

COLLEGE SUCCESS

MICHIGAN FUTURE SCHOOLS

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Section 1: Major Topics in College Access and Success

College Ready – A Broader Definition

It often seems like College Readiness can be reduced to a single number: 21. Attaining this score on the ACT can often seem like the only college-readiness goal. However, we know that this isn't true. Students need a broader set of competencies, beyond the academic skills tested on the ACT, in order to be successful in college.

The many definitions of these competencies can be murky, complex, and often overlap. Indeed, books have been written on the very subject. But in the interest of time and focus, we're going to narrow it down to the familiar language of the MFS college readiness matrix to help develop a (fairly) comprehensive, but also understandable, vision of what college readiness means at Michigan Future Schools.

ACT Achievement

While the ACT isn't everything, it's definitely something. And just because there's more to college readiness than the ACT, it doesn't mean that we should stop pushing our students to 21 and beyond. While recent research has shown that a student's high school GPA is more predictive of their eventual college success than their ACT score, it's unlikely that a student can be successful if they're significantly below the ACT benchmark. In addition, a low ACT score severely limits the postsecondary options a student has.

The ACT measures skills in core content areas – and students will need to be proficient in those skills to be successful in college.

GPA (Engagement and Effort)

However, while those core content skills are important, a student's high school grade-point average is – by far – the greatest predictor of their college success. How much more predictive? In the book *Crossing the Finish Line* – the definitive study on college persistence and completion – authors Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson found that a one standard deviation increase in ACT scores (about 2.5 points for our high schools) resulted in an increased chance of graduation of less than 2 percentage points. On the other hand, a standard deviation increase in GPA (about 0.5 points in our schools), resulted in an increased chance of graduation of between 6 and 10 percentage points, depending on the selectivity of the college. The takeaway: raise ACT scores by 2 points, and you increase their chance of graduation by a couple of percentage points; get students to increase their high school grades, and increase their chance of graduation by five times that much.

The common explanation for why high school GPA is so predictive of college success is that GPA measures more than just mastery of academic content; GPA also measures things like homework completion, study habits, organization, time-management, self-advocacy, and prioritization. In

other words, GPA serves as some measure of a student’s academic habits and academic perseverance.¹ As the authors of the book *Crossing the Finish Line* write, a student’s high school grades “measure a student’s ability to ‘get it done’ in a more powerful way than do SAT scores.”² For further explanation, it’s worth quoting the authors at length:

“High school grades are such a powerful predictor of graduation rates *in part* because they reveal mastery of course content. But the “in part” formulation is critically important. In our view, high school grades reveal much more than mastery of content. They reveal qualities of motivation and perseverance – as well as the presence of good study habits and time management skills – that tell us a great deal about the chances that a student will complete a college program. They are one measure of coping skills and whether a student is likely to ‘stay the course.’ They often reflect qualities such as the ability to accept criticism and benefit from it and the capacity to take a reasonably good piece of one’s work and reject it as not good enough. Getting good grades in high school, however demanding (or not) the high school, is evidence that a student consistently met a certain standard of performance. It is hardly surprising that doing well on a single standardized test is less likely to predict the myriad qualities a student needs to ‘cross the finish line’ and graduate from college.”

So in addition to content knowledge, we need students to develop the academic habits and “noncognitive skills” needed to attain a high GPA, which not only helps to open the doors to selective colleges, but also indicates that they’ll be successful when they get there. In delineating these somewhat ambiguous “noncognitive skills” in a recent paper, the Consortium on Chicago Schools Research included things like persistence, resilience, grit, goal-setting, help-seeking behaviors, cooperation, conscientiousness, sense of self-efficacy, self-regulation, self-control, self-discipline, motivation, growth mindset, effort, positive academic work habits, organizational skills, homework completion, learning strategies, and study skills.³ As you can see, this list includes fairly mechanical habits needed to do well in school (complete your homework, stay organized, seek help when needed), and a more complex set of behaviors (motivation, persistence, self-regulation) that require a deeper shift in a student’s academic mindset in order to demonstrate.

So how do we do improve this all-important metric? It seems that there are three major buckets that GPA-improvement activities fall into, and most top schools are set up to work in all three areas. The three buckets are (1) emphasizing the academic behaviors that lead to GPA, (2) setting up in-school structures so that no students fall through the cracks, and (3) consciously working to shift students’ academic mindsets that lead to the academic habits we’re trying to develop.

¹ For more on academic habits and perseverance, see *Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners*, by the Consortium on Chicago Schools Research

² Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson, 2009

³ Farrington, et. al., 2012

Bucket #1: Emphasizing Academic Behaviors

In some sense, it's no mystery how students get good GPAs. If students study for tests, finish all their homework on time, and participate and take notes in class, they should get a good GPA, even if they struggle with content. A 2006 study by the Chicago Consortium on School Research found that 60% of 9th grade students' grade variation could be accounted for by self-reported study habits, making self-reported habits a far more predictive factor of success than prior academic achievement.⁴ The message is simple: study, do your homework, and pay attention in class, and you'll do alright.⁵

However, this is not so simple for students. For starters, even if they know the academic behaviors that will lead to success, knowing and executing are two different things. But before we get to that, for a student who's never been academically successful, they may also need help in figuring out *what* they're even supposed to do to be successful. Do students know how to study? Do they know how much time they should be spending on school work each night? Do they know the academic behaviors that will help them learn more in class? As a first step to helping students achieve the GPAs that will make them college eligible and college ready, we first need to lay out the playbook – do these things, and you'll be alright.

Key Practices:

Academic Habits Rubric: Consider implementing some common rubric, or a common framework, of academic behaviors to better enable staff to evaluate student academic behaviors, and for students to better evaluate themselves. Examples of these types of rubrics are in the appendix, but they vary based on the school and the behaviors the staff wants to emphasize. For example, Casco Bay High School in Portland, ME evaluates students – both through staff and student self-evaluations – on their Habits of Work rubric, which emphasizes not only homework, studying, and in-class behaviors, but also other traits they hope to emphasize, like collaboration and integrity in finished work products.

Grade Conferences: Another great practice is to have formalized and frequent grade conferences, probably through an advisory structure. The idea is that through these GPA conferences, you can do a deep dive of the GPA makeup, looking at both which classes students are most struggling with and what academic behaviors they're struggling, and then recommending potential interventions like regular tutoring with a particular teacher or joining a homework club. For example, if a student's homework grade is low, you could try an intervention by which they can stay after school to do homework, or make better use of an academic planner; if their quiz grade is low, talk about how they take notes in class, to make sure they're listening for understanding during class; and if they're test

⁴ Farrington, 2012

⁵ This assumes that you've built your grading structures, and how you calculate GPA, to include a healthy dose of academic behaviors in the grade calculation. And again, we believe that academic behaviors should definitely be included in the final grade makeup, as it's the execution of these academic behaviors that is so predictive of college success.

grade is low, maybe work with them on potential study systems, expectations for how much they should be studying, and how they know when they've got a topic mastered.

Bucket #2: In-School Structures

Another feature of schools that value improving student GPAs is that they create the in-school structures needed to support students in keeping those GPAs up. These schools make the time needed in the school day to spend more one-on-one time with students, create intervention plans for students when GPAs fall below a certain level, and have teachers who are relentless in ensuring that students effectively use their out-of-school time in a way that helps their GPAs. Below is a summary of those three practices from schools we've visited.

Key Practices:

Free periods: At some of the high-performing high schools we visited, time was built into the students' day where both staff and students were out of class to give staff the chance to spend time with students that needed the most help. This looked different at different schools, but all of the schools made it a priority to rearrange their master schedule such that students and staff had time to meet, out of class, during the school day.

Out-of-School Time: We want students to be able to manage their time and their tasks independently. However, until they can do that, we need to set up structures that allow them to use their out-of-school time successfully. Again, this will look different at every school and even with every student, but examples we've seen include:

- Extending the hours the school is open so that students can have a quiet, well-resourced place to do their work;
- Setting students up with homework-trackers and planners to help them organize and keep track of their out-of-school tasks;
- Teachers making themselves available during out-of-school time by cell phone and e-mail;
- Teachers providing reminders and sharing certain strategies to help students set up their own structures to make sure that they prioritize their school work over other distractions.

Some of these interventions arise through conversations with the student, their advisor, and other school staff. The conversation is built around acknowledging that the student is struggling with certain academic behaviors, and troubleshooting, with the student, to figure out what structures would help her improve in those areas.

Interventions: Closely related to the last bullet is having in place some structure by which these conversations with students are triggered. To repeat one oft-quoted anecdote, at the Cranbrook School, if a student gets a C- in any course, it triggers a grade-level team meeting in which they discuss all of the different ways they're going to support that student, which could include any of the above interventions. The key idea, however, is creating a school structure in which failure is not an option.

Bucket #3: Turn Their Light Bulbs On

Of course, outside interventions and support structures won't be needed if we're successful in getting students' light bulbs turned on, and they drive themselves to do all of the things that great students do, no longer dependent on outside structures. Researchers at the University of Chicago's Consortium on Chicago School Research, have produced one research-based theory of developing the all-important "non-cognitive" skills that lead to increased GPAs, through the development of certain core academic mindsets. Their work has been adopted and affirmed by educators, researchers, and policy-makers alike. Their theory doesn't touch much on in-school structures or teaching students about academic behaviors, but instead focuses on the academic mindsets that produce the non-cognitive skills we're trying to build. Said another way, their work focuses on turning on the light bulb, or what we often refer to as student ownership.

Ownership

The final, and perhaps most important piece of the college-readiness puzzle is this idea of students taking ownership over their education, the goal of college graduation, and their broader purpose in life. By student ownership, we mean that a student has internalized their goals, their identity, and their path in life, and they've aligned their current actions with that path. Essentially, their goals are theirs, and no one else's.⁶

At MFS, we've generally leaned on the shorthand of Dreamer, Seeker, Knower to describe students' ownership of their long-term goals, and their own education.⁷ Dreamers are those students who may dream of college, and say they aspire to college success, but whose actions don't match with their supposed goals. Seekers are those that are trying on a college-going identity, and some of the behaviors associated with that identity, but have not yet fully committed to the goal. Perhaps the goal is still extrinsically motivated, with the student just doing what he knows he's supposed to be doing, and doing it inconsistently. And the Knowers are those that have committed to their college-going identity, have taken full ownership of their long-term goals, and are taking the appropriate actions along the path to their goals. Their goals and their actions are more intrinsic in nature, or at least internally regulated (Deci and Ryan, 2000), meaning that their efforts are completely driven from within – the goals, and the pursuit of those goals have become a part of who the student is. The student has a rich "motivational makeup" – they want to go to and graduate from college for a whole host of reasons, and that motivational makeup will help them to push past the many hurdles they'll face on the path to college graduation.⁸

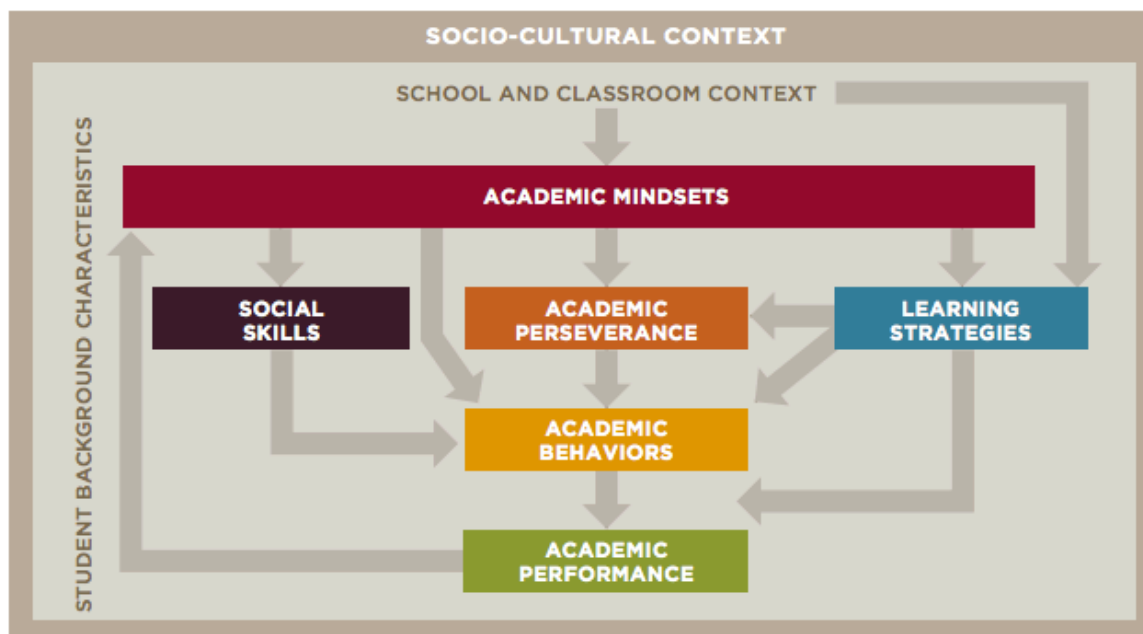
⁶ For more on this, see Deci and Ryan's work on internal regulation, and the "Turning on the Light-Bulb" eBook from MFS.

⁷ The Dreamer, Seeker, Knower framework was created by Cassie Freeman from Southern University, and we learned about it from the book *Ready, Willing, and Able: A Developmental Approach to College Access and Success* by Mandy Savitz-Romer and Suzanne Bouffard

⁸ "Motivational makeup" is a phrase used frequently in the book *Ready, Willing, and Able: A Developmental Approach to College Access and Success* by Mandy Savitz-Romer and Suzanne Bouffard

So how do we get students to develop this sense of ownership in their education? We've written a separate eBook on the topic, but below is the Cliff's Notes version. Returning to the research from the Consortium on Chicago Schools Research, the authors write that many of the skills we want students to display, like grit and perseverance, can't exactly be taught (research has been unable to find ways to teach students to be more gritty, though we can get students to *act* more gritty under the right circumstances and with the right mindsets), while others require more than just teaching (study skills can be taught, but students also need to have the motivation to study).

Therefore, the CCSR model begins with academic mindsets (I believe I can), which leads to academic perseverance (grit, tenacity, delayed gratification, self-discipline, self-control) and other academic behaviors (going to class, completing assignments with quality, organizing materials, participating in class, studying for tests), which lead to an increase in GPA.



So how do we target the student mindsets that lie behind academic behaviors and performance? And what are those academic mindsets? The CCSR paper focuses on four core mindsets that appear again and again in the academic literature:⁹

- 1) I belong in this academic community. (Belonging)
- 2) My ability and competence grow with effort. (Growth Mindset)
- 3) I can succeed at this work. (Competence)
- 4) This work has value to me. (Relevance)¹⁰

⁹ Farrington et. al., 2012

¹⁰ A 2014 article by Paul Tough for the New York Times Magazine, titled "Who Gets to Graduate?" focused on just this issue. The University of Texas – Austin dug deep into the reasons why minority, low-income, and first-generation college-goers were so much less likely than the rest of the student population to experience success in college, and eventually graduate. Through the work of David Yeager, a UT psychologist who is pioneering a lot of

There are all sorts of potential interventions that we've found both in the research literature and from talking with successful schools across the country, that can help trigger these mindsets. Some of these interventions are listed below (and many more are in the Light Bulb book), but the overlying principle is that in any of these interventions below we're trying to target student mindsets: their belief in themselves, their school, and where they're headed.

It should also be noted that the sequence put forth by the CCSR – mindsets, perseverance, behaviors, grades – is not necessarily linear. It could end up that a student starts with the behaviors, realizes he's getting good grades, which shifts the mindsets and leads to more perseverance, and the virtuous cycle continues. Or it could work in the exact way the CCSR researchers propose it does. The key is to always have these mindsets in mind as we work with students, and think about how our actions are shifting their mindsets, in one way or another.

Below is a set of interventions you could try in your school to try and shift student mindsets to a place of ownership. Each intervention is tagged with the mindset it could potentially shift:

- **Develop academic habits.** Help students develop a sense of *competence* by coaching them to be successful at the academic habits (completing homework, organizational systems) that will enable them to be successful in school. This sense of competence in the actions that lie behind academic competence can start a virtuous cycle of success. Students can make these habits a part of their identity.¹¹ *Mindset: Competence (I can do this).*
- **Help students explore identities.** Part of ownership involves students developing their identities, and “learner” or “student” being a part of that identity. So in order to work on student identity, start with where students are at now: through advisory, explore with students their strengths, interests, passions, and goals, and how these connect with school. *Mindset: Relevance (This work has value to me).*
- **Goal reflections.** We're constantly selling students on the goal of college, and why a college degree should be their goal. We need to give students plenty of opportunities to reflect on their long-term goals, and how college is a necessary part of those plans.

To push this even further, a recent study found that when students were prompted to reflect on pro-social goals (making an impact on their community, helping their family –

this work, they discovered a root cause was student mindsets, specifically related to mindsets #1 and #3 above. *belonging* and *competence*. Students took every obstacle they hit in college as a sign that they didn't *belong*, and that they couldn't *succeed* in the work. Yeager developed a series of small, stealthy, and psychological interventions to help combat these mindsets, and student performance amongst these traditionally underachieving groups rose significantly.

