

Lessons Learned: NACAC 2024

Notes from sessions attended by the counselors of Collegewise and our volunteer contributors during the National Association for College Admission Counseling Annual Conference

**COLLEGE
WISE**

A decorative graphic in the bottom right corner consisting of a cluster of colorful triangles in shades of teal, orange, yellow, and dark blue, arranged in a geometric pattern.

September 2024

Los Angeles welcomed NACAC (more than 7,000 of us!) with a little bit of everything. We had street tacos and overpriced salads and graffitied skyscrapers and quite a few convention center coffees. NACAC gave us 3 jam-packed days sessions tackling everything from how politics is impacting students' college choices to implicit bias in recommendation letters. Not to mention the approximately fifty-eleven sessions on AI! (Spoiler alert: we think it's here to stay.)

In his opening keynote, Earvin “Magic” Johnson remembered the school counselor who changed his life, and reminded us that we're all in the life-changing business. His discussion with NACAC CEO Angel B. Perez (no chairs allowed!) about perseverance, authenticity, and using your platform for good set the tone for the days that followed. At the closing session, Dr. Shaun Harper returned to the main stage, where he raised the bar on conference fashion and asked us to dig deep in our work. The panel discussion that followed dove into anti-DEI legislation and implored us to focus on what we *can* do in the wake of SFFA, not what we can't.

That brings us to Lessons Learned: Collegewise's 2024 NACAC Notes. As you'll soon discover as you work through 90+ (!) pages of notes, the sessions and keynotes covered a vast swath of our profession. We know the conference was not easy to attend so we did the following as we have for the past nine years:

1. Spread far and wide throughout the conference and took notes at the sessions we attended.
2. Cleaned up those notes: some brief, some detailed, all informative.
3. Compiled them into a document to share with anyone who wants them.

As always, every bit of credit for the content goes to the presenters themselves, as they did the real work—we just jotted down what they talked about. And we did it quickly with our laptops balanced on our knees or airplane tray tables, so please forgive any stray comments or funny typos. We know that reading a collection of notes isn't the same as attending the conference. Still, we hope you find the information helpful.

Some of the sessions we'll highlight for our public school counselor friends are:

- Don't Just Dream Big – Dream Brave: Helping FGLI Students Identify Broader, Best-Fit College Options
- Building Your AI Toolkit for College Admissions
- Increasing Impact, Access, and Equity: A Schoolwide College Peer Mentor Program at (Almost) any Budget
- Politics and College Choice: Results from a National Study on the Impact of State-Level Political Policies on Student Enrollment Decisions

Huge thank you to the Wisers who diligently took session notes and helped compile this document: Kate Strzelecki, Julie Brasseaux, Ian Parker, Katie Sprague, Sophie Heller, and Kevin McMullin.

A special shout-out to the educators who raised their hands to join Wisers in taking copious notes. THANK YOU, Christine Gambill (Bosco Tech), Sandy Longworth (College Essay Guy), and the entire College Essay Guy team. Friends, you made these notes so much richer and robust, and we're grateful on behalf of everyone reading this.

Next year, we'll trade palm trees for buckeyes when we reunite in Ohio. Until then, let's continue to bring courage, care, and community to the work of supporting students. Remember: we may not have all the answers... but ChatGPT doesn't either. See you in Columbus!

Allison Lopour
Chief People Officer, Collegewise



Wait... who is Collegewise?

With more than 25 years of college counseling & tutoring experience, [Collegewise](#) has been at the forefront of providing families, schools, and non-profits with up-to-date, honest admissions advice. We believe that applying to university should be an exciting time, not a stressful, anxiety-ridden rite of passage. We know that sharing good information is one way to do so! Since we opened our doors in 1999, our advisors and tutors have guided more than 30,000 students to successful admissions and testing outcomes. We take great care in our work, from our paid counseling programs to our complimentary [resources](#). Our resources have been downloaded by over 100,000 readers, and we thank you for reading this one. Happy Reading!

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Table of Contents | 3 |
| Student Academic Interests Are Shifting: New Strategies for Enrolling the Right Students for the Right Programs at the Right Price Point | 5 |
| How (and Why) to Uplevel Your College Essay Workshop Post-SCOTUS and ChatGPT | 7 |
| Building Partnerships and Sustainable Models to Enroll and Support Refugee and Displaced Students' Success | 9 |
| Politics and College Choice: Results from a National Study on the Impact of State-Level Political Policies on Student Enrollment Decisions | 11 |
| Throwing Three or 30 Out the Window: Contributing to an Office Culture of Growth | 14 |
| Harnessing AI in College Counseling: How to Use AI to Help Students and Yourself While Maintaining the Core Values of the Profession | 17 |
| College Admission Essays and Generative AI | 21 |
| Creating Team Synergy Through Effective Professional Development Retreats | 24 |
| Full Transparency: What Factors Go into the Decision-Making Process at Highly Selective Universities in England, and How to Make a Competitive Application | 26 |
| Drawing Outside the Lines: Counseling Visual and Performing Arts Students Through the Complexities of Discipline- Specific Arts Applications | 30 |
| Mental Health and the College Essay | 32 |
| Advising Prospective NCAA Student-Athletes | 33 |
| Myth-Busting Around Selective College Advising: Key Advising Philosophies and Techniques to Support FGLI Students Interested in Top Colleges | 36 |
| Putting our Masks on First: Self-Care for College Admission Counseling Professionals | 39 |
| IEC SIG: AI in College Admission | 40 |
| Increasing Impact, Access, and Equity: A Schoolwide College Peer Mentor Program at (Almost) any Budget | 42 |
| SIG: Hispanic/Latinx | 46 |
| STEM PUSH Network: Making Visible the STEM Achievements of Black, Latine, and Indigenous High School Students | 48 |
| Don't Just Dream Big – Dream Brave: Helping FGLI Students Identify Broader, Best-Fit College Options | 51 |
| FAFSA Deep Dive: Understanding the Student Aid Index (SAI) | 55 |
| Equity at the Crossroads: Navigating Implicit Bias in College Admissions – A Comprehensive Exploration for School Counselors | 58 |
| Expressing and Assessing Character Strengths in Admission | 60 |
| Standardized Testing and College Grades: A Look at Their Association and Why Authentic Student Work is Important | 63 |
| Building Your AI Toolkit for College Admissions | 65 |
| Millennials Managing Gen-Z: Considering Generational Differences in the Post-COVID Workplace | 67 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Reflections from our First Post-SFFA Admission Cycle | 68 |
| Admission in IPEDS: Changes to Future Collections | 69 |
| The Changing Role of Calculus in STEM Admissions | 72 |
| Moving Forward: The Future of College Admission in Challenging Times | 73 |
| How To Survive the Computer Science Hunger Games | 75 |
| College Admissions Trends You Need To Know | 79 |
| Getting the Message: Strategies for Talking About College Affordability with the Families Who Need It Most | 81 |
| The Urgency of Simplicity: Lumina Foundation’s Great Admissions Redesign | 83 |
| Below the Water’s Edge: A Reflective Deep Dive to Aid Students’ Supplemental Essay Writing | 84 |
| The Introvert’s Guide to Success in the College Admission Profession | 85 |
| Owning Your Lived Experiences: Supporting All Students in Answering Application Questions About Community, Identity, and Diversity | 86 |
| AI in Essay Writing: Unlocking New Opportunities Through Human Collaboration | 89 |
| Artificial Intelligence and the College Essay | 90 |
| SIG: Learning Differences | 91 |
| Annual Member Meeting | 92 |
| Anti LGBTQ+ Legislation Goes to College | 93 |
| From Distant Miles to the British Isles: Tips for U.S. Curriculum Schools Applying to Selective UK Universities | 94 |

Student Academic Interests Are Shifting: New Strategies for Enrolling the Right Students for the Right Programs at the Right Price Point

Presenters:

- Matt Lopez, Arizona State University
- Michelle Lewis, Washington State University
- James Miller, Seattle University

Session Notes:

- All colleges on this panel are access mission universities and are looking to admit as many students as possible.
- Students who connect earlier (pre-senior year) with the college (become a hand raiser; show demonstrated interest) yield better.
- Lead sources: Cappex/ Appily and RaiseMe are the best lead sources apart from testing agencies. It's just good to know that many of these websites are sending student info to colleges.
- Colleges are trying not to go on school visits; it's not a great recruitment strategy; instead, they're focused on marketing and touches virtually. Differentiating messaging based on affluence.
- The State of Washington has the most generous need-based aid packages.
- Some colleges are having tuition go directly to the academic units, which provides the incentive for faculty and departments to have a stake in getting students to enroll since their budgets depend on it.
- Seattle University- Jesuit University, 50% Out of state, 70% of students are students of color, and more than half make less the \$150k
- There is no sustainable enrollment future for a college that is 80% white, with demographic shifts.
- In liberal arts, enrollment has been static.
- Shifting more money into need as opposed to merit, as the diversity of the institution shifts.
- Programs are becoming more related to careers, stakes are high for every family making under \$250k, and the investment in college must result in moving the socioeconomic status of the student.
- The program mix has not kept up; you have givers and takers. We have offerings that don't match the market.
- National Student Clearinghouse data is very helpful in understanding who your competitors are, and you can break it down and see this by major.
- Consumer index data (Market View) provides data about income for prospective students.
- Job growth and degree need to match and become more nimble in the degree mix.

- As campuses become more representative of lower to middle income, the expectation the family is making for results, as well as career results, is necessary. Schools need to show the tradition and need for liberal arts education but can show a career-based outcome will survive.

How (and Why) to Uplevel Your College Essay Workshop Post-SCOTUS and ChatGPT

Speaker:

Ethan Sawyer, College Essay Guy

Session Overview:

First ChatGPT was released. Then the SCOTUS decision. Are you still giving the same essay workshop? In this session, for high school counselors and admission officers alike, College Essay Guy will share: (updated!) brainstorming exercises that go beyond the essence objects, tips on talking to students about ChatGPT, and admission-officer-informed advice on the “diversity” and “community” essays. Leave with both practical strategies and — get this — a set of Google slides you can edit and use right away.

Salient Notes:

1. Participants were asked to examine where they fall on a “mood meter” and share results with partner seated next to them
2. Sawyer then brought the larger group together to go through a “values exercise” and an “identity exercise” which prompted participants to choose from a list of values and identities and really think through which ones they connect to (we chose two for each). Then we determined how they may interconnect in surprising ways.
3. Then partners were asked to return to their conversation and share answers to the following questions:
 - An identity I’m proud of is...
 - An identity I’m often recognized for is...
 - An identity I’m not often recognized for is...
 - An identity I’m discovering more about or learning into lately is...
 - An identity I’ve left behind or am leaving behind is...

There are great “why us” and other supplement-specific essay tips on the College Essay Guy website. His resources provide brainstorming ideas and exercises which may help us approach supplements with a renewed level of creativity.

There are lots of techniques to weave aspects of our identity into extracurricular-focused supplements as well (they emphasized how connecting to an identity can reorient an activities supplement in a meaningful way). For example, instead of just focusing on the activity itself (what they did), we should be encouraging students to move toward the insights they gained (what they learned).

Main Takeaways:

1. These particular exercises are not only ideal for personal statement brainstorming but also for supplements such as the “Why us” or “What you’ll contribute” supplement (or possibly diversity as well)

2. Questions of identity (and reflection prior) can enrich not only the personal statement, but also have a role in each of the most frequently seen supplements (such as “Why us”, “Why major” and the diversity and/or community supplements)
3. Students should use additional information section to write about any significant mental health struggles (versus writing about it in a personal statement), make sure you’ve explored all other topics with students so they don’t feel they must write about certain mental health struggles as there may be other significant experiences in their lives that they haven’t considered

Building Partnerships and Sustainable Models to Enroll and Support Refugee and Displaced Students' Success

Presenters:

Axelle Nasirrou, Project Manager (Refugee Student Initiatives)

Felecia Russell, Director (Higher Ed Immigration Portal)

Luz Bertadillo Rodriguez, Director (Campus Engagement)

Marina Chakmakchi, Global Talent Navigator (University of Southern Maine)

Session Overview:

At a time of global historical displacement, with more than 108.4 million people displaced worldwide, only 6 percent of refugee students (versus 40 percent of the general population) access higher education. In addition, most of the 408,000+ undocumented students in higher education do not have DACA. While these populations face unique barriers and challenges, an increasing number of U.S. campuses, often in partnership with community-based and other nonprofit organizations, are developing innovative models to support them. This session will outline the range of immigration and legal statuses these first-generation immigrants may have and their related barriers. The Presidents' Alliance and a campus representative will present the collaborative tools and resources being developed this year by two national communities of practice for refugee and undocumented students. These resources will help practitioners in these fields connect to the state and national networks providing support in recruiting, enrolling, and supporting undocumented and refugee students.

Salient Notes:

- This session covered the barriers and solutions to recruiting, admitting and retaining refugee or displaced students
- The session covered the origins of the 1982 Supreme Court ruling (Plyler vs. Doe) which affirmed the right of undocumented students to access free K-12 education in the US
- presenters went over statistics regarding the number of undocumented students graduating from US high schools each year (around 100,000)
- Out of the 120 million+ displaced people in the world, roughly 7% have access to higher education (and the general population is 40% with access to higher education)

Main Takeaways:

1) When advising undocumented students, the following strategies are crucial

- *creating a safe space where they feel they can disclose their status
- *staying up to date on immigration policies
- *ensuring you are well-informed about all relevant financial aid organizations/scholarships
- *creating a support group on campus

2) Most higher education leaders and policymakers want more information and guidance in terms of tools to support immigrants, refugees, international students etc.

