COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE IN A DIGITAL ERA

STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOLS

A report by the Pullias Center for Higher Education, University of Southern California

ABOUT THE PULLIAS CENTER

With a generous bequest from the Pullias Family estate, the Earl and Pauline Pullias Center for Higher Education at the USC Rossier School of Education was established in 2012 (the center was previously known as the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis). The gift allows one of the world's leading research centers on higher education to continue its tradition of focusing on research, policy, and practice to improve the field.

The mission of the Pullias Center for Higher Education is to bring a multidisciplinary perspective to complex social, political, and economic issues in higher education. Since 1996, the center has engaged in action-oriented research projects regarding successful college outreach programs, financial aid and access for low- to moderate-income students of color, use of technology to supplement college counseling services, effective postsecondary governance, emerging organizational forms such as for-profit institutions, and the retention of doctoral students of color.

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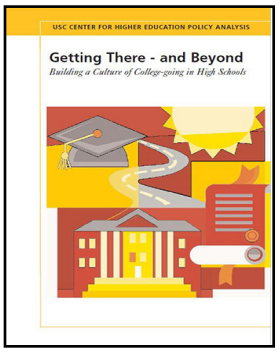
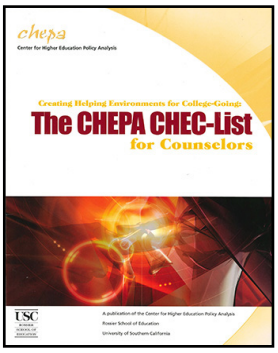
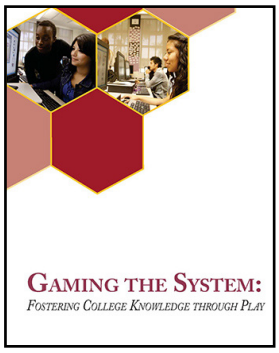
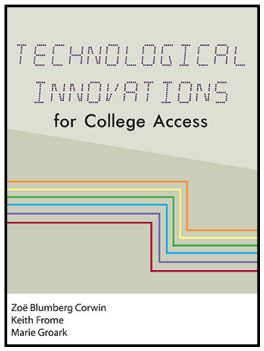
Introduction

Over a decade ago, the Pullias Center for Higher Education published a monograph that was widely disseminated to college counselors, teachers, and administrators. Our goal was to provide guidance on how to cultivate and strengthen a high school's college-going culture. Though the importance of understanding and strengthening college-going culture remains the same, the college access landscape has evolved dramatically since 2007 – most notably with the plethora of digital resources now available in the field.









This monograph is designed to revisit several of the concepts outlined in our first report (Corwin & Tierney, 2007) and share new knowledge about college-going culture in the digital era.

The information provided here is informed by findings from a four-year study examining the impact of a digital game-based college access intervention on FAFSA/CA Dream Act submissions, college application completion, and college enrollment. The *Mission: Admission* study was made possible by a $3.2 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education's First in the World grant program. The study has allowed us to explore college-going culture from new perspectives and to identify new strategies for schools seeking to improve their college-going culture, including through the use of digital tools.

While technology has the potential to cultivate student learning, it is not a remedy for the persistent challenges prevalent in the college access field – and it does not function as a one-size-fits-all solution. Technology can lead to greater engagement and deep learning if it is deployed in a thoughtful manner that is cognizant of student needs (including digital equity issues), appropriately aligned with a specific body of content knowledge, and used not as a replacement for human interaction - but as a way to facilitate discussion, foster greater understanding, and spark student enthusiasm.

What is College Culture?

All organizations have unique ways of doing things; some patterns of behavior are more formalized than others. The culture of a military unit, for example, differs from that of a college campus. Culture gives people clues about an organization's norms and values. These clues help individuals decide how to act and what to do. Conceptually, *culture* involves patterns of activity and their symbolic values.

Over the past few decades, college readiness has become a core component of the culture of high schools. As the financial returns of postsecondary education have steadily increased in value, more students than ever now express a desire to attend college (Ingels, Dalton, & LoGerfo, 2008; Johnson, Mejia, & Bohn, 2015). With the implementation of Common Core Standards across most of the country, explicit college readiness objectives have been codified in the daily practices of most high school teachers.