¹¹ Farrington et. al., 2012

essentially working to accomplish something that's larger than themselves), they were more likely to persist in the academic tasks that will help them accomplish those goals. *Mindset: Relevance.*

- **Trying on the role.** Through dual-enrollment opportunities, campus visits, after-school programs, and summer programs, we can give students the opportunity to get on a college campus and “try on” the role of college-goer. If they like the way it feels, this could add to their motivational makeup. *Mindset: Relevance/Belonging.*
- **Tying current work with future goals.** If students have set their sights on a particular college, we can use tools like the College Match Magician to show them where they're at in qualifying for that college, and what they need to do (both in GPA and ACT scores), in order to gain admission. *Mindset: Relevance*
- **Enrichment programs.** Another way to add to students' motivational makeup is by getting them involved with out-of-school enrichment programs, prioritizing those on a college campus, but really regardless of the topic. We never know what will spark new interests and passions, and how that will tie into academics, their college plans, and future goals. *Mindset: Relevance*
- **Expose students to future selves.** Anecdotally, many students begin owning their education after being exposed to professionals and college students who they identify with, and who they can picture themselves becoming. Bringing in successful college students and professionals from various careers that share background characteristics with our students to speak with small groups of students is one way to begin this work. Another way to do this work is to have students study biographies of famous individuals in their advisory course. *Mindset: Relevance*
- **Show the stats.** While perhaps over-relied on as a source of motivation for students, it's still worthwhile to show students the differences in outcomes, in terms of employment and salary, for those with and without a college degree. While we shouldn't rely on this as the only source of motivation for students, it's worth showing them that a college degree is becoming close to necessity for a middle-class life in today's economy. *Mindset: Relevance*
- **What do you want to change?** Eduardo Vianna, a teacher at LaGuardia Community College, has written about his experiences with helping students take ownership over their education at the community college level through what he calls the “transformative activist stance,” in which they focus on a problem that they want to change (something in their own lives), and then begin to understand that learning, and gaining knowledge, is a source of power in trying to create that change. *Mindset: Relevance*¹²

¹² http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/21/nyregion/raising-ambitions-the-challenge-in-teaching-at-community-colleges.html?_r=0

- **Zone of Proximal Development.** People like to do things that they excel at. For students that really struggle in school, it's unlikely that they'll develop ownership. For this reason, it's important students are being taught material that they can excel at, that they have a chance of mastering. Or to say it in a more fancy way, it's important that students are being taught at their zone of proximal development. *Mindset: Competence*
- **Learn about growth mindset.** Teaching students about the concept of growth mindset, and how they can identify a growth and fixed mindset within themselves, can help them understand that they can improve, can get smarter, and might make them more likely to stick with their long-term goals. *Mindset: Growth Mindset*
- **Give students a sense of belonging.** Students may be more likely to own their goals if they feel a sense of belonging with the folks (teachers, school leaders) dispensing these goals. There's a lot of potential interventions here, but some examples include prioritizing phone calls home to students and families, and giving students a sense of ownership in the *school* by giving them a say in how the school operates. *Mindset: Belonging*

Building ownership through out-of-school activities

All that's written above on ownership has to do with building ownership through activities during the school day. However, a big part of ownership also has to do with what happens outside of school, after the school day and on weekends. What are students involved in? What are their interests and passions, and what opportunities do they have to pursue them? What opportunities do they have to be exposed to new interests and passions? What's on their "2nd transcript," that's made up of their out-of-school activities?

This idea of a second transcript is something we talk about a lot, and is essentially a stand-in for talking about a students' out of school involvement. One reason to call it a second transcript is because this is something that colleges look at, in addition to their academic transcript. By pursuing interests and passions outside of school, students can truly stand out in the application process.

But in addition we call this a transcript because students involvement in various activities should be tracked, and their should be a record of it, because all that other stuff that students do outside of school ends up being pretty important, particularly for building student ownership. If a student gets involved in meaningful out of school activities, they can begin to draw a line through their interests, to what they're doing in school, to what they want to do with the rest of their lives. They can also begin to develop disciplined mindsets and habits that can spillover into their academic work. So we want to make sure that we give students tons of opportunities to be exposed to new potential interests and passions that they may have never considered, and to develop key habits they may still struggle with in the academic realm.

Below are some potential next steps for getting students exposed to enrichment activities, and building their second transcript:

- **Activities database.** Alicia Hernandez has created a database of extra-curricular opportunities in the region that students can participate in – this is a great place to start. This is an intervention that can be housed in advisory, with advisors matching students up with potential opportunities.
- **Get started early.** In order for students to develop a deep interest in a particular area, they need to be exposed to potential interests early. Make this a priority early in freshman year.
- **Track student involvement and follow up.** One thing we’ve found in the schools is that there are lots of examples of student involvement in extracurricular activities, but it’s often the same students doing all the activities. To make sure all students are getting involved both inside and outside the classroom, set up a tracking system for student involvement in extracurricular activities, and follow up with those students that don’t immediately engage.
- **Facilitate student applications to summer programs.** Make the researching and applying to summer programs a part of your college readiness curriculum. Schools that do this well have their students research potential opportunities early in the year, develop a reach, match, and safety opportunity, and work on the essays and applications in a college readiness course or advisory.
- **Encourage student clubs.** One major obstacle to getting students involved in activities outside of school is funding and coordination with outside organizations. However, there’s a lot you can do within the school itself. If you scan top college-prep schools across the country, you’ll notice that they have countless in-school clubs for seemingly every imaginable activity and topic, from student newspaper to social justice. These are designed, in many ways, to build student ownership. And in most cases, all that’s needed to run them is a group of students and an interested and dedicated staff member.
- **Encourage students to take the next step.** There’s a difference between just joining an activity, and making that interest or activity a true part of who you are. Taking the next step in an activity – leadership position, starting a new club or a new project – not only deepens a student’s sense of ownership, but also looks pretty good on a college resume. The student who participates in robotics club might get a couple points in the application process; a student who *starts* a robotics club and invites a local professor to work with the club will get a lot of points.

Popular student advice writer Cal Newport takes it one step further. He says that what truly separates students in the current college admissions environment, isn’t broad participation in extra-curricular activities, but deep participation, in one or two

passions.¹³ This is a tall task. No longer is it enough to just participate in a bunch of activities; you need to separate yourself from the pack by accomplishing something *unique* in only one or two areas. And Newport argues that by developing that deep interest, students become *interesting*, which is what Newport claims college admissions officers are looking for: interesting students to fill their campus with.¹⁴

College Writing

In addition to the three components of college readiness above, a fourth that we emphasize is college writing, with the understanding that the writing students are asked to do in college is altogether different from what they're asked to do in high school. In high school, students are mainly asked to summarize someone else's thinking, and writing is used as an accountability tool – a check on whether or not you did the reading. In college, students are asked to think about their readings, analyze arguments, consider how new information fits into everything else they've learned, and then *create* their own *original* arguments – a far different task than just summarization. And students will have to do this with great frequency, as analytical writing is the dominant form of college work.

There's a whole other book on College Writing, so to learn more, I'll direct you there.

¹³ Newport, Cal. *How to be a High School Superstar*

¹⁴ Maryland Professor William Sedlacek has spent a career studying the non-cognitive factors that successful minority and low-income college students demonstrate. Several of the factors in Sedlacek's model relate well to this idea of the second transcript: Leadership Experience (meaning a student has some experience leading and influencing others in an out-of-class activity), Community Involvement (meaning a student is deeply involved with the school community through service and co-curricular activities), and Non-traditional Knowledge Acquired (meaning the knowledge students gain through deep involvement in co-curricular activities). The YES Prep charter school network in Houston thinks this stuff is pretty important as well, and so they have their students work on and develop authentic products around two of Sedlacek's factors each year they're in school. Through this structure, students also develop their second transcript. For more of his work, see (<http://williamsedlacek.info/>)

Building a College-Going Culture

Creating a school culture in which the expectation is that all students will enroll in, and be successful in college, is important. For those students who've already been thinking about college, we want to affirm their goals, and let them know they're in an environment where everyone's pushing towards that same goal. And for those students who've never given college a second thought, we want to surround them with the message that they are a college-going scholar, and that this school's going to get them there.

The best definition of college-going culture comes from Patricia McDonough of UCLA, who first operationalized the term. According to McDonough, "when a school establishes a college-going culture, it sends frequent messages and information about college-going through the efforts of many staff and at many times, so that college-going information is in the drinking water, so to speak."¹⁵ First-generation college-goers are at a disadvantage when it comes to information, motivation, and aspirations around college. These students may not have been surrounded by college-going messages growing up, so it's the schools job to inundate them with these messages and information.

According to McDonough, the following 9 components contribute to a school's college-going culture¹⁶:

1) College Talk

McDonough defines 'College Talk' as 'Clear and ongoing communications about what it takes to be on a college path.' There are numerous opportunities throughout a school day to remind students of these expectations. McDonough's definition also includes:

- Faculty and administration sharing their college experiences, both formally and informally.
- Staff being knowledgeable and constantly talking about college, to reinforce expectations.
- Sending school newsletters home to parents about college-going initiatives. This is essential in the 11th and 12th grades, when students are developing college lists, writing essays, applying to college, and securing financial aid. But they can also be effective in the earlier grades, for sharing college knowledge, and reminding parents of what they can do to help with their students' study habits and co-curricular activities.
- Surround students with college messages in the hallways through pennants, posters, and school profiles.

¹⁵ *Ready, Willing, and Able*

¹⁶ The 9 components are summarized from the following paper: McClafferty, Karen A.; McDonough, Patricia M.; Nunez, Anne-Marie, "What is a College Culture? Facilitating College Preparation Through Organizational Change." University of California, Los Angeles, Graduate School of Education & Information Studies. <http://www.bridgingworlds.org/P-20/McClafferty.pdf>

Key Practice:

- Many MFS schools have teachers post on their classroom doors the college they went to, and the average ACT and GPA of incoming freshmen at that school.

2) Clear Expectations

A second component of a school's college-going culture is ensuring that clear expectations are sent that every student is expected to gain admission to a selective college. This requires not only stating this expectation, but also reinforcing the level of effort required for admission to achieve this goal.

A recent study by Shaun Harper of the University of Pennsylvania's Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education on successful Black and Latino male high school students in New York, found that one of the most significant factors contributing to their success was the high expectations set for them by family, school, church, and community members. The students described how even when they struggled academically, people in their lives continued to express that they were expecting big things from them, spurring them to work harder.¹⁷ The Harper study also shares anecdotes of parents never accepting a grade as "good enough," but instead always telling students that they can do better.

Key Practices:

- In the classroom, clear expectations can be demonstrated by teaching students college-ready study habits. In the Harper study, even top students had to make two big adjustments when they got to college. First, they found that they needed to spend a tremendous amount of out-of-class time *studying* for class, while in high school they could just skate by completing assignments, and not really studying. Also, when they got to college, they found that college professors did not accept late work; in high school they were able to save grades by turning in assignments late for less credit.

Students who had incredibly demanding teachers were grateful for their high expectations when they got to college. The moral of the story is that the academic expectations of a high school definitely contribute to the college-going culture.

- A second key practice is constantly showing students where the bar is, where they are in relation to the bar, and what they need to do to hit the bar. One way to have this conversation is to include a list of schools a student "qualifies" for after

¹⁷ Harper, S. R.: [Succeeding in the city: A report from the New York City Black and Latino Male High School Achievement Study](#). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Center for the Study of Race and Equity in Education, 2014.

each progress report or report card, along with the school's graduation rates, average financial aid dispersed, and graduate outcomes, and the types of schools a student could qualify for with an increased GPA.

3) Information & Resources

Before students can aspire to go to college, they must first know what it is they are aspiring towards. Early in high school, students need information such as the types of colleges and universities, the differences between them, the purpose of college, the admission requirements to get in to different tiers of colleges, and the costs associated with the schools.

In addition, more time needs to be spent showing students how *cool* college is, all of the opportunities that will be available to them there, and all of the opportunities that a college education will lead to. If students think of college as just "13th grade," they may not be invested in the goal; but if they see it as a life-changing, door-opening experience, that might change the conversation.

Key Practice: Establishing a College Readiness Course, starting in the 9th grade, is a good way to engage students in lessons around the purpose of higher education, why college graduation is a necessary goal, how much *fun* college is, and what you need to do in order to get into your college of choice. These lessons can also be done in an advisory course.

4) Comprehensive Counseling Model

In addition to information, there needs to be a structure at the school by which each student's world of colleges is narrowed from 3000 to the 9 that they'll apply to. Much of the research and nuts and bolts of the application process can be done in a college readiness course or advisory, but there needs to be one staff member whose full-time job it is to consistently have one-on-one conversations with each student, and their families, regarding college plans, and take full ownership over getting each student to the college where they're most likely to be successful. This person needs to understand the qualities a student is looking for in a college, understand what motivates that student, and have the expertise to help students find an academic, social, and financial match. The entire process is complex, and students and families need someone to be right there with them, advocating for them, researching for them, and educating them, through the entire process.

Key Practice: One benchmark to measure your program against is the college counseling process at top prep schools. Patrick O'Connor, at the Cranbrook School, says that between the spring of junior year, through the application process, he spends at least 8 hours meeting with, or doing research on behalf of, every student in the school. While your school's counselor case-loads may not allow for this sort of time, it's a great goal to shoot for, and it's worth thinking creatively about how to use all faculty members as counselors so that students are able to get this type of individual attention.

5) Testing & Curriculum

While we know there is a lot more to college readiness than a student's ACT/SAT score, we also know that a few extra points on the ACT/SAT can be the difference between whether or not a student is admitted to a more competitive college, and all the advantages that go along with that. With that in mind, it's important to have some sort of ACT/SAT prep wrapped into your college-going culture.

Key Practice: The Kahn Academy has made a range of SAT prep materials available, making the creation of an after-school SAT-prep class all the more attainable.

6) Faculty Involvement

In a college-prep high school, everyone's a college counselor. This means that college, and college expectations, are raised in classroom interactions, all faculty make an effort to have conversations with students around their college plans, and college exposure, research, and application activities take place in all advisories.

Key Practices:

- APS schools keep a central tracker where college team members and senior advisors can log any conversation they have with students or parents around a student's college plans. This both keeps everyone on the same page on how students' college plans are developing, and keeps the staff accountable to having these conversations.
- A second example comes from Shaun Harper's study of top Black and Hispanic male students in New York City. One of his findings was that at these students' high schools, their teachers also took on counseling duties, due to the counselors' heavy caseloads. Students reported that teachers talked to them about their own college experience, offered advice, and helped them with their application essays and letters of recommendation. Advisories are the perfect venues for additional college advising activities and for staff members eager to be involved, there's always work to be done.¹⁸

7) Family Involvement

Efforts to involve families in the college-going process are also essential. Send home newsletters to parents on the things they can do in every year of high school to help their students get on a college-bound path; host coffee-talks after school for parents to drop-in and ask questions; have an intensive meeting with parents and students in the freshman year, charting their path through high school and into college; have another meeting junior year as students have put together their college list, and evaluate the list with parents for academic, financial, and social fit; host parent nights throughout the students' senior year to keep parents on track with all of the financial aid paperwork they

¹⁸ Harper, 2014

need to submit; and have a final meeting with each student and their family to go over students' final college options, where they're most likely to be successful, and what their financial situation looks like at each of their potential colleges.

Key Practice: Saturate parents with college-going information from freshman year on, including newsletters, college-nights, and informal drop-in hours for families to get their questions answered.

8) College Partnerships and College Experiences

MFS schools have formal partnerships with University of Michigan – Dearborn, and Alma College, but there are more partnerships to be had. Talk to area colleges about getting current students into the school to tutor, and talk with the high schoolers about their college experiences. Look to area colleges for after-school and summer enrichments, college visits, and dual-enrollment programs. Make sure that students are visiting a range of different college types, understand the qualities of those colleges, and get a sense of where they might fit in. And finally, make sure that applying to summer programs, some of which may be on college campuses, is part of the college readiness program, and students apply to multiple programs of interest every year they're in high school.

Key Practice: We already have a couple of deep partnerships with U of M – Dearborn and Alma College, but look at what other types of programs are being offered at area colleges that you could connect with, and how we can expose more students to college tutors and mentors – pictures of their future selves.

The Achievement First charter school network has actually built metrics around the number of college experiences their students are exposed to. Each year, students go through 27 different college experiences, ranging in duration and intensity, from hearing from a successful alum who is back for a visit, to taking a week-long trip to visit schools in California.

This site, which features the formal college access programs in the area, may be a good place to start: <http://collegeaccess.org/>. However, we also have a more comprehensive set of resources compiled by our very own Alicia Hernandez, that you can find at her blog.

9) Articulation

Articulation refers to the way a college-going culture is messaged to the staff. Does the staff believe the college-going culture is everyone's responsibility, or just the duty of the college counselor? Does the staff truly believe that every student is going to a selective-admissions college, and are they reinforcing that message through actions? Does the staff spontaneously take the initiative to start informal college-going programs?

Key Practice: Continually message to school staff that a schools college-going culture can't be reduced to a certain set of events or college trips (though those things are



definitely a part of it), but that it truly is a culture that takes over the school, where hundreds of daily interactions send the message to students that they're destined for success and selective admission colleges and universities.

College Counseling

Many factors go into finding the right college ‘match’ for a student. The qualities of the school have to match the qualities the student is looking for, the school has to be in the right location and offer the right programs and services for the student, and of course the student has to be able to afford the school. However, the most important part of ‘matching’ is finding the right academic match.

In recent years, there has been a spate of news stories written about the problem of under-matching. Under matching is when a student attends a college for which she is *over-qualified* (links to these articles are included in the appendix). For example, a student might have the grades to get into a highly selective school, but attend a non-selective state school, or a student could qualify for a less-selective four-year college, but choose to attend a 2-year community college instead.

This may seem harmless enough, or even advantageous; won’t a student have an easier time at a less selective school? As it happens, the answer is no. Statistically, with all else being equal, a student is less likely to graduate from the less selective school. If you took two of the same student (grades, background, demographics), and one went to the most selective college they could get into, and the other went to a less selective college, the one who went to the more selective college is far more likely to graduate.¹⁹

There are a few potential explanations for this. One is resources. More selective schools generally have more resources, in terms of financial aid funding and academic supports, than less selective schools.²⁰ Peer effects might also have something to do with it. If students are surrounded by a higher-achieving group of students, they may be more likely to be successful themselves. For these and other reasons, we want our students to be attending the most selective school they can get into.

Undermatching is a problem across the country, but it’s a particularly acute problem for low-income students. 53% of high achieving, low-income students nationwide apply to no schools whose freshmen have a median SAT or ACT similar to their own,²¹ and only 8% apply to an appropriate set of reach, match, and safety schools.²²

¹⁹ Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson, 2009.

²⁰ This article by David Leonhardt (*What Makes a College ‘Selective’ – and Why It Matters*) talks a bit about why selective schools might have better graduation rates: http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/04/04/what-makes-a-college-selective-and-why-it-matters/?_r=0

²¹ For our students, however, undermatching takes on a much broader definition. Many of our students will apply to schools with median ACT scores similar to their own – but for many students, these schools will be *undermatches*, because they could have gotten into *better* schools.

²² Hoxby, C.M., Avery, C. *The Missing “One-Offs”: The Hidden Supply of High-Achieving, Low-Income Students*. National Bureau of Economic Research. 2012

This happens for a number of reasons. One big one is lack of information. A student may not even bother applying to some highly selective schools, figuring they're too expensive, not knowing that some of these schools will cover a student's full-financial need, or thinking that they have no shot at getting in, not knowing that an application is more than just an ACT score. Another reason may be simple inertia: a student may be comfortable close to home or attending the same college as their friends, and be hesitant to make the jump to a more selective school that's farther away. And a final reason, and probably the most prevalent one, is that students make their decisions without using the two pieces of data that matter most in making their college decision: their likelihood of graduation, and the amount of debt they'll have to take on.

