

THE IMPACT OF ADVICE ON PRICE: EVIDENCE FROM RESEARCH

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This report was commissioned by TERI to provide a review of existing research findings, focused on the impact of student aid program design, operations, and marketing. This report was prepared under the direction of Ann Coles (Senior Vice President of TERI, coles@teri.org) and David Mundel (a consultant to TERI, david.mundel@comcast.net).

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Executive Summary

Nearly three quarters of adults believe that a four-year college education is not affordable for most Americans, yet at the same time almost sixty percent of those same adults believe that, regardless of costs, education is so indispensable that they will do whatever it takes to ensure their child's college attendance. In spite of the extensive financial aid system and low prices in the public sector, poor students and students of color still experience major barriers to college access and policy concerns for inequity continue. An assumed and potential source of college affordability information is high school counselors, but what do high school counselors know about college preparation, admissions, and student financial aid? How, if at all, does counselors' student aid knowledge affect students' postsecondary education aspirations, plans, and preparation for and eventual enrollment in college? What impact do counselors have on students' and parents' college-going aspirations, plans and knowledge? Can we reasonably assess counselors' knowledge and impact on the knowledge that students and parents possess?

After an extensive review of nearly twenty years of research literature, the best answers to these questions are: We have evidence on the college advising role of high school counselors in some schools, we have limited evidence of counselors' impact on students' (and parents') college dreams, plans and behaviors, and we have little to no empirical evidence of counselors' awareness of and familiarity with student aid.

We have evidence on the college advising role of middle school and high school counselors in some schools that suggests that counselors can have both positive and negative impacts on students' aspirations, plans, and enrollments as well as on their financial aid knowledge. Meeting frequently with counselors increases students' chances of enrolling in a four-year college, and if students, parents, and counselors work together and communicate clearly students' chances of enrolling in college significantly increase. Moreover, lack of college counseling related to academic preparation explains a large and statistically significant part of the effect of socioeconomic status on the college enrollment of low-income students.

Where they are available, counselors are seen by students and parents as primary and reliable sources of information, especially for aspirations and plans in the middle school years, and for providing information about college costs and financial aid in the junior and senior years. Good counseling results in statistically proven differences in students feeling that they have enough information. Students have more accurate information about college entrance requirements and costs when they consult with available and trained counselors.

What we know little about from research is the extent to which counselors are actually aware of and knowledgeable about college costs and student aid. This gap in our knowledge about counselors is because of an almost complete lack of empirical data from large, nationally representative databases and a small number of non-representative

studies, and a small number of good, but limited sample qualitative studies. Students and their families lack awareness and understanding of the affordability of college (knowledge of costs and available aid) and this lack of awareness and understanding limits many students of color and low-socioeconomic status (SES) students' preparation for college---aspirations are not formed or are abandoned when college seems out of reach. The existing research on "advice on price" suggests that timely, informed, and reliable advisement about college costs and financial aid can make a difference in college-going.

Consistent, frequent interactions (at least once a month) in groups and one-on-one was the kind of systematic counseling that proved to be effective for students and their families, with more frequent interactions with students being more effective. Communication among students, parents, and school personnel predicted increased enrollment in college.

Based on existing research, the average school counselor is relatively unavailable for any college task, and mostly uninformed about costs and financial aid. Moreover, the least available and least college-informed counselors are in schools that serve large numbers of underrepresented minority and low-SES students and their families.

Counselors, high school counseling, and college-related counseling are not the foci of adequate, nationally representative data collection. The few studies that have examined financially-oriented counseling are quite limited and the existing research base suggests that few students of color and low-SES students appear to be getting college affordability, or any, counseling. A few studies suggest that the complexity and obtuse, ever-changing nature of the student aid system limits counselor action and effectiveness for this role.

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Forward

Why Does It Have To Be This Way? Thoughts From Two Experienced Counselors

Coming from a combined total of a quarter century of college counseling experience, we are extremely grateful that someone is finally looking at the issue of college counseling, financial aid, and students' and parents aspirations, plans, and knowledge. The role of student aid and college costs are the brick wall of college access, especially, for parents. We, and other dedicated college counselors spend a lot of time and effort getting students into colleges, but enrollment is almost always dependent upon the next steps of understanding costs and students aid.

In our experience, and in the experience of the many counselors we know, understanding student aid comes from knowledge gained only at counselor's initiative and financial aid training is most often accidental. Moreover, learning student aid information is complicated by the fact that counselors can rarely get away from their offices. Teachers can plan ahead, do lesson plans, and get a substitute. Counselors can't get substitutes.

Our own training came from an experienced college counselor within our district, the occasional local college financial aid officer, and training workshops from California state groups and the College Board. Although we were grateful for state groups' training efforts, those workshops were only offered once a year. If our high schools could not do without us for that day in any given year, then we lost that opportunity for another year. Moreover, the registrations and travel costs for these conferences were un-reimbursed out-of-pockets expenses. We especially liked the College Board workshop because they were offered repeatedly throughout the school year, the trainers explained the FASFA line by line, and the workshops were always free (and included lunch).

The difficulties in learning about student aid is that it is the most convoluted and least pleasant thing to learn, it is like dental work. Also, student aid is ever-changing and very complex, especially the loan components. You can never learn too much, but learning it is not currently easy.

Our task was multidimensional and no job was harder: first we had to learn it, then we had to explain it, then we had to sell it to students and parents. Often, you're not interpreting the offer, you're talking about going into debt for this teenager who won't empty the dishwasher. We were also keenly aware of parents' impediments to understanding college costs and student aid. Parents' first reactions were almost always "How can we afford it?" After that, it was often a tough selling job to convince parents to not go the most inexpensive way, to help parents understand that what is best is to choose the college based on 'fit' for the student. The better that fit, the better invested that money is. You also need to keep in mind that parents were often math phobic.

We have several suggestions to improve counselors' knowledge of student aid. First NASFAA should encourage and welcome counselor's participation in their meetings, which could be important sources of training. They could do this by creating secondary

membership categories to lessen the financial barriers to membership and participation. Also, there is currently a complete disconnect between high school counselors and financial aid officers and between the relevant national and regional associations that we believe needs to be remedied if we are to enlist counselors to help lower college access financial barriers. If financial aid officers could talk more with counselors we could find a common language and vocabulary to use with parents. This would simplify the process for parents. There is an inborn trust that parents have in their student's counselor that is not yet there with financial aid officers.

We also have several suggestions for institutions. Campus aid officials too often communicate with parents and students almost exclusively through letters but they need to talk directly with students and parents. Offer more workshops in local high schools, in shopping malls, at places where students and parents gather. When you do communicate verbally, don't get lost in the details. Remember that you need to explain the aid system and packages over and over until students and parents understand. Help parents understand aid packages by breaking down costs to manageable pieces, for example monthly and weekly payments, rather than annual costs. Focus more on students and parents as consumers who need assistance in understanding aid packages and need to see the payoff of taking on loans and debt.

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Introduction

America has developed a postsecondary education system that is the envy of the world. Federal, state, and institutional policymakers have created extensive financial aid systems, with the federal government alone spending over 34 billion dollars in student aid and loan subsidies in 2002-03 (College Board, 2003). Yet, despite a marked shift in federal policy that emphasizes a broad range of financing options intended to support increased postsecondary participation, in this decade 440,000 potential students per year out of 15 million will be turned away from four-year colleges due to financial reasons (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2002). Nearly three quarters of adults believe that a four-year college education is not affordable for most Americans, yet at the same time almost sixty percent of those same adults believe that, regardless of costs, education is so indispensable that they will do whatever it takes to ensure their child's college attendance. (Ikenberry and Hartle, 1998; Miller, 1997).

In spite of low prices in the public sector and student aid, poor students and students of color still experience major barriers to college access (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000) and this inequitable condition has been the subject of much policy and advocacy activity over the last four decades. Fifty years after *Brown v. the Board of Education* declared that "education be made available to all on equal terms," college enrollment rates have grown but they remain unequal. Allen (2003) has acknowledged that even though the number of African American, Latino, and Native American students enrolled in college has been rising over the last 50 years, those enrollment figures are far below the representation of those students in K-12 schools and below what would be projected for average college attendance given those K-12 enrollment figures.