College-going culture in a high school establishes the context for cultivating aspirations and behaviors conducive to preparing for, applying to, and enrolling in college. A strong college-going culture is tangible, pervasive, and beneficial to students. It may be developed in a specialized section of a school - such as within a magnet program or small learning community – or fostered across an entire campus (see pp. 4-5). Even though attending college may not be an ideal fit for every student, it is paramount that a school's college-going culture be inclusive and accessible to all students. The reason for this is that students may be supported in or dissuaded from applying to college based on the culture of the school they attend (Bryan, Farmer-Hinton, Rawls, & Woods, 2017; McDonough, 1997, 2005).

No two high schools are the same, and rigid rules do not apply to every campus; consequently, a "strong" college-going culture may take many forms (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002; Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005). Relatedly, there are some cultural characteristics and strategies that have been proven to improve student performance and boost college enrollment (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997; Reavis, Vinson, & Fox, 1999). For example, engaged parents, advisory periods, in-school academically focused programs (e.g., AVID), and low student to counselor ratios (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines, & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011) have all been shown to improve student achievement and increase the likelihood that students will apply to college.

Technology has become an increasingly central factor in determining a school's culture. Technology use both impacts and is impacted by teacher knowledge, practices, pedagogical beliefs, professional development, and school culture (Levin & Schrum, 2014).

Though schools can take steps to change their cultures, research suggests that school leaders, counselors, and teachers should first understand their culture before they attempt to shift it (Bulach, 1999; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). In what follows, we offer a framework to guide school personnel in evaluating their college-going culture based on the school's inclusive environment and how central college-going is to the school's mission (Horng et al., 2013).

Strong leadership "change agents" (MacNeil, Prater & Busch, 2009), or technology-specific "digital empowerment agents" (Corwin & Tichavakunda, 2018), can facilitate cultural change through advocacy or collaboration, and can sometimes circumvent institutional barriers to facilitate the incorporation of digital tools. For example, despite school-wide restrictions on student cell phone use, a teacher might permit the use of cell phones for lessons in his/her classroom. Change agents can be principals, teachers, district leaders, staff, or students, but their common thread is that they "capitalize on the scalable and pervasive nature of online resources—including social media—to facilitate meaningful learning opportunities and the growth of social capital" (Corwin & Ochsner, 2016, p. 3).

Dimensions of College-Going Culture

Evaluating a school's college culture is difficult because "culture" of any kind is complex and multi-dimensional. In many instances, culture is not easily articulated or consciously developed. For this reason, we have devised a conceptual spectrum based on the interaction of two dimensions of college culture: centrality of college mission and inclusivity of the school community.