The Two Goals of the College Counseling Program

There are two major goals of the MFS college counseling program. First, we want students to avoid the undermatching problem described above. At MFS, the metric we're using to define undermatching is 6-year minority graduation rates. If a student attends a college that has a 6-year minority graduation rate that is more than 15% below their "target" graduation rate, that student has undermatched.²³ For example, if a student has a 3.3 and an 18, that student has a pretty good chance of getting into schools like Michigan State University, Grand Valley State University, Alma College, and Albion College. Taking an average of the graduation rates of those schools, and other schools in the "Very Competitive" bracket of schools (the above schools all fall into the "Very Competitive" bracket), this student's "target" graduation rate is 57%. So if the student ends up attending Eastern Michigan University, a school with a 25% six-year minority graduation rate, we'd consider it an undermatch.

Along with avoiding undermatching, the second major goal of the MFS college counseling program is that students avoid financial aid gaps. By this we mean that after students take out the maximum amount of federal student loans (\$5500 in their freshman year), they face no more than a \$2,000 gap to reach their total cost of attendance.²⁴ Why \$2,000 instead of \$0? The reason is that the final roughly \$3,000 of a student's cost of attendance calculation is made up of travel and living expenses, and books. So if we limit the travel and living expenses, and maybe get a few more scholarship dollars, we can bring that gap down to zero.

During students' senior years, these two pieces of data should be rigorously tracked through the MFS college tracker.

Information gathered from Matthew Yglesias article (*Smart, Poor Kids Are Applying to the Wrong Colleges*):
http://www.slate.com/articles/business/moneybox/2013/03/undermatching_half_of_the_smartest_kids_from_low_income_households_don_t.html

²³ Every student will have a target graduation rate based on the selectivity level of the schools that they "match" at. This data comes from the Match Magician

²⁴ You may be asking why the \$5,500 in federal loans is "okay" to take out. The reason is that these federal loans carry a low interest rate, and they're income-contingent, meaning that the payback plan will vary based on the amount of money a student makes after graduation.

How do we reach these goals?

Luckily, we're in a good position to fix the problem of undermatching and large student debt.

In the defining paper of the undermatching problem, written by Caroline Hoxby and Christopher Avery, of Stanford and Harvard respectively, the authors introduce the terms “income typical” and “achievement typical.”²⁵ “Income typical” students are high-achieving low-income students who apply to the same set of schools as their lower-achieving, low-income peers. “Achievement typical” students are high-achieving low-income students who behave like their high-achieving peers from wealthy districts, who apply to a strategic set of reach, match, and safety schools. Applying with this sort of strategy, which is the standard operating procedure at college-prep schools across the country, assures that the student will have a set of options that will likely present a good academic and financial match for the student.

We want our counseling programs to create more “achievement typical” students. For guidance on how to do this we can look to some of the highest achieving charter school networks in the country, and other college-prep high schools. These schools structure their programs so as to guide students to behave in a more “achievement typical” manner. Below are some basic components of this type of program:

- **College exposure.** In the **freshman and sophomore years**, students are exposed to a variety of institutions through class trips to colleges, different college-going culture initiatives at the school, and campus-based summer programs. Programs are designed to give students a sense of the college landscape, so that they have an idea of the type of school they're interested in by their junior year.
- **Student-specific college research.** In the **fall of junior year** (and preferably earlier!), students start the academic matching process. Students can get a sense of potential reach, match, and safety schools using the College Match Magician, as well as potential goal schools in each category, as they improve their ACT and GPA over their junior year.²⁶
- **Dedicated college counselor.** Top college counseling programs also have a dedicated college counselor whose sole job is to advise students on their college choices, ensure all students apply to the right schools for them, and take full ownership over ensuring students end up at the college that affords them the best chance of success.
- **Counselor audit.** In **February of the junior year**, counselors can audit the students' lists, to ensure that they have the appropriate mix of reach, match, and safety schools. In addition to three reach, three match, and three safety, in each category students should apply to a couple small independent colleges, and should apply to a couple test-optional

²⁵ Hoxby, 2012

²⁶ The College Match Magician is a tool that allows students to plug in their GPA and ACT score, and get a rough guide as to the selectivity level of the schools that should be their reach, match, and safety schools.

colleges.²⁷ Counselors ensure that students have a group of “reach” schools on the list (where students have around a 20% chance of getting in), “match” schools (greater than 50% chance of getting in), and “safety” schools (nearly 100% chance of getting in).

- **Junior Meetings.** In the **spring of junior year**, counselors have a ‘junior meeting’ with every student, and their family. In the meeting, counselors review the college list with families, and cover all the steps of the application and financial aid process.

This is a time to explain the concept of undermatching, and discuss the importance of finding a good academic match; discuss the financial aid process, and talk about how college might be more affordable (or less affordable) than many think; and talk about the possibility of a student going away from home for college, if that ends up being what is best for the student.

- **Another counselor audit.** Before the start of **senior year**,²⁸ counselors should do *another* audit of the students’ college lists, to ensure that each student has the appropriate number of reach, match, and safety schools on their list, with the right mix of small, private, liberal-arts colleges, and test-optional schools.
- **College seminar.** The most successful college counseling programs have a dedicated college-counseling course in the students’ senior year. There are so many things that need to be completed during the application process – student essays, recommendation letters, the applications themselves, follow-up with admissions offices – and so many ways that students can fall through the cracks, that we can’t leave this to chance.
- **Fly-in Programs.** At the very beginning of students’ senior years, all students over a 3.0 should look to apply to a few “fly-in” programs offered by selective independent colleges. These are tremendous all-expenses paid opportunities for students to experience a college that they’d otherwise never be exposed to.
- **Half by Halloween.** Regardless of whether students are planning on applying early action or not, it’s a good idea to have students apply to half of the schools on their list by Halloween. If you want to be sure that all applications are in by winter break, get half of the applications done in the first two months of school, with the next two months to finish them all off. Have students prioritize their lists, and apply to their top schools early.

²⁷ We want students to apply to a mix of in-state public colleges, as well as small, private, liberal arts colleges, either in-state or across the country. Charter networks from across the country have found that their students have great success at these small liberal arts colleges, because the deep support the small environment offers. In addition, these schools often offer financial aid on-par or better than the less selective in-state publics, and they’ll often have more flexible admissions policies, enabling a student to get into a more selective school that they’d otherwise qualify for.

²⁸ This just gives a very brief overview of the work that needs to be done in students senior year. We’ve also created a task list to guide students and counselors through the myriad steps of the application process. This comes later in the eBook.

This can leave them more time to contact the schools admissions offices to ask them if they need to do anything else for their application, and to show their interest.

- **Everything by Christmas.** Make sure all applications are completed and sent in, with transcripts and all, by Christmas break. Many of the most selective schools have deadlines in early to mid-January, but you don't want to be rushing at the last minute. Also be sure to look out for any schools that have final deadlines in November or mid-December.
- **FAFSA by February 15th.** Due to the changes in the FAFSA rules, students no longer have to wait until after January 1st of their senior year to complete the FAFSA, but can begin working on the FAFSA on October 1st of their senior year. AND, the FAFSA will no longer require parents to fill out their income for the *current* year, but they can instead report their income from the *previous* year, using their completed tax returns and using the IRS data-retrieval tool.

However, parents and students will still undoubtedly have tons of questions, and will run into road blocks, so it's a good idea to have several opportunities for them to complete their FAFSA at the school, ideally with some outside help from FAFSA/tax professionals.

But it's essential that students complete the FAFSA by February 15th. This is when colleges begin making financial aid decisions, and most colleges have a pot of need-based aid that is given out on a first-come, first-served basis. This past year, students who applied before the February 15th deadline received, on average, double the need-based aid as students that filled out the FAFSA after the deadline.

- **Decisions.** Have a process whereby students report all acceptances and financial aid award letters to the counseling office, and mark this in the tracker. In the spring of senior year, have a "senior meeting" with all students and parents, to discuss their thinking around the final college decisions, academic match, and financing.

Again, this is just a brief overview. The entire task-list for senior year college counseling program is substantial, and is presented in full detail later in the eBook.

It's also worth noting, after all of the talk of the dangers of undermatching, that there are some cases in which it's appropriate for a student to undermatch. If a student applies to a school where she will be in the top 50% or top quarter of her class academically, she's likely to receive significant merit aid that will significantly reduce the cost of college. So some students may indeed get their only affordable option at an undermatch school. This type of "strategic undermatching" is of course acceptable, but should always be carefully compared to opportunities a student might be passing up at a more selective school, despite the potential of additional loans.

Matching for Qualities

The protocol listed above will help keep students from slipping through the cracks, and ensure that all students find the right academic and financial match. However, after those two boxes are checked, we can move on to matching students based on school qualities. A top college counseling program will not only make sure their students match and face minimal gaps, but will also work to ensure that every student finds a school they will flourish at, based on what the counselor knows about the student, and what the counselor knows about the college.

So how do you do that? For advice on this area of college counseling, we can turn to Patrick O'Connor, college counselor at the Cranbrook School. Patrick talks a lot about how before students look for colleges, they need to think about the *qualities* that they want in a college, and how those qualities will allow the student to continue living their life to its fullest.²⁹

Do they need a small, supportive school where they'll be on a first-name basis with their professors, and be encouraged to explore intellectually? Do they need a large research-based university with a high-tech science lab? Do they need a school close to home? Or would they thrive at a residential college, far away from the distractions of home? These are all the things that counselors should be trying to get at in the first two years of high school, through various college exposure activities. If you visit colleges, be sure to visit different kinds, and make sure students aren't focusing just on the school itself, but on the *type* of school, and the *qualities* of the school. For example, if you go on a school visit to Kalamazoo College, a small liberal arts school on the west side of the state, and they really love it, it might mean they don't just love Kalamazoo, but would also like whole bunch of other schools that are similar in size, structure, and educational philosophy.

And in addition to knowing the students, counselors need to develop an encyclopedic knowledge of colleges. O'Connor says that from the February of their Junior year, through fall of their Senior year, he'll generally spend at least 8 hours meeting with, or doing research on behalf of, every student he counsels. A lot of that time is spent learning more about all of the different colleges potentially available to the student, in order to get a sense of what type of student will thrive at which college. Recommended reading for counselors, to help develop this insider knowledge, is listed in the appendix.

Some notes on Financial Aid

We already covered some of this above, but there are a few notes on financial aid that either bear repeating, as they're really important. There are a bunch of other resources MFS has compiled on financial aid, but this provides an overview of some of the more important points.

- **There may be a situation where undermatching may be appropriate.** In the section above, we made it seem like undermatching was a problem to be avoided at all costs.

²⁹ Workshop with Patrick O'Connor

And while this is generally true, there are situations when undermatching can actually be used as a strategy to find the appropriate financial aid match. Schools that a student would ‘undermatch’ at may provide a student with their best financial aid package. This is because the school would likely offer the student significant merit aid to attract them to come to their school. Less selective schools want to attract higher-achieving students who would not normally consider attending the school, and so will offer more financial aid dollars in hopes of attracting them to their school.

It could end up that a student gets into some good schools, but that all of them leave a significant ‘gap’ in the financial aid package, while one of the student’s ‘safety’ schools offers them significant merit aid, that will cover any financial aid gaps. In this scenario, finances enter the matching process. Is it better to attend the more selective school, knowing that finances will be an issue, and that the student and the student’s parents might have to take out significantly more loans? Or does it make more sense to take the offer from the less selective school, knowing that financial concerns are one of the reasons that students end up dropping out of school? The answer will vary depending on the student and the family’s financial situation, but as a general rule we want to avoid parents taking out PLUS loans, which carry a higher interest rate and are easy to qualify for, so if an undermatch allows us to do that, it may be the right move.

- **In general, the more selective schools offer more financial aid.** All that said, as a general rule, the more selective a school is the more financial aid they can offer. More selective schools generally have more resources at their disposal, allowing them to offer more need-based aid. This is a message that both students and parents need to hear, as the “sticker price” at more selective schools can often scare students and parents off. Which brings up the next point...
- **A college’s “sticker price” doesn’t matter. The net price is what matters.** The “sticker price” at more selective schools can often scare off parents and students from applying. For example, let’s look at a highly selective school, like Amherst College, and a less selective school, like Eastern Michigan University.

At Eastern Michigan University, students face a total estimated annual cost of attendance of \$19,278. Compare this with Amherst College, where the estimated total cost of attendance comes in at \$60,160. This could lead a student to just apply to Eastern Michigan, because it’s \$40,000 cheaper, even if the student could have gotten admitted to Amherst.

This, however, would be a mistake. Let’s say that the student’s family income was \$40,000. Amherst is a school that meets every student’s full financial need. So a student whose family earns \$40,000 per year would receive a roughly \$52,000 annual grant from Amherst to attend the school. When combined with federal aid, this drops the net-price to about \$4,000 per year, to be covered by work-study and student loans.

While the “sticker price” may have scared some people out of applying, when you look at the net-price, the choice becomes clear.

- **No FAFSA means no aid.** Above I mention that students and their families need to get their FAFSA in by February 15th in order to maximize the financial aid they’re offered by schools. This is absolutely true. But even more importantly, parents need to understand that if they don’t fill out the FAFSA *at all*, they don’t get any aid. Some parents mistakenly don’t fill out the FAFSA because they think that by sharing their financial information, they’ll be on the hook for paying for college. In fact, the opposite is true. If they don’t fill out the FAFSA, the federal government assumes that they don’t need any help paying for college, and then they really *will* be on the hook for paying the whole freight, which isn’t possible for most families. The FAFSA is simply a tool for the federal government and the different colleges to which a student applies to get a sense of how much help a family needs in paying for school.

How to Structure Your College Counseling Program

Again, a lot of the tasks that students need to execute in a college counseling program – college exposure, college research, essay writing, college applications, financial aid forms – can be executed in a college-readiness course or advisory program. Indeed, having time set aside to work on this stuff in school is essential.

However, you still need someone on staff who drives the program, and whose sole responsibility is getting each student into their best-fit school. This means that they’re meeting and having conversations constantly with students and parents, to find out more about what the student is looking for in a college, to allay parents’ concerns about their child going away to college, and to walk them through the incredibly complex financial aid and application process. This means that they’re constantly researching and building relationships with colleges, so that they’ll have a good understanding of which students fit where, and will be able to advocate on behalf of students when they’re “on the bubble” at a particular school. And this means that they’re the person responsible for ensuring that every student leaves high school with a sustainable postsecondary plan, and follows through on that plan.

In addition, having an administrative position that oversees the college program, checks in with the counselor on key college counseling data, and helps strategize to reach key objectives, has proven critical.

Alumni Success

If nothing else, national college persistence data has taught us that students can't do it on their own. Nationwide, just over half of the students that attend college graduate in six years.³⁰ This problem is more acute for low-income students. Nationally, only 8 percent of 9th graders in low-income communities are expected to graduate from college by age 25, while 82% of the 9th graders in the top income quartile will.³¹

There are dozens of potential explanations for this. Low-income students face financial stresses, and may not be able to make tuition bills, or may need to work while they attend college, hurting their performance in the classroom; many low-income students may not be prepared academically for the rigors of college; students may not be equipped with the study and time-management skills needed to handle multiple commitments and the significant workload they faced with in college; students may have trouble navigating the social and cultural complexities of campus life; students may feel like they don't belong, or that they can't do the work; and of course, when all those issues are combined, the smallest of obstacles, from a missed tuition payment, to problems back home, to the end of a relationship, can result in the student dropping out.

To help guide students over the myriad obstacles they'll face in college, each MFS school hires an alumni success counselor, whose sole job is to support students on the road to college graduation. Near the end of this book is an outline of the responsibilities of the alumni counselor position. All these responsibilities, however, can be summed up in the following three guiding principles:

- Stay in close, systematic contact with students, and give them advice, coaching, and encouragement on any issues they're dealing with;
- Build relationships with the campus staff that will be supporting students, and connect students to the campus resources that can help them;
- Rigorously collect GPA and credit-attainment data from students and/or the college, which includes navigating every college's different FERPA regulations;
- And report back to the school both on common obstacles students are facing in college so that the high school can make adjustments to help develop the skills that will enable students to navigate those obstacles, and on which colleges are doing a good job of supporting our students.

And a final guiding principle is that the early years of college are not just a time to survive for our students, but also a time to thrive. A major theme that we want to drive home with the alumni support program is that when our students get to college, the work is just beginning. We want to use those first years of college to continue to close the opportunity and achievement gap that exists between poor, minority students, and wealthy, white students. Before closing this section,

³⁰ New York Times article by Catherine Rampbell: <http://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/02/26/only-half-of-first-time-college-students-graduate-in-6-years/>

³¹ One Goal website: <http://www.onegoalgraduation.org/about-us/>

here's an example of how the work in closing this gap doesn't stop in the senior year of high school.

Below is a passage from the book *How Children Succeed*, by Paul Tough. In the passage, Jeff Nelson, founder of the OneGoal college prep program in Chicago, explains OneGoal's theory of change, and why the freshman year is so important for their underprepared students.

"To many observers, (the fact that college students are studying less, across the country, is) cause for alarm. But Jeff Nelson sees this situation as an opportunity for his students. He recalled for me his own freshman year at the University of Michigan, when he did what a lot of other upper-middle-class kids do at the beginning of their college careers: he didn't work very hard. For some affluent students, freshman year is about drinking heavily; for others, it's about pledging a fraternity or trying to write for the student newspaper. That time is certainly not always wasted, but it generally doesn't contribute much to a student's academic outcomes.³² And so Nelson sees freshman year as a 'magical timeframe' for OneGoal students 'where they can radically close the achievement gap.' As Nelson explained his theory in one of our early conversations, 'Freshman year is this unique moment in time. Kids who have not had to persevere as much walk into college and they coast, for the most part. Or they're partying too hard. And in that moment, if our kids are working diligently and building relationships with professors and studying and using all of the skills that we've trained them to use, they can close the gap. We've seen it time and time again, that all of a sudden a kid who might have been three or four grade levels behind in high school has caught up in a really significant way to his peers by the beginning of sophomore year.'³³

We need to coach our students on how to be engaged students in this critical freshman year, and develop the habits needed to be successful, even if they face gaps in academic skill. As Vincent Tinto, professor of education at Syracuse University writes, "For academically underprepared students, in particular, engagement appears to help offset the otherwise negative effects of lower academic skills."³⁴

*Alumni Counselor Responsibilities/Metrics*³⁵

The job of the alumni counselor is to support your students in a variety of ways, to ensure that they make a smooth transition to college, and stay on track in their freshman and sophomore years. However, just 'supporting' students can mean a lot of different things. Below is a deeper set of responsibilities for your work, so you can ensure that you're appropriately supporting your students.