3) Increasing F1 visas and temporary protected status to immigrants or undocumented students on US campuses are possible steps forward

Politics and College Choice: Results from a National Study on the Impact of State-Level Political Policies on Student Enrollment Decisions

Presenters:

Eric Page, EVP Client Success, Carnegie

Allana Forté, Senior Vice President, Chief Compliance Officer and Legal Counsel, Chief People and Culture Officer, Jacksonville University

Session Overview:

Within the past two years, several states have brought forward laws and regulations that create very real safety concerns for specific college-bound audiences. For example, the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* and its impact on abortion rights that are now up to state legislatures, the state legislation banning institutional funding used for DEI programming, and several regulations surrounding gender-affirming care and access to medications, therapies, and surgeries for transgender individuals. As a result, students are more aware of statewide politics when making decisions about where to apply to and attend college. This session reviews national research completed in 2024 asking whether these political decisions are making an impact on where students want to go to college, and which of these issues is most salient in making that decision. The results are filtered through a student's own political ideologies and where they live, bringing up the question as to whether or not more students will go out-of-state if they currently live in a state regulating these issues in a way they don't agree with. This session, led by Carnegie's Senior Vice President of Research, will cover the most salient outcomes of the research and explore how this information can be used in understanding future admissions trends, especially in states where these topics are hot-button issues and legislation. By the end of this session, those in attendance will be able to report on the impact of a state's political decisions on student recruitment, how school-based resources and support systems can help ease the minds of those who are impacted by legislation, and identify where students are getting information about these important topics so that colleges can contribute to the conversation.

Salient Notes:

- 47% of HS students now report they are researching the politics of the states in which their colleges are located
 - o Seeking information on where to attend school in states aligned with their own values & ideologies
- Carnegie surveyed ~2,000 students, asking about reproductive health rights, DEI initiatives & state laws regarding DEI, and transgender issues on college campuses.
- Students generally considered these social issues to be important when choosing a college or not choosing a college.
- Looking at the results of the question on reproductive health, more than 70% of students said they were slightly or more concerned re: college locations.

- More than 80% of students said it was moderately or more important that college match their attitudes toward DEI and conversations on race.
- About 60% of students said it was important that the college they attend is located in a state with laws regarding gender affirming care that match their own.
- Liberal students opposed attending schools with strict transgender bans, but conservative students hesitated if no restrictions were in place.
- Students' political beliefs affect their willingness to attend college in a state that has laws that match/don't match their own.
- Most students prioritized traditional factors like program quality, location, athletics etc, but:
 - o 9% ranked reproductive healthcare as #1
 - o 8% ranked law about race, racism, and DEI #1
 - o 3% ranked laws on transgender issues and gender affirming care #1
 - o 69% of students indicated that one or more of those issues would be an overriding factor in their decision to attend a college
- Students are getting information on legislative decisions & politics from social media more than any other source.
- There are also ideologically-oriented guides, such as the one from the Heritage Foundation for conservative students seeking conservative colleges
- HBCU applications also up significantly as students identify colleges that will support their identity
- What can schools do?
 - o Curate a culture of belonging
 - o Teach civil discourse and how to disagree respectfully
 - o Lobby/advocate at the state level
 - o Message and market the stories that highlight your positive culture
 - o Train admission teams to respond to prospective student concerns

Main Takeaways:

- Political climate is increasingly influencing college choice. A significant number of high school students (47%) are now factoring in state politics when choosing colleges. They're looking at issues like reproductive health rights, DEI initiatives, and transgender policies. While traditional factors still dominate, for many students (69%), these political issues could be deal-breakers. This trend suggests that admissions offices need to be prepared to address these concerns and articulate their institution's stance on sensitive topics.
- Social issues are shaping institutional appeal. Students are showing a strong preference for institutions that align with their values on social issues. More than 80% of students consider a college's approach to DEI and race-related conversations, while 60% consider a state's laws on gender-affirming care. This polarization presents both challenges and opportunities for colleges, depending on their location and institutional values. It's becoming increasingly important to clearly communicate your school's culture and values to attract like-minded students.

- Proactive strategies are needed to navigate this new landscape. To adapt to these changing dynamics, colleges should focus on creating inclusive environments, teaching civil discourse, and actively showcasing their positive culture. Training admission teams to address prospective students' concerns about political and social issues is crucial. Additionally, schools might consider engaging in advocacy at the state level to influence policies that affect their ability to attract students. Remember, students are primarily getting this information from social media, so a strong, authentic online presence is more important than ever.

Throwing Three or 30 Out the Window: Contributing to an Office Culture of Growth

Presenters:

Quincey Malauulu Otuafi, Director of Admissions, Westminster University (formerly Westminster College)

Tamara Siler, Interim Director of Admission, Rice University

Kristen Pantazes, Senior Associate Director of Admission, University of Pennsylvania

Hugh Durham, Executive Director of Undergraduate Admissions & Enrollment Management, Florida A&M University (FAMU)

Session Overview:

As the saying goes, folks work in admission for three years or 30 years — there's really no in between. But is that still the case in 2024? In admission work, frequent turnover feels inevitable — especially in today's competitive job market. As new professionals join the profession, especially those of us who stumble upon this work as a career, how can we collectively nurture professional development for those who want to continue to grow within the profession? For those who are unsure if this is the career path for them? Simultaneously, how can we contribute to an office culture that values individual growth and celebrates growth that ends in departure from their institution? It may be challenging to navigate these conversations while generational differences exist between senior leadership and rising professionals. We will also discuss some tactics to steer the conversation about growth and development, whether you are a seasoned admission professional or brand new. Join us for an open dialogue with admission professionals who are throwing the three-or-30 language out the window and are ready to replace it with a positive culture of grow or go.

Salient Notes:

- If you decide you enjoy the work, you need to additionally ask questions:
 - o Personal/professional goals?
 - o Is the institution I serve able to support my goals and interests? Think about:
 - Type of institution - private, independent, public, etc, as well as overall campus resources
 - Org chart - is there room for promotion or additional responsibilities that are compensated?
 - o Am I in the right space? Am I in the right role?
 - o Am I willing to relocate to achieve my goals and interests?
- Am I in the right role?
- If institutions don't create a culture of trust, transparency will not follow.
- Identify stepping stones
 - o Taking on "more" strategically - if compensation for additional responsibilities is not available, are there specific tasks or skills that you can develop in lieu of compensation? Can view enhanced PD opportunities as compensation

- o Transparency (to the extent possible) - what are the consequences of communicating your goals with your supervisor?
- Why do people leave roles in admission?
 - o Low pay/high expectations
 - o Undervalued or underutilized
 - o Family planning
 - o Limited opportunities for growth
 - o Burnout/disinterest
- What can leaders do?
 - o Be innovative with budgets (FTE, overhead, strategic travel, meaningful expenditures on staff)
 - o Be innovative (in general) - encourage participation in orgs and groups at a local, regional, or national level. Familiarize yourself with the wide array of orgs, PD opportunities, and scholarships available
 - o Transparent conversations can help identify where to place employees so that they thrive in their positions
- Contributing to an office culture of growth
 - o Don't gatekeep information
 - o Be mindful of the capacity of colleagues
 - o Remember that leaders inspire. How can you lead from the middle?
 - o Put people in the right roles.
- Typical new hire costs half the salary of the person they replace to hire & train, and don't achieve the competency of the person they replaced for ~2 years. Burnout/turnover is expensive!

Main Takeaways:

- Career growth requires proactive self-reflection. Take a good look at your goals, interests, and the opportunities your current institution offers. Don't shy away from asking yourself tough questions about whether you're in the right role or if you need to consider relocating. Remember, it's okay to strategically take on extra responsibilities - even without immediate compensation - if they help you develop valuable skills or open doors for future growth.
- Retention is a two-way street. High turnover in admissions often stems from issues like low pay, feeling undervalued, or limited growth opportunities. As a leader, get creative with your resources to support your team. This could mean rethinking budget allocations, encouraging professional development, or having open conversations about career paths. Creating a culture of trust and transparency can go a long way in keeping talented staff engaged and committed.
- Nurture a culture of growth and collaboration. Whether you're in a leadership position or not, you can contribute to a positive office culture. Share knowledge freely, be mindful of your colleagues' workloads, and remember that leadership can happen at all levels. Putting people in roles where they can thrive not only boosts morale but also makes financial sense - considering the high costs associated with hiring and training new staff.

By fostering an environment of growth and support, you're investing in both individual and institutional success.

Harnessing AI in College Counseling: How to Use AI to Help Students and Yourself While Maintaining the Core Values of the Profession

Presenters:

Scott Kominkiewicz, Associate Director of College Counseling, 'Iolani School

Michelle Rasich, Co-Director of College Counseling, Rowland Hall

Randy Mills, Director of College Counseling, Greenhill School

Stephanie Dupaul, Vice President for Enrollment Management, University of Richmond

Session Overview:

Facing a national predicament where counseling caseloads are unsustainably high, resulting in a stark disparity in college guidance and advocacy, as well as burnt-out counselors, there is an urgent need for solutions. This session confronts this challenge by examining the utilization of artificial intelligence in the college process. AI presents a unique opportunity to scale personalized assistance in various areas of the college search and aids counselors in their advocacy for students. However, this technology also raises ethical concerns regarding the balance between automated assistance and human insight. Our session will bring together experienced professionals from both high school and college offices to discuss how they are integrating AI into their work while staying true to the core values of our profession. Attendees will first gain an understanding of basic AI prompt engineering, equipping them with the skills to effectively use AI to assist with tasks. Secondly, they will explore the benefits of AI, gaining insights into how it can be implemented in their professional practices to improve student support while upholding the integrity of the process. Finally, the session will highlight how some selective colleges view the use of AI in the college counseling process and how AI might have affected applications this past cycle.

Salient Notes:

Speaker was staunchly against using AI, but changed his mind. Why?

- Using AI produced higher productivity
- Produced higher quality work regardless of domain
- Reflect on core values & finding ways AI could add
- Leveled the skill gap between workers

How to craft effective prompts

- Creating effective prompts, practical examples of AI in use, view from the https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DEAsaid4DCKWIKCmA-6-JUnIJ_H-SG3-Re1qpMW482o/edit?usp=drivesdk college side in using AI
- Using AI produced higher productivity, higher quality work, leveled skill gap between higher performing and lower performing employees
- M.A.S.T.E.R. - developed by Rachel Woods at the AI Exchange. A way to prompt AI effectively, where you produce the critical information and AI can produce a working draft

- M – Markdown (organization)
- A - Act as
- S - Specify (Instruments)
- T – Thread – one topic per thread
- E – Examples (provide context)
- R – Regenerate and test
- Still requires critical thought, is work intensive yet still quicker than the old way
- Markdown (Organization), Act As, Specify (Instructions), Thread - one topic per thread, Examples (provide context), Regenerate and test
- At, Scott Kominkiewicz provided a prompt that he used, including context about the student, a clear outline, and examples of good, medium, and bad recommendations. The more information you give the AI, the better job it can do crafting a recommendation.

AI Ground Rules

- If you wouldn't post it anonymously on Reddit, don't put it into any AI
- Do not use student names or your school's name in the letter. Instead create aliases.
- Align AI use with your mission
- https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DEAsaid4DCKWIKCmA-6-JUnIJ_H-SG3-Re1qpMW482o/edit?usp=drivesdk
- Otter.ai is a good transcription tool for meetings with students, parents, college reps
 - Can also be great at searches when you're looking for what specific topics were discussed
 - Transcription note-taking tool
 - Free version is 30min / 300min month
 - 1200 minutes is next package up, \$79/yr with teacher discount
 - Ask family/student first before using it
 - "Listens" and has 'Speaker 1' Speaker 2 – you can go back and assign names/roles
 - There is a LOT you can do with it after the transcription
 - Ex: record conversations with college reps to share new information with entire counseling office
 - Team Meetings – able to generate action items
 - Has chatbot where you can prompt it to identify information from the conversations
 - Great to use as a reminder about precise details when you can't take thorough notes during meetings
 - Can generate letters of rec – tend to be generic, though, but does a decent job
- Gemini
 - Randy used it to create a new transcript request form by indicating what information should be collected - took 6-8 minutes
 - Google's AI tool
 - You can ask it to craft forms, graphs, charts, etc

- Pulls a lot of data directly from internet

Free AI chat Bots you can use:

- Chat GPT
- Claude 3.5 Sonnet
- Magic School
- Gemini
- Llama??
- IEC resources
- College Vine (was showing off product in expo)
 - What's the difference between all of these? "It's like Burger King v McDonald's. Or, more accurately, it's like comparing two toilets. They do the same thing, and are occasionally full of shit."

Using AI to assist students

- As teachers, we have the ethical & professional obligation to teach students to use this in a responsible way. "The genie isn't going back in the bottle"
- See Rowland Hall's AI statement on their website
 - Honor Code
- Do we have an ethical obligation to teach students how to use AI tools responsibly? Very likely yes.