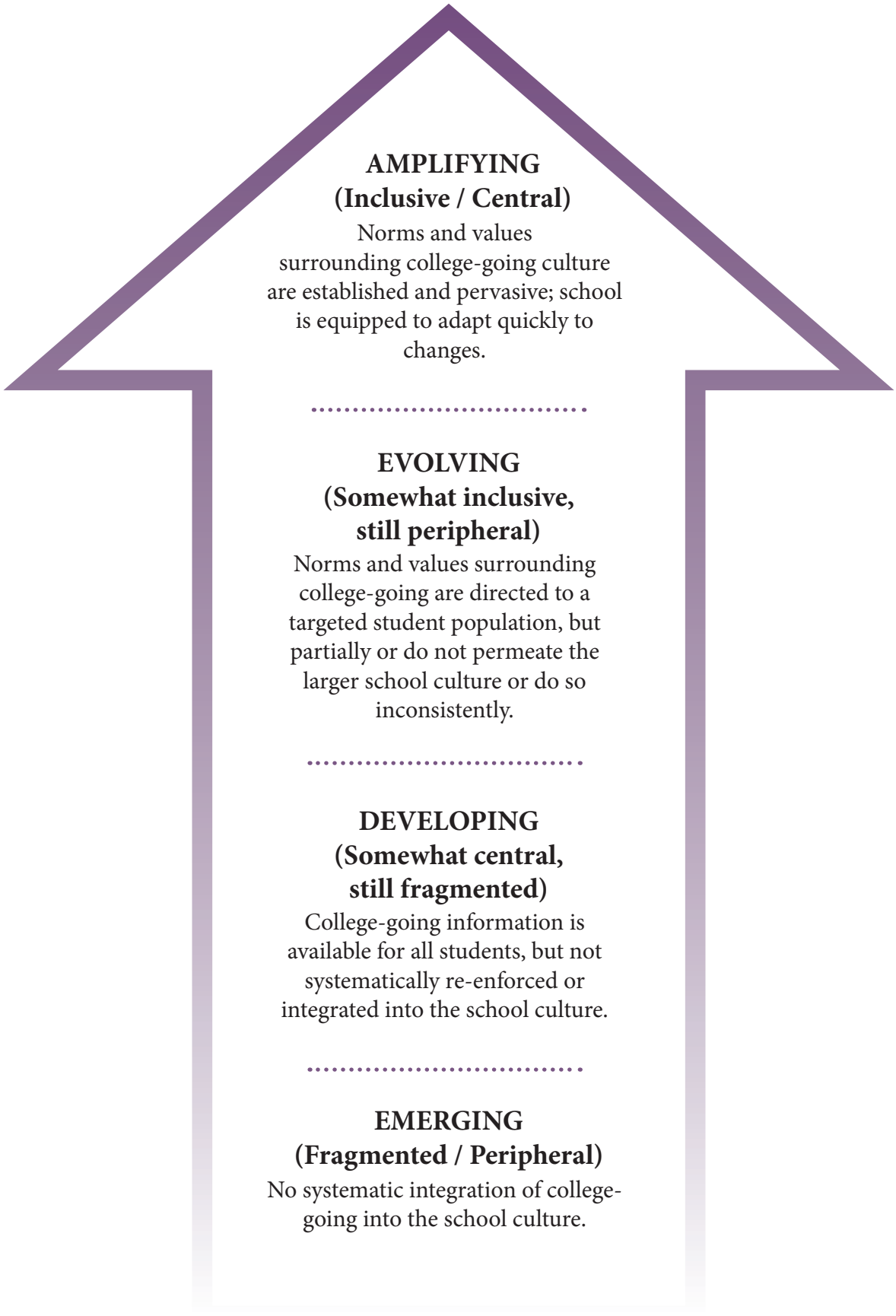
Centrality of college-going culture describes how *central* college-going is to the school community. Inclusivity of college-going culture describes how *inclusive* the school is on matters of college, career, and academic success.

College culture can be either peripheral or central, or somewhere in between. For example, if a school holds a college night event, but only advertises it in their AVID and AP classrooms, the college curriculum can be described as *peripheral*: prioritized only on the margins of the school community. By contrast, if that same school promoted college night by putting up posters in subject classes, such as English and math, sending out a school-wide email, and advertising during morning announcements and school assemblies, the college curriculum can be considered more *central* because information is shared with all students.

An *inclusive* culture is based on notions of collaboration and reciprocity where teachers, counselors, and students share resources and information around college preparation. Research suggests that successful schools are cooperative and encourage "peer-to-peer collaboration and informal sharing" (Levin & Schrum, 2014, p. 651). *Inclusivity* can be encouraged by school leaders or students, or it can develop organically. *Fragmented* cultures are more isolating; they might be haphazard, where the school makes little effort to build community and students are left to their own devices to engage in college activities. In *fragmented* schools, students run the risk of not sharing common goals or values to bind them together and are instead detached from the school community, if one exists at all.

In short, whether a school has a dedicated college center, staffed and funded by the school or district, is indicative of centrality. How college activities are promoted and advertised, reveals how widely or narrowly the college mission is emphasized among the community, and is therefore relevant for inclusivity.

We have included the following graphic as a tool for school staff and administrators to identify where their school might reside on a spectrum of inclusivity/centrality. On pages 12-17, we offer strategies for improving college-going culture with attention paid to digital resources.


AMPLIFYING
(Inclusive / Central)
Norms and values surrounding college-going culture are established and pervasive; school is equipped to adapt quickly to changes.
EVOLVING
(Somewhat inclusive, still peripheral)
Norms and values surrounding college-going are directed to a targeted student population, but partially or do not permeate the larger school culture or do so inconsistently.
DEVELOPING
(Somewhat central, still fragmented)
College-going information is available for all students, but not systematically re-enforced or integrated into the school culture.
EMERGING
(Fragmented / Peripheral)
No systematic integration of college-going into the school culture.

Who Participates in a College-Going Culture?

While college counselors tend to anchor the college and financial aid processes at schools where they are employed, students benefit from the participation of multiple members of the school and local community. This section describes the important roles that various community members play in strengthening a school's college-going culture, from school administrators to siblings.