³² This is probably true, except for the fact that the more involved a student is, the more likely they are to persist through college.

³³ Tough, 2012

³⁴ Tinto, 2012

³⁵ Much of these metrics and guidelines are modeled after the Achievement First network.

Before Alumni Graduate (Spring of Senior Year)

- **Compile list of seniors to submit to the [National Student Clearinghouse](http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/colleges/studenttracker/).** (<http://www.studentclearinghouse.org/colleges/studenttracker/>) The National Student Clearinghouse tracks graduates by matching student names and birthdates, so making sure that these are 100% accurate is essential.
- **Create a tracking system for logging each contact made with students in the alumni outreach program.** You'll have a lot of students on your plate, and they won't all be in the same location. MFS high schools use a clone of the Salesforce sales tracking platform in order to help track and support alums.
- **"Tier" all seniors prior to graduation day.** Based on high school performance (GPA), ACT scores, a qualitative judgment of a student's college readiness, and the level of support offered by the school they're attending, label each student as Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3, with Tier 3 students requiring the most support.³⁶
- **All seniors have an exit meeting with alumni counselor.** At the exit meeting, alumni counselor and the senior discuss the steps the student needs to take over the summer to enroll, gets various contacts for the student, reviews their financial aid plan, and sets a schedule for when they'll check in over the summer.
- **All seniors complete a 'matriculation passport.'** The matriculation passport lays out key tasks students need to take care of, and hurdles they need to get over, in order to matriculate in the fall. A completed matriculation passport can give us a relatively secure feeling that the student will follow through on their plans. *Contact MFS for Matriculation Passport materials.*
- **Obtain each college's FERPA release forms to enable direct information sharing.** Every college has their own process by which individuals outside the college get clearance to view a student's college data. For every college, figure out what those requirements are, and have the students (if they agree) sign FERPA release forms to better enable counselors to support them. This will enable counselors to have real-time academic and financial aid data for all students. The message to students should be that the job of the alumni counselor is to advocate on behalf of students, and without students providing this authorization, counselors will be unable to provide this support.

Before Alumni Enroll (summer before freshman year of college)

- **Check in with students and track conversations several times throughout the summer (roughly 2 to 3 hours of outreach per student).** There are dozens of things that students need to do the summer between their senior year of high school and their freshman fall of college: sign up for orientation, register for classes, buy books, arrange for

³⁶ This tiering system is taken from the Achievement First charter network.

transportation to campus, etc. That time period is also ripe for “summer melt,”³⁷ when students who were planning on enrolling in college don’t show up for the fall of their freshman year; supporting students by staying in touch over the summer, and keeping them on track, is essential. Use the checklist in the MFS matriculation passport to keep you, and your students, on track.

- **Set up digital communication platforms (i.e. Facebook group) for all graduating seniors, to provide them updates and connect them with the experiences of other students.** One best practice in the field is to set up social networks so that students can informally share tips, successes, and struggles with one another. Set this network up over the summer so that students can build excitement with one another before the school year starts.
- **Set up some mass-information contact system.** One fairly easy low-touch method of support for students is to set up some sort of mass e-mail/text system to remind students of key things they need to do both in the lead-up to college, and through the school year. This could include things like registering for classes, buying books, wishing them luck on mid-terms, and reminding them to re-apply for financial aid each year. Signal-vine is the most popular mass texting service, though a service called Bridgit combines mass-texting with an interactive matriculation to-do list.

Once Alumni are Enrolled (Fall of Freshman Year of College and beyond)³⁸

Place students into tiers to prioritize students in terms of the level of attention they receive from their college success counselor. Put students in tiers prior to graduation from high school, but the students in each tier can be updated based on how they’re progressing.

- Tier 1
 - Receives less outreach
 - Has strong academic skills and performance, with a GPA of **2.7 or higher**.
 - Intangibles:
 - Financial aid package has few gaps
 - Strong self-advocacy skills
 - Consistent communication with alumni counselor.
 - Receives monthly outreach and has strong on-campus support in multiple areas identified by scholar and/or alumni office
- Tier 2
 - Needs support beyond monthly outreach
 - Has mid-level academic skills/performance, with a GPA of **2.0 to 2.7**.
 - Intangibles:
 - Some financial aid gaps

³⁷ More can be learned on the “summer melt” by reading [The Summer Melt Handbook](http://cepr.harvard.edu/publications/summer-melt-handbook) (<http://cepr.harvard.edu/publications/summer-melt-handbook>), from Harvard’s Strategic Data Project.

³⁸ This is the support framework used by the Achievement First charter school network.

- Some on-campus support
 - Room for growth in communication and self-advocacy
 - Receives monthly outreach, and some may need campus visits, or more guidance on accessing campus resources.
- Tier 3
 - Needs most support from college, alumni counselor
 - Has low academic skills/performance, with a GPA of **2.0 or lower**.
 - Intangibles:
 - Large gaps in financial aid
 - School does not have many on-campus support mechanisms
 - Lacks self-advocacy
 - Lacks family involvement
 - Receives outreach at least 2x per month, but is less proactive about outreach

Tracking

- **Counselors compose monthly alumni persistence reports.** Reports specify priority students through the Salesforce “direness” coding, and note special issues that have arisen. These reports are designed to help counselors reflect on how to support high-priority students, ensure that all students are in their proper tier, and report this information to the high school administration.
- **Visit, or make outreach to, every college that’s new to the network.** At each new college, meet student support staff, advising offices, and learn who will be the ‘on-campus champion’ for your student(s). Meetings can be in person for local colleges, and over the phone for colleges outside of driving distance. The idea is to get a sense of the support mechanisms in place at each school, and get a sense of whether or not it’s a school to recommend for future students.
- **Collect FERPA release forms.** On campus visits, or over the phone, ask about the school’s FERPA release form, which, if signed by the student, may allow for greater ease in data sharing between the college and alumni counselor.
- **Find an ‘On-Campus Champion’³⁹ for each student.** Your full-time job, as alumni counselor, is to support the students from your high school that are in college. The good news is, there are other people that have this same job, and they’re right there on campus. However, because many of these support offices on college campuses are understaffed, we need to make sure that they know who our students are, and that they’re set up to support them.

³⁹ This is the terminology used by Achievement First.

Make sure that each of your students has an on-campus champion, and that both the student and the on-campus champion are aware of the relationship. You can use this on-campus champion for check-ins as well, and it may be good to set up a goal for the number of times you'll speak with the on-campus champion each month. The on-campus champion can be a "go-to" at the college for any academic, financial, or social obstacle facing the student. Setting up this contact can be something as simple as a phone call, making them aware of the student on-campus, and letting the on-campus champion know that if anything arises, both you and the student will likely be checking in with them.

- **Submit GPA, credit-attainment, and intangibles each semester.** In the tracker enter student GPAs and credits attained, based off of transcript data, at the close of each semester. In addition, you'll also want to enter any intangibles that may impact a student's likelihood of success, such as co-curricular involvement, number of visits to academic advisors and professors' office hours, and whether or not the student is working for pay.

Student Contacts

- **All first-year college students receive a contact every month.** Every month, counselors should make contact by phone with a student. The phone call should be used to get a sense of how well the student is transitioning, and what obstacles they're running into. Conversations, and the contents of these conversations, should be documented.
- **By end of first semester (and then again in the second semester), counselor should visit all Tier 3 students on campus (if possible).** On the visit, counselors can set up meetings with the learning center, academic advising, and financial aid office, depending on the needs of the student. Counselors will prepare students for meetings by discussing issues they're facing, role-playing the meetings, accompanying students on the meetings, and setting up follow up meetings.
- **At the beginning of each semester, get essential information from each student.** Essential information includes their mailing address, e-mail and phone, class schedule with class times, name of classes, levels, professors, and the name and contact information for their academic advisor.
- **Each quarter, have students send a screen shot of their online transcript.** The easiest way to get your students' information is by having the student give you access through the college's FERPA release form. Absent that, get the students to send you a screenshot from the school's online transcript system, and e-mail it to you once a quarter.

- **For any student with below a 2.3 GPA, check in with their on-campus champion every month.** You're already checking in with all students every month; for students who are struggling academically, you should check-in with the on-campus champion as well.
- **Personal contact made with sophomore year students every other month.** By the time students are sophomores, you'll have a new batch of freshman, so unless a student is in trouble, move the contacts back to every other month.
- **Ensure that all students respond to the fall and spring survey.** Fall and spring survey data can give a good snapshot of where your students are at in the transition process.
- **Set up a Facebook group for alumni.** In the Facebook group students can share success stories, study strategies they have found success with, activities they've joined, offer each other encouragement, and send each other reminders on important dates.

Community-College Students

- **Work with students in community colleges to create a transfer plan.** By the end of the first semester, make sure that every student enrolled in a community college has a plan to transfer to a four-year college. This doesn't mean that they'll necessarily transfer after their first semester, but it does mean that they have a plan in place for where they want to transfer to, what credits transfer, and what grades they need in order to get into that school.

"Not-Enrolled" Students

- **Any student who 'stops out' should be contacted and brought into school to make plans.** If a student stops out of school for whatever reason, arrange for the student to come to the school with their parents, and arrange for them to take courses at a community college, and make plans for re-enrolling the next semester.

Contacting Parents

- **Host 'supporting your child workshops' at the high school.** There are lots of things that parents can do to support their students while they're off at college. And some of these things may be counterintuitive to them, like not always encouraging students to head home whenever their child is having a problem at college. Bring them in to the school to share resources, research, and small tips of what they can do to help their students while they're off at school.
- **Host FAFSA night at school in January of every school year.** Students need to apply for the FAFSA every year. Host a night at the school to enable parents to get the information and assistance that they need in helping their child fill out the FAFSA.
- **Compose a bi-annual alumni newsletter.** An alumni newsletter is a great way to keep alumni and parents of alumni involved in the high school community.

- **Check parent contact information annually.** Aside from the students and the on-campus champions, parents are obviously key actors in the success of your students; we need to be able to get in touch with them.

Contact with Colleges

- **By the end of the first semester, visit every college new to the network if possible.** On the visit, counselor should meet with advising, student support, and financial aid offices, assess student progress, and assess the school for its fit for future students.
- **Set up goals with ‘campus champion.’** During the first semester, reach out to each student’s ‘campus champion,’ and create a plan for frequency of contact between student and the campus champion.
- **Non-academic outreach.** Some schools will send out a holiday card each November to all schools to which their school has sent alums. Anecdotally, these personal touches go a long way towards building your long-term relationship with the school.
- **Bring admissions officials to campus.** Aside from the college visits that the school’s college counselor is setting up, as alumni counselor you can and should bring officials from partner colleges to campus to show them around the school, meet current students, and get feedback on the college-readiness program of the school. College-prep schools like U of D Jesuit have over 60 college representatives visit the school every fall.

Sample Program Goals (Taken from Achievement First program)

- Goal is to have 85% of alumni enrolled in college at all times.
- Goal is to have 75% of alumni earning a 2.5 GPA or higher in first semester.
- Goal is to have 80% of alumni earn at least 12 credits in their first semester.
- Goal is to have 25% of alumni earning at least a 3.0 GPA.
- Goal is to have 85% of alumni earn sophomore status by the end of freshman year.
- Goal is to have 75% of alumni below a 3.0 in first semester increase their GPA by 0.25 by June.
- Goal is to have 100% of alumni with a GPA of 2.0 or higher.
- Goal is to have 60% of alumni graduate from college in four years.
- Goal is to have 70% of alumni graduate from college within five years.
- Goal is to have 75% of alumni graduate within six years.
- Goal is to have 85% of alumni graduate by age 26.
- Goal is to have 75% of students graduate with less than \$25,000 in debt.
- Goal is to have 100% of students graduate with less than \$35,000 in debt.



Proposed Calendars

In the pages that follow, we've included a proposed calendar for every year of high school outlining the activities to be completed each year in order to achieve all of the goals outlined above. For each topic, we've also included some guiding questions, potential products that students could create, and/or potential resources.

There will also be an ever-evolving set of resources added to this book that you can use in an advisory or college readiness seminar, to try and get at some of these objectives.

Section 2: Proposed Calendars for 9-12 College Readiness Program

Senior Year

By senior year, the college success program's goals are pretty simple – get every student admitted to and enrolled in the best fit school for them, with the best financial aid package possible. The OneGoal program in Chicago calls this process AAA&E, representing the four components of the admissions process: Application, Admission, Aid, and Enrollment. As a guide, we'll be using a calendar to structure the curriculum for senior year, as many things the seniors do will be time sensitive.

Goals

Below are some potential core goals for your senior year college counseling program:

- **College Applications** – Every student should submit a *minimum* of 9 applications to best-fit colleges. 3 of the schools should be reach schools, 3 should be match schools, and 3 should be safety schools. At least two of the schools should be small, private, liberal arts colleges, at least one of the schools should be a test-optional college, and at least one of the schools in the match and safety categories should be in-state schools.
- **Admission** – All seniors should bring in all of their admissions letters, whether admitted, waitlisted/deferred, or rejected. All students should enroll for their best-fit college by May 1st of their senior year. The school in which they enroll should offer the best academic, financial, and social fit, and all else equal should have a graduation rate close to their “target” rate.
- **College Financing** – This means that all seniors must fill out the FAFSA by February 15th at the latest. Seniors should also have turned in all of their financial aid award letters by April 15th, to ensure that they have financing in place for college prior to the May 1st deadline. By bringing in the letters, and inputting information into the admissions and gap tracker, seniors and their families will know exactly how much they'll be receiving in federal, state, and institutional grants, how much they'll be taking out in loans, whether or not they'll be working part-time, and how much their family will be contributing.

This should also include a scholarship goal, in which all students apply to a minimum amount of private scholarships, in order to increase their ability to pay for their college education.

- **College-Ready** – Seniors should receive training on college survival skills. On top of the academic, leadership, self-advocacy, and self-management skills they've developed over the past four years, there are dozens of other skills and bits of knowledge that we need

to equip students with. From where to sit in class, to how to interact with professors, to study strategies, to where the cafeteria is, the college environment will be foreign to many students, and we need to teach them as much of the language as possible in their senior year.

- **Leave a Legacy** – Don’t forget, while students are spending their senior years applying to college, it’s also their final year of high school. Encourage students to get more involved, or take leadership positions, as they leave a mark on their high school and their community. As an added benefit, if students are placed on the wait-list for their reach colleges, they can send colleges notes on what they’ve been up to in their senior year.

The Casco Bay Expeditionary Learning school in Portland, ME has all of their students do a “last word” speech, in which seniors talk about how they’ve grown over the past four years, the legacy they’re leaving behind, and their plans for the future.

- **Get to Campus** – “College Melt,” the phenomenon in which students, and low-income students in particular, end up not matriculating in the fall to the college they say they’re headed to in the spring of their senior year, is a major problem. However, it’s also fixable. We need to make sure that all students complete core steps in the matriculation process before leaving high school (attached), take an exit survey before graduation, and that we keep in touch with them over the summer to help with any obstacles they run into. *Contact MFS for a version of the exit survey*

Sub-Goals

The goals above are the major goals for the year. Of course, there are many smaller goals that need to be accomplished in order to reach the larger ones. Below are some of those potential sub-goals, with a note on when they should be accomplished by.⁴⁰

- **Research and finalize list of colleges applying to** (*To be accomplished by end of September at the latest*)
- **Note all significant deadlines on planners/calendars** (*To be accomplished by end of September at the latest*)
- **Request letters of recommendation (2)** (*To be accomplished by the middle of September at the latest, ideally requested before summer break*)
- **Have students collect and note all additional essay questions on college applications (personal statement and supplemental), and plan out the additional essays you’ll need to write** (*To be accomplished by the end of September at the latest*) *Contact MFS for materials on writing personal statements*

⁴⁰ Many of the benchmarks listed above were adopted from the OneGoal program (<http://www.onegoalgraduation.org/>), the Achievement First network (<http://www.achievementfirst.org/>)

- Review all student personal statements and score them on an internal rubric. (*Ongoing, but essays completed for first round of applications should be done by the end of October.*)
- Complete applications for half of colleges by the end of October
- Have students re-take the SAT or ACT (whichever they did better on) in the fall
- Have students research the 10 (or more) scholarships you will apply to, and put deadlines in planner/calendar (*To be accomplished before winter break*)
- All complete applications submitted (*To be accomplished by December 1st at the latest*)
- Submit FAFSA application (*To be accomplished by mid-January*)
- Collect all financial aid award letters, and acceptances or denials by April 15th.
- Have an individual meeting with each student on their final decision (*To be accomplished by end of April*)
- Place a deposit at a college (*To be accomplished by May 1st*)
- Complete matriculation passport (*By graduation*)

Senior Year Calendar

Before school starts...

July

- **Summer Reading.** Encourage students to go above and beyond any required reading list. For all the focus on test-prep and instructional strategies, some research suggests that student ACT scores are highly correlated with the number of adult-level books they've read. Students should take this opportunity to take on with vigor one of the main tasks of being a college student: reading.
- **Summer Programs.** Ideally students will also be spending part of the summer before their senior year on a college campus, taking college courses or getting involved in other enrichment activities.
- **Essay:** In order to ease the work-burden in the fall, students can create a rough draft of their personal statement essay. In addition to the personal statement, they'll likely have to write supplemental essays for some of the schools they apply to, particularly if they're

applying to test-optional schools, which they should. Reference the section of the book on college essays for help in giving students guidance in this arena.

- **Draft Resume:** Students should draft a resume with all of their extra-curricular and academic information, as well as grade point average and ACT score. This can be completed on Naviance, and transferred to a paper version if need-be.

August

- **College List Audit:** Counselors can use this month before school starts to sit down with the transcripts and college lists for their rising seniors. Go through the lists, and figure out if the students have enough match, safety, and reach schools, based on the students' transcript, and whether or not those schools are the right schools for that student. What we're ideally looking for, in addition to a mix of true reach, match, and safety schools, is a mix of institution types: in-state public colleges, private colleges from across the country, and test-optional schools. Make sure, as a general rule, that the lists don't include out-of-state public schools, which won't be able to offer good aid to our students.
- **Letter of Recommendation Writing Workshop:** Students only get a couple chances to really 'come alive' to the admissions staff at the colleges they apply to. One of the ways that they do is through faculty letters of recommendation. To ensure that staff gets this part right, counselors can host a workshop for best practices in writing these letters of recommendation.