Ways Counselor has used AI in HER work:

- letters of rec, college list building, college visit itineraries, drafting emails, policy statements, essay feedback
 - Essay Feedback: Working w/students & getting feedback together and then trying to refocus writing
 - For Counselors: "What constructive feedback do you suggest for this college essay?"
 - Help clean up "Activities" sections & descriptions
 - Interview prep "What are some possible interview questions they might ask me?"
 - Major / Career Exploration
 - recommendations, college list building, college visit itineraries, drafting emails & policy statements, and essay feedback
 - Great prompt: "What constructive feedback do you suggest for this essay?"
- Ethical use of AI: Exercise your humanity, don't surrender your responsibility, use the time that you reclaim to meet with students/parents OR with your family/friends
- On the college side:
 - There are a lot of tools already used (Grammarly, Spellcheck, calculators, thesaurus, etc), but we must trust that the information is true
 - Foundational to the admission process: Trust - in what is stated in the letter, in the transcript, in the essay, in the activity list
 - Most constrained resource is time, and AI can be used to make processing applications more efficient
 - Opportunities to automate GPA calculation, transcript review, keyword/activity review, survey analysis, travel planning, distaste w/ Slate, AI chat, Slate Reader AI

- Communicate better to prospective students. Faster and more targeted.
- Values are non-negotiable.
- On the college side, AOs don't typically have time to check all essays for AI (even if the detection programs were reliable — which they are not) - instead, if they get an essay that is likely a result of AI, they'll check against the grades and see if the quality of the writing is consistent with grades in for instance English or against Reading section of testings.
- Things colleges are excited to use AI for:
 - Automate GPA review
 - Transcript review
 - Keyword / activity review
 - Survey analysis
 - Travel planning
 - Dictate
 - AI Chat
 - Slate Reader AI
 - Use "Descript" to cut / edit videos for social media
- Great Question:
 - Do we run the risk of our student's work getting flagged as GPT-generated if we're running their essays through it??
 - UC's claim they are looking for plagiarism not "assistive" technology
 - ((Personal note/addition: A UC rep was very clear at our recent visit that they were going to be running PIQs through AI generation filters to ensure things were not being chat gpt generated))

Main Takeaways:

- Responsible and thoughtful use of AI can be VERY valuable for time-constrained counselors and admission professionals, for everything from drafting recommendations to writing emails to creating forms and processes. The goal should be to use AI as a tool to enhance human decision-making, not replace it.
- The more context and information an AI service has, the more likely it is to provide useful feedback. Counselors can ask it to take on a role (seasoned school counselor, for instance) as well as provide detailed information about the style, tone, and format they are looking for.
- Privacy issues absolutely exist here — the companies running these platforms can and will use all available data to further train their models. As such, it's imperative that all names and identifying information be hidden or replaced when using those services.
- There are a lot of free, effective tools to use
- Outsourcing to AI can free up your own headspace/calendar time to more effectively work with students
- Concerns regarding AI & privacy / "learning" from student info are still high

College Admission Essays and Generative AI

Presenters:

Rob Franek, Editor-in-Chief, The Princeton Review

Jodi Hester, Associate Director of College Counseling, Woodward Academy

Ellen Deitrich, Asst Head of School, Academics & Dean of College Counseling, Saint Mary's Hall School

Colby McCarthy, Dean of Enrollment Management, Drew University

Session Overview:

You, me, all of us: We're believers in the value of an authentic and beautifully crafted college essay. But the reality is college-bound students often get tripped up by the stress attributed to crafting essays, no matter their writing prowess. As generative AI takes root in nearly every fiber of our student's lives, we wonder if it could also be a solution to fear surrounding college essays. Could a college essay review tool responsibly use AI to help students craft essays where their innermost voices shine? Or is using AI in any capacity cheating from the get-go? Opinions and questions abound. In this session, we're going to poke at each of those questions, taboos, and opinions...together! Starter list below:

- o Does AI just write or rewrite new essays for our students?
- o Can students craft a primo essay using AI that's still authentic?
- o Is using AI for college essay feedback any different than paying an independent counselor to review your essay?
- o Will using an AI college essay review answer the access question that so many students with limited financial means face during the college process?
- o If students use AI for college essay feedback, what's next? Counseling, test prep, financial aid, scholarship searches?
- o Will admission review committees know if students used an AI essay coach? Will they care?

The Princeton Review's Editor-in-Chief, Rob Franek, will lead this session using Princeton Review products as guinea pigs. We'll take this deep dive together and exit ready to teach the "AI in college admissions" master class!

Salient Notes:

- What are colleges doing to adapt to AI? Colleges don't completely know yet because it's new for them too; colleges are trying to listen and learn from each other
- What are appropriate uses of AI?
 - One college said that coming up with ideas, or proofreading (if they don't have resources to have someone review it, under resourced students/schools)
 - "AI can provide the ingredients, but you still have to do the cooking"
 - If they start relying on it, it won't have a positive impact on their app because it will sound inauthentic
- School looks at AI almost like a tutor, and at one high school, it's a violation of their honor code because it's not them doing their own work; integrity issue that's of concern
- Schools are creating AI philosophy statements for their students
- Workarounds to protect authenticity include colleges requiring video statements and submitting graded schoolwork for comparison.
- Question raised: "Is there a distinction between using AI and hiring a private counselor?"

- Presenters agree firmly that AI use is not that different from parents helping or essay coaches helping.
- Response from HS counselor is that the students who don't need the help are using AI the most.
- Georgia Tech has a statement on how to use AI and encourage doing so ethically. If taught how to use it properly, AI could level the playing field a bit
- Lots of resourced students use it, and we should find a way to inform ALL students on best practices and ethical use.
- Other considerations:
 - Developmental maturity for students to take ownership in their use of it
 - English teachers assigning prompts in English class—instead of failing kids for using AI, make it a learning experience
 - Some students who write really well fear it'll be assumed they're using AI — as long as there is consistency across grades, it's okay. Holistic viewing is very helpful
- How are colleges utilizing AI in their app reviews?
 - Some colleges are running every essay through a software like Turnitin
 - Many schools, including the UCs, are running essays through a database to flag AI.
 - Some colleges do not use any AI checkers at all (Director of Admissions at Marist)
 - 25 years ago we were talking about if it was ethical for students to use spell check. For example, Marist is not running them through any program, because they still want to come up with the broader institutional policy
- How should students be advised or against? Embrace it as a tool. Help students understand we can't be afraid of this.
- Can we just be honest about the college essay for a minute? Jodi from Woodward reminds everyone that, on a given day, it's 5-7 minutes for the entire app. That essay is used to confirm the rest of the app, it's part of so many other things. There are a whole host of colleges where the essay is not required, so let's just breathe for a minute about this.
- All about consistency with the English grades and how the essay sounds.
- A bad essay is a bad essay, whether it's written by a parent or by AI or by a counselor — it's the same issue: THAT'S NOT YOU. Colleges can look at them and see that. Inauthentic essays are an issue because it doesn't allow the student to articulate the match for them.
- Rob: let's air our grievances: WHY does this make us nervous? Authenticity in question, pricey essay coaches and other people who have gotten involved with students trying to find their own voice, issue with fear lingering around it (parents think they have to do this or they won't get in)
- English as a second language students — fear mongering from top colleges leads them to more use of AI. How can we help non native Presenters use AI?
- Encouragement of colleges to let HS counselors know if there is a suspicious AI so it can be a learning moment

- Other ideas from audience members: a ten minute writing prompt that is timed to level the playing field? —accessibility issue with that; people asked what about a video
 - Submit a graded writing sample, short videos, timed essays — some issues brought up with access, ability for colleges to review all this within the 5 min they have to review and app
 - TPR is building a college counseling bot that is an acceptable use of AI. Could give feedback, but not doing the writing FOR students. How do we as a profession develop a bot that would be productive and have guardrails in place. Giving comments rather than rewriting.

Main Takeaways:

- What should colleges and high schools do now? Responsibility of creating those philosophies and guardrails and then communicating that with students and families
 - Reminder: AI favors AI — if colleges start to use AI in evaluation of students, it will favor the files that USE AI (example of AI evaluating an interview for eye contact, when you looked down at notes, etc.).
- What's the future look like? Does AI devalue the essay? Why are we even using the essay? What doesn't change and never should change: the ethical way we do the work no matter what tech does. No matter what, we can't lose site if helping students find and feel proud of their work.
- The opportunity is for the college admissions counselor community to come together to develop its own tool that all schools and counselors conform to that upholds academic integrity standards using smart guardrails to prevent students from using AI to think and create for them. Guardrails in the form of a common tool for all schools can and should be created and should be the standard for all schools.

Creating Team Synergy Through Effective Professional Development Retreats

Presenters:

Natalie Ford, Associate Director of College Counseling, Kent Denver School

Matthew Mettillie, Director of College Counseling, North Shore Country Day School

Lisa Giarratano, Director of College Counseling, Menlo School

Beatriz Hodavdekar, Director of College Counseling, St. Stephen's Episcopal School

Session Overview:

College counseling offices of all sizes and budgets benefit from continued, effective reflection at the academic year-end, as well as projection for the academic year ahead. While we all know that time is precious and the pace of our work feels impossible, too often the year comes to an abrupt close and an even more abrupt start in August without adequate reflection and forward planning. Professional development retreats are a critical way to capture best practices while planning for the next academic cycle. Creating productive (and fun!) opportunities for goal-setting retreats offer moments for cohesion among colleagues and team building. Whether on a limited budget or with generous financial support, retreats can last for a mere few hours, span a few days off-site, or anything in between. Far too often, college counseling colleagues work in a silo, rather than in a collaborative environment. Yearly (or preferably twice yearly) retreats offer specific and defined moments to articulate shared team goals while eliciting individual professional goals in tandem. A college counseling team that is professionally bonded affords happier and healthier individuals with the hope of greater retention. Whether adding a new colleague to your team, adjusting for staff changes, stepping into a new leadership role, or if you're lucky enough to have the same team, every office benefits from an energizing and dynamic retreat. Based on years of experience at varying secondary institutions, we will present effective retreat ideas and strategies through cross collaboration amongst intended stakeholders.

Salient Notes:

- Synergy-combined efforts are more than what we would have achieved on our own; not just adding them together, but multiplying them — harnessing collective power of the group, how to build and maintain synergy through retreats
- Who is the team, and understanding work background, strengths and interests - consider shared goals
- Circle of Safety
 - Want everyone to feel comfortable
 - an organization's culture where employees' needs are prioritized above profit. By putting your employees' needs first, you create an environment where they feel safe to collaborate and innovate.
- Building Synergy:
 - Staff meetings
 - 1:1 mentor meetings

- Establishing communication lines (call/email/time of day)
- Retreats
- Down time (lunch, quiet time in office)
- Connecting with faculty outside of counseling office
- Benefits of Team Building:
 - Reduced pressure
 - Builds open communication
 - Fresh perspective and innovation
 - Improved problem solving and teamwork
- Building a supportive team culture throughout the year, not just one retreat per year
 - When planning a retreat, choose appropriate location and format for the team
 - At the office, at a local college, lunch meeting, coffee shop, virtual, team members' house - as long as it's within everyone's circle of safety
 - Throughout the year, facilitate meaningful discussions and activities to promote collaboration and trust
 - Allow for downtime and informal interactions to strengthen interpersonal connection
 - Build supportive culture for new team members throughout the year
 - Informal team check-ins, social opportunities (not required)
- Examples shared of various budgets - no budget, moderate budget, and sizable budget
 - There are options no matter the budget! It's all about understanding the needs, timing, and comfort level of your staff
 - Common for offices to do a retreat at the end of the summer to kick off the new school year aligned and feeling excited.
 - Some also did a mini retreat in January coming back from winter break, or at the end of the school year to reflect.

Main Takeaways:

Whether adding a new colleague to your team, adjusting for staff changes, stepping into a new leadership role, or if you're lucky enough to have the same team, every office benefits from an energizing and dynamic retreat.

Full Transparency: What Factors Go into the Decision-Making Process at Highly Selective Universities in England, and How to Make a Competitive Application

Presenters:

Fiona Rushworth, Senior Liaison and Recruitment Officer, UCL, University College London

Rachel Bannister, Student Recruitment Officer, Americas, University of Warwick

Catherine Eames, International Student Recruitment Manager, Imperial College London

Roshan Walkerley, Deputy Head of Student Recruitment (International), University of Cambridge

Session Overview:

With the UK UCAS system being based on one application and only five university course choices, how can students ensure they are applying to the right universities for them and giving themselves the best chance of a successful application to competitive programs? Admission representatives from Cambridge, Imperial, UCL, and Warwick will dive into how selective universities in England assess applications, including differences in how applications are assessed in a collegiate system and possible nuances between subject areas, such as comparing applications to STEM programs vs. arts and humanities. We'll examine what makes effective UCAS personal statements and references, as well as additional application components utilized by some of our universities and programs like interviews and supplementary essays or tests. This session aims to equip advisors with the confidence to navigate admission in England and to support their students in making effective applications to competitive institutions.

Salient Notes:

Why study in the UK

- Enhanced study experience
 - Option to specialize from year one
 - Option to complete in three years with the option for an extra year to Master's level
 - Experience a variety of teaching methods, including small-group tutorials
 - Outside the classroom experiences - field trips, study abroad, research opportunities, internships
 - The Student Union - 100s of clubs and societies for sport, culture, music, tech, academic, volunteering.
- Enhanced future career opportunities
 - Develop transferable skills
 - Gain an internationally recognised degree
 - Opt to stay in the UK via the Graduate Route visa
- Student support

- Academic and departmental tutors
- International student support teams/mentoring and buddy schemes
- Counseling, mental health and wellbeing services
- Accommodation teams - guaranteed housing for at least year one
- NHS Healthcare

Studying in England

- Minimum 3 years (England, Wales, NI)
 - BA, BSC, BEng

Choosing a Course via UCAS Hub <https://www.ucas.com/discover>

- Refine options and check:
 - Entry requirements
 - Course modules*
 - Style of teaching
 - Study opportunities
 - Graduate destinations and skills
 - Location
 - City
 - Campus - all in one or multiple locations
 - Coastal
 - Size - the average UK university has 15,000 students
 - Activities/facilities available
 - Rankings

Applying to the UK - UCAS

- UK universities operate a transparent, selective admissions process
- Research entry requirements, including any admissions tests, portfolios, interviews
- Apply through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)
- 5 choices, 1 application form
 - (4 choices for Medicine and related courses)
- Early application deadline for Oxford, Cambridge and all Medicine

How are applications assessed?

- Predicted final grades - IB, APs, SATs, ACTs etc
 - Emphasis on final school qualifications - must meet the minimum
 - Potential subject requirements
- Proven academic record
- Additional tests where applicable - e.g. ESAT, LNAT, TMUA, UCAT
- Reference
- Personal Statement - balance and focus
- Interviews where applicable

What makes a strong application?

- Beyond the grades
 - Serious academic interest in the subject
 - Ability to think independently and critically
 - Skills: hands-on experience etc.
 - Why is the student the ideal applicant for that programme?
- All demonstrated through the Personal Statement and reinforced by the Reference

UCAS Personal Statement - What does it tell us?