ADMINISTRATORS

Administrators perform a central role in fostering college-going culture: they set a college-oriented agenda for the school community. This agenda involves: taking stock of existing resources; collecting and analyzing college-going data; articulating college goals; forging relationships with community colleges, four-year institutions, and educational non-profits; facilitating a school-wide plan to increase college going; choosing key individuals to implement the plan, and setting accountability benchmarks.

TEACHERS

Teachers are essential to a school's college-going culture. Our research shows that students rely on their teachers above all other resources for college support. This makes sense because students have the most frequent contact with teachers, typically on a daily basis. Teachers have the potential to motivate students by creating a college-positive environment in the classroom and working closely with students who might be otherwise overlooked as potential college-goers. Most importantly, teachers prepare students for eligibility requirements and the academic challenges and opportunities they will face once in college. Teachers who oversee supplementary college preparation programs, such as AVID, MESA, or college clubs, are particularly instrumental. These teachers often train others on how to incorporate college activities into the curriculum. All teachers can take simple and concrete steps to contribute to a school's college-going culture without dedicating significant time to professional development or taking away time from content-area instruction. Teachers can share their college stories, make links between subject matter and college majors and careers, learn who on campus to direct students to for specific types of support, and be honest and consistent in their interactions with students.

COUNSELORS

The college counselor's main responsibility is to provide guidance about college and financial aid, and when sufficiently resourced, the college center serves as the hub of college guidance and activities. Counselors also hold workshops to educate families about college and financial aid, coordinate visits from college representatives, plan student tours of college campuses, and facilitate other events that foster a college-going culture. It should be noted, that counselors often have to balance these duties with other responsibilities, such as test coordinating and proctoring exams. School guidance counselors are responsible for advising students with their high school course selection; thus, they are integral figures in steering them toward considering college options. Among the many tasks that school counselors (guidance and college) perform to strengthen a school's college-going culture, they work with administrators to develop college-going metrics, organize professional development for teachers focused on counseling activities (e.g., create "bite-size" lessons that teachers can share with their students, or support they can offer, such as deadline reminders and peer editing for college essays), seek productive partnerships, and train and capitalize on peer mentors as valuable resources for other students.

SCHOOL STAFF

From administrative assistants to custodial staff to security guards, the extent to which the entire school staff supports college goals indicates how widely college-going culture is shared throughout the school community. When a student hears about the importance of college from one teacher and no one else, the student receives a mixed message about post-secondary opportunities at best. A strong college-going culture requires that the whole school community maintain a consistent and shared message.

DISTRICT STAFF

School districts have the capacity to set goals for college-going and hold schools accountable and to allocate funding for college-related professional development, family events, additional guidance personnel, and community messaging (such as street banners promoting student success). Designating a district contact for college access is optimal.

STUDENTS

Developing a college-going culture requires active involvement from students. No matter how many college services are available, they are only as helpful as the students make them. Though students may ask their college counselor questions, they may be unaware of other college resources available on campus, such as financial aid workshops or college recruiting sessions. Students are important resources in cultivating a college-going culture that meets their needs. To leverage these resources, school personnel should ask students about their needs and tailor services accordingly. Students can contribute to a school's college-going culture through positive peer-pressure (i.e., doing well in school is cool), and by serving as peer counselors and disseminating information in engaging ways. Alumni can also serve as resources for motivating students and providing strategies for getting ready for, applying to, and successfully navigating college.

FAMILY MEMBERS

Parents, siblings, extended family and legal guardians also play an important role in strengthening a school's college-going culture. High school students benefit from having someone to talk to about their goals and support college aspirations, regardless of whether that person has college experience. Family members who have attended college are especially helpful in assisting students in filling out applications, reading personal statements, and answering questions about what college is like. Families can learn more about college options by attending informational events at schools and requesting additional resources.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Community members act as college resources by serving as mentors and guest speakers, offering summer internships, and raising funds for scholarships and other college services. Many community-based organizations provide programs and support to students interested in pursuing college and serve as useful partners when supplementing school services.

Optimal Timing of College-Related Activities

8TH GRADE	• Encourage student involvement in school activities (e.g. clubs, sports, etc.). • Identify interests students might want to pursue. • Provide opportunity for students to learn more about themselves.	Host parent college awareness and financial literacy workshops; repeat annually.
9TH GRADE **SPRING**	Organize tours to college campuses; repeat annually.	Hold an orientation to college center.
Start systematically exposing students to the idea of going to college.	**10TH GRADE** **FALL**	Hold assembly to review college eligiblity guidelines.