After school starts...

September

- **Task #1 – Get students on Naviance (if they're not already!):** Ideally, the entire college program will run through Naviance. This is where students will list the schools they're applying to, update their progress in those applications, and request transcripts and letters of recommendation. So we need to make sure (1) they know how to get on, and (2) complete some basic functions like how to add colleges to their lists, update their progress, and request materials from teachers and counselors.
- **Task #2 - College List:** The first task of the college application process is to have students finalize their college list, ideally with 9 schools: 3 that are best fit match colleges, 3 that are best-fit reach colleges, and 3 that are best-fit safety schools. To accomplish this task, students should generally follow this process:
 - 1) **Articulate the strategy** – Learn about, and be able to articulate, the application strategy, and the importance of following the strategy.

- 2) **Use the Match Magician** – Students use the Match Magician to get a sense of the recommended schools in their reach, match, and safety universe. Students can enter these schools they’re “thinking about applying to” into Naviance.
 - 3) **Internet research** – Using a range of internet search tools, students narrow their list down to the 9 schools they’re going to apply to (3 reach, 3 match, 3 safety), based on (1) graduation rates, (2) net-price, and (3) fit/campus feel – is this a place they can see themselves attending? Students can enter they’re list in the “schools I’m applying to” section of Naviance.
 - 4) **Audit** – Counselors audit students’ final list of schools to ensure the appropriate mix of reach, match, and safety, public and private, and test-optional schools.
- **Task #3 - Plan:** Once the college list is created, all significant deadlines need to be marked on a planner or calendar that is dedicated to the college search.

- 1) **Common App, Online App, or On-Site** – On Naviance, students can see the method they should use for applying to that school – either through the Common App, through an online application on the school’s website, or perhaps through an on-site admissions process. On-site admissions will likely be the application method for all of the in-state publics, perhaps with the exception of U of M – Ann Arbor.

On student planner/checklist, students can mark the correct delivery mechanism.

- 2) **Plan out tasks and dates** – In order to stay on track for finishing all applications by December, we want half of the applications completed by the end of October. These can either be schools that are their top choice, and probably at least one of their safety schools, so they can get a “sure thing” in the bank early in the application season.

On a student planner/checklist, students can mark the due-dates for all their applications (either end of October or December 1), and all the tasks they need to get done for each application, including securing letters of recommendation, and any essays that need to be completed.

- 3) **Note your essays.** In particular, students should go through their common app schools, and their online app schools, and note the additional essays they need to write for each schools, and the prompt for each of those essays. Working on these essays can take up a bulk of their time in a college seminar course.
- **Task #4 – Fly-In Programs:** Many of the small private schools that we want our students to apply to, and eventually attend, offer all-expenses paid overnight trips to students in the fall to come visit their campuses. These trips are generally only available to the higher

achieving students, so the students who should be applying are generally students over a 3.0.

- 1) **Go through the list.** The first step in this process for students is to go through the list of colleges that offer these overnight visits, and see if there's any overlap in the schools they're applying to. Even if there isn't, they may still want to apply to a few, to see if in the end they want to apply to one of those schools. For a comprehensive set of schools that offer these fly-in programs, see here:
<http://blog.collegegreenlight.com/blog/college-fly-diversity-programs-2016-2017/-sthash.U97I8VEQ.dpbs>
 - 2) **Apply.** Set some sort of goal with the students that every student above a 3.0 applies to at least 3 overnight trips. These applications usually involve some basic student information and a brief essay.
- **Task #5 – Essays:** Filling out college applications, when it comes down to it, is actually pretty easy. A bit of biographical information, transcript data, and co-curricular activities, and you're all set. The hard part, however, is the personal statement, supplemental essays, and portfolio essays that students may need to include in their applications.

And students will often avoid doing these at all costs, opting instead to apply to schools that don't require essays. But here's the thing – we need our students to apply to schools that require essays. These are often the small, private colleges where a great essay can make up for a lower test score, boosting a student into a reach school. And we need students to compile their best written works so they can also apply to test-optional colleges, where the only admission criteria is a great GPA and good academic writing.

- 1) **Complete a (great) personal statement.** First step in this process is to make sure students have one personal statement, based on one of the Common App prompts, that can be their main essay for the application season, and really makes the student stand out, jump off the page, and offer the admissions committee some sense of how unique the student is. This personal statement isn't just a box to be checked, but instead something to be worked over again and again, until both student and staff feel that their best effort is put forward.
- 2) **Complete any supplemental essays.** If we're pushing our students, some schools that they apply to will have to write supplemental essays in addition to the personal statement. This is good! More chances for students to stand out. Completing these essays is the next step, though if some of the schools requiring these essays are schools that students will be applying to regular decision, they can wait a bit and plan to do these essays in November.
- 3) **Compile great pieces of written work.** We want all of our students to apply to at least one test-optional school, particularly for those students whose ACT scores don't offer

a true sense of the kind of student they are. But in order to apply test-optional, students will generally have to offer a few pieces of written, college-level work, often with teacher comments on them – so we need to make sure these are collected.

- **Task #6 – Request Letters of Recommendation:** Ideally students will have completed this task before leaving for the summer after junior year, but if they haven't, in September they need to secure two teachers to write their letters of recommendations. The letters of recommendation can be requested through Naviance, but most schools insist that students also approach their teachers in person to ask for them to write the letters of recommendation.

Teachers can also submit these letters through Naviance, and they can be uploaded into the students' digital portfolio, to be sent to the schools through the Naviance eDocs system.

- **Task #7 – Request Transcripts:** When students have their final list completely ironed out (like, they're definitely applying to these schools!) and entered into Naviance, they should also request transcripts for each of the schools they're applying to. Schools have their own systems for this, but it can be done easily through Naviance, enabling counselors to also see their entire workflow right in front of them. They can also upload and send those transcripts with the click of a button.

For students applying to schools through on-site admissions, however, transcripts will likely need to be printed out and delivered in-person.

- **Task #8 – Register for ACT/SAT:** Even the folks that make the test claim that your scores on the ACT can range a couple points between test even if you didn't study between test sittings. So when students get back to school in the fall, we need to make sure they're registered for one, if not two, fall sittings of the SAT or ACT, depending on which one the student did better on. It's not the ideal system, but a couple points on the SAT/ACT can make the difference between one college and another, between thousands in scholarships versus more loans.

October

- **Task #9 – Apply!** Once October hits, and we know the colleges students are applying to, have application deadlines marked out, know the dates of our various on-site admission visits, and have our essays and letters of recommendation in order, we can get to the business of filling out the actual applications. By all means, if students are in a position to start on this earlier, definitely do. But, if students haven't submitted any applications by October, they should get moving.
- **Task #10 – The Common App:** Filling out the Common App comes after Task #9 because not all students will be applying to Common App schools. That said, if students want to

get this out of the way early, because they've got a good number of common app schools they're applying to, that's fine.

- **Task #11 – The FAFSA!** Because of changes to the FAFSA, it will now come available on October 1st of students' senior year, rather than January 1st. This is great news! Students no longer need to wait, and then make a mad dash to get it done by February 15th. Students and parents should knock the FAFSA out as soon as possible, and they can just use their previous year's tax returns to do it.

MFS has a bunch of resources to help guide students and families through the process, but some of the basic steps are below:

- First, parents and students can apply for their FAFSA Pin online, which they'll need to file the FAFSA (<https://pin.ed.gov/PINWebApp/pinindex.jsp>). Both the student and the parent need to register for a pin.
 - Collect the necessary student and parent information. To complete the FAFSA, students and parents will need: pin numbers for both parents and students; social security numbers for both parents and students; tax returns from the previous year; bank statements; brokerage statements.
 - With materials gathered, students and parents can then fill out the FAFSA. It's a bunch of questions, but taken step-by-step, really isn't so bad. In addition, on the application FAFSA offers a help number that is staffed with financial aid professionals that can answer any questions you have.
 - The starting place is <https://fafsa.ed.gov/>. From there, students can use <https://studentaid.ed.gov/fafsa/filling-out> but basic guidance, and these two sites which feature FAQs: <http://www.finaid.org/fafsa/help.phtml> and <http://www.finaid.org/questions/faq.phtml#misc>
- **Task #12 – Register for the Detroit Scholarship Fund.** The Detroit Scholarship Fund started as a "last-dollar" scholarship offered by the Detroit Regional Chamber to cover tuition for any Detroit student planning to attend a community college. However, there is now a four-year component to the Detroit Scholarship Fund, offering last-dollar tuition scholarships to participating in-state public four-year colleges, so long as the student has over a 3.0 GPA and 21 ACT score.

So a good idea is to have every student register for the Detroit Scholarship Fund, with those over a 3.0 and a 21 registering for the four-year option. In addition, if students who meet the four-year criteria haven't yet applied to the appropriate reach, match, and safety in-state publics that participate in the scholarship, this can prompt them to do that now as well.

- **Task #13 – Prep for Decision Day:** Decision day generally takes place in early November, at either Renaissance or Cass Tech. It's an event where all of the big, in-state, public colleges come to the city to collect application materials from Detroit students – and then get them an admissions decision the very same day! Students need to know (1) which schools they're applying to at Decision Day, (2) and what they need to get in order to apply to those schools. Students often have to complete some tasks online prior to Decision Day for certain schools.
- **Task #14 – Document Everything:** As students start completing online applications, we need to build in two crucial organizational systems. First, when a student applies, he/she needs to mark it in Naviance. And second, we also want to collect documentation on this. When a student applies to a school, they'll receive an e-mail back from the school saying "Thanks you for your application, etc." Students should print out two copies of this e-mail. One copy goes to their counselor, and the other goes in their college folder.
- **Task #15 – Admissions Visits:** These visits may happen outside of the college readiness course, but the college readiness course can facilitate students signing up for campus visits from admissions representatives from various colleges. Students should be attending these throughout the fall. Naviance can also be used to facilitate this process. Visits from college admissions officers offer a great opportunity to get students "hooked" on a certain school. Again, U of D Jesuit High School here in Detroit welcomes 60 admissions officers every fall.
- **Task #16 – Half by Halloween:** Make sure all students are on track for having half of their applications submitted by Halloween, focusing on the schools that they want to apply to "early action." Remember that this is far different from "early decision." If students are accepted "early decision," the acceptance is binding. "Early action" simply means that the student finds out about their acceptance decision early.

November

- **Task #17 – Revisit your list:** After the first round of applications, students should revisit their list to make sure that it's still made up of the schools they want to apply to. Did they become interested in another school during an admissions visit? Do they want to add another test-optional school in to the mix? Did their fall ACT score put them into another selectivity category? Students should revisit their lists on Naviance, finalize those lists, and then get them audited by their counselor.
- **Task #18 - Work on Regular Decision applications** – With the early apps in, students can move their focus to the regular decision applications, generally due in early January. The goal, however, is to get these wrapped up by early December.
- **Task #19 – Scholarships** – Hopefully students aren't waiting until mid-November to start on scholarship applications, but as their application burden lessens, they can shift more

of their efforts to applying to private scholarships. These can be hard to get, so students should apply for a bunch, both using national sites, and also chasing down scholarships in the community.

The student deliverable here should be some set number of scholarships that students need to apply to. Receipts for those scholarship applications can go in student portfolios.

- **Task #20 – E-mail all colleges** – Somewhere in mid to late November, students should take on the task of writing a professional e-mail to all of the schools they’ve applied to in order to follow up on two things. First, they should check to see that the college has received all of their materials and that their application is all set, but second, they should write to ask if there’s anything else they can do to make a stronger application. Colleges want to see this because they get a ton of applications, and they want to admit students who are actually interested in attending the school – these e-mails will show that interest.

The student deliverable here could be copies of these e-mails.

- **Task #21 – One-on-One Meetings** – Also in mid to late November, counselors should start to meet with students individually to take stock of where they’re at in the application process. Where have they applied? Do they have confirmation that their application is complete? How’s their list looking? Do they need to apply to more reach, match, or safety schools? Does the list include a mix of in-state publics and small private colleges in the Midwest? Have they applied to any test-optional schools?

Make sure students leave with a set of next-steps.

December

- **Task #22 – Make sure all applications are in!** - All applications should be in by now. In addition to getting those existing applications in, counselors should do another audit to make sure that every student has applied to the appropriate reach, match, and safety schools, that they’ve applied to a mix of large, public schools and small, private colleges, and that they’ve applied to at least one test-optional school. If students have gaps, this is the time to complete those final applications.
- **Task #23 – Students speak fluent financial aid:** Before students start hearing back from colleges, and receiving financial aid award letters, we need students to speak fluent financial aid. One way to go about doing this is by having students prepare a report/presentation that covers the following items:
 - **Overview of the financial aid process**, including the deadlines for the FAFSA, the importance of turning in the FAFSA early, the CSS Profile, and financial aid award letters.

- **The different types of financial aid they'll receive**, including from federal and institutional sources, grants and loans, good loans and bad loans, and private scholarships.
- **An estimation of the aid** they're likely to receive from each of the colleges they applied to, through the use of net-price calculators, tuitiontracker.org, and meritaid.org.

January

- **Task #24 – Complete the FAFSA!**: If the FAFSA is not complete by now, this is the top priority.
- **Task #25 – Complete CSS/Financial Aid Profile**: Some colleges also require financial aid form the schools' forms, or from the CSS/Financial Aid Profile, which is provided by the College Board. The colleges that require these are generally the more selective colleges.

Information on filling out the CSS Profile can be found here

(<https://www.edvisors.com/fafsa/other-forms/profile/>), and this is a link to the schools that require students to fill out the CSS Profile

(<https://profileonline.collegeboard.org/prf/PXRemotePartInstitutionServlet/PXRemotePartInstitutionServlet.srv>)

- **Task #26 – Final Applications**. Again, ideally, all applications are complete before students leave holiday break. However, when students get back from break, we should perform one more audit, just to make sure that they've applied to the right number of reach, match, and safety schools, applied to some small private colleges, and applied to some test-optional schools. Most schools' final deadlines (for those that have deadlines), range from early January to mid-February.

February

- **Task #27 – Getting an accurate financial aid picture**: With applications in by winter break, and FAFSAs in by February 15th, we enter a waiting game. It'll be close to a month before decisions, and financial aid award letters begin to arrive. And when students do finally hear, they won't have much time to make their final decision.

Luckily, there are tools at our disposal to get a prediction of both (1) where you're likely to get in and (2) how much aid you're likely to get. On collegegreenlight.com, students can see scatter plots of admissions decisions for their school, and if they go to their school's website, they can use their net-price calculator to get a sense of how much merit and need-based aid they're likely to receive. In order to use this net-price calculator, they'll need much of the same family financial information that they needed to fill out the FAFSA.

- **Task #28 – Follow up with admissions and financial aid offices.** If students are applying to 9 schools, their next task is to write 18 e-mails. One application materials and their FAFSA have been submitted, we want students to write to each schools’ admissions office and each schools financial aid office to check and see if they’ve received all of the students’ application and financial aid materials. Be sure to use these e-mails as an opportunity to practice proper e-mail etiquette (resources attached), and encourage students to wish the admissions staff a happy new year, and check to see if they can do anything else to help their admissions chances!

Many of the tasks above (such as scholarship applications) will be ongoing. However, as students wait for application and financial aid decisions, we can shift back away from the mechanical tasks of applying to college, and into some deeper lessons on how to succeed in college.

- **College Prep Task #1: How do I decide where to go to school?** Ideally, students will end up with more than one college option; they’ll need a framework for evaluating these options. Using the information gained from Task #27, students can rank their schools – based on available information, and I get into all my schools, where will I go? Why?
- **College Prep Task #2: What do successful college students do?** There are time-tested things that the best college students do. From where they sit in class, to how they take notes, to how they study, to the way they manage their time, to the activities they choose to get involved in. Students need to know what the best college students do, so they can emulate these same things. They can read research, student testimonials, and ‘college survival guides’ written by top students and college staff. Potential guiding questions include:
 - *Where should I sit in class?*
 - *How should I take notes in lecture?*
 - *How should I take notes when reading?*
 - *How should I manage my schedule?*
 - *How should I study?*
 - *How much should I study?*
 - *What should I get involved in?*
 - *How should I interact with professors?*
 - *How should I study with classmates?*

A potential deliverable could be a sort of plan for success, or a self-made college survival guide. What are the things that you’re going to do next year to make sure you’re successful?

A good student-friendly book for students to read in doing such a project is Cal Newport’s *How to Win at College*. There’s also a list of resources and articles in the resources section.

- **College Prep Task #3: Why College?** Another potential task for this period of the year could be to have student put together an essay on why they want to go to college in the first place. As much as possible, we want students to internalize the answer to this question so that when they hit obstacles in the process, they remember why they're there. Potential guiding questions include:
 - *Do you want to go to college to get a great career? What career?*
 - *Do you want to go to college to explore the myriad opportunities available to you both inside and outside the classroom?*
 - *Do you want to go to college to delve deeply into a certain subject, and study with certain professors?*
 - *A college experience is what you make of it. Have students read about students who've made the most out of college, and have students brainstorm how they might also make the most out of college.*

In the resources section are a set of excerpts and readings that students can use as fodder to build their essays.

- **College Prep Task #4: How do I choose a major?** The whole concept of a college major may be a foreign concept for many students. And declaring the wrong major, and getting on the wrong track, can be costly to students, both in terms of time to completion, and in actual money. You may have reviewed this with students earlier in their high school career, but it's worth going over all this again, to make sure everyone's on the same page. Potential guiding questions include
 - *What is a major?*
 - *What implications come with choosing a major? For college? For career? For switching careers?*
 - *What are the best majors in terms of job security? Pay?*
 - *When do you choose a major?*
 - *How do you switch majors?*
 - *How and when do you pick classes for college, and how does my major impact that process?*

March and April

- **Task #29: Turn in all admissions and financial aid award letters.** The ongoing task throughout March and April is for students to bring in every admission letter and financial aid award letter they receive from the colleges they applied to. All information from the letters should be entered into the tracker. All students should be followed up with until all letters are in. If students say that they haven't received one or both of these pieces, bring the student into the office to conduct a joint call to the admissions/financial aid office at the school in question, to see if there's a reason for the delay. It's often the case that students haven't received their aid letter or decision because a piece of their application or their FAFSA hasn't been submitted.