- Why the student has chosen that course
- What they have done to prepare
- Understanding of the subject
- Suitability for course
- Max. 4,000 characters (approx. 47 lines)
- 75 - 90% academic interests
 - Knowledge of subject
 - Interest and enthusiasm
- 10 - 25% extracurricular
 - School based non-academic activities
 - Non-school related activities
- Tips:
 - Evidence to support "claims" that they are ready for, and enthusiastic about, their chosen course
 - Reflection on activities - the "so what?" test
 - Depth rather than breadth
 - As related to the US College Essay - striking the right balance between academic vs extracurricular
 - Precise, Academic, Intellectual - not too quirky, but in student's own voice
Watch for wasted words, listing, overwriting, quotations and superfluous introduction or conclusion
- Changes for 2026 Entry:
 - Structured approach - still 4,000 characters but broken into three sections (minimum of 350 characters in each):
 - Why do you want to study this course or subject?
 - How have your qualifications and studies helped you to prepare for this course or subject?
 - What else have you done to prepare outside of education, and why are these experiences useful?
 - Further guidance to follow from UCAS and universities For 2026 entry, no changes for those applying this year

UCAS Reference

- Max. 4,000 characters, 3 sections
 - Section 1 - The School
 - Section 2 - Any extenuating circumstances

- Section 3 - Any other supportive information specific to the applicant and relevant to the course

Additional methods to assess

- How: Interviews, admissions tests and/or submitted work
- Why:
 - Provides supplementary information
 - Assesses relevant skills, aptitude, academic ability and potential
 - Find out more about student's reason, understanding, and motivation for the subject

Main Takeaways:

- US wants your heart, UK wants your head (when it comes to personal statement)
- Minimum requirement is truly the entry to be even considered
- One personal statement goes to all unis, so students need to write a single statement for one course/major. Can't apply to English at one and math at another because it won't be successful.
- Be mindful of programs have that supplementary materials
- PPE — want to see two of the three covered in the PS, want to see how they link and how they know they link, which will cover for other courses they select at other unis
- Predicted grades are expected in the referee letter, even for APs taken spring of senior year

Drawing Outside the Lines: Counseling Visual and Performing Arts Students Through the Complexities of Discipline- Specific Arts Applications

Presenters:

Rebecca Kandel, Director of College Counseling, Idyllwild Arts Academy
Andrew Moss, Associate Head of Recruitment- NA, BMM University

Session Overview:

With the rise of new media and interdisciplinary studies, college arts programs are increasingly complex, intricate, and field-specific. Within each discipline, students must navigate differing styles of education, alternative application deadlines, and submission of prescreen videos, slide room portfolios, and scheduling of auditions. How do dancers find the appropriate program for their style? How does a jazz musician schedule a sample lesson? How much do academics matter for arts programs? What should students consider in applying to arts programs outside of the United States? How do we advise parents past the “neighborhood test?” And what is the role of counselors in guiding our students through this process? Guided by presenters from both sides of the application process, this workshop will examine the process by which counselors can effectively guide visual and performing arts students to appropriate post-secondary programs. Hear from a college counselor at a prestigious arts high school and an admission representative from one of the top arts college consortiums in the world. Walk away with real facts on the search process as well as concrete templates for timelines, field-specific resumes, and college lists to help guide your creative students through the college application process from start to finish.

Salient Notes:

- Parent education: Focus on faculty of actual program- industry test - the “ network test” is this valuable. Student Career or a Passion?
- Within each discipline- different specializations: printmaking? studios?
 - UCLA: Focus on devised theater- vs USC: more traditional: different education
 - Peabody: Classical programs/ Frost in Miami: JAZZ- Not classical
 - Northwestern: classical- niche instruments
 - Harvard/ Tufts... 4 +1
- International: can get into the ART industry! UK- hours less in class- in the studio- freelance. UK after freshman year- working making \$, working 20 hours- or full time when on break on visa. 3 years vs 4. The UK avg is below \$30,000. Want to get you out into the world- working individually.

Main Takeaways:

- READ REQUIREMENTS of Portfolios
- Links:

- Art resume:
https://s3.amazonaws.com/bee-content/beeUploadedFiles/33500920/c0b47a0c-d4b-4881-afd3-645f6b5435f7_DrawingOutsidetheLinesResumes.pdf
- Timeline:
https://s3.amazonaws.com/bee-content/beeUploadedFiles/33500920/3ef55229-8cc9-43c4-8b53-d5297017f83a_DrawingOutsidetheLinesSampleApplicationTimeline.pdf
- Research spreadsheet:
https://s3.amazonaws.com/bee-content/beeUploadedFiles/33500920/2ad26131-3e51-4e79-bd66-0b7f29d955ae_DrawingOutsidetheLinesCollegeResearchChartTemplate.pdf

Mental Health and the College Essay

Presenters:

Chistine Loo, Director of College Counseling, The Stoney Brook School
Ethan Sawyer, Founder, College Essay Guy

Session Overview:

According to Mental Health America, 16 percent of U.S. teens (ages 12 to 17) had at least one major depressive episode in 2022, while a recent YouthTruth survey of nearly 223,000 students found that 56 percent feel depressed, stressed, or anxious. When applying to college, many students wonder: Should I disclose mental health issues? If so, how do I do so in a way that helps rather than hurts my application? In this session, Ethan Sawyer (College Essay Guy) will share a set of specific questions students can use to determine whether or not to disclose, advice from college admission officers, as well as real student examples written post-pandemic. We'll also have time for discussion with colleagues. Practical handouts provided.

Salient Notes:

- When speaking with students about essays- Count up from zero (good ideas) vs Counting down (from perfection)
- Situations where the student MAY want to disclose:
 - Grades disrupted, transcript app issues that need explaining
- Situations where the student may NOT want to disclose:
 - Students grades/ transcript NOT significantly disrupted
 - Recent diagnosis
 - Disclosing raises more questions than solutions
- If the student DOES want to disclose: WHEN & HOW?
 - Personal statement? Additional information? Education? Counselor recommendations?
- If a student is unsure- have them write about it and decide later.

Main Takeaways:

- Should a student disclose mental health challenges in their college application? (short answer) IT DEPENDS
 - <https://www.collegeessayguy.com/blog/mental-health-in-college-essay-applications#A1>
- Name the problem doc:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zGy4wDAC8eLDFI33kcdq7oi9YyHXMrvjzXramRmX2RA/edit#heading=h.s4sjf0yyriz8>

Advising Prospective NCAA Student-Athletes

Presenters:

Matt Harris, Asst. Director of HS Review NCAA

Susan Peal, Director of Governance NCAA

Session Overview:

New to the NCAA Initial Eligibility process or just need a refresher? Get the facts about NCAA academic initial eligibility requirements, the core course review process, recruiting basics, and the National Letter of Intent. Learn about updates to the NCAA Division I and Division II initial eligibility requirements and the changing landscape of higher education, and how these updates will impact prospective student-athletes.

Notes:

- There are a few different qualification outcomes for a student athlete interested in Division I sports
 - Qualifier, Academic Redshirt, and Nonqualifier
- Qualifier
 - Students who meet the Qualifier requirements are eligible to receive athletics aid, practice, and compete in their first year of full-time enrollment
 - MUST meet core-course progression before 7th semester
 - Complete 16 core-course units in the required subject areas
 - Earn a core-course GPA greater than or equal to 2.3 in the required subject areas
 - Submit proof of graduation
 - Note: students certified based solely on int'l credentials are exempt from core-course progression
 - Core-course time limitation
 - 10 of 16 core courses, including 7 in English, Math or Natural/Physical Science, before the start of the 7th semester
- Division I: Academic Redshirt
 - Students who meet the academic redshirt requirements are eligible to receive athletics aid and practice in their first full year of full-time enrollment but are not eligible to compete in their first year of full-time enrollment
 - Main difference is that they earned a 2.0-2.99 in the required subject areas
- Division I: Nonqualifier
 - Not eligible to receive athletics aid, practice or compete in their first year at an NCAA Division I School
 - Either failed to complete 16 core-course units in the required subject area, OR
 - Fail to earn a core-course GPA greater than or equal to 2.0 in the required subject areas
- Division II Standards—different governing bodies

Three possible academic outcomes:

- Early academic qualifier
- Qualifier
- Partial Qualifier
- Early Academic Qualifier status based on student's pre-seventh semester academic record
 - Complete 14 core-course units in required subject areas
 - Earn 2.5 GPA core
- Qualifier
 - Only difference in requirement is gpa is 2.2 in required subject areas
- Partial Qualifier
 - Same things as academic redshirt in Division I
- No non-qualifier for Division II
- Division III
 - Each school determines its own eligibility for admission, financial aid and practice and competition
 - NCAA eligibility center does not perform certs for domestic student-athletes enrolling at a Division III school
- No charge to create a free profile account and register with NCAA
 - Have to pay \$100 for certification account (DI and II?)
- What is a core course?
 - Meet NCAA legislation and meet core-course criteria for review
 - One of the sciences have to have a lab (unless school doesn't offer it)
 - Math Algebra 1 or higher
 - English
 - Social Science
 - World Language
 - Comparative Religion
 - Philosophy
- Review steps
 - NCAA legislation
 - Criteria for review
 - Context of school's current list
 - Render a decision—outcomes are: approved, addl info required, not approved
- Special scenarios
 - Dual enrollment
 - Eligible but MUST meet NCAA core-course criteria for approval
 - DE taught in HS must appear on HS list of NCAA-approved core courses
 - Those taught at a college do NOT needed to be added to HS approved list
 - Courses must appear on the HS transcript with grade and HS credit
 - Pre-9th courses
 - Are eligible but MUST appear on HS list of approved and appear on HS transcript with grade and hs credit

- Common examples: Spanish 1 and Algebra 1 taken in 8th grade
 - Bridge/transition courses
 - Commonly offered in senior year to further prepare students for college-level courses
 - May be approved only if majority of course's contents are unique from and/or extend beyond previous coursework
 - Courses that review course contents from previous coursework in prep for future coursework (ex: intermediate algebra) may be approved only if the majority of the course's content is unique from and/or extend beyond previous and/or subsequent coursework
- Weighted grading scales
 - May be used for initial-eligibility purposes if
 - Course title indicates the course is taught at an advanced level
 - ex: Honors, Pre-IB, Advanced, IB, AP
 - Submit grading scale info and policies to ec-highschool@ncaa.org
- Important reminders for counselors
 - Know which courses are NCAA approved before student-athletes enroll
 - Assist them with navigating recruiting process
 - Remind them to register with NCAA eligibility center
 - Remind them to apply to the colleges and universities recruiting them
- Standardized test scores
 - No longer required for NCAA initial-eligibility purposes
 - However, colleges and/or scholarship programs may still require test scores as part of admission requirements
- Modernized core-course legislation
 - No longer a separate set of reqs for nontraditional courses
 - Courses must appear on school's list of courses for NCAA
 - When submitting courses for review, your school will need to submit course titles as they appear on transcripts, including designations with course titles indicating online programs, instructional format, etc. if applicable
- Contact eligibility center
 - HS support line: 877-622-2321 M-F 8:30-5:30 Eastern
 - College-bound student-athlete support line 877-262-1492 M-F 9-5 Eastern
- Main Takeaway: Counselors need to be on top of things to ensure that courses at their school are properly approved for NCAA eligibility before a student takes them

Myth-Busting Around Selective College Advising: Key Advising Philosophies and Techniques to Support FGLI Students Interested in Top Colleges

Presenters:

Cierra Duckworth, Director of District Strategy, 12th Grade EMERGE

Bobby Hampton, Director, District Strategy, EMERGE

Session Overview:

- In the United States, only 25 percent of high-achieving students from low-income communities apply to the nation's most selective colleges and universities. These students face mental, financial, and social challenges that deter them from ever submitting an application. This session will demystify the selective college admission process for FGLI students and provide concrete strategies for college access advisors and counselors supporting with advising, applying, and analyzing the admission and financial aid processes for these students. In this session, you will hear from key advisors from EMERGE, a Houston-based CBO focused on closing the opportunity gap for high-achieving, under-resourced students. They will speak about barriers they've faced in their work, including citizenship concerns, family fears, and more. By deeply exploring the challenges and inequities that exist for these students, you will leave the session with your own personal toolkit of tactics and actions to empower FGLI students from underrepresented backgrounds and their families to navigate the (selective) college admission process.

Salient Notes:

- The Challenge: Black and Latinx Student Enrollment at Elite Colleges and Universities
- 78% elite colleges are failing in support for Black and Latinx students
 - Mostly very inaccessible
- Post SCOTUS decision—black enrollment is slipping, same for Latinx and Indigenous students
- Aspirational outcomes
 - Poor students who attend top colleges do about as well as their rich classmates
 - Selective institutions: graduating on-time and better outcomes
- Instructional Expenditures per student higher at selective institutions
 - More competitive a school is, the more they have to spend on each student
 - Less competitive \$5000, most competitive \$30,000
- What are the potential barriers?
- Student apprehensions
 - Wants diverse community, doesn't know what to include in app, feels overwhelmed
- Top 3 concerns

- Fear of failure
- Lack of community
- Lack of resources
- Myth: Black and Latin students don't want to apply to selective colleges/universities
 - They have fears, but desire to go outweighs those fears
 - For those willing to leave the state, 7x more likely to attend selective school
- Financial concerns
 - Cost of attendance too high
 - Inflated app fees
 - Students will need to work while in school
- Myth: black and Latinx students from low-income backgrounds will not be able to afford out of state tuition or private, selective institutions. Students from single income homes are less likely to afford college
 - Truth: more competitive schools are more affordable than less competitive schools for lower income students and families due to their generous financial aid policies
- EMERGENCY fund data
 - Money the org disperses to students while in school to help with unexpected costs
 - At EMERGE, those at selective colleges are 2.5x less likely to apply for this
- Barrier 3: Citizenship concerns
- Concerns from families with mixed status
 - No financial aid for undocumented students
 - Safety concerns
 - Lack of resources
- Myth: undocumented parents cannot/don't file taxes, so their students are ineligible for financial aid
 - Truth: there are resources available to undocumented parents/students for low-cost tax prep without fear of prosecution. By filing taxes, the student can apply for institutional aid and can receive a competitive package
- Myth: undocumented students cannot leave their resident state for college
 - Truth: students under age of 18 may travel by plane within the US with student ID
 - Students over 18 can travel with native country's ID
- Myth: undoc will not have access to funding
 - Many still offer generous awards to undocumented students
- Solution 1: exposure
 - What do students see in your school? How accessible is your campus to black/brown students? What checkpoints do you have beyond orientation? How often are you visiting diverse campuses?
- Providing opps for black/brown students to be exposed to elite colleges at their high school counseling office allows them to see what's possible for them
- Solution:
 - Expose to numerous selective colleges thru a fair and spoke deeper with a rep
- Advisors can act as advocates for students' mental health

- Should support students in their varied mental health journeys. Use a toolkit to promote connection and community to boost their confidence in attending selective colleges/universities
 - Webinars centered around DEI
 - Student check-ins
 - Targeted info sessions
 - Training
 - Newsletters
- Advisors can act as advocates
 - Provide support including
 - Work-study
 - Internship and career sourcing
 - Food pantry
 - Tech grants
 - Summer stipend
- Solution 3: connection and community
 - Letters of support
 - College visits and fairs
 - FACE programming
 - Counselor Breakfasts
 - Strategic Partnerships with college
 - Conference attendance
 - Counselor fly-ins
 - Newsletters
 - Counselors should encourage students to participate in opps and activities that offer connection and community within elite college
- Idea: have past scholars return and speak to current students to share their experiences
- Squad leader for bigger campuses or region-based
- Idea: send students to pre-college programs after junior year

Main Takeaways:

- There are several barriers to high-achieving/FGLI students from low-income backgrounds to get to a highly selective institution. The Presenters provided many myths and their solutions to this issue. If these FGLI students have help pushing through those barriers and enroll at a highly-selective school, they are much more likely to graduate on time and with less debt.