Specifically, 65 percent of 2002 high school graduates went immediately on to college (U.S. Department of Labor 2003). Although this is nearly two-thirds of high school graduates and seemingly a good proportion, it is far less than the college expectations that more than 90% of middle and high school students and their parents have (U.S. Department of Education 2003a). In a recent study funded by the Sallie Mae Fund and undertaken by the Tomas Rivera Institute, 84% of Latino young adults and 94% of parents believe that a college education was necessary to be successful today (2004). In another study, Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2003) found that over 80% of African American and Latino students had college expectations.

What is the cause of such a profound gap between students and parents expectations and actual enrollments? Alexander, Pallas, and Holupka (1987) found that academic preparation was more important than socioeconomic status in college enrollment. In a very recent study of leading higher education policy analysts and researchers, Stampen and Hansen (2004) found that the two highest priority options for improving college access were improving academic preparation and increasing need-based aid. However, the authors found that informing students about costs and ways of financing college, and educating parents about financing their child's college education were also rated by eight out of ten respondents as high priority tasks.

High-SES students attend schools that only offer courses that are college preparatory, that set expectations for high achievement, and that begin college preparation and advising when schooling begins. In short, those students live in a social and cultural environment that takes college for granted and they attend schools that have strong and powerfully influencing college cultures (McDonough, 1997).

The gap in K-12 academic preparation and college participation rates between white students and African-American and Latino high school graduates has widened (Oakes, 2004). Underrepresented minorities and low-SES students make their college access preparations constrained a lack of trained professionals to advise them. Moreover, within their schools and families there exists a lack college knowledge, training and advising, and the invisible barrier of their schools and teachers' low expectations and aspirations of them (Oakes et al. 2002; Obidah et al., 2004). Finally in a post-affirmative action era, if these students can prepare and get to college, they face campus climates of presumed lack of merit and racial hostility (McDonough, 1999). Because of these structural and motivational barriers, low-SES students and their parents struggle to get basic information and assistance both to sustain and fulfill college aspirations.

Across public K-12 education, the college enrollment of graduates is not built into secondary school accountability systems; no staff member has primary responsibility for college preparatory advising, nor is there a regularly identifiable K-12 staff member held accountable for graduates' college enrollment. School counselors would appear to be the logical choice for college access preparation and assistance, and are often assumed to be handling this role, yet they are inappropriately trained and structurally constrained from being able to fulfill this role in public high schools (McDonough, 2004). Nonetheless, counseling has long been identified as both a direct as well as an indirect asset to students' college aspiration development, preparation, choice and enrollment (Adelman, 1999; Boyer, 1987; Plank and Jordan, 2001; McDonough, 1997; Orfield and Paul; 1993; Romo and Falbo, 1996).

Focal Point: Financial Aid Information & the School Counselor

But what do high school counselors know about college preparation, admissions, and student financial aid? What impact do counselors have on students' and parents' college-going aspirations, plans, and knowledge? How, if at all, does counselors' student aid knowledge affect students' postsecondary education plans? Can we reasonably assess counselors' knowledge and impact on the knowledge of others?

After an extensive review of nearly twenty years of research literature, the best answer to these questions are: We have evidence on the college advising role of high school counselors in some schools, we have limited evidence of counselors' impact on students' (and parents') college dreams, plans and behaviors, and we have little to no empirical evidence of counselors' awareness of and familiarity with student aid.

The focus of this paper is to understand the impact of counselors and their knowledge on students' aspirations, and to identify how this might shape students' and parents'

awareness of student aid delivery systems, including the prediction of costs and aid in determining affordability.

I reviewed the literature on the impact of counselors on the development and maintenance of students' aspirations, college plans, and college preparations from middle school through high school, with particular attention given to the needs of low-socioeconomic status students and underrepresented minority students. Since this is a rather complex task, this review is structured to focus on the K-12 educational context, the development of student aspirations, college plans and preparations, and then the role and impact of counselors and counseling.

The K-12 Context That Shapes School Counseling

College access is fundamentally affected by K-12 educational contexts because this is the environment that shapes school counseling and holds it accountable (or not). Therefore, it is important to understand the state of K-12 education in order to understand the specific problem of student and parent knowledge of student aid.

Fifty years ago in *Brown v. the Board of Education*, America outlawed segregation in public schools, yet today we have an educational system defined by educational inequality. The pathway to college access is marked by vast disparities in college preparation, college knowledge, college culture within schools, counseling resources, and most especially college counseling assistance (McDonough, 2004).

These disparities cannot be ignored. For decades, a plethora of educational researchers have documented inequitable conditions in K-12 public education for low socioeconomic and racial and ethnic minority students (Goodlad, 1984; Jencks et. al, 1972; Kozol, 1991; Lightfoot, 1978; MacLeod, 1995; Oakes, 1985). Haycock (2001) found that between 1970 and 1988, "the achievement gap between African American and white students was cut in half. Progress came to a halt in 1988" (p. 8). Based upon these findings, Haycock identified two crucial components to improving K-12 education: a challenging curriculum and teachers who know their subjects and know how to teach.

K-12 students today are educated in highly segregated schools (Kahlenberg, 2001). Orfield (1988) found that Black and Latino students were concentrated in schools with high dropout rates and lack serious college preparation. Moreover, disparities in academic achievement progressively worsen as students advance from elementary to secondary schools (Obidah, et al. 2004).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, has resulted in a K-12 educational system that organizes its resources around a definition of quality that is attuned to higher levels of student performance on standardized testing rather than quality education overall. Obidah and colleagues argue that these tests misfocus school attention. Rather than have another set of costly indicators that deflect resources away from real school improvements, elementary and secondary schools need to be focused on college expectations, college information and academic preparation that have more academic and occupational currency (2004).

However, many journalists, policy advocates, and voters have become inured, desensitized, and overwhelmed by the magnitude of the need and obstacles to K-12 reform. The result is that we often stop paying attention to these first order problems and begin to think about intervention for the select few that we might possibly help.

Because most comprehensive public high schools in America do not have adequate resources to accomplish the college preparatory task, intervention programs have stepped into the breach to provide students with the necessary preparation and assistance for college. Today, there are significant but as yet uncalculated sums of money expended by colleges and universities in outreach, early intervention, and college preparation programs. One in three colleges and universities (Chaney, Lewis and Farris, 1995; NCES, 1996) offer some kind of outreach program to assist low-income, first-generation, or students of color in their college access quest. These programs may be found within the operation of admissions departments, as part of schools and colleges of education, as part of external relations offices, etc.

Yet most intervention programs target improving opportunities for individual students, rather than changing the structure or functioning of the schools, and thus are student-centered, rather than, school-centered programs. By definition, an intervention program intervenes between two things. Seemingly a pre-college program intervenes positively between a student and her/his college dreams or aspirations. However, more accurately, these programs intervene between students and school systems that are failing to prepare them for college.

By design, outreach programs are inequitable. Because they target certain students and or families, they do not and can not serve all students consistently. At best, our efforts are not a systematic solution to a policy problem of equalizing educational access across all populations, but in fact, a system of educational triage. Triage is a medical term that originated as an emergency medical mechanism designed to sort and allocate scarce treatment to patients in an effort to maximize the number of survivors. Our educational access triage efforts also are scarce treatments. Most estimates are that we are reaching approximately 10% of the eligible or needy populations and that it would take \$6 billion dollars to serve all eligible students (Swail, 2000).

Information about college requirements or financial aid will be of little value for students who are structurally put at great risk of never succeeding in their college preparations without the requisite coursework or foundational academic skills. Students needs to take the necessary academic preparation steps in high school, then apply, then enroll (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000). However, lack of college information can have a substantial dampening impact on college preparation and high school persistence rates.

School Counseling: Overview, Numbers, Structure, and Support

As a general characterization, school counseling is not a funding priority (Western Association of College Admission Counselors and The College Board, 1995; Hugo, 2004), is not a federal or state data collection priority (McDonough, 2004), college

advising tasks in public schools are often neglected or outsourced to early outreach intervention programs (Gandara and Bial, 2001), and yet, we have evidence that counselors' can have a major impact on critical student outcomes like enrolling in college (Gandara, 2002a; McDonough, 2004; Plank and Jordan, 2001).

History

A vocationally-dominated guidance movement emerged during the early 1900s as a result of urbanization, social reform, immigration, and industrialization (Beale, 1986). Several forces have influenced the development of modern counseling in public schools and within that, the role of college counseling. The first force historically has been and continues to be the competing demands between psychological development and testing versus administrative support roles--scheduling, yard duty, etc. (Hugo, 2004), versus the burgeoning personal and social needs (Boswell and Carr, 1998).