- **Task #30: Family meetings.** When a student has heard from every college, both admissions and financial aid, set up a time to meet with the student and the student's family, to go over all their options, specifically focusing on the Acceptance/Gap tracker, that will shine a light on the 6-year minority graduation rates of all the schools the student was accepted to, and the financial aid gap they're facing at all of their potential schools.
- **Task #31: Final decisions.** Make sure that every student places a deposit at the school that provides the best academic and financial match.

The above tasks are mostly mechanical and/or will happen outside of class. Therefore, March and April can also be spent going through more College Prep tasks, to ensure that students can hit the ground running in the fall.

- **College Prep Task #5: How do I ask for help?** Asking for help might be the number one college success skill. No one is successful in college on their own, and students need to understand that. Read through passages of how students found success only after asking for help, and go through all of the various people whose *job* it is to help students on a college campus.
- **College Prep Task #6: How do you budget in college?** An often-overlooked part of the financial aid process is that students also need some spending money to live on in college. Talk to students about how to create a personal budget, build their personal budget into the total cost of college, and how to save. Potential guiding questions include:
 - *How much money will I need for spending money in college?*
 - *What are good things to spend money on? What are not-so-good things to spend money on?*
- **College Prep Task #7: How will I find my place on campus? What do I want to do in college?** Students need a way to find their sense of place, their home, on campus. One way to do that is through the clubs and activities students get involved in, and the classes they take. Spend some time with students going through the various clubs, activities, and classes at one of their potential schools, to help give them a sense of what they'll do when they hit campus. Potential guiding questions include:
 - *What do you like doing? What do you want to continue doing in college?*
 - *What activity do you want to get involved in at college that wasn't offered at your high school?*
 - *Look at the different colleges you applied to; how do you see yourself fitting in there?*
 - *What clubs and activities do I want to get involved in at my new school?*
 - *What resources and cultural activities do I want to check out at my new school?*
 - *What professors do I want to get to know at my new school?*

- *What classes do I want to take at my new school?*
 - *What's the process in picking these classes?*

 - **College Prep Task #8: What if I feel out of place, or am one of the few minority faces on a white campus?** Many of our students will end up on campuses that are majority-white. Students should be at least prepared for this, and ideally be given strategies that have worked for other students who have found themselves in similar situations. Potential guiding questions include:
 - *Have you been in an experience before where you were the racial minority? How did you deal with it?*
 - *Are there places on any campus where all different types of students can find their place?*

 - **College Prep Task #9: How do I avoid procrastination? How do I manage my time?** Procrastination plagues everyone, but college students are notorious for it. Students need to understand that their lives will be a whole lot better if they find a way to avoid procrastination, and they need to be given concrete strategies for how to get-going, and how to manage their time. Potential guiding questions include:
 - *How do you avoid procrastination?*
 - *How do top students manage their time?*
-

May

- **Task #32: Decline other colleges politely:** Remind students that the other schools that admitted them actually really wanted them to come to their schools. Have your students politely send e-mails notifying those schools that they will not be attending, so that they can open up spots to any students currently on their waiting lists.

 - **Task #33: Respond to wait-list decisions:** If students are active on a college's wait-list, the decision could come any day. Make sure that students know that they need to respond immediately, and with great interest, when contacted by the college, if they plan on attending.

 - **Task #34: Complete the Matriculation Passport.** Now that students know where they're planning to attend in the fall, we need to make sure that they actually attend. A helpful guide in this process is the "Matriculation Passport," which lays out key tasks students need to take care of, and hurdles they need to get over, in order to matriculate in the fall. A completed matriculation passport can give us a relatively secure feeling that the student will follow through on their plans.
-

The matriculation passport may indeed take the remainder of the year. But if there's time left, here are some other college-prep tasks to tackle.

- **College Prep Task #10: What is plagiarism?** Students may not know what the lines are for plagiarism. Some students may be used to unintentionally plagiarizing. The offense is taken very seriously in college, and students must know the guidelines, and some rules of thumb, to ensure that they don't end up unintentionally plagiarizing in college. Potential guiding questions include:
 - *What is plagiarism?*
 - *What is the difference between plagiarism and properly citing a source?*
 - *What are some good "rules of thumb" to make sure that students don't plagiarize?*

- **College Prep Task #11: What if I'm met with racist behavior, or disparaging comments?** Dr. William Sedlacek, of the University of Maryland, focuses much of his research on how the SAT test is not a good predictor of college success. Instead, Sedlacek uses a whole range of indicators to determine success, from leadership activities, to positive self-concept, to the presence of a strong support person. Another of Sedlacek's indicators is students' ability to "handle the system," which in his earlier work is titled as the students' ability to deal with racism. Students may be confronted with subtle or explicit forms of racism, causing them to feel slighted, or like they don't belong. The ability to deal with these issues may be necessary for a student to succeed. Potential guiding questions include:⁴¹
 - *When have you felt you were a victim of overt or subtle racism? What did you do? What else might you have done?*
 - *How might a student feel subtle racism on a college campus?*
 - *Is racism common on college campuses?*
 - *What are some situations that might arise on a college campus, and how might you handle them?*
 - *How might you be stereotyped on a college campus? What might you do to overcome that stereotype?*
 - *What are some other ways in the past where you felt like you didn't 'belong'? Can you imagine any of those things happening in college? How will you react?*

- **College Prep Task #12: How do I reapply for financial aid?** Many students may not know that financial aid is not a one-time thing; you have to apply every year. Use this time to set up a system by which students remind themselves that they reapply at the beginning of each new year. Potential lessons include:
 - *What systems can we set up to keep all of us, as a community, accountable to completing the FAFSA before our sophomore year of college?*

- **College Prep Task #13: What do I do about academic anxiety in college?** No matter the quality of student, every student is met with academic anxiety, and feelings that they

⁴¹ For more on Sedlacek's research, see <http://williamsedlacek.info/>

won't be successful in college. Students need to know this (normalizing the process of facing obstacles), and also know how to manage academic anxiety.

- *Does every student face academic anxiety?*
 - *Who do I talk to if I'm really worried about academics?*
 - *How do I overcome academic anxiety?*
- **College Prep Task #14: How do you build relationships in college?** Over and again, research shows that it's rarely just academic reasons that cause students to drop out of college. Another contributing factor is often social exclusion, or a failure on the part of students to embed themselves in the fabric of the college. We can give students concrete strategies for how they can get involved on campus, and build relationships with their fellow students. Potential guiding questions include:
 - *How do I make friends on campus?*
 - *How do I get involved with campus organizations?*
 - *How do I balance socializing with academics?*
 - **College Prep Task #15: What do I do if I get homesick?** Based on discussions with college faculty, and from personal experience, everyone gets homesick. The trick is staying at school when you get homesick. The difference between the students who persist and those that leave, is often whether or not they can make it through those first six weeks of college without going home. Students need strategies for how to get through their first bout of homesickness. Potential guiding questions include:
 - *What should I do if I get homesick?*
 - *Who should I talk to?*
 - *Does the feeling ever go away? Do you eventually find a home for yourself on campus?*
 - *What are the needs you're lacking when you're homesick?*
 - *Think of a time you've been away from home. Were you homesick? How did you deal with it?*
 - **College Prep Task #16: What if I don't get along with my roommate?** This is an age-old issue. Thankfully, there's also lots of advice here. We need to make sure students are prepared for the fact that they may be meeting a lot of folks in college that they don't get along with, and they need to figure out a way to manage these situations. Potential lessons include:
 - *What are some common roommate issues?*
 - *How are these issues generally dealt with?*
 - *What if there's a serious problem? Who do you talk to?*
 - **College Prep Task #17: What if I made the wrong choice, and want to transfer?** First, students need to know that an overwhelming number of students think that they've made the wrong choice when they first get on campus. But then they find their place on campus, find their friends, and end up thriving at their school. In extreme situations,



students may need to transfer, and we can offer some guidance on how that is done as well. Potential lessons include:

- *What are the mechanics behind transferring?*
- *What are some examples of students who thought they wanted to transfer, but ended up finding their place on campus and ended up thriving at their initial college?*

Junior Year

Junior year is when students set themselves up for success in the senior year application process, both academically and organizationally.

In addition to college research and college prep, this is the final year that students can make a serious impact on their grade-point average. So, priority number one is performance in the classroom. Even if a student started off slow in high school, admissions officers pay particular attention to the grades achieved in junior year, as it represents a shift to more rigorous, college-level work.

The junior year is also the final year for students to show colleges what they can do outside of the classroom. Students already engaged in activities can fully immerse themselves, seeking leadership positions, while those that have not yet gotten involved can try new things, developing new interests and passions, and get in the habit of actively engaging both inside and outside the classroom.

Finally, students take the SAT and ACT in their junior year. With even small improvements on either test, students can end up getting admitted to a whole new tier of schools, which can end up putting them on a whole different life trajectory. So ensuring that students are getting some type of SAT/ACT prep in their junior year, is critical.

Potential Big Goals for Junior Year

- **ACT/SAT Improvement** – A potential goal is to have students increase their composite ACT score by *at least* three points, or approximately 100 points on the SAT. The Khan Academy offers a range of SAT prep resources to take advantage of.⁴²
- **Study Habits and GPA Improvement** – A potential goal is for students to increase their GPA by *at least* 0.25 points. A GPA increase can shift the selectivity level of the college available to students, and in so doing can increase the chances of students graduating, and graduating with less debt. This is obviously just an example goal, but a school wide campaign for students to set their own GPA goals could be pretty powerful.⁴³

In order to accomplish that GPA goal, students can also set goals for their academic habits. In the junior year, students truly need to up their academic habits to more ‘college-level’ academic habits, and goals need to be set around these behaviors that can lead to the GPA bumps.

- **College Lists** – Students will develop a list of *at least* 12 colleges of consideration, with 4 being match schools, 4 being reach schools, and 4 being safety schools. The purpose

⁴² This goal was adapted from the OneGoal program - <http://www.onegoalgraduation.org/>

⁴³ Ibid.

behind undergoing intensive research in the junior year is so that the list can be whittled down to 9 application schools by senior year, with 3 match schools, 3 reach schools, and 3 safety schools.

- **Summer Programs** – Mimicking the college application process, students should apply to a match, reach, and safety summer program. Summer programs can be trajectory-altering experiences, and we want to make sure our students are exposed to as many of these experiences as possible.
- **Take the Lead** – The junior year is also the last year for students to show colleges who they are outside the classroom. Colleges want students who take on leadership positions, and have real passions and interests. A goal for the junior year should be for students to get involved, and for those students already involved, to move their involvement to the next level.

Junior Year Curriculum

Unit 1: Why College, and How to Get There?

- **Summer Report:** Summer programs often have large affects on students, altering their paths and goals. Spend some time figuring out if anything has changed for your students, as a result of their summer experiences. Potential lessons include:
 - *What did you do last summer?*
 - *Did the experience change your interests, plans, or goals?*
 - *What do you think you want to do next summer? During the school year?*
- **Why College?** As we ramp up to what might be the most important year in the college-going process (last chance for grades, college research, ACT), it's important to revisit the most important question: why college? Each student should have his or her own reasons for going to college, and at the start of the year, we need to reframe that question. Potential questions include:
 - *Why do you want to go to college? Interests, a particular career, money, pride, a love for learning, etc.?*
 - *How have your reasons for wanting to go to college changed since you were a freshman?*
- **What type of college?** By this point in high school, students should know the various types of colleges (2-year vs. 4-year, small liberal arts vs. large public, highly selective vs. less selective). Have students reflect on the type of college they think they want to attend. Potential guiding questions for lessons include:
 - *What qualities do you want in a college? (Big, small, rural, urban, highly selective, academic program offerings, extracurricular offerings)*
 - *What are the advantages of going to a more selective college?*

- **Goals for the year.** To get to the type of college you want to go to, students need to achieve certain ACT and GPA goals. This is the time to set those goals. Potential guiding questions for lessons include:
 - *What is the average GPA and ACT for the type of school I want to go to?*
 - *What do I need to do every day in order to attain that GPA and that ACT?*
 - *How will I keep myself accountable to those goals?*

Potential Products: Summer Report, Why College? essays, college goals, GPA and ACT goals for the year.

Unit 2: Where do I want to go to college?

- **College List** Based on where students are currently, and where they project they will be by the end of the year, students will begin building their initial list of colleges and universities. Students should use the match magician to get their larger set of potential reach, match, and safety schools, and then narrow that list down through internet research (materials attached). Potential guiding questions include:
 - *Why is it important to apply to a wide array of schools?*
 - *Why is it important to apply to small, private, liberal arts colleges? Why is it important to apply to test-optional colleges?*
 - *What are the factors that go into building a school list (academic fit, social fit, financial fit, etc.)*
 - *What college search tools can you use to do college research?*
 - *How do you navigate a college website to try and get a sense and feel for the college?*

Potential Product: This can culminate in an actual list of 10 to 20 schools, with the accompanying factors that went into their decisions. This project could also include a task in which students contact an admissions officer at the schools, expressing their interest, and asking for advice on how to submit a strong application. College admissions offices actually keep track of the number of times students contact them, because it gives them some idea as to how serious the student is about going to that school.

Note: *Computer access would be a necessity for an assignment like this. If all students don't have access to computers in school, give this assignment as a multi-week research project. If they don't have access to computers at home, you can have them stay after school, or use computers at the public library.*

- **“Apply” to a College of Choice** As seniors are going through the application process, juniors can do the same thing. Completing a mock application will accomplish two things. First, it will give students and staff an accurate indication of where the student is in relation to being able to gain admission to a selective college. And second, it will give students a practice run at the application process, including working through personal statement and supplemental essays. Potential guiding questions include:



- *Is my GPA and projected ACT where I want it to be in order to get into this goal college? What do I need to do every day to ensure that they are?*
- *Is my extra-curricular and service resume where I want it to be? What else do I want to get involved in? How can I push my interests and activities to the next step?*
- *Is my coursework challenging enough?*
- *What else can I do to truly get the most out of high school?*
- *How does my essay stack-up against exemplar essays? What can I do to change it?*

Potential Product: Completed college application.

Unit 3: Do I study like a college student?

- **Study-Systems Audit.** Mid-way through their junior year, students should be getting a sense of what study systems work, and which do not. Self-management is a core college-going skill, and students need to be able to monitor their own learning, and know what works and what doesn't. Potential lessons include:
 - *What is my study system for every class?*
 - *How much do I learn using that study system?*
 - *How much do I study when I have a test coming up?*
 - *How do my study habits compare with the study habits of top college students?*

Potential Product: Essay on how the best college students study, and how your study habits compare.

- **Time Management Techniques:** *Everyone* struggles with time management, and it's a skill that must be learned. Have students read about how other successful students and individuals manage their time, and then strategize on how to apply the techniques to their life. Potential guiding questions include:
 - *How do successful students manage their time?*
 - *How do I manage my time?*
 - *How can I manage my time better?*

Potential Product: Commitment to a time-management technique.

Unit 4: How do I get the most out of the rest of high school?

- **High school legacy:** It's not too late for students to find new interests and passions that can make them better college applicants, and give them a greater sense of focus for college. Potential guiding questions include:
 - *What legacy do I want to leave at my high school?*
 - *What cool projects have other high schoolers taken on?*
 - *What could I do?*

Potential Product: A description of our high school legacy, and some plan for how to get there.

- **Summer Program Applications:** Students can also start conducting their research and beginning their applications for summer programs. Potential guiding questions include:
 - *Do I want to do something similar or different from what I did last summer?*
 - *What can I do that will broaden or deepen my interests?*

Potential Product: 3 quality applications (reach, match, and safety) to summer programs.

Unit 5: How do I pay for college?

- **FAFSA4caster and Financial Aid** As seniors are filling out their actual FAFSAs, juniors can go through a project where they fill out the FAFSA4caster, to get a sense of their expected family contribution, and learn about all the nuances of the financial aid process. Potential guiding questions include:
 - *How do students pay for college?*
 - *What are the different sources of financial aid?*
 - *How do I cover the “gap” that exists after federal aid?*
 - *What is a reasonable loan-burden?*
 - *What are the good kinds of loans?*

Potential Product: FAFSA4Caster report for each student, including Expected Family Contribution and projected federal aid.

- **Institutional Aid Case Studies** Students need to know that schools vary widely in the amount of financial aid that they give out. Have students evaluate their big list of schools to see who is generous with need-based aid, and for which schools they may be eligible for merit-based aid.

Helpful resources: tuitiontracker.org, which gives net-price information based on family income; cappex.com allows students to sift through the various “merit-aid” guidelines that colleges have (i.e., a 21 ACT score earns you a \$2,000 scholarship at Success University)

Potential guiding questions include:

- *How do you use net-price calculators?*
- *Which of your schools offers the best need-based aid?*
- *For which of your schools might you qualify for merit-based aid?*

Potential Product: Financial aid report for each school on your list, including the projected institutional aid you will receive, and the potential gap you’ll have to make up for with loans and scholarships.

- **Scholarship Search** While many students wait until their senior year to start applying to scholarships, the second semester of students’ junior year (or preferably before!) is the

time to start the process. There are scholarships available specifically for high school juniors. In addition, students can start working on next year's scholarships now, as the prompts and awards available won't change much from year to year. Potential lessons include:

- *Register for scholarship-finder websites.* (cappex.com, fastweb.com)
- *Research scholarships you're matched with.*
- *Write scholarship essays.*

Unit 6: What are my Best-Fit Colleges/Careers?

- **College List:** As the junior year progresses, the picture of which colleges are match, safety, and reach colleges for each student will become more clear. Have students research and refine their college-lists, based on admissions fit, academic fit, financial fit, and the qualities of the college. In addition to another round of research based on cost, location, admissions, and other important factors, now is the time to start thinking more about how the qualities of specific colleges match with the student qualities. Potential guiding questions include:
 - *What type of learner are you, and what setting brings out the best in you?*
 - *What extracurricular activities in high school have meant the most to you?*
 - *What does a college need to offer in order for you to keep living your life to the fullest?*

Potential Product: 12 current best-fit schools. Four will be current matches, four will be reaches, and four will be safeties. One school can be a 'super-reach,' or goal school that they could get into with a GPA and ACT bump. And one school can be a super-safety, or a school where the student would enter near the top of the class, ensuring significant merit aid.