Putting our Masks on First: Self-Care for College Admission Counseling Professionals

Presenters:

Christine Loo, Director of College Counseling, Stony Brook School

Angel B. Perez, CEO, NACAC

Ethan Sawyer, Founder, College Essay Guy

Session Overview:

A NACAC membership survey revealed that 38 percent are struggling with burnout. It's not surprising, given the relentless challenges our profession is facing. Join Angel B. Pérez (NACAC CEO), Ethan Sawyer (College Essay Guy), and Chris Loo (counselor, therapist, and NACAC board director) as they share their own authentic journeys and learnings. We'll share tools for addressing burnout, creating daily rituals, embarking on personal retreats, supporting your colleagues, and more. We'll also share readings, podcasts, and other resources that have shaped our experiences. This heartfelt session promises to leave you with tools as you continue your own journey.

Notes:

- Do I have to exercise all of my gifts/talents all the time?
- Are there things on your plate you can slowly start taking off?
- Recipe for burnout
 - Capacity overlapping with competence and compassion in a venn diagram
- Barriers to self-care
 - I'm too important--no one else can do what I do
 - The messiah complex
 - The fixer
 - The listener
 - I'm not important enough
 - I need to prove my worth
 - I'm defined by my productivity and efficiency
 - I don't deserve time off
- Slow Productivity down
 - Cal Newport book w/ practical advice like:
 - Reducing big projects by 25-50%
 - Value of doubling project timelines
 - No more than half the hours in the day spent in meetings and calls

Main Takeaways:

Burnout is big in this industry, and there are ways that staff and counselors can remove unnecessary things off their plate (ex: planning prom, lengthen a deadline, etc.) to help alleviate this. Try spending less than half the day in direct meetings, slow productivity down to have some time for a mental break.

IEC SIG: AI in College Admission

Presenters:

Emily Pacheco, Asst. Dir Loyola University Chicago

Session Overview:

A session brief wasn't provided, but this session focused on how IECs can use AI (or not use it) in our work. And if it is something we should be focusing more on.

Notes:

- Levels of Comfort with AI
 - Resistant, Cautious, Neutral, Comfortable, Advocate
- Why AI Matters in College Counseling
 - Transforming Education
 - AI is reshaping admissions processes and educational landscapes. Counselors must adapt to stay relevant
 - Essential Understanding
 - Grasping AI's role is crucial for preparing students for college and future careers
- AI's impact on college counselors and IECs
 - Enhanced support
 - AI tools offer new ways for counselors to provide personalized guidance to students
 - Alignment with modern practices
 - Embracing AI helps counselors stay current with evolving admissions trends and tech
 - Shifting expectations
 - Colleges' AI adoption signals how high school counselors should prepare students for admissions
- Cal Tech
 - Ethical use of AI: Guidelines for Fall 2024 Applicants
 - Relying on AI will dilute your voice
 - Unethical:
 - Copy and pasting directly from AI generator
 - Relying on AI generated content to outline or draft an essay
 - Replacing your unique voice and tone with AI generated content
 - Translating an essay written in another language
 - Ethical:
 - AI tools to review grammar and spelling of completed essays
 - Generating questions or exercises to help kick start the brainstorming process

- Using AI to research the college app process
 - If you're wondering whether it's ethical, ask whether it would be ethical to have a trusted adult perform the same task
- UC
 - Mentions AI in regard to PIQ, includes artificial intelligence software is plagiarism
- Ex of AI tools students are using
 - Esai.ai
 - Helps students brainstorm topics, outline essays, edit writing
 - Esslo.org
 - Compares your essay with other 'successful' college essays and gives feedback for improvement
 - Bypassgpt.ai
 - Humanizes AI writing
 - Admityogi.com
 - Lets you review successful past applicants and compare yourself to them
 - Collegevine.com
 - Offers Sage, a free AI college counselor chatbot
 - Kollegio.com
 - AI admission platform which helps students with every aspect of admission process
- Tools for counselors
 - Prompt engineering: college list prompt, college application planner prompt
 - Presentations in a snap: gamma.app
 - Resources for AI in college admissions
 - Edhub.ai, Toolbox, NACAC SIG
- Conclusion and call to action
 - Be inquisitive: counselors should be open to exploring AI
 - Educate on ethics: guide students in ethical and effective AI use thru the admission process
 - Lead by example: continue the convo (?)
- Four quadrants of AI in Higher Ed
 - Standardized testing prep
 - Assistance with college app essay writing
 - Interview prep leveraging Natural Language Processing
 - Selecting the Best Fit College

Main Takeaways:

Even if we are not fully comfortable using AI, students are becoming accustomed to it quickly. There are unethical and ethical ways to use it in college research vs. essay writing, outlined above by CalTech. We also got a list of helpful AI tools that students are using and that we can use in our work.

Increasing Impact, Access, and Equity: A Schoolwide College Peer Mentor Program at (Almost) any Budget

Presenters:

Li Hsiang (Lisa) Chung, College and Career Counselor/Specialist, La Canada High School
Julie Grair, Counselor, East Valley High School, Los Angeles Unified School District
Jennifer Sohn Lim, Counselor, John Burroughs High School, Burbank Unified School District
Kelly Proctor, College and Career Coordinator, La Canada High School, La Canada Unified School District

Session Overview:

With the fast-changing landscape of college admission, impact of the SCOTUS decision, and a lot of general misinformation, counselors need more help to reach and support students. Whether you are a college counselor or a comprehensive guidance counselor, the post-COVID college and career readiness needs of students and families can be overwhelming. During the 2021-22 academic year, each public-school counselor was responsible for overseeing 405 students, on average, which exceeds the 250-to-1 ratio recommended by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). How can counselors do more with limited time and resources? Peer support programs can enhance the effectiveness of school counseling programs by increasing outreach and raising student awareness of services. Check out how four high schools with varying levels of resources (from Title I to highly resourced) have figured out a way to initiate peer mentoring programs focused on increasing support to meet students' college and career needs. According to the ASCA, research shows: 1. A school counseling intervention designed to be culturally and language-appropriate can make a significant difference in reducing the achievement gap with Latina/Latino students with limited English proficiency. 2. School counselors can effectively assist underachieving students using a small group intervention. 3. School counselors can impact the achievement gap by examining school-wide data and using the data to deliver an effective group intervention. This session will take a closer look at the evidenced based benefits of school-wide college peer mentoring, then go into how to choose/create a data informed model that best addresses the needs of your student population. Lastly, participants will be given resources, templates, and tips to begin creating or enhancing their own college peer mentoring program proposal, budget, and curriculum. An effective college peer mentoring program can increase impact, access, and equity in ways that a counselor or a counseling team cannot do by themselves!

Salient Notes:

- 1) WHY Create a College Mentorship Program?
 - Peers tend to listen to their peers over adults
 - Increased HS graduation rates
 - Better attitude about school

- Higher College enrollment rates & higher education aspirations
- Enhanced self esteem
- Increased workload on HS counselors – taking away from the time we have to work with students
 - ex: testing, social/emotional, HS scheduling & course selection
 - We counselors need help to do our jobs

Pair & Share – What does your school offer?

2. WHAT is a College Peer Mentor Program?

4 Models of College Peer Mentor Programs

| Model | Year | Students | Periods | Staff | Space | Cost |
|---|------|----------|---------|---|-----------------|--------|
| GHCHS Granada Hills Charter High School | 1999 | 4652 | 6 | 4 College & career counselors + 1 coordinator | Dedicated space | \$\$\$ |
| JBHS John Burroughs High School | 2016 | 2,300 | 1 | 1 Teacher + 1 counselor | Classroom | \$\$ |
| LCHS LCHS College & Career Center | 2023 | 1,300 | 1-2 | 1 College & career counselor + 1 coordinator | Dedicated space | \$\$ |
| EVHS East Valley High School | 2024 | 564 | 4 | 1 Counselor | College Center | \$ |

THE COURAGE WITHIN

- Granada Hills
 - 4652 students
 - 4 college & career counselors & 1 coordinator
 - 6 periods of students trained over summer & every student met w/their mentor in a dedicated space
- John Burrows
 - 2,300 students
 - 1 period, 1 teacher, 1 counselor – meeting in the classroom
 - Teacher works w/counselor & leads a traditional class
 - Class is Seniors – they chose them as juniors & trained them over summer; back-fill 2nd semester w/juniors
 - When program began, there was only 30% college going rate – big focus on ROE & CTE pathways
 - created big visibility & english & spanish
 - presentations, insta, door decorating, events, celebrations of college bound students, photo booth, signing week, bulletin board

- 3) worked w/teacher to lead the class to upscale the operation to give the counselors more time
- 4) NORMALIZED the college-bound experience & expanded the conversation on campus
- 5) 76% of seniors in 2023-24 met with their College Peer Mentor
 - (a) PARENT INVOLVEMENT: now hosting 2 Saturday workshops in Fall

c) La Canada

- i) 1,300 students
- ii) 1-2 periods; 1 college & career counselor & 1 coordinator in a dedicated space
- iii) Working on making it an A-G elective

HOW?

- nominate juniors to apply for it – look for diversity in students in all categories (academically as well)
- seniors – they begin getting trained
- Advisory Classroom presentations by student mentors
- Applying w/Peers
- Make it student-focused (ex: coffee, tea, snacks) to create student union feel
- Partner w/ Challenge Success to destress the process
- La Canada is well resourced, so this is to kind of destress the population & make sure they're not applying to too many schools
- Engagement: Cupcake contest (ex: BTS night), Ramen & Resume Night, Iced Tea & Interviews Night, Chalk drawing of acceptances, lots of celebrations

“SOMETIMES DOING A GOOD JOB AT WORK IS LIKE WETTING YOUR PANTS IN A DARK SUIT – YOU GET A WARM FEELING, BUT NOBODY NOTICES IT”

- You get to give more students a role in the process & help spread the joy

d) East Valley HS

- i) 564 students
- ii) 4 periods; 2-4 students/period; 1 counselor; meet in College Center

HOW:

- As juniors, class of '25 had 7% a-g completion rate. The goal of their program is to build a college-going culture at their school
 - Peers could help with buy-in
 - This is their first year with the peer program
- Campus Tours, College Fair Field Trips, College Awareness Month Kickoff, Weekly morning meetings, birthday buddies, pennants on lollipops

OTHER THINGS PEER MENTORS HELP WITH:

- Local Scholarship lists (links, due dates)
- Outreach for volunteer lists
- Internships research lists
- Lists of all colleges visiting that have demonstrated interest considered

How did you develop the curriculum?

- ID'd 5 books (ex: CTCL, Where you go is not who you are, etc)
- Burroughs HS counselor created packet of articles to augment the curriculum & then they outlined the big standards they were trying to meet & how they would train students & help them
- At La Canada, it's like ASB or TA position – lots more flexible. At East Valley, it's an a-g class.

Confidentiality Concerns:

- Sent opt-out letter to parents & families
- Another suggestion: don't give transcripts/report cards to students, but say "this student is UC eligible" vs "this student is CSU eligible" vs "this student is NOT eligible"
- Train peer counselors to be sensitive & how to handle lower grades
 - "You're not a counselor; you're a traffic controller"

How do you guide them to have conversations with underclassmen?

- email session leaders for checklists they use

How do you pick your leaders?

- Don't just pick the 4.0 kids!!!! You need kids with empathy, with heart, who are kind, who have a wide variety of experiences, who can communicate & relate to others, positive attitude, helpful
 - A graded class motivates kids to follow through

HOW TO START THE PROGRAM:

- 1) Involve your stakeholders (PTA, Boosters, students, teachers, counselors, admin)
- 2) Build Momentum & consensus
 - a) Presenters provided a ton of resources (proposals, budgets, curriculum, recruitment, retention, staff buy-in, look for grant funding (even for non-obvious things ex: microphones/headsets to record podcasts),
- 3) CELEBRATE THEM
 - a) Impress with heart and DATA
 - b) Celebrate & care for your peer mentors
 - i) baskets, stoles, breakfasts, pennants/gear

Main Takeaways:

1. You don't need a huge budget or a big team to get the program started
2. Frontloading by training your student mentors over summer will make your life a LOT easier
3. Students can be very effective motivators & trusted sources, and can drum up enthusiasm and participation in ways adults cannot.

[RESOURCES HERE](#)

SIG: Hispanic/Latinx

What are some of the barriers Hispanic/Latinx students face?