A second force influencing the role of college counseling within school counseling has been a longstanding, sometimes acrimonious debate about whether college counseling should be a part of school counselors' work. An argument against college counseling was that it was not actual guidance. At worst, it was considered the unseemly work of subtle persuasion or salesmanship (Tibby, 1965), and at best, little more than a simple task of proffering information. Until the 1990s, college advising was seen as simply information dispensing in the counseling literature (Cole, 1991) and, a significant segment of the college advising support industry is premised on this fundamental assumption (McDonough, Ventresca and Outcalt, 2000). Also, many counselors view college advising as esoteric (Cole, 1991; Murro, 1963) and in conflict with counselors' identities as mental health agents (Carroll, 1985). These same counselors bristle at the elitism inherent in providing disproportionate institutional resources for college advising to small numbers of college-bound students (Avis, 1982; NACAC, 1986), even though eight or nine out of all students now say they plan on going to college (U.S. Department of Education 2003a; Venezia, Kirst and Antonio, 2003).

A third force influencing the development of modern school counseling has been the impact of scholarly research that identified and criticized counselors' gatekeeping functions and subsequently influenced public discourse and policy debates (Rosenbaum et al., 1996). Cicourel and Kitsuse (1963) described and critiqued counselors' exercise of professional responsibility for determining which students were college material based on their personal assessments of students' character, maturity and appearance. Rosenbaum (1976) critiqued counselors' practices in thwarting working-class students' access to college preparatory curricular tracks and other means of discouraging students' college aspirations.

Other historical tensions affecting the development of counselors' complex, often conflicting, and always unmanageable roles have been counselors' inability to demonstrate their effectiveness in terms of student learning or development which has led to their vulnerability in times of budget cuts (Aubrey, 1982; Avis, 1982; Carroll, 1985; Cole, 1991; Kehas, 1975; Miller & Boller, 1975). In addition, escalating demands by principals to have counselors' assume additional administrative duties (i.e. scheduling,

yard duty) have led to further confusion over counseling missions (Cole, 1991; Day & Sparacio, 1980; Hugo, 2004; Monson and Brown, 1985).

Historically, counseling education programs (Hossler, 1999; McDonough, 2004; National Association of College Admission Counselors, 1991) have not included preparation in the area of college counseling. Moreover, counselors identified securing accurate information, staying up-to-date with ever-changing college admissions information, and advising students and parents on financial aid issues (Chapman and DeMasi, 1984) as their biggest professional development needs. Moles (1991) found that the typical counselor attended three in-service programs annually, while in a more recent study, Hawkins (2003) found that nine out of ten counselors received time off for professional development, however, only 42% received full financial support (registration fees, travel expenses, etc.), and only 21% of public school counselors received full financial support for those professional development activities. Counselor effectiveness is only possible by meeting counselors' pre-service and in-service professional development needs. Strong college counseling and support systems that assist students and parents with their college preparation, admission, and financial aid information needs will be possible only if counselors are provided appropriate training (Hossler et al. 1999; McDonough, 2004). Training for counselors also needs to distinguish between dispensing information and helping students interpret the meaning of admissions and student aid information in the context of their individual circumstances (McDonough, 1998; NACAC, 1990).

Over the last several decades, most counseling programs have migrated from education departments into psychology departments resulting in increased family and clinical practice training; a considerably more desirable and higher status role (Aubrey, 1982; Carroll, 1985), and a subsequent shift in professional identity to mental health agents whose primary goal is helping adolescents through the challenges and pitfalls of adolescence (Aubrey, 1982; Carroll, 1985; Huey, 1987). This identity and training has also offered alternative job options when school counseling positions have been eliminated (Carroll, 1985; Hull, 1979).

This role conception, resolving students' social-emotional problems, has consistently put counselors at odds with principals who seldom perceive this task as a central role for counselors and who instead perceived them as academic advisors or administrators with responsibilities for scheduling, testing or discipline (Chapman and DeMasi, 1984). Other researchers and counselor advocates have noted the role conflicts that emerge from differing expectations of counselors and principals (Hugo, 2004; Partin, 1990). Tennyson et al. (1989) found another conflict in counselors' competing roles: some of counselors' duties (i.e. enforcing school discipline rules) undermine counselors' roles as advocates and confidants.

The federal government's Occupational Outlook Handbook (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2004a/b) states that high school counselors "advise students regarding college majors, admission requirements, entrance exams, financial aid, trade or technical schools, and apprenticeship programs." Research and textbooks on school counseling say that counselors' work in schools includes 1) coordination of administrative tasks (scheduling, etc.), 2) counseling across academic, career and

personal domains, and 3) consultation with all school personnel on guidance tasks (Hannaford, 1987). The realities of counselor-to-student ratios mean that counselors often have to rely on large group guidance in order to reach, at least minimally, all students (American School Counselor Association, 2001; Gysberg and Henderson, 1997).

Freeman and Coll (1997) in a study of counselor role conflict and ambiguity surveyed members of the American School Counselor Association. Their results demonstrate that counselors experience role ambiguity, or confusion about the priorities of the job. Some counselors also experience role incongruity resulting from inadequate funding, materials and staff thus hampering their effectiveness. Finally, counselors experience role conflict vis a vis work overload and meeting the competing needs of different constituencies (parents, students, school personnel).

In an interesting contrast to the public school counseling profession's evolution, in college preparatory or "prep" schools, counseling as a profession began in the 1950s when the number of college applicants in the U.S. grew and heads of prep schools could no longer call admissions offices and "place" their students into a small number of elite colleges. In stark contrast to public schools, counseling positions in prep schools developed exclusively for the purpose of college counseling and the psychological counseling components so prevalent in public schools was outsourced to private therapists who have minimal connection to the school (Powell, 1996). Furthermore, another big public school counseling function, scheduling, is not a significant function in prep schools because of their relatively small size and their singular mission, therefore all course are college preparatory.

A related area of counseling research comes from private college counselors. With unavailable high school counselors, what can individuals do to strategically meet college assistance needs? Increasingly competitive college admissions have made college entry a complex, high risk, and stressful task. In the absence of cohesive college advising programs within schools, high SES students and their parents look to private counselors to: compensate for inadequate high school counseling, provide access to specialized knowledge, coach on tests and essays, "hand-hold" students through the admissions process, keep the admissions process organized and the student on schedule, and help with peer pressure and learning disabilities or other special circumstances. Private counselors spend more time with college-bound students than any type of school-based counselor, public or private, and most are available both by phone and in-person during evenings or weekends (McDonough, 1994; McDonough et al. 1997). The privatized and costly nature of this support precludes access by lower SES college aspirants who arguably need it most.

This conflict in professional roles is paralleled by a fragmentation in the professional associations. There are three major, national counseling associations: The American Counseling Association (ACA), the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), and the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC). High school counselors sometimes belong to ACA, often to ASCA, and only a small fraction belongs to NACAC. ACA and ASCA do not mention college advising in their websites or mission statements, with the exception of mentioning college entrance exams, which

reads: “Professional school counselors help students and their families become aware of college entrance test preparation programs” (American School Counselor Association, 2004b).

Counselors: Their Availability and Work

In U.S. public schools, there are not many counselors, and in the urban and rural schools, and schools serving low-SES, students and students of color, counselors are fewer and often unavailable for the college advising job. Counselors at the high school level already have an impossible job. In day-to-day practice, the work of counselors in public schools revolves around the tasks of scheduling, testing, and discipline (Delany, 1991; Lombana, 1985; McDonough, 1997, 2004; McDonough, Ventresca and Outcalt, 2000; Monson and Brown, 1985; Wilson and Rossman, 1993), with additional needs for counseling related to dropout, drug, pregnancy, and suicide prevention, as well as sexuality and personal crisis counseling (Miller 1998).

How many counselors are there in American schools? Counselor data are not systematically collected at federal and state levels, but what is collected documents how many professional educators carry the formal title of counselor. Using NCES data, Moles (1991) found that the average high school guidance program has 2.4 full-time professional staff members. The College Board, in a more recent counselor survey, (Maucieri et al., 2002) reported that the average number of counselors per high school was 2.5, that public high schools had a slightly higher ratio of 2.71, and that nearly all counselors reported providing college counseling as a part of their job.