Tech tools suggestions for 9th grade:

- COLLEGE AWARENESS: Get Schooled, I'm First
- CAREER EXPLORATION: C'reer (mobile app), My next Move, KnowHow2Go, FutureBound

Tech tools suggestions for 10th grade:

- ACADEMIC/SAT PREPARATION: Khan Academy
- COLLEGE AWARENESS: MyOptions (mobile app & website), Big Future
- CAREER EXPLORATION: PathSource (mobile app), Road Trip Nation

9TH GRADE

FALL

Create and promote visible markers of college-culture (i.e., banners, bulletin boards, college T-shirt days etc.).

- Ask students what career interests they have.
- Offer career assessments at the beginning and end of the school year.
- Help students research different types of post-secondary institutions.

Offer an extra-curricular/ club rush event; repeat annually.

Ensure students are on track to completing their college-eligibility (i.e., A-G) requirements.

Encourage students to take AP courses and/or community college courses (dual enrollment).

Require all students to take the PSAT.

- Hold parent college workshop.
- Share the different college admission requirements with students and families.

Collaborate with other organizations, community colleges, or 4-universities to provide students with SAT Prep courses.

Show students what a "college" consists of

- Size, location, diversity, housing, accreditation, entrance requirements, costs, etc.

10TH GRADE

SPRING

- Encourage students to apply to scholarships.
- Incentivize students to apply to scholarships as homework assignments, extra-credit or assign as a high school graduation requirement.

Schedule meetings with students to talk to them about their options for college and plan for the application process. Follow up with them in the Spring.

Check in with students about their extra-curricular and/or service activities. Encourage students to aim for leadership positions.

11TH GRADE

SPRING

Have students sign up for college admissions tests (i.e., SAT and/or ACT).

12TH GRADE

SPRING

Make sure students submit college applications by the Fall deadline.

Encourage students to apply to scholarships.

Encourage teachers and staff to engage in conversations with students about their college experiences and share insights on how to choose a college.

Have students submit FAFSA or Dream Act application by March 2.

- Hold financial aid meetings with students and parents.
- Explain financial aid award letters to students and their families to demystify the idea of not being able to pay "the sticker price".

Tech tools suggestions for 11th grade:

- COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH: Remind (mobile app and website)
- FINANCIAL LITERACY: Raise.me, NerdWallet
- TIME MANAGEMENT: GradGuru (mobile app)
- COLLEGE AWARENESS: GetSchooled
- COLLEGE EXPLORATION: CollegeGo (mobile app), Unigo

11TH GRADE

FALL

Help students find internships aligned with their career interests.

Encourage students to participate in college access programs.

Hold workshops for students to learn about financial aid and the different ways to pay for college.

- Make sure students have taken the ACT/SAT in time to submit scores to colleges.

[The last time to take the SAT is in the fall semester of senior year.]

12TH GRADE

FALL

Require students to draft their college personal statement.

Remind students the importance of creating their college and university portals in time and of regularly checking emails.

- If possible, students should visit their future campus and become familiar with the programs and services (e.g., financial aid office, academic advising office).
- Remind students the importance of sending required documents in time for deadlines.

- Help students plan for the upcoming summer.
- Look into summer bridge programs, internships, work experience, summer classes at community college to transfer to their institution.

Tech tools suggestions for 12th grade:

- COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH: GroupMe (mobile app)
- COLLEGE GUIDANCE: UpNext (text-based service), UStrive (online mentoring)
- AFFORDING COLLEGE: Dreamers Road Map (mobile app)

How Can a School Strengthen its College-Going Culture in a Digital Era?

Generally, schools that engage multiple stakeholders in developing college-going culture are better equipped to strengthen their college-going culture than those that rely solely on college counselors (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; Farmer-Hinton, 2008; McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002). Best practices for holistic college-going culture often emerge when a school has developed a clear and concise college mission statement and action plan that incorporates benchmarks for evaluating college goals (i.e., are juniors on track to complete college requirements? Have all seniors submitted their FAFSA or CA Dream Act applications?). Students benefit from pervasive messaging about college and the opportunity to engage with multiple individuals about college and financial aid. Students are well-served by having opportunities to discuss college plans, ask questions, and troubleshoot, thus, ensuring college aspirations evolve into actionable college plans.