- FAFSA –
 - Cristo Rey HS: Challenge w/ undocumented parents; local community colleges came in & supported families w/creating FSA ID's &
 - LAUSD – financial aid hubs during spring break & Saturdays – counselors called & told parents to come in to get help. Lots of shared knowledge in the district
 - DePaul – every other month Spanish info sessions & Spanish language tours; hosted Spanish language financial aid town hall – create more access to information, mitigate student's role as translator
 - Xfer Counselor @ Roosevelt(?) University – held sessions on how to navigate a financial award letter / demystify in Spanish
 - i) Question: Is there data out there on FAFSA completion broken down by race? (ex: students w/out SSNs, Parents w/out SSNs) ??
- FAMILY ENGAGEMENT
 - Make sure all marketing materials are in multiple languages (if your population supports it)
 - Parents & Guardians – how do we get them involved?
 - i) Santa Clara – goal to be HSI – work has to start earlier – get the parents open – festivals, Dia de los Muertos events, partnering w/Univision, Mexican consulate, intentional about inviting local community into the spaces & recognizing what is valuable validates your population
 - (1) CA Promise – all CalGrant eligible students will meet full demonstrated need
 - ii) Weber State – Building Puentes program
 - iii) CSU Dominguez Hills – WACAC's Cafecitos con Colleges – 10/5 Private Colleges & Universities; 11/9 How to Support Student through App process; Loteria kit!!!! Admission Glossaries in 4 different languages
 - iv) HS Counselor from Lower Rio Grande w/Gear Up Program — reach out & service parents is #1 priority – “where do we see the parents the most? FOOTBALL.” Hold TAILGATE PARTIES w/FSA ID's, Scholarship Info, etc etc before football games
 - (1) tamalades, loteria, local college reps coming in to tailgate, too
 - v) Miami Country Day – brought in 9th grade families for vocabulary night, asked senior parents to come in & speak to 9th grade families
 - (1) ex: what's a credit? what's a required course?
 - vi) A-G requirements & how it impacts FinAid & admissions;
 - vii) “Family Decision Meetings”
 - (1) breaking down FinAid award letters w/students & parents to understand what they mean

Upcoming Presenters / Presentations:

- Beyond Translating: Bilingual Resources & Programming – Saturday Morning
- To Matriculation & Beyond – also Saturday Morning
- College Admissions in Espanol 2.0 – (will be in Spanish) 9:15 Friday
- Friday 1pm – Fostering Seamless Transitions
- Saturday 11am – Planting Seeds: Partnerships (focus on 9-12 students & CBOs, universities)

- You can sign up to review sessions to help choose next year's Presenters at NACAC

Anjelica:

If you make the right choices for your students & your families, you're going to make a lot of people upset. But you have to do the right thing for your families, no matter their status. Raise your hand. Volunteer. Get out of your comfort zone. Present. Fill the space.

- Importance of Mentorship

Director of DEI @ NACAC (John Halloman?):

- HBCU Advance Event
- HSI Summit – in progress, being planned for next summer
- Guiding the way to inclusion in ATL this year – call for submissions & volunteers

STEM PUSH Network: Making Visible the STEM Achievements of Black, Latine, and Indigenous High School Students

Presenter(s) Name(s) + Organizations:

- Becky Ganda, gene team program and is a teaching associate professor
- David Boone, Director of Outreach at the University of Pittsburgh
- Desanne Davis, a research associate and the lead of the admissions and accreditation work for the stem push network.
- Kelly Kane, our Associate Vice Provost of enrollment, Executive Director of Admissions and super some push cheerleader

Session Notes & Key Take-Aways:

Full Narrative Transcript

https://otter.ai/u/YNzRsz7DACB_IAoEWd-4ov4H7d8?view=transcript (Includes SLIDES)

Introduction to the STEM Push Network

- NSF-funded project hosted at the University of Pittsburgh aims to increase the representation of Black, Latina, and Indigenous students in STEM higher education. The network, comprising 40 pre-college STEM programs, has shown that 81% of participants enroll and persist in STEM for over a year, compared to 80% for non-participants. The University of Pittsburgh has implemented fee waivers and academic scholarships for these students and is exploring credit recognition for pre-college STEM programs. The network emphasizes continuous improvement, data sharing, and accreditation to enhance visibility and recognition in admissions.
- The goal is to recruit and support diverse students in STEM, addressing challenges like systemic inequality and recruitment biases.

Challenges and Equity Gaps in STEM Education

- Speaker 1 highlights systemic inequalities that limit access to advanced coursework and academic opportunities for underrepresented students.
- Recruitment efforts often favor wealthier, private schools, creating barriers for black, Latina, and indigenous students.
- The network aims to address these gaps by recognizing out-of-school-time STEM experiences that are not always valued in college applications.
- The STEM Push Network includes pre-college STEM programs that are intensive, hands-on, and equity-centered, serving underrepresented students.

Network Structure and Goals

- The network consists of pre-college STEM programs that have been established for at least three years, offering 100 hours or more of hands-on STEM.

- Programs are intentionally serving black, Latina, Indigenous, and other underrepresented students, with practices centered on equity and preparation for undergraduate STEM.
- Programs offer financial support, transportation, food, and other resources to ensure students can fully participate.
- The network aims to increase the rate of black, Latina and Indigenous pre-college STEM program students admitted to and persisting in STEM undergraduate study by 2026.

Continuous Improvement and Data Sharing

- Programs in the network participate in continuous improvement, using an improvement science model and evidence-based quality standards.
- They engage in peer sharing and professional development, focusing on culturally sustaining pedagogy practices.
- Data sharing allows for research and collective improvement, with programs working to build visibility and recognition with admissions.
- The network is exploring a pathway for programs to become accredited by the Middle States Association, recognizing their work in broadening participation in STEM.

Accreditation and Program Recognition

- The accreditation process aligns with the network's aim and the Middle States Association's quality standards, recognizing programs for their equity-centered work.
- Accredited programs document their improvement and align with the network's definition of a pre-college STEM program.
- The goal is to provide a national credential that recognizes the qualities and improvements of these programs, enhancing their visibility and recognition.
- The network aims to meet recruitment needs by providing a diverse cohort of promising STEM professionals.

Juneteenth Program Overview

- Speaker 2, Becky Ganda, introduces the Juneteenth program at the University of Pittsburgh, a summer program for high school students.
- The program immerses students in research, teamwork, and college preparatory sessions, with a focus on STEM and college readiness.
- Students present their research to scientists, demonstrating their growth and understanding of STEM concepts.
- The program uses improvement science to make small changes and test improvements, focusing on elevating students' experiences in college applications.

Research and Student Outcomes

- Speaker 3 discusses the research project's goal to understand the impacts and outcomes of pre-college STEM programs.
- The project collects data from 40 programs, analyzing matriculation and persistence in STEM.

- Preliminary data shows high rates of enrollment and persistence in STEM for students who participate in these programs.
- The project aims to demonstrate the value of pre-college STEM programs and provide opportunities for targeted recruitment.

Admissions Partnership and Support

- Speaker 4, Kelly Kane, explains the University of Pittsburgh's partnership with the STEM Push Network, emphasizing the importance of supporting these programs.
- The university provides fee waivers and academic scholarships to STEM Push students, recognizing their potential and achievements.
- The university is exploring ways to offer credit for pre-college STEM programs, aligning with national models for recognizing high school achievements.
- The partnership aims to enhance the network's impact and support the success of underrepresented students in STEM.

Closing Remarks and Future Directions

- Speaker 1 summarizes the key points, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and supporting pre-college STEM programs.
- The network is working to make pathways for admissions more seamless and impactful, encouraging more institutions to partner.
- The goal is to continue research, build foundations, and find ways to support the success of underrepresented students in STEM.

The network invites further collaboration and partnerships to enhance the recruitment and support of diverse STEM students.

Don't Just Dream Big – Dream Brave: Helping FGLI Students Identify Broader, Best-Fit College Options

Presenters:

Tom Campbell – Community Manager, College Essay Guy

Nitzya Cuevas-Macias – Director of College Programs, Downtown College Prep

Logan Shearer – College Counselor, Schuler Scholars (Chicago, IL)

Tieisha Tift – Assistant Director for College Preparation Initiatives, Emma Bloomberg Center for Access and Opportunity (Princeton University, NJ) ((unable to attend))

Session Overview:

Undermatching is when a student matriculates to a school well below their academic profile and can occur when a student is unaware of the array of options available to them. The effects of undermatching can be especially deleterious for first-generation and/or low-income (FGLI) students, who are especially vulnerable to the continued inequities of the higher education landscape, including access to opportunities like research, internships and professional networking that can lead to powerful social mobility. Conversations about fit must include attention to financial aid, academic and social support, and resume-building internship and research experiences (all of which require a healthy endowment). When we talk about undermatching for FGLI students, the language we use may refer to academic caliber or prestige, but we really should be talking about money. Leveraging insights from schools and CBOs that have begun making headway on this work — including College Essay Guy's Matchlighters Scholars Program, Downtown College Prep (CA), Schuler Scholars (IL) and the Emma Bloomberg Center for Access & Opportunity at Princeton University (NJ) — this session will share case studies, resources, and reports to help counselors and admission professionals better understand how we can collectively encourage FGLI students to consider a broader range of college options that prioritize secure outcomes, affordability, and belonging. We also plan to be joined by an admission representative who can speak to how colleges are modifying their recruitment efforts to reach more FGLI families.

ahaslides.com/DREAMBRAVE

Salient Notes:

Intro to Undermatching

- High income students are 34% more likely to attend selective colleges than low income students w/similar scores
- Undermatched students are 80% less likely to graduate in 4 years
- 7.3% of low income students w/ a 1400+ SAT attend Ivy-plus colleges
- Non-selective Private, Non-selective Public & For Profit colleges have the smallest share of success stories
 - Students who are able to attend a school that is more selective tend to have more opportunities & support, and thus have higher success rates
 - Opportunity Insights chart “The Determinants of Income Segregation & Intergenerational Mobility”

- Why First Gen students say they went to college:
 - Help family
 - provide better life for children
 - give back to community
 - show people w/my background can do well
 - be a role model for people in my community
 - bring honor to my family
- College advisors telling students they “can’t afford” or that they can’t get into their dream schools
 - Be careful & responsible to give students healthy options, but don’t talk students down, don’t make assumptions
- So... what’s our job?
 - Counselors felt like it wasn’t appropriate to give advice to where students apply
 - ((Counselors in room looked puzzled at this idea))
 - Others said they didn’t have the confidence/knowledge to provide individualized advice
 - “I don’t want to be responsible for wrong choices.”
 - EDUCATE. EXPOSE. EMPOWER.
 - We know we have less control over caseloads, ed policy, cultural & broader norms
 - But we do have more control over differentiated conversations about fit & affordability, resources we give

Los Angeles: an FGLI Case Study

Sample student: single parent + 3 siblings, \$30k income, SAI of \$1500
no standardized test scores

Looking at Cal State LA & UCLA

- Cal State LA has some of the best upward mobility rates among public universities
- UCLA FG students respond that they feel at home, that they belong
 - What if you suggest a road less traveled?
 - Ex: Harvey Mudd, Claremont McKenna, Pepperdine, UC Riverside

7 Most Common Reasons FGLI Students Undermatch + Best Practices & Strategies

1. Affordability Misconceptions
 - a. MyinTuition or Tution Tracker
 - b. NetPriceCalculator tutorial, in school (UC’s is easiest)
 - c. Demystify Early Decision
 - i. Having the best shot of admission, esp. at schools that meet 100% or 90% of need
 - ii. Now more of a financial decision for very low income students who want “the best” schools
 - iii. Look for “No Loan” schools – element of “FIT” was really down to \$\$\$
 - d. Questbridge-vetted schools
 - e. Debunk Debt (yes to federal loans & work study, proceed VERY cautiously with other options)

- i. “Healthy” debt vs “Scary” private options – normalize that federal loans are reasonable
 - f. Integrate financial viability alongside admissibility
 - i.
 - g. Navigating affordability gaps at MSI’s & HBCU’s
- 2. Admissibility Doubts
 - Ground predictions in school-specific data (ex: CollegeKickstart)
 - Rolling admission for an early win
 - Legitimize test-optional & dual enrollment
 - Really make sure students understand what it is.
 - It’s REAL – don’t stress on “bad” test scores
 - Explain context-based academic & extracurricular evaluation (ex: not going to a “fancy” school w/ limited ECs/rigor is not a detriment)
 - STEM preparation & course selection
 - Instead of ranking shame – rank smarter (ex: Washington Monthly)
 - Junior survey w/conditional logic can help you identify FGLI students & provide most essential messages/reassurance
- 3. Exposure & Education Gaps
 - a. Fly-In programs (in-person or virtual – ex: Emory will admit any virtual applicant)
 - i. Need to be shared out to juniors EARLY (summer deadlines)
 - ii. IMPORTANT: a fly in acceptance can be encouraging “pre-read” but don’t let denials hold students back
 - b. RepVisits - not just for 11th & 12th graders
 - i. Make sure your school profile is updated
 - c. Planning group tours and field trips to local colleges of different “flavors” - even if it’s just for a sporting event or something casual
 - d. Explain the power & importance of data
 - i. Students will trust you more if you can back up your suggestions with data
 - 1. Ex: “This school says 95% of students receive an aid package, what do you think that means? Let’s look at average percentage of need met” – explain what these terms mean
 - 2. Empower students to understand data & think about it critically – especially if the data points are conflicting
- 4. Family Ties & Home Responsibilities
 - a. Family Fly-in Programs (SweetBriar & Columbia)
 - i. Encourage families to visit, to attend local events, “big games”
 - ii. Make the unfamiliar familiar
 - iii. being able to visualize a college campus makes farther schools less scary
 - b. Translated college resource guides
 - c. encouraging past parents (panels, volunteers)
 - d. Putting college lists in Google MyMaps to help families visualize distance
 - i. Looking up flights for places like Emory that are further but accessible
 - ii. Discuss the options (color code in the map)
 - iii. Inform families about low graduation rates

- iv. If you're willing to go a little farther away, here are "safer" options in terms of money and graduation rates
- e. Informing families around travel grants, emergency funds at colleges
- f. Providing template emails that families can send to colleges to lessen barrier
- 5. "Goldilocks Dilemma"
 - a. "If not — then —"
 - i. ex: either I go to a huge reach school, or community college
 - b. Urban small liberal arts/adjacent colleges: Often unfamiliar but often less intimidating (Macalester, Oxy, Case Western, Lehigh, Richmond, Brandeis, Holy Cross, Bryn Mawr, Haverford – have more familiarity & setting for urban students – less rural/scary to them maybe)
 - c. Colleges That Change Lives
 - i. pro tip: appeal your aid package if you're gapped
 - d. Use data to validate harder sells
- 6. Hidden Curriculum, Social Capital + Belonging
 - a. Hidden Curriculum full syllabus from Georgetown has videos & lessons on imposter syndrome, tackling unmet needs in college & navigating PWI's
 - b. Joining programming w/CBOs on professional readiness side of college
 - c. Validate asking for help & support. It's brave, not burdensome
 - d. Reiterate the power of 4-year relationships (with professors/advisors)
- 7. Paperwork Barrier
 - a. Direct admissions: Common app has 117 partners
 - b. Encouraging students to apply to colleges that meet full/close to full need but have no supplemental essays
 - c. Maximizing 4 fee waiver slots for the UC's
 - d. In-school application workshop for your flagship and/or Common App
 - e. "Check your portal" equipping students to reasonably manage individual school logins, materials, requirements, and options like scholarships

Resources, Final Thoughts + Discussions

- College Essay Guy FGLI Resources are extensive
- College List-Building Resources for FGLI Students (blog)
- Current Vanderbilt (Questbridge) student spoke on her experience & a startup she's working on at/with Vanderbilt

Main Takeaways:

This session easily could have been 2 hrs long. So many linked resources that I hope I can include in these notes. There was supposed to be time to resource share together & discuss suggestions/best practices, but we ran out of time. A little bit of a missed opportunity – a lot of knowledge & experience in that room!!! It would have been nice if they let us extend since there was nothing happening elsewhere for another 45min.