Knowing the number of counselors in schools still does not offer enough of a context to understand the enormity of the school counseling task. The plain fact is that in public schools across America student-to-counselor ratios are outrageously high. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) recommends a maximum counselor-to-student ratio of 100:1. Yet, according to NCES the ratio is 284:1, although in large schools and schools with more than 20% minority students the ratios are 300+:1 (US Department of Education, 2003b). According to NACAC the national average is 490:1 (Hawkins, 2003) and other reports on the largest urban metropolitan areas find a 740:1 average (Fitzsimmons, 1991). California is the undisputed leader in student-to-counselor ratios at 994:1, followed by Minnesota at 800:1, and Arizona with 736:1. In a separate study of California counseling, Paul (2002) found an even higher ratio of 1,056 students assigned to an individual counselor.

What these ratios do not tell us is how counselors spend their time. The Association for School Counselors has set a benchmark that 70% of counselors' time should be spent in direct services to students. Across multiple surveys however, counselors report a lack of time and attention given to all forms of direct service to students, especially college counseling. A recent national study found that public school counselors spend 50% of their time in direct service to students (Miller, 1998). This study, which over-sampled college counselors---who have the most time to devote to college tasks--found that public school counselors spent an average of 20 hours per week in direct contact with students, carried an average caseload of approximately 330 students, and their perceptions of their

most important jobs were college counseling, personal counseling, academic counseling, scheduling and testing. With 330 students and five critically important tasks competing for 20 hours per week, these structural conditions effectively leave precious little time for meaningful college counseling.

According to the latest NCES study (US Department of Education, 2003b), less than half (43%) of all public school counselors spend 20% or more of their time on college advising. The difference here is likely that the NACAC study oversampled college counselors and private schools thus likely inflating their estimations.

An earlier study that was even more nationally representative (Moles, 1991), found that counselors reported equally valuing assisting students in making plans for college alongside helping students with personal growth and development. Yet counselors reported that 25% of their actual time was spent in personal counseling, and of that only 13% of their time was spent in college guidance.

In analyzing trends across annual NACAC member survey data, Hawkins (2003) summarized the state of the college advising task as follows:

On average, the precollege counseling infrastructure is lacking in secondary schools across the country, as the national student-to-counselor ratio remains high at 490 to one. Public schools and rural schools suffer from the worst counseling shortages. Schools with supportive environments for postsecondary education, including a well-staffed counseling department, reported significantly higher rates of college attendance.

NACAC, the professional association with the highest stake in college counseling, found that the great disparities in college counseling resources and activities are a direct result of the social class of the communities in which these high schools are located (1986). Specifically, they found that school counselors in upper income neighborhoods spent more time on college counseling. It is important to note, that those populations who are especially hard hit in terms of unmet or inadequate counseling are primarily communities, schools, and students of color (McDonough, 1999; Paul, 2002).

Imagine if schools had ratios of 500 students to one teacher, if we collected no data on teachers at the federal or state levels, and if we constantly cut teaching positions when budget crises hit. Now you have imagined the Rodney Dangerfield of education professionals, school counselors. Counselors have never been able to capture the attention of school administrators or policymakers and thus are frequent targets for budget cuts and are perennially ignored in accountability systems and data collection for educational indicator systems (McDonough, 1997; Whiston, 1996).

Both Corwin and colleagues (2004) and Hugo (2004) articulate the problems that arise for counselors who know too well the devastation that comes from neglect of counseling in public schools. Yet, Whiston (1996) documents that counselors also know that they lack the hard evidence that could persuade state and local policymakers and school

administrators to the need and potential benefits of hiring more school counselors. Moreover, Grubb and Watson (2002) concede that the general consensus is that counseling and guidance are among the weakest services in most high schools, and that there is very little research evidence on what counselors do.

Factors Influencing College Access

The development of an individual predisposition to college is a lengthy process (Chapman 1981; Hossler et al. 1989). A major new report from Educational Testing Service acknowledges that college preparation begins in preschool (Carnevale and Desrochers, 2003). Student aspirations precede the development of college plans, college preparation precedes college choice, and all of the foregoing are the precursors to college enrollment. Along the pathway to college and over the course of elementary, middle and high school, students pass through predisposition, search, and choice stages where they respectively: decide whether to attend college; search for information, consider specific colleges; and finally choose a single college (Hossler, Braxton and Coopersmith, 1989; Hossler, Schmidt and Vesper, 1999).

Generally speaking, the predisposition stage is where a student begins to develop occupational and educational aspirations, and this generally occurs from elementary school age on through middle school. Research shows that most students have some post-high school educational or job plans by the ninth grade (Stage & Hossler, 1989). It is in this stage that students and parents need to make sure the student is becoming informed of college entrance requirements, is enrolled in a college preparatory curriculum, is engaged in extracurricular activities, and is learning in broad-brush ways about financing a college education (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000; Hearn and Holdsworth, 2004).

During the tenth through twelfth grades, all students are in the search phase, which “involves the accumulation and assimilation of information necessary to develop the student’s short list of institutions” (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000, p. 9). Comparatively speaking, high-SES students in this phase have more information sources, are more knowledgeable about college costs, and tend to have parents engaged in saving for college (Flint, 1992, 1993; Hossler, Schmidt and Vesper, 1999; Leslie, Johnson, and Carlson, 1977; Miller, 1997; Olivas, 1985; Olson and Rosenfeld, 1984).

The choice phase of the decision to go to college begins in the eleventh grade and usually culminates in the twelfth grade. College costs and financial aid play different roles for high- and low-SES students. High-SES students know more about college costs but assume that parents are shouldering the major burden for financing college (McDonough, 1997). Low-SES students, many of whom are African American and Latino, are highly sensitive to tuition and financial aid (Heller, 1999), and specifically, they are negatively influenced by high tuition (McPherson and Shapiro, 1998; St. John, 1994) but positively influenced by financial aid (Berkner and Chavez, 1997).

For all students, academic achievement remains the most important determinant of whether and where they go to college (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000; Perna, 2004). Yet,

across all achievement levels, students from the lowest socioeconomic (SES) groups are less likely to apply to or attend college than are the highest SES students, while students of color and poor students are less likely to start or finish college (Cabrera, La Nasa, & Burkum, 2001; 2003; Levine and Nidiffer, 1995; Perna, 2000; Terenzini, Cabrera, and Bernal, 2001). Moreover, despite decades of concerted policy efforts and extensive financial aid resources, the college participation gap between low-income and high-income students today is roughly the same as the participation gap in the 1960s (Gladieux and Swail, 1999).

One of the major influences on college enrollments are individual college expectations (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000; Hearn, 1987) and oftentimes are the single strongest predictor of four-year college attendance (Thomas, 1980). Early college expectations, especially if developed at least by the eighth grade, stimulate planning for college as well as provide motivation for students to maintain grades and engage in necessary extracurricular activities (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000; Hearn and Holdsworth, 2004; Hossler, Schmidt and Vesper, 1999; McDonough, 1997). Also, expectations are significantly influenced by school structures and cultures (Alexander and Eckland, 1977; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Hearn & Holdsworth, 2004; Hossler, Schmidt, and Vesper, 1999; McDonough, 1997). Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2003) found that over 80% of African American and Latino students had early college expectations.

Many researchers have documented five preconditions for college access: having college plans by middle school (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2001; Stage & Hossler, 1989) having a family that holds college expectations for their student, a rigorous college preparatory curriculum (Alexander and Eckland, 1977, Bryk, Lee and Holland, 1993; Cabrera and La Nasa 2000; McDonough, 1997; Perna, 2004), a college culture (Falsey and Heyns, 1984; McDonough and Jarsky, In Press; Oakes et al., 2002), and available college counseling (Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, 2002; McDonough, 1997, 2004; Stanton-Salazar, 2000).

When Available for College Counseling, What Is the Evidence of Impact

We have evidence that when counselors provide college advising they can and do have an impact. Effective counselors have an impact on the following components of the college advising task: 1) structuring information and organizing activities that foster and support students' college aspirations and an understanding of college and its importance, 2) assisting parents in understanding their role in fostering and supporting college aspirations, setting of college expectations, and motivating students; 3) assisting students in academic preparation for college; 4) supporting and influencing students in decision-making about college, and 5) organizationally focusing the school on its college mission (Fallon, 1997; Hossler et al., 1999; McDonough, 2004). What follows is a summary of that evidence.

