, only 40% had access to free programs. (60% had no academic assistance or had to pay for it.)

Over three-fourths of the participants indicated that the supports were very helpful in their decision to pursue higher education. However, most also indicated that they still felt unprepared when entering college. They noted that their high school could have offered more supports, such as college mentorship, college visits, assistance in learning about the costs of college, filling out applications for scholarships and FAFSA, tutoring for admission test taking. (Some also indicated that they would have liked to have learned more – not just about college but about life as an adult and such basic skills as managing finances, learning how to study correctly, and so on.)

As to their choice of major, most chose out of interest; only one-fourth made a choice because of parental influence or a desire for financial security. Over half indicated that they had switched their major at least once. The commonly stated reasons for changing majors were: not enjoying the material and wanting to explore new topics, struggling academically, or wanting to go into a similar field but not the one originally chosen.

Among the open-ended comments made by more than a few respondents at the end of the survey was the feeling that they felt alone in the process of transitioning to higher education.

Concluding Comments

Enhancing equity of opportunity requires more funding to schools so that *all* student have free access to the type of transition supports provided by AVID and TRIO. In addition, current high school courses need to expand their efforts to promote personal development and life skills (e.g., social-emotional learning, study skills, handling finances) in ways that not only enhance college readiness, but also improve students' sense of independence and hope for the future.

At the same time, it is essential to ensure that transition supports are implemented as part of efforts at all schools to provide a unified, comprehensive, and equitable system of learning supports staring in preschool. Such a support system is designed to address barriers to learning and ameliorate learning, behavior, and emotional problems so that students are able to move on successfully to college, work, and life.

References Used In Preparing this Resource

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2017). *Improving school improvement*. Los Angeles: Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA. http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

Adelman, H.S., & Taylor, L. (2018). *Addressing barriers to learning: In the classroom and schoolwide.* Los Angeles: Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports at UCLA. http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/improving_school_improvement.html

Adelman, H. S. Taylor, L., & Nelson, P. (2013). Native American students going to and staying in postsecondary education: An intervention perspective. American Indian Culture and Research Journal, 37, 29-56. Special issue of the on "Reducing Barriers to Native American Student Success in Higher Education: Challenges and Best Practices." http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/native.pdf

Bryan, J., Moore-Thomas, C., Day‑Vines, N.L., & Holcomb‑McCoy, C. (2011). School counselors as social capital: The effects of high school college counseling on college application rates. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 89,* 190-199.

Center for Mental Health in Schools (2010). *Notes on transition planning for college*. Los Angeles: Author at UCLA. http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/transitiontocollege.pdf

Center for Mental Health in Schools (2010). *Interventions to support readiness, recruitment, access, transition, and retention for postsecondary education success: An equity of opportunity policy and practice analysis.* Los Angeles: Author at UCLA. http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/postsecondary.pdf

Center for Mental Health in Schools (2015). *First year transition into higher education: One student's experiences.* Los Angeles: Author at UCLA. http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/college.pdf

Center for MH in Schools & Student/Learning Supports (2018). *Enhancing equity of opportunity by improving access to higher education.* Los Angeles: Author at UCLA. http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/accesscoll.pdf

College Board (2017). *First-generation students*. Online at https://professionals.collegeboard.org/guidance/prepare/first-generation

Cunningham, P., Cardenas, J., Martinez, R., & Mason, M. (2006). LUCERO: Shining a light on Latino student retention. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 30*, 139-140

Graham, L.K. (2011). Learning a new world: Reflections on being a first‑generation college student and the influence of TRIO programs. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning,*127, 33-38.

Hughes, K.L. & Karp, M.M. (2006). *Strengthening transitions by encouraging career pathways: A look at state policies and practices.* New York: Community College Research Center, Institute on Education and the Economy, Teachers College, Columbia University.

McDonough, P. M. (2004). The school to college transition: Challenges and prospects. Washington,DC: American Council on Education. http://www.acenet.edu/bookstore/pdf/2004_IPtransitions.pdf

Malgwi, C.A., Howe, M.A., & Burnaby, P.A. (2005). Influences on students' choice of college major. *Journal of Education for Business, 80,* 275-282.

Martinez, M., & Klopott, S. (2005). *The link between high school reform and college access and success for low-income and minority youth.* Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum.

National Center For Education Statistics. (2016). *Status and trends in the education of racial and ethnic minorities 2016.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016007.pdf

National Council on Disability (2003). *People with disabilities and postsecondary education*. http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/2003/education.htm

Pascarella, E.T., Pierson, C.T., Wolniak, G.C., & Terenzini, P.T. (2004). First-generation college students: Additional evidence on college experiences and outcomes. *Journal of Higher Education 75, 249-284.*

Porter, S.R., & Umbach, P.D. (2006). College major choice: An analysis of person–environment fit. *Research in higher education*, *47,* 429-449.

Ruppert, S.S. (2003). *Closing the college participation gap: A national summary*. Denver: Center for Community College Policy, Education Commission of the States.

Saunders, M., & Chrisman, C. A. (2008). *Multiple pathways: 21st century high schools that prepare all students for college, career and civic participation*. Boulder and Tempe: Education and the Public Interest Center & Education Policy Research Unit. http://epicpolicy.org/publication/multiple-pathways

Sevier, R.A. (2000). *Building an effective recruiting funnel. Journal of College Admission, 169*, 10-19.

SREB (2005). *Building transitions from high school to college and careers for North Carolina youth*. http://www.sreb.org/programs/hstw/publications/2006pubs/06V22NorthCarolina.asp

Tierney, W. G., Bailey, T., Constantine, J., Finkelstein, N., & Hurd, N. F. (2009). *Helping students navigate the path to college: What high schools can do: A practice guide* (NCEE #2009-4066).Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/publications/practiceguides/

U.S. Department of Education (2003). *College transition programs: Promoting success beyond high school*. Washington, D.C.: Author. http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/hsinit/papers/trans.pdf

U.S. Department of Education (2016). *Advancing diversity and inclusion in higher education.* Washington, D.C.: Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development and Office of the UnderSecretary. https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/advancing-diversity-inclusion.pdf

Villalpando, O., & Solorzano, D. (2005). The role of culture in college preparation programs: A review of the research literature. In Tierney, W.G., Corwin, Z.B., & Colyar, J.E. (Eds), *Preparing for college: Nine elements of effective outreach*. New York: State University of New York Press. https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=gm9uuR8wMAYC&oi=fnd&pg=PA13&ots=15rTPdUIz5&sig=fFx3JRBsqymhphGHDyG_tmFW1sY#v=onepage&q&f=false

Ward, N.L. (2006). Improving equity and access for low-income and minority youth into institutions ofhigher education. *Urban Education, 41*, 50-70.

Watt, K. M., Powell, C. A., & Mendiola, I. D. (2004). Implications of one comprehensive school reform model for secondary school students underrepresented in higher education. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk, 9,* 241-259.

For more resources on *Transition To College*, see the Center's Quick Find on that topic at http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/qf/transitiontocollege.htm