Schools can aim to strengthen their college-going cultures by dedicating resources to college guidance and related activities such as:

- Coordinating services and widely communicating goals and college activities
- Building a welcoming and well-designed college center
- Offering ample opportunities for professional development around college guidance
- Developing a volunteer cohort to assist the college counselor/outreach staff
- Building relationships with local colleges and non-profits to support college pathways

Additionally, in the digital era, consistent access to computers and Broadband is vital during the college preparation process, especially in schools serving low-income students. With the growing acknowledgement that digital proficiency is essential for the 21st century, schools are well-served when they pay attention to how their digital capacity affects students' opportunities. Based on our longitudinal work over the last several years in over 50 high schools, we offer strategies for cultivating a college-going culture in the digital era. To deliver these strategies more efficiently, the remainder of this document is composed largely of tips and action items for school personnel. We first outline strategies for incorporating digital resources into college preparation and application processes and ensuring accessibility to those digital resources. We then suggest strategies for enhancing the use of digital resources. It should be noted that while we focus on digital tools below, we maintain the critical importance of finding and supporting personnel who can provide face-to-face guidance above all other approaches.

DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY STRATEGIES

Digital tools can be helpful in engaging students, amplifying college messaging, and expanding outreach. Yet careful consideration of contextual challenges and opportunities is critical due to digital equity issues. When incorporating digital resources, school personnel should:

- Recognize that each student approaches the college and financial aid processes with unique personal experiences and educational histories.
- Think broadly about who might be able to support students in learning about and applying to college and for financial aid (e.g., teachers, extended family members, alumni). Empower those constituents to support students.
- Inquire about digital access. With the prevalence of college and financial aid resources and applications online, students can be adversely affected if they do not have a computer or Broadband Internet at home.

TIPS

- Keep an eye out for students who are writing college essays on their phones, thus making editing difficult.
- Consider how to make computers accessible after school during busy college application times.
- Be creative about expanding Wi-Fi zones around schools.
- Prioritize digital tools that can be accessed via any internet browser (accessible to mobile phones as well as desktops, laptops and tablets) because seamless access or connectivity outside of school or over breaks is ideal.

- Be discerning about digital resources.

TIPS

- Seek digital tools that engage students and meet a particular need; avoid those that don't. Curation is key given the high number of online tools.
- Involve students in vetting digital tools.

- Develop a hybrid approach to providing college services. Face-to-face interactions are well-suited for nurturing aspirations, supporting complex decision making, and offering individualized guidance. Online approaches can be effective in engaging students, nudging students, and sharing information.

Face-to-face interactions are good for:

- Providing nuanced guidance and feedback
- Complex discussions involving decision-making about college and financial aid
- Modeling behaviors
- Building trust
- Enabling relationships with other individuals who might have valuable resources and/or advice

Digital tools and programs are good for:

- Engaging students
- Amplifying college and financial aid messages
- Holding students accountable
- Tracking progress
- Facilitating access to information
- Offering consistent and continuous reminders

DIGITAL ENHANCEMENT STRATEGIES

Boost outreach and communication

Social media and the proliferation of smartphones make 24-hour access to multiple channels of information possible. Using digital tools can amplify existing, on-the-ground college-going efforts and give stakeholders multiple ways to engage students.

1 Free mobile texting and nudging apps can emphasize timely calls to action for large groups (i.e., staff, teachers, students, and even parents), focused groups (i.e., just seniors), or targeted individuals.

TIPS

- Calls to action can be high stakes (e.g., "FAFSA applications are due tomorrow!") or low stakes (e.g., Teachers and staff, tomorrow is College Day – be sure to wear a T-shirt from your alma mater!).
- Universities and colleges still overwhelmingly use email to communicate. An example call to action via text could be "Check your email. There's lot of important info to come AFTER you get your acceptance letter!"

2 An updated school website, especially the Counseling and/or College & Career page, can provide unified messaging on college-going for the entire campus and community.

TIPS

- House most "evergreen" content here, such as the mission statement and links to commonly used websites (e.g., the Common App, FAFSA/CA Dream Act, SAT/ACT testing dates, A-G requirements).
- Embed an updated Google calendar focused on counseling activities and important deadlines.
- Commit to updating the website at least once a week during college application and scholarship season.