Information and Aspirations

The apparent disconnect between college aspirations and quality admissions information has been well-documented in the existing literature. In one of the better designed studies

reported here, Venezia, et al. (2003) found that students from six states overestimated tuition at all colleges, but especially so at less-selective four-year colleges and at community colleges. Using the same data and reporting on California students, Antonio (2004) found that students' knowledge of college entrance requirements and college costs and financial aid information was higher if they had consulted with their school counselor.

Middle and high school counselors' information-dispensing has been shown to positively impact students' motivations and expectations particularly through providing information on college preparations, admission testing and financial aid (Fallon, 1997). Hutchinson and Bottorff (1986) found that 79% of the students surveyed identified college information as an important need, yet only 59% of these students felt that their counselors were able to provide college information.

Research has also indicated that information dissemination must not be construed as a stand-alone task. Rather quality college information must be combined with meaningful admissions advising by counselors. One study found that 90% of students felt that their school counselor was a "knowledgeable and approachable" source for information about colleges and universities and that this was their main reason for seeking out the counselor (Hutchinson and Reagan, 1989). But, this study also found that students felt that they were not getting the assistance they needed from counselors, thus drawing out the distinction that information is a necessary but insufficient condition for meaningful college assistance.

Gandara (2002a), in a study of an outreach program with an extensive counseling component, found that at each high school grade level, increasing majorities of program students felt that they had all or most of the information they needed to prepare for college, and the differences between these students and the control group students with no intervention were dramatic and statistically significant. The students who had in-depth counselors relationships reported that their counselors significantly influenced how hard the students worked in high school, their decision to go to college, and their future goals.

In the recent federal study of parents and youth, only 18% of all high school students and 30% of parents had information on college costs (U.S. Department of Education 2003a). However, this knowledge improved over time because 52% of juniors and seniors had information on college costs. As might be expected, poor students and students of color were less likely to have that information than high-SES or White students.

Furthermore, vast majorities of students reported that they had discussed college entrance requirements with teachers or counselors (74%) and had discussed the type of college they expected to attend (69%). However, smaller numbers of all high school students (≤ 50) had discussed financial aid or college costs with teachers or counselors. Again, as students progress through high school those numbers improved: three-quarters of juniors and seniors discussed college costs and financial aid with teachers and counselors. Unfortunately, the data in this report do not disaggregate the teachers from counselors.

Looking internationally, the Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) published a recent report (2003) indicating that previous research had found that counselors were the third ranked source of information on financial aid for students. In their 2003 study, CCDF found that students consistently reported that school counselors were “among the first and most reliable sources of information on post-secondary education opportunities, financial support and assistance with decision making” (p. 25). Strikingly, the CCDF found that the state-of-the-art guidance programs were a very highly rated information source for students on all types of financial aid. Nonetheless, students were still frustrated by the complexity of student aid information and applications, and by the daunting perceptions of costs and potential student debt load. No comparable US study exists.

Parents

Counselors have both direct effects upon parents and indirect effects on students via parents. Counselors’ first impact on parents is on their efforts to foster early college aspirations in their children (Bouse and Hossler, 1991; Hossler et al., 1999). Counselors can impact student plans and progress indirectly through their parents, especially early on in middle school (Hossler et al., 1999). Boyer (1987) identified parents’ need for basic college information, while Chapman and DeMasi (1984) documented substantial parental needs vis a vis financial aid. Yet, NACAC (2000) evidence showed that many U.S. high schools did not even have the simplest of parental college informational and engagement activities.

Puente is a University of California systemwide outreach program which has an extensive counseling component. Using interview, focus groups, and participant observation data from across all of the sites, Grubb, Lara and Valdez (2002) found that counselors worked with parents and families through workshops on financial aid, college entrance requirements, and academic preparation in high school in ways that were more akin to parental education. Consistent, frequent interactions (at least once a month) in groups and one-on-one with families and more frequently with students was the kind of systematic counseling that proved to be effective.

Given the positive findings about parent and student aid information, it is particularly important to note the specific needs of Latino students and their families identified in a recent Harris poll. The Tomas Rivera Policy Institute and The Sallie Mae Fund (2004) recently released a descriptive-level study which found a direct correlation between awareness of financial aid and college enrollment. More than half of Latino parents and 43% of Latino young adults could not name a single source of student aid. Additionally, two-thirds of Latino parents said that they did not receive any student aid information before their child left high school.

McDonough (1997) found that counselors’ major work with parents was to provide them with informational materials and to organize meetings. Another major finding was that middle and upper-middle class parents often were dissatisfied with the quality of school counseling services and sought extra-school supplemental services as a result. The two major extra-school services parents most often sought were information resources (i.e.

guidebooks/rankings magazines) and private counselors. Low-SES parents expressed neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction and just assumed the adequacy of counseling services or secured a private Catholic education in order to get better curricular and advising supports.

Hossler et al. (1999) found that the major need of parents was to have an accurate understanding of college costs and the financial aid system. Plank and Jordan (2001) found that counselors were critical in educating parents and assuaging their concerns about college costs and potential debt. They also found that communication among students, parents, and school personnel predicted increased enrollment in college but that parent-student discussions that happen after sophomore year are “too little, too late.” However, they did find that even in weak schools, strong families can still help their child in securing financial aid information.

Olson and Rosenfeld in well-designed study using the Parent Survey of the High School and Beyond database of NCES, found that roughly half of all parents talked to high school counselors about financial aid information, but more lower income parents utilized counselors than their higher SES peers. Yet, talking with high school counselors and college admissions representatives had a relatively small impact on parents’ student aid knowledge. (It is difficult to know for certain, but the difference between this finding and the Hossler et al. (1999) cited in the previous paragraph may be that the latter study is 15 years more recent than Olson and Rosenfeld and that Hossler did not use the national sample that Olson and Rosenfeld used.) However, in their predictive analyses, Olson and Rosenfeld found that there was no evidence that counselors were providing misinformation, yet counselors were not as effective as other sources of knowledge (college representatives, loan officers, books and pamphlets). The authors conclude that a “consumer gap may be as deleterious as an income gap” for perceptions of college access (1984: 476).

In another well-designed study, Terenzini et al. (2001) found that the poorest students and their families were dependent on school counselors for financial aid information and assistance, while higher-SES students used the counselor as one of many sources that also included their own informational and experiential sources, other students, printed materials, college representatives, and private counselors.

Counselor Impact on Academic Preparation

Evidence suggests that counselors, where available and focused on college advising, positively impact students’ college preparation. Several studies have found that counselors’ scheduling of students into college preparatory classes has a positive impact on academic preparation, (Hossler et al., 1999; Hutchinson and Reagan, 1989, Rowe, 1989). Yet, several studies report counselors’ limited availability for student advising. Moles (1991) found that only one half of the students in the HS & B study had talked to a guidance counselor about planning their school program. Other researchers have found that counselor support is differentially available to students based on social class and race (Gandara, 2002b; Gandara and Bial, 2001), as well as gender and rural statuses (Lee and Ekstrom, 1987). The National Commission on the Senior Year found that college access

would improve if every high school student took a college preparatory curriculum (Viadero, 2001).

Advising

Across several studies, we have evidence that the breadth and depth of school counselors' information and support accounts for the variance in impact upon students and their families college planning and enrollment. Counselors tend to become more influential over the middle and high school years, especially by junior year of high school, when students are engaging in their choice phase (Hossler et al., 1999). Yet, the lack of counseling or wholly inadequate counseling at these advanced stages has been found to be a major barrier to college preparation (McDonough, 1997; Romo and Falbo, 1996).

In a well designed study using NELS and careful statistical controls, Plank and Jordan (2001) conducted a longitudinal study of 10th graders, 12th graders, and then students two years after high school graduation. They supplemented their student analyses with data from administrators and parents. Plank and Jordan found that counselors who provide high levels of guidance and assistance increase a student's likelihood of reaching a four-year college (2001). Moreover, utilizing financial aid information sources and completing a financial aid application has significant effects on enrolling in college and enrolling in a four-year college. Plank and Jordan concluded that efforts to improve high school counseling and equalizing students' access to counseling would likely have a significant impact on improving college access for underserved populations because absent college counseling explains much of the college under-enrollment of low-income students.