FAFSA Deep Dive: Understanding the Student Aid Index (SAI)

Presenters:

Kerri Moseley-Hobbs – Director, Policy Implementation and Liaison Group, U.S. Dept of Ed
Cindy Forbes Cameron – Supervisory Communications Analyst, U.S. DOE

Session Overview:

Starting with the 2024-25 FAFSA® cycle, the Student Aid Index (SAI) replaces the Expected Family Contribution (EFC). But this isn't just a change of name; the SAI is calculated differently from the EFC and plays a different role in the packaging of federal student aid. This session will explain the differences and will provide an introduction to the SAI.

The SAI is a number that determines a student's eligibility for certain types of federal student aid. An applicant's SAI is calculated using modified need analysis formulas outlined in the FAFSA Simplification Act. These formulas use information that applicants provide on the FAFSA form and, in most cases, federal tax information that is retrieved directly from the Internal Revenue Service. During the session, we'll explain where the concept of the SAI came from, discussing the FAFSA Simplification Act and the general goals in the creation of the SAI.

We'll provide a detailed walk-through of how the SAI is calculated, using information from an imaginary student. You'll be able to see how the information a student provides affects the SAI that results from the formula. Along with learning how the SAI is calculated, you'll also see how it affects — or doesn't affect — eligibility for Pell Grants and other types of federal student aid. Finally, we'll let you know where to get further information about the SAI and aid packaging.

Salient Notes:

FAFSA News

- What's New? (Not much, almost every thing is rolling over from last year as the problem solve last year's dumpster fire)
- Demographics Info will populate when they sign in, taken from FSA ID but no other info will prepopulate/pull over
- Beta Launch: Invite Only (October 1) – these groups have ALREADY BEEN SELECTED
 - Every few weeks, they will release to larger and larger groups as they fix issues
- 2025-26 will be available to general public on or before Dec 1
- SAI will appear on their FAFSA Submission Summary
- New Tools!!! Parent Wizard: New tool will ask a series of questions to gather information and then provide clear direction on which parent(s) will need to participate on a student's FAFSA
 - StudentAid.gov/fafsaparent

SAI Overview

- Number used to determine eligibility for need-based aid. Calculated using info that the student (& contributors if required) provides on FAFSA
 - The SAI replaced EFC in 24-25
 - A student's SAI can be a negative number down to -1500
 - when a school packages a student's financial aid, they will treat it as a 0
 - schools can use this to determine the neediest of students
 - a 0 SAI and a -1500 SAI will get the same Pell
- A dependent student whose parents aren't required to file a federal income tax return will be assigned -1500.
- An independent student who isn't required to file taxes will be given -1500
 - FAFSA not policing who is and is not required to file, will not be reporting to IRS
- PELL GRANT WILL NOT BE DEPENDENT ON SAI LIKE EFC WAS
- Eligibility will have 3 Steps:
 - 1. Determine if student is eligible for max Pell Grant (ex: non-filer automatically gets -1500 SAI) or taking adjusted gross income compared against poverty guidelines to a certain percentage
 - If student is NOT eligible for max pell, go to step 2
 - 2. Calculated Pell – Uses SAI to determine Pell eligibility.
 - Takes student's SAI & subtract it from the max Pell eligibility for the year – a Pell can never be >10% of max amount. If it is, move to Step 3
 - 3. A Student whose SAI is greater than the max Pell Grant award for the award year may still be eligible for a Pell, based on family size, AGI, and poverty guidelines
 - single parent, married, or separated/widowed will be used to
- Refresher on Criteria for Maximum Scheduled Pell Grant
- Refresher of Criteria for Minimum Pell Grant Eligibility

SAI Formula:

- Allows for negative SAI up to -1500
- No allowance to prorate SAI for periods other than nine months
 - Avoid student needing only 1 semester on a year – they will get less aid
- Implements separate Pell Grant eligibility determination

CHANGES TO INCOME DATA — SAI

- Uses AGI
- Deductible payments to SEP/SIMPLE/KEOGH/Other
- Tax exempt interest
- Untaxed portions of IRA distributions & pensions (excluding rollovers)
- Foreign income exclusion
- CONTRIBUTION FROM ASSETS:
 - Annual Child Support Received
 - cash, savings, checking, time deposits & money market funds
 - net worth of investments, including real estate (EXCLUDING PRIMARY PLACE OF RESIDENCE)
 - adjusted net worth of business and/or farm
 - look at # & remove liabilities – farms are investments?

- Allowance Against Assets::
 - Asset protection allowance

FORMULAS FOR SAI CALCULATION

1. Formula A – for Dependent Students
 - a. Probably most common for HS students
2. Formula B – Independent students w/out dependents other than a spouse
3. Formula C – Independent students w/dependents other than a spouse

[GO TO THE SLIDES NOW – THERE IS A WALKTHROUGH OF A MOCK STUDENT](#)

- GUYS I'M SORRY, NOTES ARE HARD ON THIS SECTION – You definitely want to look at the slides for the examples/walkthrough of how they are calculating & what the formula means
- REMEMBER: If a family owns a farm or business AND the family's primary residence is on the same property, They need to subtract the value of the primary residence from the value of the property/business
 - Do not ask her how to calculate this, leave it to the student/family to figure it out
- Yes, the presenter is aware it's ridiculous the student has \$13k in savings. She's just working with what she was given. Laughs were had.
- STUDENT AID INDEX for Mock Student:
 - "We did all that, and they're not Pell Grant eligible"
- Skip ahead to slide 44 to see the difference in how this mock student & parents calculations would be different under EFC & SAI

Formula A – Dependent Student Calculation

Resources

- [Slideshow](#)
 - Replace slide 47 with [THIS ONE](#)

Questions – NO TIME FOR QUESTIONS 😞

Equity at the Crossroads: Navigating Implicit Bias in College Admissions – A Comprehensive Exploration for School Counselors

Presenters:

Kimberly D. Brown, Wade Hampton High School

Dr. Christy Conley, North Oconee HS

Miya Walker, Agnes Scott College

Session Notes & Key Take-Aways:

Our natural tendency is to seek out and trust people like us. You just have to be aware and conscious and add an extra step. We need to put systems in place to make sure we're not hurting our students.

Not a lot of people are doing implicit bias training. Public school counselors were the least engaged. There are not a lot of conversations on either side of the desk about implicit bias.

We need:

- Professional development/training
- Honest/courageous conversations
- Using established connections across the desk
- Are we contributors or disruptors?

Bias sneaks into:

- Admissions criteria
- Holistic review
- Institutional preferences

From early on, in elementary and middle school, doors are opening for some but not others. So we ask questions: Are you making yourself aware of the imbalance (like in teacher recommendations – who are they recommending? Who is asking questions? Who's showing up? Are you putting measures in place to bring more equity?

There were students we didn't recommend because they didn't fit certain criteria, but teachers who knew their story advocated for them. But what about the kids who no one knows their story? Or who no one advocates for? So, we have to be intentional advocates.

In advising students, how can I advocate for them? Am I recommending them for programs or opportunities that they wouldn't

Brown: Students who get my advice are the ones who are beating down my door. So I have to look for those who aren't – and I've found some diamonds in the rough. So it makes me wonder about those kids who we're not finding. So be aware and step out and know that there are those out there who need help.

Conley: I know there are limitations. How can we get creative when we don't have time? Instead of a 4-hour lunch visit with one college, bring in 6 colleges for a mini-fair. Small examples. Think about how your students engage with us (HBCUs) and how you are giving your students

opportunities to engage with us (colleges). How are you advocating for space for diverse, culturally diverse clubs and activities in your high school?

Walker: Take advantage of counselor-to-counselor relationships to broaden your students' access to diverse opportunities. Host HBCU Night at school to introduce students and families to other options.

Develop a HS profile to give to college reps to get to know your school, its rigor, its student body demographics—how your HS has navigated the social and academic landscape of your community. Important to highlight extracurricular offerings. The ownership your community has and values are going to help your application reader a lot.

Colleges and universities need to take into account not just the outcome but the journey.

How do you know if implicit bias is coming through in your letters of recommendation? If you'd use an adjective for one type of gender or background but wouldn't for other types or genders (like bubbly for girls), then maybe that's not an adjective you should use at all. Try to give fuller descriptions – use bullets, one page – need depth and breadth. If I'm reading the longer, fuller LOR vs. one with five sentences, imagine how much more I am going to know about that first student than the other (and I have to check my own bias to make sure that the second student isn't penalized by their counselor's too-short LOR).

Have honest, internal conversations, and don't have judgment. Recognize it and be intentional about addressing it and helping to fill in the gaps. Be a disruptor.

Implicit Association Test by Harvard – assessment tool

Develop an action plan to tackle implicit bias.

Work smart, not hard – lots of resources are already out there.

Expressing and Assessing Character Strengths in Admission

Presenters:

- Robert Alexander, University of Rochester
- Tom Bear, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology
- Marlais Brand, Voyager Outward Bound School
- Trisha Ross Anderson, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Session Notes & Key Take-Aways:

Why character matters:

- Character attributes are a predictor of success in school, work, and life.
- History shows parents, students, and secondary schools will respond to what colleges are seeking.
- Colleges want to keep faith with their founding principles, which include positive values, good character, and citizenship.

Aligning admission criteria with mission-based goals and values before and even after college enrollment.

- **Character Collaborative:**

Formed by admission officers and counselors in 2016, COVID put a damper on it; NACAC picked it up in 2023 as the Character Focus Initiative to:

- Address the lack of widespread, well-understood ways to assess students' positive character attributes
- Find means to message and value positive character traits in college admissions (which encourages students' authentic presentation of themselves in the application process)
- Recommend that colleges and universities align their mission criteria with the institution's mission (pursue a student body that embodies and forwards the institutional mission)

In 2019, a survey of colleges on important factors in admission found testing was fourth on the list. After the pandemic, it dropped to 11th, and positive character attributes rose to fourth.

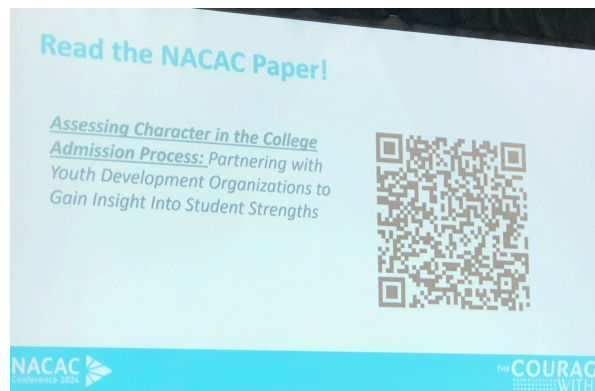
- Alexander from URochester: *We train our readers to assess academic achievement and potential by laying out the character traits we look for and use a rubric to assess for those traits.*

Tools used in college selection (testing, personal interviews, LOR) are fraught with weaknesses and bias. So it's important to have a team of college admission staff that reflects the different lived experiences and who can pick up on the

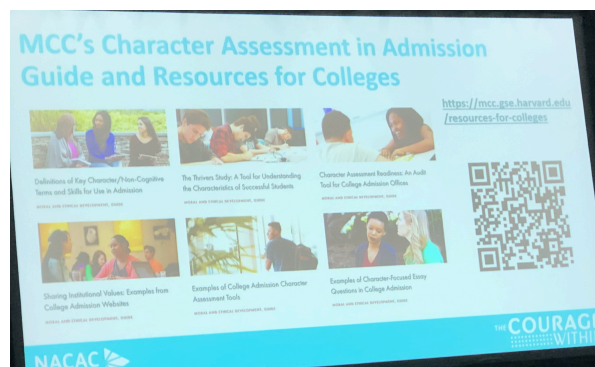
character traits important to the college’s mission, vision, and values.

“Students’ achievement and experiences should be viewed within the context of privilege and advantage afforded to the individual

- NACAC’s publication “Toward a More Equitable Future for Postsecondary Access” led to the launch of the Center for Reimagining College Access. To find means to message and value positive character traits in the college admission process (authentic presentation of themselves in the application process).
- Read the NACAC paper “Assessing Character in the College Admissions Process”



- *Making Caring Common Project* (Harvard Graduate School of Education) - Harvard’s Making Caring Common project offers many tools to help assess for and express character in applications, including a tool to help write character-focused LORs, develop relationship mapping for students on campus, and family resources.
 - MCC’s [Character Assessment in Admission Guide](https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/resources-for-colleges) and Resources for Colleges (Harvard Graduate School of Education). For example, you can read about how to properly assess a value like “grit.”