3 School-centered social media accounts can provide opportunities for the whole campus and community to engage. Social media accounts are flexible and work best when they can quickly publicize timely, relevant content (whether or not they originate from the school). Active engagement can come in the form of re-posts, "liking," or commenting on fresh, ever-changing content.

TIPS

- Video a counselor talking through a common college misconception one day of every week.
- Mobilize a group of students to manage college-related social media. Empower them to bring their own "flavor" to messaging, thus increasing the likelihood that other students will pay attention.

TIPS

- Highlight successes (e.g., college application submissions).
- Encourage small learning communities and academies on campus to share college-going information with each other.
- Offer incentives or competitions through social media channels related to completing college milestones.
- Promote social media accounts to middle school students in feeder schools to foster college awareness.

4 Have a plan for when school is not in session, such as during winter and spring break periods. Many digital communication tools allow you to auto-schedule posts in advance.

TIPS

- If you know where students intend to enroll, auto-schedule reminders on key dates (e.g., Don't forget to send your college your final transcript!).

Tailor resources to your students

The flow of information and opportunities for connection made available by digital tools allow for sharing of meaningful content with diverse groups of students.

1 Many students turn to teachers as a resource for college guidance. Offering digital resources that are campus-wide and sensitive to the experiences of diverse student groups has the potential to promote robust student-adult interactions about college.

2 Specific student groups, such as Dreamer students, homeless students or students in foster care may not be aware of additional supports available to them. Digital resources facilitate sharing information in non-threatening ways.

EXAMPLES: It Gets Better Project; I'm First; TheDream.Us; United Friends of the Children.

3 Capitalize on the effectiveness of introducing a complicated topic in a playful way with games. Games introduce a low-stakes opportunity to engage in learning about a potentially intimidating subject.

EXAMPLES: Mission: Admission; Application Crunch; Graduate Strike Force; FutureBound; Zombie College.

Get ready for application season

Many high-stakes college-related activities, such as applying for federal financial aid and applying to college, happen almost exclusively online. While counselors are familiar with these annual processes and procedures, this is a unique and highly personal activity for each individual student.

1 Time management apps, introduced before senior year, can help students to learn how to stay organized and take control over how they spend their time.

TIPS

- Start with backwards planning with a particular date or milestone in mind (i.e. PSAT or SAT).

2 Encourage students to share their personal statements via Google Docs (also available as a mobile app), a useful tool that allows writing to be shared across devices and people.

3 Cloud-based spreadsheet software is also great for keeping track of acceptances and university/college-specific student portal information, like login names and passwords.

4 Social media campaigns during the fall can answer general questions and/or address common fears about applying to and affording college. Consider putting actual people and voices, as opposed to just information, on social media posts, so students know they are not alone in the process.

5 Many public and private colleges, and even the Common App, have mobile apps to accompany their browser-based applications. While most are not comprehensive as the browser-based version, they prioritize ease of navigation.

TIPS

- Ask students to add you as an "advisor" on their Common App. You can view their application progress in the Common App OnTrack mobile app.

6 Affording college is one of the most commonly cited concerns of students, parents and counselors. Linking students up with scholarship databases and financial planning websites and mobile apps can help students' personalize the experience of looking for additional financial aid.

7 The availability of free, online spreadsheet and survey software makes collecting and tracking large amounts of student data possible. Micro-data collection can provide opportunities for consistent points of contact between counselors and students, highlight areas for celebration, and track areas to improve for the next academic year (e.g., FAFSA/CA

Dream Act completion, amount of federal aid awarded in the aggregate, college applications submitted, number of students admitted to two and four-year colleges).

TIPS

- Use Google Forms to create simple surveys to help track data (mobile screen friendly).
- Work with other college-focused service providers to the collect the data.

Strengthen students' college-going identity

Students need to be able see themselves as "college material," and that their identities and backgrounds are consistent with college attendance and success. This is especially important for first-generation college-going students and other minoritized groups. Cultivating a college-going identity is a highly personal activity, but digital tools can help expose students to the college experience.

1 Explore college fit – not just grades, but culture, location, and size.

TIPS

- Connect students via social networking sites to high school alumni that are currently attending college.
- Supplement college campus visits with links to virtual tours (videos) of colleges and universities across and even out-of-state.
- Explore geotags near the school and school hashtags on social media to see different perspectives.