Hossler and Vesper (1993) found that when counselors actively supported students and their family through the college admissions process, as opposed to simply disseminating information, it had a critical influence on students' college pursuits. King (1996) found that low-SES students were more likely to attend a four-year college if they frequently met with a supportive counselor. Lapan et al. (1997) found that students who were enrolled in high schools with fully implemented guidance program reported receiving more career and college information. Rosenbaum, Miller and Krei (1996) found that if counselors provided students with high levels of information and guidance, the counselors had a significant positive impact on students' enrollment in a four-year college. Rosen et al. (1998) found that college guides and counselors were the most important influences shaping the set of colleges that students were initially aware of and therefore considering applying to, and counselors' advice was the most influential influence behind mothers and fathers' advice in the final college choice decisionmaking.

Gándara & Bial (1999) identified six elements that the most effective outreach programs shared. The first of these elements elaborated upon was the importance of an adult who served as a key referent to participants by guiding them in their college planning over time. Counselors were often cited as this key referent. Also, Gandara (2002a) in an analysis of an outreach program that provided advising, tutoring, and a holistic approach to supporting students and their families including extensive counseling, used statistically matched student pairs to test the impact of the program on students' aspirations,

preparations, and enrollment in college. She found that the aspirations of Latino students in the program resembled the high rates of aspirations held by non-program White and Asian-American students, more than resembling non-program Latino students. Counselors also influenced program participants in terms of their motivation in school, their decision-making to go to college, and their goal orientation. The differences between students were “huge and highly statistically significant” (p. 482).

African American and Latino students as well as first-generation college bound students are significantly more likely than their white counterparts to have their college plans influenced by their high school counselors, both potentially positively and negatively (Lee and Ekstrom, 1987; Plank and Jordan, 2001). Yet these are the students who are least likely to have counselors, the most likely to have underprepared counselors, and the most likely to have counselors pulled away from college counseling to work on other counseling tasks (Paul, 2002). Moreover, even negative counseling can have positive impacts when students resist counselor underestimations of their abilities and set out to prove the counselor wrong (Perez, 1999).

Many researchers have found evidence of deep and well-founded student and parent distrust of school counselors because of racist and socioeconomic biases in advising (Auerbach, 2002; Gandara and Bial, 2001; Oakes, 1985; Perez, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Students of color express grave reluctance to use counselors because they are perceived to be uninformed and hostile (Corwin, et al., 2004; Gandara and Bial, 2001), have advised low-income students and students of color into general education or vocational classes (Atkinson, Jennings, and Livingston, 1990; Gandara and Bial, 2001; Oakes, 1986; Rosenbaum, 1976), provide their support differentially to students based on social class, race, gender and rural statuses (Corwin, et al., 2004; Gandara, 2002a; Gandara and Bial, 2001; Lee and Ekstrom, 1987), and historically have thwarted students’ and their parents’ educational aspirations (Lareau and Horvat, 1999; Perez, 2000). Matthey (1989) found that first-generation college students were less satisfied with their counselor than those students whose family members had already attended college and could provide other college knowledge and assistance.

Libsch and Freedman-Doan (1995) assessed student satisfaction with counseling services. They found that most students would have preferred more assistance from counselors in selecting their coursework and assistance in developing their education plans. Other studies find first generation and students of color unable to capture their counselor’s attention, having their college aspirations dismissed as inappropriate, or having their parents attempts at securing appropriate advising thwarted (Oakes, 1985; Perez, 2000).

So we do have evidence that counselors can and do have impacts, positive and negative, on students directly and indirectly through their parents. On the positive side, across many studies we have evidence that developing a college knowledge and advising infrastructure within high schools and developing interconnected and interdependent schools and families were necessary to improving access for all students.

Some of counselors' negative impacts has to do with their unavailability and their inadequate availability for college counseling tasks. Of perhaps greater concern is the

apparent connection between information dissemination and active forms of support to the college enrollment process for lower SES students. While the parents of high SES students are able to supplement school-based college guidance, such is not the case for many lower income students. The critical nature of the school counselor function speaks to a need for appropriate policies that support increased numbers of school-based counselors, with more time committed to college counseling tasks.

In high school, counselors need to be consistently available to students to provide basic college information as well as financial aid and costs information. Empirical evidence indicates that the more available counselors are to students for guidance, and not merely information dispensing, the better prepared students are and the higher the likelihood that they will enroll in a four year college (Hutchinson and Reagan; Hossler et al. 1999; McDonough, 1997, 1999; Plank and Jordan, 2001; Powell, 1996; Rowe, 1989).

The dissemination of financial aid information and the requisite support that must be accompany it appears to be a critical component of any college guidance task. Moreover, we have clear evidence of counseling's ability to improve college enrollments for low-SES and students of color. Yet, the structural impediments that inhibit quality counseling also inhibit clear understanding of finance-related issues such as college cost-structuring and pricing, affordability, and the multitude of aid options available privately and at the state and federal levels. The existing structural organization of schools makes meaningful guidance in this area increasingly challenging.

Organizational Focus on the College Access Mission

Much of the foregoing research emphasizes individual attributes as a key determinant in measuring impact and/or inequality, while neglecting the larger role of educational organizations. The school effects literature posits that organizational contexts are critical to understanding the empirical patterns of individual educational outcomes. This research analyzes schools' organizational structures, resources, constraints, and contingencies (Coleman, 1987; Oakes, 1989; Oakes et al. 2002) in order to document how different school environments produce different curricula, administrative supports, and student outcomes. Building on the empirical and conceptual insights of organizational culture and climate research (Martin, 1992; Ouchi and Wilkins, 1985; and Schein, 1990), school culture analysts have established a strand of this research which identifies the cultural and symbolic elements of schools that affect organizational performance and goal attainment (McDonough, 1997).

Researchers have for some time called on college access scholars to identify the specific individual and structural causal processes of educational attainment—how the web of opportunities, structural arrangements, contingencies and timing—work together to shape families' and students' interactions with, and movements through, schools (Hearn, 1987). Some researchers have responded to that call by writing about the organization culture and climate of schools as it relates to college (McDonough, 1998; Oakes, et al., 2002) and the uneven distribution of educational resources, and therefore, the unequal distribution of educational opportunity.

But structure and agency intersect at the level of individual aspiration and organizational capacity to enable that aspiration. The expectations that teachers, parents, and other adults have of students are integral to the earliest decisions they will make about college. Too often, students are labeled early in their educational careers as “college bound” or “non-college bound.” Those labels are persistent and typically have a profound impact on the choices students make, the options they see for themselves, and their ideas about what is realistic (Oakes, 1989).

The critically important question in evaluating the high school's role in the transition to college is: What impact does the high school counseling operations have on enabling or constraining students in securing adequate college preparation, such as financial planning, and the necessary preparation and financial information on college access? If schools are not structured in such a way that they can reinforce the feasibility of college among students and their parents at the earliest stages of schooling, the chances for postsecondary attainment are tempered dramatically. Cost and affordability are component pieces of the larger feasibility question. Without systematized school-based college guidance that includes accurate, well-informed support related to financial aid, college-aspirations will remain de-contextualized from any notion of achievement.

A student's decision-making and attitudes about college are affected by both the normative expectations that exist among the students, parents, and faculty of a school, as well as by anticipated consequences, and what alternatives will be considered or ignored. Not surprisingly, those expectations are highly susceptible to influence from the school and the individuals who exist within it. This combination of social networks and environment is an individual's frame of reference for college planning. The end result is that students who are expected to go to college, by and large, do so. Those for whom the expectations do not exist are never given the chance to make it to college because they are denied the support, information, and resources such as financial aid that is necessary to get there.

One common thread running through the research evidence on the school's role in structuring students' aspirations and actual college preparatory opportunities is that guidance and counseling staff can help to establish a school's college culture. But that culture needs to be reinforced and nourished by knowledgeable staff that is able to affect students in daily interactions apart from specific college preparatory programs (Hotchkiss & Vetter, 1987; McDonough, 1994 and 1997; McDonough and Jarsky, In Press).

If all students are to receive the guidance and preparation that will allow them to make well-informed decisions about how to effectively prepare for and choose a college, we must change not only the structure of counseling, but also the cultures of our schools. Research indicates that all students desperately need basic information about college options, particularly for more selective colleges and that low-SES students and students of color are the least likely to receive this information (McDonough, 1999). Moreover, research also indicates that students need to receive it early enough in their educational careers (by eighth grade) for them to enroll in appropriate classes (Cabrera and La Nasa, 2000; Hart, 1992). Middle and high schools have important and irreplaceable roles to

play in guiding each student's decision-making about whether or not a four-year college is an option (Hart, 1993/4).