Students can give a presentation on their lists, with a PowerPoint slide, or word document per school. The page should explain why the school is in its category (match, reach, safety), its affordability, its graduation rate, its post-graduation metrics, and why it's a best fit for that student.

- **What will I do in college?** At their best-fit schools students can find activities they want to do, clubs they want to join, professors they want to study with, classes they want to take, and subjects they want to major in. The idea here is to help the students to internalize their college lists, and really try and picture themselves at the college. Potential lessons include:
 - *What activities will I do in my potential colleges? What clubs will I join?*
 - *What speakers came to the colleges last year?*
 - *What professors sound really interesting?*
 - *What classes sound really interesting?*
 - *What famous alumni have graduated from those colleges?*
 - *Were there any students featured on the website? What cool projects were they working on?*

- *What do I want to major in?*

Potential Product: Letter to admissions officer (or a professor) at a top choice college, expressing interest, explaining why you're interested, and asking a few questions about the college, and/or what you can do to improve your application.

- **Building a 4-year graduation plan** Students can pick one of their schools, and build a 4-year graduation plan at that school. Using course catalogs, students can select a major, and select a sequence of courses that will give them the credits to graduate in four years. Potential lessons include:
 - *What are the courses you have to take in college?*
 - *What are the electives you can take?*
 - *What are the courses you have to take for your major?*

Potential Product: A 4-year course schedule, including descriptions of each course.

- **What will I do after college?** Students have already done some career research, but interests obviously change. Revisit their career choices, based on their choices in potential major, summer programs they've gotten involved in, and extracurriculars they do during the school year. Potential lessons include:
 - *What is your greatest interest?*
 - *How have you pursued this interest both in school and out of school during high school?*
 - *What majors and careers connect with this interest?*
 - *Contact someone in the region who works in this career, to do an informational interview.*

Unit 7: How do I write a good personal statement?

- **Draft of Personal Statement and Common Supplemental Essays** During the application process, students have little opportunity to show the admissions officers who they really are, outside of their scores and activities. That little opportunity rests in the personal statement and supplemental essays that students are asked to write for their college applications. Unfortunately, when it comes time to write their essays, many students simply focus on completing an essay, not worrying as much about quality.

But these essays are a really great opportunity for students to show admissions officers who they are, and should be done with appropriate care and strategy. Plus they're fun! And good personal statement essays can double as entries to writing contests, or scholarship competitions.

Attached you'll find resources that include exercises for students to get started on their essays, revise their essays, and write solid first drafts of their essays. Potential guiding questions include:

- *What are the elements of a great college admissions essay?*

- *How do you get started?*
- *What do you write about?*
- *What do good essays look like?*
- *How does my essay compare to exemplar essays?*

Potential Product: Several quality drafts of different personal statement essays.

Unit 8: What’s the difference between going to college and succeeding in college?

- **Stories of Obstacles and Resilience** In this section, students will read stories from other first-generation college-goers, learn about grit and resilience, read research on why many college students don’t finish their degrees, and make a plan for how they will overcome common obstacles to graduate. Potential guiding questions include:
 - *Why do students struggle in college?*
 - *Why do students drop out of college?*
 - *What are some examples of students who have faced obstacles and have persevered?*
 - *What will I do when I’m met with these same obstacles?*

Potential Product: An extended essay on why they’re pursuing a college education, and how they picture their ‘future selves.’

- **Roadblocks Inventory** Students can explore what obstacles currently stand in their way to achieving academically, and what obstacles they think they’ll be met with in the future. They can then create specific strategies to help them overcome those obstacles. Potential lessons include:
 - *What obstacles am I faced with now?*
 - *What obstacles will I be faced with in the future, as I pursue my college degree?*
 - *What strategies will allow me to overcome those obstacles?*

Unit 9: What are my plans for the summer? For next year?

- **Summer Programs:** Earlier in the year, students went through the process of researching and applying to summer programs. Make sure students hit their application deadlines, and/or make plans to work or volunteer over the summer. Ensure that every student has an opportunity to grow over the summer. Potential guiding questions include:
 - *What did you do last summer? Do you want to do something similar? Something different?*
 - *How do your potential summer programs fit into your college plans? Your career plans?*
 - *Is your summer program paid for, or do you need to raise money?*
- **Letters of Recommendation Requests/College Essays:** Students should also plan for how they will enter the fall of their senior year with all application materials in-hand. Students should request their letters of recommendation from teachers before leaving for summer

break, and they should have a plan in place for how they'll compose all required essays for their applications. Potential lessons include:

- *What teacher knows you well enough to write a quality letter of recommendation?*
- *What are all of the different essays (common app and supplemental questions) that you need to complete for the schools on your list?*
- *When will you dedicate time over the summer to essay writing?*
- *Is there a time over the summer when you can visit colleges on your list?*

Potential Product: A 'summary of me' letter to each recommendation writer, outlining the parts of a student's resume that they feel are important, and thanking the recommendation writer in advance.

- **Get Organized:** You may use Naviance to keep track of students' application materials, but you shouldn't depend only on that tool. The application process presents a great chance for students to work on their organizational skills. In May, consider creating a project where students create a spreadsheet (written, or on computer) that includes their school list, all of the schools' application deadlines, application types (early action, early decision, rolling, regular), testing requirements, supplements, and supplementary materials (art portfolios, dance and theater DVDs, etc.) (From Rick Hazelton's piece titled *May College Checklist for Juniors* in NYTimes 'choice blog': <http://thechoice.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/05/07/counselors-calendar-may-juniors/>)
 Potential lessons include:
 - *Create an excel spreadsheet organizational structure.*
 - *Research and insert all important due-dates in the application process.*
 - *Insert your own due-dates you need to stick to in order to hit the official due dates.*
- **Senior Year Courses** Colleges like to see that you've challenged yourself as much as possible within the confines of what your high school offers. This is the time to make sure that every student's senior year schedule reflects this, based on that individual student. Potential lessons include:
 - *What courses can I take to challenge myself as much as possible?*
 - *What independent projects can I take on to serve as a capstone to my high school experience?*
- **How'd I do this year?** Students reflect on the year through a letter to themselves. In the letter, they'll write about what they've done this year in relation to their goals, where they are in their ongoing journey to college, and prepare goals for the summer and their senior year. Potential lessons include:
 - *Did I accomplish my academic goals for the year? Why or why not?*
 - *Did I execute all of the academic habits I wanted to? Why or why not?*
 - *Did I accomplish my goals in terms of my social engagement and extracurricular involvement? Why or why not?*
 - *What do I want to change over the summer? Next year?*

Junior Year College Counselor Duties

The primary task of the college counselor for juniors is ensuring that the college-counseling curriculum, like the one sketched out above, is implemented. This means collecting resources, structuring activities, and potentially scripting lesson plans for other staff members, if the lessons are conducted in advisory.

In addition to the curriculum, listed below are some other duties that college counselors are responsible for in the junior year.

Ongoing Duties

- **Junior Newsletter**

To keep parents, teachers, and school administration abreast of what college counseling activities are going on at the school, and what information they should know about, consider creating a bi-monthly or monthly newsletter outlining what's going on in the college readiness course that month, what events are happening at the school, what parents can do to support their student, and any college-going information parents need to be informed about.

- **Coordinate College Visits**

In order for students to know what kind of school they want to apply to, they need to visit different types of schools. Counselors should coordinate class-wide, and small-group, tailored trips, to a variety of different types of local colleges and universities.

- **Speaker Series**

Many schools have had great experiences inviting successful college students, and successful professionals in the community, to their schools to talk to students about their path to college and career, how they made choices along the way, obstacles they hit, and what they did to overcome those obstacles.

- **Service, Extracurricular Activities, and Summer Programs**

We want our students to get exposed to various enrichment activities. The problem is, many students simply aren't exposed to potential opportunities. Keep an activity database that stores the activities that all students are involved in, and potential activities that are available both at school, and around the city. The same can be done with service programs and summer programs.

Track this information as part of the data that your school analyzes, and have individual discussions with students who aren't involved, or are under-involved, to get a sense of what they might want to try.

- **Book Club/Activity Club**

Some research on college persistence says that cultural capital (which in this context means exposure to and knowledge about significant works of literature, art, and performances) is important for student persistence. When students enter their freshmen year, they'll likely be thrown together with students with a variety of different backgrounds. Many students will be from middle and upper class backgrounds, and will know how to 'speak the language' of the academic elite. We want to give our students exposure to different thoughts and ideas they might come in contact with in college, so that they don't think of college as a foreign land that they don't belong in.

Consider starting an advisory book club that covers significant works that are considered mandatory pre-college reading, even if they're not required for a specific course. You could also keep a cultural activity bank that keeps track of events occurring in the area that students may not have been exposed to before.

- **ACT Prep**

Most everything we do in the classroom contributes, in some way, to students improving on the ACT. However, our students' wealthier counterparts in private and suburban schools often pay for expensive test-prep in addition to classroom instruction. We need to think about how we provide these same services for our students.

The Khan Academy has created a range of SAT prep resources that allow students to practice, track, and gain mastery on the various skills they'll need to demonstrate on the SAT. Creating a school-wide campaign around practicing, and mastering, these skills might be a good place to start.

- **College Knowledge Nights**

Applying to college is an incredibly complex process, and many parents and students are naturally intimidated. We need to walk them through the process, and arm them with as much information as possible. Consider, in addition to newsletters, hosting events at the school that feature information on key issues related to college going, and college success. Potential topics include some of the topics mentioned in Section 1 of this book, such as:

- *The characteristics of college-ready*
- *The importance of GPA, and what GPA captures*
- *The importance of college matching*
- *The importance of summer programs*
- *Common obstacles students meet on the path to college, and in college*
- *How to make college affordable, and the importance of finding a college that is a financial match*

- **Financial Aid Information**

Students will be spending some time on the financial aid process, and financing college, in the college readiness course. However, they need to be saturated with this information, and parents need it too. MFS has a range of resources that can be used for

financial aid discussions, but the key is to drive home three major points: (1) that college can be affordable, but students need to be strategic in applying to a set of reach, match, and safety schools; (2) that the more selective the school is the more resources they generally have to offer in need-based aid; (3) and that, in general, the ‘sticker-price’ of a college should be ignored, and we need to figure out what the ‘net-price’ of each school is, for a specific student, based on their family income and academic performance.

Consider the following ways of having these financial aid discussions:

- **Financial aid nights.** Invite parents to the school for a rundown of the financial aid process.
 - **Coffee talks.** Make yourself, and perhaps financial aid professionals, available at the school for parents to come ask any questions they have on the financial aid process.
 - **Junior Newsletter.** Include financial aid and savings tips and information in the junior newsletter.
- **Encourage Student/Parent Conversations**

Ideally, students and parents should be trying to hash out issues like college selection and college financing on a fairly regular basis. Parents need to be kept up to date on the college search, but can often feel like they’re in the dark. It will take time for parents to get used to the idea of their child going off to college, especially if they’re going to school far from home. Recommend that students update their parents once a week on what they’ve learned on their college search, and field any questions that their parents have. Consider creating weekly check-in sheets that are shared in class, documenting common parent questions, and parent reactions to college lists. Advisors can help students answer the questions that students don’t know.
 - **Summer Program Application Deadlines**

Just like for the senior year college application process, track student applications, and acceptances to, summer programs. This way you can ensure that every student will reach the goal of applying to at least three summer programs.
 - **Counselor Audit**

By the spring of their junior year, students should have generated some version of their own college list. Counselors can take these lists, student transcripts, and a list of recommended colleges, and ensure that students have the right set of reach, match, and safety best-fit schools on their list.
 - **Junior Meetings:** After counselor audits, counselors can have ‘junior meetings’ with every junior. In that meeting, counselors should meet with every student and their parents, describe the student’s college options thus far, what further options might be available to



the student, what their estimated net-price will look like at their potential schools, and what the next steps are from this point, to the same date a year from now.

Sophomore Year

In the sophomore year, students need to correct any mistakes they made in their freshman year, and get a better sense of what their “path” will look like, through high school, college, and perhaps even into career.

Potential Big Goals for Sophomore Year

- **Finding their path** – A potential focus for the sophomore year is to spend time on what each student’s unique path might look like. This means reflecting on their current performance both in and out of the classroom, looking at what they’re really passionate about, and reading about the paths of other students and professionals like them.
- **Academics and Activities** – In the sophomore year, students can look to increase their engagement both inside and outside the classroom. Students can learn more about what happens on college campuses, and what the best college students do, and then set learning goals of what they need to do to become better learners, not just better students. In addition, they can reflect on their current activities, and try and get more deeply involved in enrichment activities outside the classroom.
- **Summer Programs** – Mimicking the college application process, students should apply to a match, reach, and safety summer program. Summer programs can be trajectory-altering experiences, and we want to make sure our students are exposed to as many of these experiences as possible.

Unit 1: What did you do last summer, and last year?

- **Summer experience.** Start the year by talking about what students did over the summer. Potential lessons include:
 - *What did you do over the summer?*
 - *Has it shaped or changed your interests? If so, how?*
 - *What, if anything, did you discover about yourself that you did not know before?*
- **Last Year.** Spend some time talking about the previous academic year, and what they want to change or continue this year. Potential lessons include:
 - *How do you feel you did last year academically? Socially? Behaviorally? In getting involved in extra-curricular and service activities?*
 - *What are you proud of from last year that you want to continue?*
 - *What are you not proud of from last year that you want to change?*
- **This Year.** Talk with students about their goals for the year, academically, socially, behaviorally, and in terms of involvement. Potential lessons include:



- *What do you want to achieve this year academically?*
- *What are your goals for academic behaviors? What do you want to do to ensure you reach your academic goals?*
- *What are your goals socially and behaviorally? How do you want to act, and how do you want others to think of you? What strategies can you use to keep you on track?*
- *What activities (service or extra-curricular) do you want to get involved in this year that you didn't last year?*

Unit 2: What do successful students/people do?

- **Self-Advocacy:** Students can study examples of how students and others with strong self-advocacy skills were successful in school and in life as a result of those skills. Potential lessons include:
 - *Why are self-advocacy skills important?*
 - *Why do students often refrain from asking for help?*
 - *Why might some students refrain more than others?*
 - *What are some strategies for being a better self-advocate?*
- **Active Engagement:** Active engagement is at the core of academic success. This could be a time to revisit key study skills learned in freshman year, and consider the difference between being an actively engaged learner, and being someone who dutifully completes assignments. Potential lessons include:
 - *What do the best students do?*
 - *What does it mean to be actively engaged?*
 - *How can you be actively engaged in class?*
 - *How can you be actively engaged in reading?*
 - *How can you be actively engaged in the non-academic facets of your life?*
- **Find/Cultivate a Passion:** Colleges aren't just looking for students who are *interesting*, but also *interested*. Whether students are interested in a wide array of topics, or deeply passionate about just one, colleges want students who are genuinely interested in the world around them, and will bring that interest to campus with them. Potential lessons include:
 - *How have other students found their passions in high school?*
 - *What is available to me?*
 - *What are my interests, and how have they changed over the past year?*
 - *How can I take current interests/activities to the next step?*
 - *What are some interests I can picture carrying into college?*

Unit 3: What careers match my interests?

- **Career-Match:** Using tools like the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Naviance, and other career search tools, students can match their interests with a range of potential careers.⁴⁴ Potential lessons include:
 - *What careers match my interest?*
 - *What do people in those careers do? Is this something that I'd enjoy doing? How does this relate to my character strengths?*
 - *How much money do those careers make?*
 - *What level of education is needed to attain those careers?*
- **Labor-Market Research:** Students need to be aware of the labor-market that they are headed into; one that greatly values a four-year degree, and one in which workers must have broad skills and be flexible. Potential lessons include:
 - *How has the US labor market changed over the past 50 years?*
 - *What kinds of skills does today's labor market value?*
 - *What type of education is needed in the labor market today?*

Unit 4: What happens in college?

- **Majors:** Students have likely heard about “majoring” in something, but they are unlikely to know what it means, what kinds of majors are available, how you should select a major, and how a major connects with potential careers. Potential lessons include:
 - *What is a major?*
 - *What type of subjects can you major in?*
 - *How do you decide on a major?*
 - *How is a major related to potential careers?*
- **Original Research:** Colleges will often boast that their students get an opportunity to engage in original research. It's unlikely that students know what this means, why this is an opportunity that colleges brag about, and how it's different from classroom learning. Potential lessons include:
 - *What do professors do when they're not teaching?*
 - *What kinds of projects do students work on for professors?*
 - *How is doing original research while at college helpful in both learning and in shaping your career?*
- **College Qualities:** Colleges vary greatly from one another. Before students can evaluate what college they want to look at, or where they want to go, students need to know the different qualities to look for in a college. Potential lessons include:
 - *What are the differences between a small liberal-arts school and a large public university?*
 - *What type of activities do students engage in at different colleges?*

⁴⁴ It doesn't necessarily have to be a career goal, but students with a preference for long-term goals, and have at least some idea of their 'path,' are more likely to persist in college, perhaps because they can better see the connection between current effort and future reward (Sedlacek).

- *What’s the difference between small, discussion-style classes, and large, lecture-style classes?*
- *How do different colleges support their students?*
- **College Activities:** Everyone knows that a whole lot more goes on at college than just academics. Expose students to the types of clubs, student groups, internships, and study-abroad they can experience at college. Potential lessons include:
 - *What do college students do when they’re not in class?*
 - *What types of clubs and student groups are available at most college campuses?*
 - *What colleges offer experiential learning opportunities, and other internships?*
 - *What are study-abroad programs, which colleges offer them, who goes on them, and are they too expensive for me to participate in?*
- **College Visits:** In order for students to understand what students do at college, and the differences between colleges, they need to see the colleges. A focus at the start of sophomore year should be spending time at a wide variety of local colleges, to get a sense of the “feel” for the colleges.

Potential Product: Report on the differences between the different schools, why students liked one school or another, and why.

Unit 5: Where do I want to go to college?

- **Quality Search:** Based on the college qualities that students have just been researching, have students determine the *type* of college they’re currently interested in. Potential lessons include:
 - *What qualities do I like in a college?*
 - *What schools have those qualities?*
- **Academic Match:** Students then pick a college that they match with academically, using the Match Magician. Potential lessons include:
 - *Based on my current grades, what tier of colleges do I match with?*
 - *What colleges fit both my tier and the qualities that I’m looking for in a college?*
- **“Apply” to College:** Students apply to their college of choice.

Potential Product: A completed college application with a new personal statement essay, completed application, reflection on how their application has changed since freshman year, reflection on what they want to see change in their application, how they’ll go about changing it, and why they chose the school they did.