2 Encourage students to keep a running "brag sheet" on Google Docs.

3 There are tons of videos located on YouTube made by college students documenting their college experience. Although they will need to vetted, they can expose students to college students that look like them, share their interests (or fears), and/or go to the school they aspire to.

4 Assign an online college research project and encourage students to share out data on location, size, and college culture, including major organizations and clubs on campus.

Questions to Guide Discussion

Addressing college guidance across an entire school community is complex and should be tailored to the specific demographics and needs of a school population. Thoughtful planning and sustained communication and collaboration are key facets in bolstering a college-going culture.

Talking Points to Guide Discussions among High School Administrators, Counselors, Teachers & Staff:

- What is our college mission statement?
- How does college guidance fit into our overarching school program? Individual classes?
- What visual cues can we post to illustrate our commitment to college-going? (i.e., college pennants, bulletin boards illustrating teachers' educational pathways, college acceptances)
- When is the best time to schedule college guidance activities? (schoolwide & in class)
- What additional college guidance resources might beneficial for our students? Are there particular student groups on campus with unique needs? (i.e., Dreamers, foster youth, homeless students, etc.)
- What is the best way to communicate college-related activities and milestones to students?
- How are we using technology to amplify existing activities and/or engage students?
- How are we tracking students' progress towards college applications and acceptances?
- How are we tracking students' pathways after graduating from our school?
- What is the best way to share college-going metrics within our school community?
- What partnerships can we forge/maintain with postsecondary institutions? With community groups?
- How can we educate and involve families as their children apply to college? And after they are accepted?
- How can we empower students to take initiative in preparing for and applying to college and for financial aid?

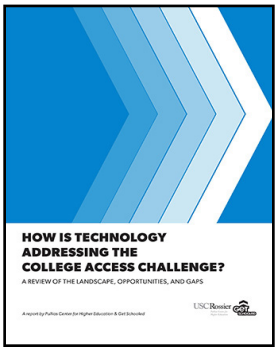
For students, figuring out college plans is multi-faceted and can be daunting. Despite the focus on digital tools outlined in this monograph, face-to-face interactions that allow for deep thinking and reflection are critical.

Talking Points to Guide Discussions with Students:

- What are your current college and career goals?
- Are you taking the right classes to meet those goals?
- What are your plans for taking the PSAT and SAT/ACT?
- Which colleges are you considering applying to and why? Have you identified reach, match, and safety schools?
- How are you planning to afford college? What steps are you taking to learn about and apply for financial aid?
- What kinds of extracurricular activities have you participated in? What leadership experience do you have?
- Where do you go to find information about college?
- Who is part of your college support network?
- Who can you ask to write a college or scholarship letter of recommendation?
- How are you keeping track of college deadlines and milestones? Have you discovered any helpful tools online?

Additional Resources

Tools for Use in Schools, Classrooms, and Beyond
For a list of online-resources pertaining to college preparation, college exploration, college applications, coaching and mentoring, and financial aid and scholarships, please review the guide we created with our partner, Get Schooled.



Suggested Publications
For a deeper dive into topics covered in this monograph, we recommend the following:

- *College and Career Ready: Helping All Students Succeed Beyond High School – David T. Conley*
- *Diversifying Digital Learning: Online Literacy and Educational Opportunity – Edited by William G. Tierney, Zoë B. Corwin & Amanda Ochsner*
- *Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Kids Living and Learning with New Media – Mizuko Ito, Sonja Baumer, Matteo Bittani, danah boyd, Rachel Cody, Becky Herr Stephenson, Heather A. Horst, Patricia G. Lange, Dilan Mahendran, Katynka Z. Martinez, C. J. Pascoe, Dan Perkel, Laura Robinson, Christo Sims, and Lisa Tripp*
- *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens – danah boyd*
- *Postsecondary Play: The Role of Games and Social Media in Higher Education – Edited by William G. Tierney, Zoë B. Corwin, Tracy Fullerton & Gisele Ragusa*
- *Stuck in the Shallow End: Education, Race and Computing – Jane Margolis with Rachel Estreall, Joanna Goode, Jennifer Jellison Holme, and Kim Nao*
- *Summer Melt – Benjamin Castleman & Lindsay Page*
- *The Young and the Digital: What the Migration to Social-Network Sites, Games, and Anytime, Anywhere Media Means for Our Future – Craig S. Watkins*

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