Besides assisting with the development of college plans, middle and high schools counselors influence students' college options and decisions by how they structure the flow and content of information; make explicit expectations that highlight or downplay specific options; limit the search for alternatives; and impose a specific schedule (McDonough, 1997). Middle schools have fewer counseling resources, and few resources, if any, devoted to college preparation (Hart, 1992; 1993/4). High schools have different structural arrangements for counseling in general, and college advising in particular (McDonough 1997).

Guidance counselors have a direct impact on students, and more importantly, they create and implement the school's normative expectations for students' college destination and how to prepare for them. They create a worldview for students and their parents that delimit the full universe of 4000 possible postsecondary choices into a smaller range (1-8) of cognitively manageable considerations. Schools and counselors construct this worldview in response to their perceptions of the parents' and community's expectations for appropriate college destinations, combined with the counselor's own knowledge and experience base. Among the myriad of potential considerations faced by the counselor in constructing expectations for students, financing is a formidable factor (US Department of Education, 2003a). The greater their understandings regarding college pricing and financial aid options, the greater the possibility for a more accurate assessment of individual student postsecondary options and therefore their impact on student expectations.

Most public high schools' minimal guidance services are developed in reference to the identified needs of the average student in that school. Sometimes because of desegregation and other reasons, high schools have racially and socioeconomically disparate student populations with widely varying needs and family resources that they can use to supplement school assistance. Any definition of normative in a heterogeneous population runs the risk of privileging those students who fit the norm and disenfranchising those students whose needs are silenced by the operation of a single, dominant norm (Gibson 1986). For example, we often find in large urban school districts with students of color bused in from other neighborhoods, that schools within schools develop. In these situations, white and more economically advantaged students end up in college prep tracks while students of color and poor students end up disproportionately in general or vocational tracks (Horvat, 1996; Hugo, 2004). Counseling often is tied to the track placement of students, therefore, if you are not in the college track you do not receive college information (Horvat, 1996; Hugo, 2004).

Daily, the frequency and nature of students' and counselors' college preparatory interactions are shaped by a school's policies, resources, and organizational structures. The guidance process impacts students through subtle and unobtrusive controls and assumes that students are familiar with the communication channels for the transmission of college information, know the specialized college choice vocabularies, and are aware

of the necessary preparations, prerequisites, tests, financial information, deadlines and appropriate timetables (McDonough, 1997).

But, what will it take and how can ordinary public schools begin to mimic the college cultures of high-SES schools to foster increased college aspirations and attainment? The school change and implementation literatures offers insight into that transformation process by documenting that effective school change must be guided by strong local leadership, reflective of the micro-realities of organizational life, steady (non-episodic), and systemic (not add-ons or special projects) (McLaughlin, 1992). Specifically, extensive evidence demonstrates that:

- Change is effective only in proportion to local leadership, capacity and motivation;
- Staff attitudes can change simply as a result of repeated engagement in new organizational routines (changes in daily practice);
- Real, sustainable change comes from understanding and accounting for the interconnected conditions that influence classroom and administrative practice in education; and
- Ever-present competing pressures and demands in everyday school life will always doom special projects and add-ons, so systemic and on-going change offers the only hope for lasting impact.

In sum, when the culture of a school is successfully transformed to the point that all students see college as an option and are able to make decisions about their futures in informed ways supported by knowledgeable school staff, then the impact of such changes is longer-term and much more profound. Increasing college access for low-SES students and students of color will only come from creating college cultures in ordinary public schools that will build and nurture college aspirations, as well as provide the structural, motivational and experiential opportunities to help enroll in college and secure the financial aid resources to do so.

McDonough and Jarsky (In press) have developed and tested a framework of nine interrelated principles of a college culture for raising aspirations, better informing students and families, improving academic preparation, and transforming counseling in ordinary public schools in urban and rural environments. They urge college cultures be adopted by public schools and they provide empirical evidence of cultural and programmatic initiatives that offer policy remedies for collectively shaping the perceptions and expectations of low-SES students and students of color at the K-12 level. Their college culture principles involve teachers, counselors, school leadership and families as partners and they identify ways that systemic change can take place, many with little or no new financial investments. Their principles are: College Talk, Clear Expectations, Information and Resources, Comprehensive Counseling Model, Testing and Curriculum, Faculty Involvement, Family Involvement, College Partnerships, and Articulation.

Hugo (2004) in a study of four public high schools that sent higher than average (20-26%) numbers of students on to four-year colleges, described those successful schools as having: multiple types of academic preparation programs, including small learning communities and outreach programs targeted to different student populations; comprehensive college counseling programs that worked with families, teachers and external partners; and counselors who believe that all students should be exposed to college options and who motivated students toward those goals. Hugo's counselors saw their main function as "motivators" (p. 148) and had enlisted school leadership in articulating a school mission that all students should be prepared for college access. In these schools, all counselors were college counselors and the principals and heads of guidance developed their school's master schedule to provide a maximum of courses that satisfied competitive college entrance requirements.

The Pathways to College Network is a national alliance of researchers, policymakers, funders, advocates, and practitioners who after 30 papers and policy briefs summarizing the state of the art in research and practice on college access developed a "Shared Agenda" for improving college access for underserved students. Those student are underrepresented minorities, first-generation college-bound students, low income students and students with disabilities. Their action agenda has six principles: expect all underserved students are capable of preparing for, enrolling in, and succeed at college; provide multiple forms of high-quality academic preparation for these students and their families; embrace social, cultural and learning style differences; involve all of K-16 and employers in developing policies and practices to help students through educational and workforce transitions; have adequate quantity and quality school personnel who can help and keep financial aid robust; and finally assess regularly (2004).

Finally, Venezia, Kirst, and Antonio (2003) found that the major barrier to students' high aspirations is a fractured K-16 educational system that sends conflicting and vague signals to students and their families about how to prepare for and succeed in college. They documented significant and persistent inequality in college counseling, course offerings, college information availability, and partnership with local universities that could facilitate students' college visits and recruiter visits to high schools.

Conclusions

To recap, good counseling results in statistically proven differences in students having adequate information, and can increase a student's likelihood of enrolling in a four-year college. Counselors can be especially influential for college aspirations and plans in the middle school years and can be an effective, primary, and reliable source of college admissions, costs and financial aid at the junior and senior grade levels. Students have more accurate college entrance and costs cost information when they consult with available and trained counselors. The research we have on advice on price suggests that timely, informed, and reliable advisement about college costs and financial aid can make a difference in college-going.

The foregoing evidence shows that counselors potential for increasing the postsecondary attainment of poor students and underrepresented students can be increased if they:

- receive greater pre-service training and ongoing professional development for the college and student aid advising task,
- are given more structural support to focus on college preparatory responsibilities,
- can build trust with underserved students and their families,
- can improve their overall knowledge base on admissions criteria and finance-related information, and
- increase their own and their schools' commitment to supporting students' college aspirations through a sustainable college-going culture.

Finally, we need to make nationally representative data collection on counselors, high school counseling, and college-related counseling a priority. Given the substantial lack of national databases on counselors or their effectiveness, the first need for research would be extensive, ongoing and longitudinal data collection by NCES and/or by other data collection agencies. We need data on how counseling loads are organized within schools.

Different models exist in American public schools with two dominant approaches: the alphabetic model where counselors divide up the student caseload and each counselor carries the same quantity of students in grades 9-11 and then a college counselor carries the senior caseload; versus a counselor working all of the high school years with the same groups of students and then handing off the students in the senior year to a college counselor? In the latter case, what kind of professional development is available for counselors to get consistently retooled for college advising, establishing contacts with colleges, financial aid organizations, etc? In the former case, what do we lose by having college counseling only in the senior year with a counselor who is meeting students for the first time? What are the relative strengths and weaknesses of each of these models? For what student outcomes are they most effective?

We need to know how frequent counselor interactions are, and do all students get the same amount of contact with those counselors or do some get different amounts. For example, in some schools the best students have more frequent and individual interactions with counselors while the average student gets en masse guidance in classes.