Unit 6: How do I want my application to change?

- **Goal setting:** After completing the application, have students set goals for how they want their application to change by next year. Potential lessons include:

- *What do students want their GPA to be? What concrete steps can they take every day to make sure they get that GPA?*
- *What do students want their projected ACT to be? What concrete steps can they take every day to make sure they get that score?*
- *How will they keep themselves accountable to reaching these goals?*
- **Resume:** How do students want their extra-curricular and service resume to change by the next application? What activities do they want to try? What clubs do they want to start? Potential lessons include:
 - *What clubs or activities do you want to get involved in during this next year?*
 - *What club or activity does not exist in this school that you'd want to start?*
 - *What activity do you want to get involved in that may not be at this school, but that does exist elsewhere around the city?*
 - *What can you do to take the activity you're participating in a step further?*
 - *Do you want to pursue a leadership position in one of your activities? What does this look like?⁴⁵*
- **Essay:** Using a rubric and exemplar essays, critique your own essay you wrote for your application. Potential lessons include:
 - *What makes a good college essay?*
 - *Does your essay meet the requirements of a good college essay?*
 - *What improvements can you make to your essay?*
- **Summer Programs:** Going right off the theme of applications, students need to apply to their summer programs for the coming summer. Potential lessons include:
 - *What type of opportunities am I interested in?*
 - *Do I have a list of reach, match, and safety opportunities?*
 - *Do I have a 3 completed applications to summer program opportunities (match, reach, and safety)?*

Unit 7: What is college writing?

- **Differences between high school and college writing:** Any college professor will tell you: college writing is an altogether different beast from high school writing. While high school writing will ask you to mainly summarize what other people have said, in college you'll need to make *original* arguments, support those arguments with *evidence from text*, and often have to pull from a wide variety of texts. Potential lessons include:
 - *What are the major differences between high school and college writing?*
- **The major types of college writing:** There are several major types of college writing, and students should know what these are. Potential lessons include:
 - *What are the major types of college writing?*

⁴⁵ Leadership experience is one of the noncognitive characteristics on William Sedlacek's set of noncognitive predictors of college success.



- *What skills do you need to be able to successfully complete all of those different types of writing?*
- *What are some great examples of all of the various types of college writing?*
- **Executing college writing:** Use the college success class to have students practice various types of college writing, and the skills associated with those assignments.

Potential Product: One example of different major types of college writing including an argumentative paper using multiple sources and a specific prompt, an argumentative paper using multiple sources and a broad prompt, an argumentative paper focusing on a close-read of a single text, and an op-ed.

Unit 8: Who is my future self?

- **Biography study:** Through articles and excerpts from books, students will read about a variety of potential future selves, and then write about how they view their own future self. Potential lessons include:
 - *Who are some people that I look up to, and what characteristics do they share?*
 - *Do I exhibit these same characteristics? How can I exhibit these characteristics more in the future?*
- **College Testimonials:** Through video, written word, and in-person presentations, students can hear from successful college students about the obstacles they faced in high school and in college, and how they overcame them to be successful. Potential lessons include:
 - *What are the common obstacles that all students face?*
 - *How do we overcome those obstacles?*

Freshman Year

In the freshman year, students are in the process of building their identity, and deciding whether or not that identity includes doing well academically. If freshman really struggle, they can dig themselves an academic hole that can severely limit their college options. Therefore, we need to ensure that students' "light bulbs to go on," and they're able to connect their current actions to potential future outcomes.

We can use the goal of college to help turn students' light bulbs on by helping students (1) discover the benefits of college, and why it's a worthy goal; (2) analyze their identities and look for ways it aligns with being a college-goer; (3) see that college is possible for them, and chart their personal path to college; (4) understand the habits and skills you need to develop into a successful college student; (5) and develop vocational, educational, and recreational passions and interests.

Potential Big Goals for Freshman Year

Here are some potential goals for your freshman college-readiness program:

- **Why College?** Students will need to have an understanding of what college is, why it's a worthwhile goal, and what is necessary to reach that goal. We'll also want students to develop the beginning of an understanding of the "why college?" question for them specifically – what are their own personal reasons for wanting to go to college? To help in this goal, students can visit colleges and do college research around all of the various paths that people pursue in college.
- **Who am I, and where am I going?** Students will also spend time exploring their own identity, and see how it aligns with going to college. Students can also identify potential "future selves," have some idea of who they want to be in the future, and have their own understanding of what makes for a good life.
- **College-ready foundation.** In addition to aspirational and motivational goals, students will also lay the groundwork for a successful high school career in their freshman year. This means understanding and executing the academic habits needed to be successful in high school, setting and monitoring personal goals for the year, understand the concept of a '2nd Transcript,' getting involved in extra-curricular and service opportunities that they're passionate about, and reflecting on their path, how they're doing on that path, and they're next steps along that path.⁴⁶

Proposed Units

Unit 1: Who am I?

⁴⁶ This framework is similar to one used as a consistent reflection question at Casco Bay High School in Portland, ME.

- **What is my identity?** Emerging research is finding that one key aspect of the push for ‘college-going identity’ is being left out of the process: the *identity* part.⁴⁷ Clearly, students figuring out who they are will be an on-going process, but the process should start in the freshman year by giving freshman the opportunity to explore their own identity. Potential exercises include:
 - *Creating personal interest inventories*
 - *Create identity maps*
 - *Personal Biographies*
- **What is my context?** As part of their identity, students can explore the context in which they live. Potential lessons include:
 - *What is the achievement gap, and why does it matter? What does this mean for our students?*
 - *What is inequality, why does this matter, and how does it relate to education?*
 - *How does where I live contribute to my identity?*
 - *What assets exist in my family and community, financial or otherwise?*
 - *What does my race and gender mean to me?*
 - *What challenges have I faced? What personal assets allowed me to overcome those challenges? How can I use those same assets in the classroom?*
 - *What are the major obstacles that people in my context face?*

Potential Products: reflection essays

- **Does going to college fit with my identity and my context?** After students consider their own identity, and the context in which they live, we can introduce college, and discuss how it fits into the picture. This is a time to get students exposed to those who share a similar background (race, income, interests), and have been successful in college and career, and begin thinking of higher education as an equalizer. Potential lessons include:
 - *How does higher education relate to inequality?*
 - *What role does college play in creating opportunity?*
 - *Do students like me (first-gens, minority, low-income) go to college?*
 - *What were the paths of other successful people who share my background?*
 - *What can college do for me in my life?*

Potential Product: Future Selves report. Who, out of the stories they read, do they identify with? Why? Who do they want to become? What do they need to do every day in order for that person to come to fruition?

Unit 2: What is College?

⁴⁷ Savitz-Romer, M., Bouffard, S.M.. *Ready, Willing, and Able: A Developmental Approach to College Access and Success*.

- **What is College?** Students need to understand what college is, the purpose of college, the different types of colleges, what happens in college, what college leads to, and why college is a worthy goal. Potential lessons include:
 - *What is college?*
 - *What is the purpose of college?*
 - *What are the different types of colleges?*
 - *What do students do at college?*
 - *What does college lead to?*
 - *What do I “get” out of college?*
 - *Why is college a worthy goal?*

Potential Product: Students write a final paper that details their personal reasons for wanting to go to college.

- **What does it take to get in to college?** Students need to learn, in general terms, about the admission requirements to different tiers of colleges, and the results (in terms of graduation rates, scholarship dollars, and outcomes) of different tiers of schools. Potential lessons include:
 - *What are the different tiers of colleges?*
 - *What are the benefits of attending higher tier colleges?*
 - *What does it take to get into each tier of college?*

Potential Product: Students produce a poster detailing the different tiers of colleges, example colleges from each tier, and the benefits associated with each tier.

Unit 3: What can I do now?

- **How do I know if I’m on track?** Now that students know the goal, they need to know where they stand on the path towards reaching that goal. Teach them how to calculate their own GPA, and tips for monitoring their own progress. Potential lessons include:
 - *Learn how to calculate GPA, and re-calculate based on grade adjustments.*
 - *Analyze how good and bad grades affect GPA.*
 - *Set GPA goals, along with the academic behaviors students need to adopt to achieve those goals.*

Potential Product: Students produce bi-weekly goal sheets, detailing their GPA goal, actual GPA, improvement over the two weeks, actions responsible for improvement, and goals for improving academic habits.

- **What is on a college application?** Students need to know, early in high school, that they won’t simply be judged on their grades when applying to college; they’ll also be judged on the extent to which they took advantage of every opportunity in high school. Admissions officers want to admit students who are complete people, who are involved both inside the classroom and out, and therefore will add something to the college they

attend. The best way for students to get a sense of what colleges are looking for is to have them “apply” to college.

Have students fill out an entire application to Alma College, one of our partner colleges. They may not be involved in any extra-curricular or service activities yet, but have them think about what they want to get involved in. If they’ve had a rough start to the semester, invite the students to think about what they want their grades to look like when they apply in four years. And have students write their personal statements as well, a first try at trying to give admissions officers a sense of who they are.

It’s also important to emphasize that getting involved in extracurricular activities is not just about checking off a box on the college application, but truly is about taking advantage of your high school years to get exposed to potential interests and passions that you can take with you throughout your entire life.

Potential lessons include:

- *What goes on a college application?*
- *What am I involved in/interested in now? What do I want to get involved in/interested in?*
- *What do I want my grades to look like by the time I apply to college?*
- *How can I get my identity across through an essay?*

Potential Product: A completed application to Alma, with comments from evaluator, and reflections from students.

- **How do I succeed academically high school?** Students have been told that in order to go to college, they need great grades. So, how do you get great grades? Spend some time teaching students study skills, using their class work from academic classes as a point of reflection. Potential lessons include:
 - *How do you study for different classes?*
 - *How do you demonstrate active engagement in class?*
 - *What is a good note-taking strategy for class?*
 - *What is a good note-taking strategy for reading?*
 - *How is studying different from completing assignments?*
 - *How much time should I spend studying every night?*
 - *How do I spend my time, how can I spend my time better, and how can I manage my time?*

Potential Products: Study systems for different subjects; organizational systems; notebook checks; presentations on study strategies; time-management projects, like charting how students spend time for a week, and then reflect on what they could do better.

- **How do I make the most out of high school?** The key takeaway from the college application exercise is for students to realize that what college admissions officers are looking for are students who made the most out of their time in high school. Use this time to help students figure out what that means. Potential lessons include:
 - *What does it mean academically to make the most out of high school?*
 - *What does it mean socially to make the most out of high school?*
 - *What does it mean in terms of extra-curricular activities and service to make the most out of high school?*
 - *What mark do you want to make during your time in high school?*

Potential Product: Have students create a product stating their goals in all those different areas. Who do they want to be when they're seniors in high school? What do they want to look back on? What do they want their legacy to be? How will they make the most of high school? This is a sort of extension of the college application exercise.

Unit 4: What am I good at?

- **What values are important to me, and what do I excel at that's important to me?** Much has been written about the importance of students affirming the values and talents that are important to them. University of Maryland professor of education William Sedlacek has spent his career studying the "noncognitive" factors that predict college success, and the first one on his list is *positive self-concept*. In order to promote this positive self-concept, psychologists recommend exercises that seek to affirm values and talents both inside and outside the academic realm. Potential lessons include:
 - *What values are most important to me?*
 - *What am I good at?*
 - *What do I think I might be good at?*

Potential Product: Set of writing exercises in which students affirm values and talents important to them.

- **Character strengths inventory.** Martin Seligman, and researchers at the University of Pennsylvania, have established an enormous inventory of what they call 'character strengths,' but really encompass a whole range of talents, mindsets, and beliefs, that all people can excel at. A potential practice that they've piloted at several schools is to have students identify the 5 character strengths that are their strongest, and try to utilize these strengths as much as they can in both academics and in career. On the flip side of this, students can also look at the 5 character attributes that they really struggle with, and think about how they can improve on those attributes. Potential lessons include:
 - *What are your top 5 character strengths?*
 - *What are some examples of how you've used these in your life?*
 - *What are some examples of how you could use them even more?*
 - *What are your 5 weakest character strengths?*
 - *How could you improve upon these?*

Potential Product: Students identifying the 5 strengths, describing the 5 strengths, and giving examples of how they already use those strengths in their lives, and how they can continue to use those strengths more in the future.

Resources: Martin Seligman [character strengths inventory](http://viacharacter.org). (viacharacter.org)

- **Interest Inventory and Preliminary Career Search:** Students take interest inventories, to begin the process of drawing a line connecting who they are, their current interests both in school and out, and potential colleges and careers.

Potential lessons include:

- *What do I really love doing?*
- *What do I want to get involved in?*
- *How does this relate to potential careers?*
- *What education is needed for these potential careers?*
- *What type of major should you choose for this type of career?*
- *What can you do now to get on that path?*

Potential Product: Report on one career that interests them, including the skills required, education required, average pay, and reasons for selecting that career and how it aligns with student interests and strengths.

- **Summer Opportunities Research and Application.** Have students research potential summer opportunities from a bank of potential opportunities. Potential lessons include:
 - *Identify 3 to 5 potential opportunities, some of which are “match” opportunities, some of which are “reach” opportunities, and some of which are “safety” opportunities.*
 - *Students write essays, complete applications, and brainstorm fundraising opportunities (if needed).*

Potential Product: 3 completed summer program applications (one reach, one match, one safety).

- **Pulling it all together.** Students can draw a line through how what they’re doing right now is connected to who they will be in the future. Potential lessons include:
 - *What do I want to do with my life?*
 - *What will make my life a good life?*
 - *How do my academic and behavioral habits impact my grades?*
 - *How do my grades impact my summer opportunities?*
 - *How do my grades, extra-curricular activities, and summer opportunities impact my college options?*
 - *How do my college options impact my career options and life choices?*

Unit 5: What obstacles will I face, and how will I overcome them?

- **Normalizing Obstacles.** There is significant research that backs up the idea that by normalizing obstacles (showing students that obstacles are normal, and everyone faces them), students get a boost in their own confidence, and are more successful. Potential lessons include:
 - *“Hoped for” and “Feared” possible selves lesson sequence (Oyserman).*
 - *What obstacles have “successful” people faced, and how did they deal with them?*
 - *How do people learn? Is failure a necessary ingredient in the learning process?*

Potential Products: Reflection essays.

- **Growth Mindset:** Students will be able to articulate what a growth mindset is, where they fall on the fixed mindset to growth mindset continuum, and how adopting a growth mindset will be helpful for them. Potential lessons include:
 - *What is a growth mindset?*
 - *What’s the difference between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset?*
 - *Where do you fall along the fixed mindset to growth mindset continuum?*
 - *How is a growth mindset helpful to success in school and life?*
 - *What happens to the brain when you learn?*

Potential Product: Letters to younger students that describe what a growth mindset is, and what happens to the brain when you learn.

- **Obstacles Inventory:** Students can spend time reflecting on the obstacles they’ve already hit in their freshman year, and how they’ve overcome them. They can also reflect on the obstacles they’re likely to hit between now and college graduation, and how they might overcome those obstacles. Potential lessons include:
 - *What obstacles have I faced thus far in high school? How have I overcome them?*
 - *What obstacles might I face between now and college graduation? How will I overcome those obstacles?*
 - *How are the obstacles I’m facing similar to the obstacles faced by other students who pushed through obstacles and experienced success?*
 - *What can I do now in preparation for the obstacles I will face in the future?*

Potential Product: Letter to younger students describing the obstacles they’ll likely face in high school, and what they can do to overcome those obstacles.

Unit 6: Where am I ‘matching?’

- **‘Matching’:** Start the process now of getting students to understand the concept of ‘matching’ (attending a school where their GPA and ACT scores are roughly the same as the other incoming freshmen). Students can identify schools that they’re currently matching with, and can identify ‘goal’ schools. Potential lessons include:
 - *What ‘tier’ of schools do you currently ‘qualify’ for?*
 - *What school in that tier are you interested in?*
 - *What “qualities” in a school interest you?*



- *What's the graduation rate at your school?*
- *What's the average financial award given at the school?*
- *What's the advantage of getting admitted to a more selective school?*

Potential Product: Small research report on one school that they're currently 'matching' with.

Further Reading

David Leonhardt from the New York Times has written several articles on undermatching and the value of selective colleges. Start with [“Best Colleges Failing to Lure Talented Poor”](#), but he’s written a lot about the topic.

Matthew Yglesias has written several articles on undermatching in Slate including one titled [“Smart, Poor Kids Are Applying to the Wrong Colleges,”](#) and [“How Smart Poor Kids Get Screwed by the College Admissions Process.”](#)

Caroline Hoxby and Christopher Avery’s original research on undermatching is titled [“Missing the One-Offs”](#) (<http://www.nber.org/papers/w18586>). One fault in their research, however, is that they only focus on the highest-achieving students. However, undermatching is a problem for students at all academic levels. For a comprehensive review of the research on undermatching, and how avoiding undermatching is important not just for those eligible for the most selective colleges, but for all students, read *Crossing the Finish Line*, by Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson.

Patrick O’Connor’s (Cranbrook High School) *College is Yours 2.0* and *College Counseling for School Counselors* provide a great crash course in college counseling from a top counselor at an elite college-prep high school.

Hold Fast to Dreams by Joshua Steckel and Beth Zasloff gives a great account of efforts by Mr. Steckel to implement top prep-school college counseling practices in a low-income public school in Brooklyn.

Colleges That Change Lives, by Loren Pope, is *the* book to give anyone who needs convincing on the importance of applying to small independent colleges.

How to Win at College by Cal Newport is a great book, written in student-friendly language, for providing a blueprint for what students need to do to thrive at the next level.

“Who Gets to Graduate,” an article by Paul Tough in the New York Times from 2014, is a great account of the obstacles low-income, minority, and first-gen students face in college, even when they’re academically qualified.

How Children Succeed by Paul Tough presents a great account of the various obstacles that low-income students face throughout their schooling lives, and what we can do to help them navigate those obstacles.

Crossing the Finish Line, by Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson provides a dense, statistics heavy look at who finishes college in America, and at what types of institutions. A lot of the findings will surprise you.



Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners

(<https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/teaching-adolescents-become-learners-role-noncognitive-factors-shaping-school>), by researchers at the University of Chicago, is the best review of research on non-cognitive skills

For more on non-cognitive skills, also look at William Sedlacek’s work on what he calls non-cognitive “variables,” in “[Why We Should Use Non-Cognitive Variables.](#)”

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