In our era of multiple and frequent accountability testing, how much time are counselors spending in testing? How much time is devoted to yard duty versus individual student advisement? How much time is devoted to scheduling, discipline, crisis intervention, etc?

What do principals believe the proper role of counselors should be? How much do principals depend on counselors to be additional administrators and are they willing to free up their time for advisement? What about teacher attitudes and beliefs about the proper role of counselors?

We need data from students and parents on the specifics of counseling interactions and its impact? How knowledgeable and helpful were counselors on information dispensing,

helping students with essays, coaching on admissions tests, advising, guiding students and parents through decision-making, negotiating with college admissions offices and financial aid offices?

We also need national scope, in-depth qualitative studies of counseling interactions from the counselor, student and parent perspectives, especially across socioeconomically and racially diverse student groups. We need to look at alternative sources of adult counseling or mentoring and compare their effectiveness with counselors' effectiveness. For example, what about lower teacher-student ratio schools and the role that teachers can and do play in knowing and advising students? How much do teachers know about college costs and entrance requirements? What about university outreach programs and their advising models? Can external advising be effective without the ability to impact the school in structuring and providing college preparatory services, i.e. increasing the number of college preparatory classes, etc?

Most of all, we need attention to counseling. This paper has shown important effects of counseling in spite of limited data availability. We desperately need more research across most domains of counseling.

Appendix A: Approach to This Review

The charge of this highly focused review was to “conduct a comprehensive search of the research literature on counseling including published articles, unpublished reports and dissertation abstracts.” I searched all research library engines, online resources, and national databases I could identify that asked questions of students, parents or counselors about the college and student aid knowledge of counselors and any subsequent impact of counselors on students or families in their college aspiration and plans.

What became apparent in the course of this thorough review was a marked absence of relevant documentation elaborating upon the role of the school counselor in disseminating critical financial aid information to students. These findings suggest that the existing structural obligations of school counselors may preclude any extensive involvement in matters related to financial aid for postsecondary aspirants and their families.

A. 1. Non-Published Document Review

I conducted an extensive search of Dissertation Abstracts using the key words: school counseling and financial aid, counselors, college advising, counseling and financial aid knowledge, counseling and financial aid awareness, counseling and students and parents’ college expectations and aspirations. The four studies that matched those key words were assessed for relevance; and if a dissertation did not gather any evidence on counselors’ effectiveness, college or student aid knowledge, etc. it was not used. Any dissertation that elaborated upon the impact of counselors on students or parents’ aspirations was considered relevant to this paper.

I conducted an extensive search of the databases of the ERIC Clearinghouses on Urban Education, Counseling, and Higher Education using the key words: high school counseling, counselors, college advising, counseling and financial aid knowledge, counseling and financial aid awareness, counseling and students and parents’ college expectations and aspirations. After identifying and reviewing the 22 documents that showed the most promise, none of the studies provided evidence of counselors’ college or student aid knowledge. Any ERIC documents that provided evidence related to the impact of counselors on students or parents’ aspirations was considered relevant to this paper.

A. 2 Financial Aid and Counseling Journals

I reviewed the publication of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, the Journal of Student Financial Aid, from 1984 until 2003. No article out of the 199 articles reviewed from this time period listed high school counselors in the title, nor did the articles mention counselors or their influence on students or parents as a focus. All of the articles about staff development and professionals’ need for training referred to financial aid officers at postsecondary institutions, most especially at the level of the financial aid office.

The one exception is an article that focused on a 1983 survey of the regional NASFAA presidents (Pennell and Ryan, 1985). The survey documented that financial aid training provided from 1980-83 was primarily offered at annual NASFAA state association meetings, mostly to new financial aid office staff, and secondarily, to high school advisors. NASFAA leadership ranked training needs for financial aid staff highest and the next highest ranked need was for workshops for high school counselors. As a result of a national training project of NASFAA, in 1984 a financial aid curriculum for high school counselor workshops was developed and distributed nationally because regional associations were deemed an appropriate delivery system for outreach to high school counselors.

I also reviewed the Journal of College Admissions, The School Counselor, the National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin, the Journal of Counseling and Development, and Measurement and Evaluation in Counseling and Development. These studies were reported in the body of this paper.

A. 3. Databases Consulted

A. 3. 1 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

A thorough review of all NCES elementary and secondary databases was conducted. The following NCES databases collected no information from middle or high school counselors: Common Core of Data, Crime and Safety Surveys, Current Population Survey, Education Finance Statistics Center, High School Transcript Studies, National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972, Private School Survey, School District Demographics, School Survey on Crime and Safety, and the Schools and Staffing Survey.

One might reasonably expect that databases labeled “Common Core of Data” or “Schools and Staffing Survey” should have information on how many counselors are employed in schools today at each grade level, the ratios of counselors to students, and the workloads and training/credentials of counselors. However, no data is collected from counselors in these surveys.

Four NCES databases collected information on counselors or their impact: High School and Beyond (HS&B), the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS), and The Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS). The HS&B database focused on the activities of seniors and sophomores as they progressed through high school, postsecondary education, and into the workplace. The data spanned from 1980 through 1992 and included parent and teacher surveys, high school transcripts, student financial aid records, postsecondary transcripts, and student questionnaires and interviews. The 1984 Supplement to HS&B was an Administrator and Teacher Survey that asked heads of guidance programs about staffing and staff development, program development, program goals and priorities, broad activities, specific guidance activities, and directors’ assessment of guidance programs. This study was discussed in the school counseling section of this paper.

The National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988 began with an 8th grade cohort in 1988, with three more cycles of data (1990, 1992, 1994) subsequently collected from students, parents, teachers, and principals and from students' high school transcripts. Four questions about counselors were asked of parents and students, and four questions about counselors were asked of administrators. The Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 (ELS) is a follow-up longitudinal survey of students as they progress from tenth grade to work and postsecondary education. ELS will also survey students' parents, teachers, librarians and administrators. The same four questions about counselors that were asked of parents and students in NELS will be asked in ELS, and the same four administrator questions about counselors asked in NELS will also be asked in ELS.

Acknowledging that the federal government had not collected any data on guidance programs and activities since 1984, in 2002 NCES, through its Fast Response Survey System (FRSS), conducted a survey of public high school guidance counseling entitled, High School Guidance Counseling (HSGC) (U.S. Department of Education, 2003b). Respondents included counselors (90%), principals (7%), and other staff (3%). So that HSGC data could be compared with the 1984 HS&B Study, three questions were repeated from the HS&B 1984 Supplement. More information on the specifics of these studies was presented in the school counseling section of this paper.

Finally, NCES collected information on education-related topics through its Youth and Parent Surveys of its National Household Education Surveys Program. In 1999, they collected data that lead to the report Getting Ready to Pay for College (2003a). Students in grades 6-12 (n=7,913) were surveyed along with their parents. More information on the specifics of these studies was presented in the school counseling section of this paper.

A. 3. 2 Other Surveys of Counselors or Counseling

Another national survey, Monitoring the Future, was conducted by the University of Michigan in collaboration with the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. This study has been collecting data on youth since 1975. In each survey, youth are asked five questions about high school counseling. An article (Libsch and Freedman-Doan, 1995) in the National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin reported on counselor impact findings, which was reported in the school counseling section of this paper.

The College Board periodically surveys counselors across public, independent, independent religious and Catholic high schools. Maucieri and colleagues (2002) authored a national report based on a College Board survey which had an overall response rate of 63%, although data was collected from nearly 70% of the 27,000 public high schools in America. More information on the findings of this study was presented in the school counseling section of this paper.

The National Association for College Admissions Counselors (NACAC) periodically surveys high school counselors and produces major reports on the state of high school counseling (Hawkins, 2003; Miller, 1998). In these studies, college counselors are overly represented in the respondent base and therefore the reports of attention to the

college task are highly likely to be unrepresentative of all counselors. The first study (Miller, 1998) surveyed high school counselors at NACAC and non-NACAC member schools. Regrettably, the 154 item survey was returned by only 15% of counselors sampled, with a subsequent acknowledgement by the authors as to the limitations of their findings. More information on the specifics of this study was presented in the school counseling section of this paper.

Hawkins (2003) describes the more recent instrument, Counseling Trends Survey (CTS), which had a 42% response rate from NACAC secondary school members, including public and private high schools. Hawkins states that private school counselors were overrepresented among CTS respondents. More information on the specifics of this study was presented in the school counseling section of this paper.

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