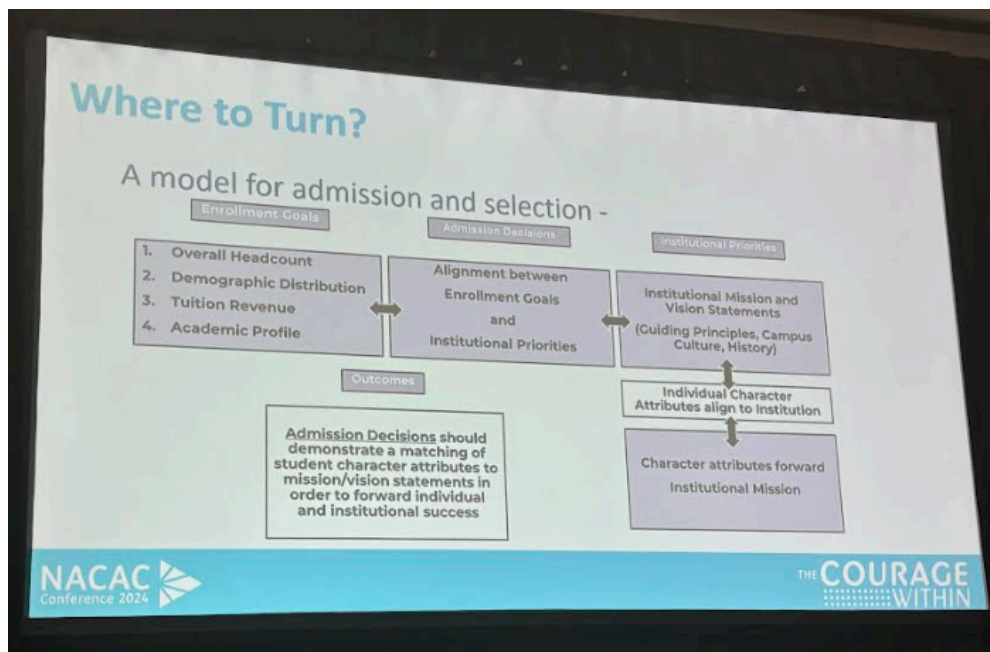


Outward Bound - “Let’s work together to build the bridge between Youth Development

Organizations (mission + culture) and Institutes of Higher Education (mission + culture)

Brand from Outward Bound: *We develop character in youth and can be your partners in building classes with character.*

- Potential next steps (Youth Development):
 - Raise awareness in admissions on the work of youth development organizations (like Outward Bound)
 - Allow youth development orgs and colleges to collaborate (in some kind of forum or database).
 - Encourage outreach to students in youth development organizations.



Resources for Families

The grid contains the following resources:

- Circles of Control:** MENTAL HEALTH
- Helping Teens Process Current Events: A Toolkit for Parents:** CURRENT EVENTS, FAMILY RESOURCES
- Positive Self-Talk and Problem-Solving:** MENTAL HEALTH
- How To Help Kids Develop Empathy:** MORAL AND ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT, SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING, CARING FAMILIES RESEARCH PROJECT, EMPATHY
- How to Use Stories to Help Kids Develop Empathy:** SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING, MORAL AND ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT, CARING FAMILIES RESEARCH PROJECT, EMPATHY
- How to Show Empathy Through Caring:** SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING, MORAL AND ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT, CARING FAMILIES RESEARCH PROJECT, EMPATHY

Logos: NACAC Conference 2024, THE COURAGE WITHIN

Standardized Testing and College Grades: A Look at Their Association and Why Authentic Student Work is Important

Presenters:

- Cait Hayward, Dir of Research & Analytics, Center for Academic Innovation (University of Michigan)
- Mark Mills, Data Scientist (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)
- Blaire Moody Rideout, Director of Undergraduate Admissions (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)
- Catherine Shakespeare (Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)

Session Notes:

The test-optional admission movement has required administrators to take a further look at the association between standardized test scores and college course grades.

At Michigan Ross, administrators from the undergraduate program office and the Center for Academic Innovation conducted a report that utilizes 28 years of data from fall 1995 to winter 2023 and represents 13,934 unique student records. The findings reveal:

- There is a positive association between standardized test scores and course grades. This association is also strongest for first-generation college students, students with racially minoritized identities, limited-income students, and students with in-state residency. No differences were observed by gender.

The study found there are limitations to standardized testing. These data revealed that:

- Higher test scores are less predictive of course grades. While students with marginalized identities and backgrounds show the strongest association between test scores and grades, this association is with lower test scores. It can be interpreted that test scores can best be used to predict lower college grades rather than as a predictor of student success or a metric of student achievement in the admission process.
- Furthermore, we believe the most important finding from this study is that the association between standardized test scores and course grades has significantly weakened over time. The association will be almost non-existent by 2025. The study suggests that the strength of association will be between three and five times weaker than in 2005.

The question of whether the use of standardized test scores in admission should be continued is reasonable and justified by the reduction in their association with course grades over time.

The answer is conditional:

- For students in the lower range of test scores (e.g., less than 24 on the ACT), their score is far more predictive of course grades than for students in the upper range of test scores.

- However, even this conditionality is weakening over time. At some point in the near future, test scores will no longer be useful for predicting course grades, but that does not mean test scores are entirely meaningless.

We believe that engaging in an admission process that values multiple forms of academic excellence will better meet the evolving exit standards of high school curricula to better predict student success in college. This study reinforces the need for authentic student work to be utilized in college admission and will be further discussed in this session.

Building Your AI Toolkit for College Admissions

Presenters:

- Ben Nealy, CEO, Revolution Prep
- Coral Azarian, Director of College Counseling, Rowland Hall
- Samantha Schreiber, College Counselor, Polytechnic School
- Sara Miranda, Ex. Dir. of College Counseling, Chadwick School

Session Notes & Key Take-Aways:

What to know about AI in college admissions

Grievances

- These models aren't actually intelligent (yet) — they have no ability to reason or have human intelligence.
- They're coming for your data. When using a tool for free, you are the product.
- Systems reflect their creators' bias. (The most common admission use case is feeding the same cues into the system for a male and female student and spitting out very different adjectives.
- Large language models male stuff up. (Like a joke meme post about putting glue in pizza.)

Why Use Tools?

- They can sift through an enormous amount of data
- They are incredibly efficient
- Think of these tools as an enhancement of your skills
- Be cognizant of the unique setting you're in (and whether it's allowed in your environment)

How to use it

- Be clear in your instructions
- Be ready to revise your instructions
- Be as specific as you can
- Provide a list of next steps

Additional Uses

- Presentation outline
- Letters of recommendation
- Creating student questionnaires
- Make emails more concise

Using AI note-taking to enhance counseling

- Builtin platforms (Zoom AI Companion, MS Teams Intelligent Recap, Google Meet "Tahoe Notes for Me")
- Third-party options (Fathom Notetaker, Otter.ai, Fireflies.ai)

Interview Prep using AI Models

Allows students to ...

- Prepare thoughtful and clear responses to interview questions
- Tailor interview questions to their specific background

- Review questions specific to colleges
- Receive question-specific feedback
- Identify institution-specific programs and opportunities that match student interest.

Helps counselor ...

- Focus on the way they're responding, not what they're saying
- Amplify support for pre-mock interview
- Provide template prompts for students, providing opportunities for all students to get mock interview help even with limited time available.

Data mining on specific universities of interest

Good use case to get snapshots of ...

- Chart of test scores
- Attendance
- GPA
- Observations based on data set analysis

[AI Toolkit for College Counselors](#)

Millennials Managing Gen-Z: Considering Generational Differences in the Post-COVID Workplace

Presenters:

- Naomi Varnis - Associate Director of Admissions, Oberlin College
- Veronica Aguilar Hornig - Director of Special Programs and Engineering Admissions, Columbia University
- Alyssa Martinez - Senior Assistant Director, Northwestern University
- Katrina Souder - Associate Director, Brown University

Session Notes & Key Take-Aways:

Find out what approach works best for each individual in your team, and make sure the company processes, values, technology usage, and norms are explicit and articulated. Don't assume everyone knows what you know.

Technology is often the biggest contributor to tension in the workplace. Don't assume that everyone knows how the tech works, even things like Gmail and Docs, Sheets, or chat software. Create training for technology usage, including office norms. Create space for folks to ask questions. Check-in with employees to see how they are using their technology.

Identify and ARTICULATE the office culture, and collaborate with everyone on what that means. Consider missions and values, and create meaningful development and micro-milestones for younger generations.

- Onboarding: Use a standard procedure for everyone. Create a single drive folder where everyone can access the onboarding and training materials, especially for HR and onboarding.
- Professionalism: Come up with a shared understanding of what professionalism is; it can be a handbook or broad conversations about how our office can best work together and get input.

Define what your office means by "transparency." Disseminate office decisions, the why behind them, and the structure and processes by which decisions are made. This helps younger generations "see how the sauce is made" and opens up avenues for growth and development.

- Be transparent that there are things you can't be transparent about.
- Share your own management experience when relevant

Remain open. It's OK to talk about folks' career interests, even if they aren't planning to stay forever. You can help folks grow even if they leave. You never know how they might appear in other parts of the industry.

Reflections from our First Post-SFFA Admission Cycle

Presenters

- Heath Einstein, VP Enrollment Management TCU
- Eva Blanco Masias, VP Enrollment Management, Santa Clara
- Donnell Wiggins, AVP for Strategic Enrollment Management and Dean of Admission Univ of Dayton

Session Notes:

Data based on a survey of 175+ partners

Post-SCOTUS coincided with FAFSA issue - hard to disaggregate data

GOALS: increase # Pell-eligible students, increase diversity

Public institutions were the biggest winners in terms of enrollment for students of color
Midwest and East Coast biggest losses

TAKEAWAYS:

- Colleges who prepared in advance handled it better. Super important to engage early, especially for students of color, even before sophomore year
- General Counsels need to be involved in setting strategies
- Need campus-wide buy-in and understanding - listening tours, monthly discussion sessions
- Amplify areas in the enrollment process outside the narrow scope of the court (which just focused on the application review) - increase recruitment and yield events that focus on inclusive culture
- Critical to creating a sense of belonging
- Develop strategic partnerships locally and nationally (American Talent Initiative, Posse, CA Private College Alliance, Scholarship programs)
- Importance of community events

Admission in IPEDS: Changes to Future Collections

Presenter:

- Aida Ali Akreyi, IPEDS Operations Lead - National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Session Notes & Key Take-Aways:

The IPEDS Admissions survey component has remained stable for many years, with some minor changes in the recent 2022-23 data collection. Recent decisions at the federal level have made it clear that additional data are necessary to inform decision-making at all levels.

- Starting with the information gained from the IPEDS Admissions TRP held in June 2021, NCES has proposed numerous changes to the admission survey component to be collected in 2024-25 and 2025-26, which will be shared in the session.
- The session's goal is to share information about what is currently collected, historical trends using IPEDS data, planned changes to the upcoming collections, and information about responding to federal register notices about changes.
- NCES hopes that sharing this information will help admission officers be prepared to report the data in the upcoming collection and ensure the reporting of high-quality data and useful information for IPEDS users, including institutions, policymakers, and students.

About IPEDS: The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System is a system of interrelated surveys conducted annually by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). IPEDS gathers information from every college, university, and technical and vocational institution that participates in the federal student financial aid programs. The Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, requires that institutions that participate in federal student aid programs report data to IPEDS. These data are available to students and parents through the College Navigator college-search website and to researchers and others through the IPEDS Data Center.

- IPEDS Overview
 - Data collected annually by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)
 - Admissions data is for Fall entry only.
 - Includes all post-secondary institutions eligible to participate in Title IV financial aid program
 - Some non-Title IV institutions choose to report
 - Currently, only includes non-open admission institutions
 - Currently, only disaggregated by gender
 - Purpose - describe & analyze longitudinal trends
- 3 Collection Periods
 - Registration/Fall
 - Winter
 - Spring

- 2025-2026 Changes
 - Add open admissions institutions
 - Admissions data (applicants, admits, enrolled)
 - Add transfer-in students
 - Add disaggregation by race/ethnicity (Transfer, 1st Time 1st Year (FTFY))
 - Hispanic/Latino
 - American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Asian
 - Black or African American
 - Native Hawai'ian or Other Pacific Islander
 - White
 - Two or More Races
 - Race and Ethnicity Unknown
 - Add Waitlist, Early Decision, and Early Action for FTFY
 - Guidance on which pool to report deferred students is pending
- Timeline
 - Aug. 6, 2025 - Data collection opens
 - Dec. 2026/Jan. 2027 - 1st data, including changes, will be released through IPEDS data tools
- IPEDS Website (<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds>)
 - Find your college
 - Students
 - College Navigator
 - College Scorecard (not administered by NCES)
 - Use the data
 - Researchers
 - Report data
 - Data providers
 - Collaborate with NCES
- Use the Data
 - Beginner
 - College Navigator ("Find your college")
 - Data Explorer
 - Data Trends
 - Look up an institution
 - College Scorecard
 - Intermediate
 - Data Feedback Report
 - Statistical Tables
 - Summary Tables
 - Compare Institutions
 - Advanced
 - File downloads
- Q&A

- IPEDS also collects data on international students
- What about students who enter as FTFY but not in the fall?
 - There are plans to expand to include FTFY students who enter in the spring
- Key Takeaways
 - Data from new reporting will be available Dec. 2026/Jan. 2027
 - New
 - More institutions will be reporting
 - Disaggregation of admissions data will include race/ethnicity for FTFY, transfer students.
 - Additional data for waitlist, early action, early decision (FTFY only)

The Changing Role of Calculus in STEM Admissions

Presenter(s) Name(s) + Organizations:

- Melodie Baker, National Policy Director Just Equations
- Meredith Graham, College Counselor-Collegewise
- Alicia Oglesby, Assoc Director of College Counseling-Winchester Thurston School
- Ashley Pallie, Dean of Admissions Cal Tech

Session Notes & Key Take-Aways:

Not every student has access to Calculus. How does this impact the STEM pipeline?
Only 38% of HS with 75% or more population of black and Latinx students have calculus.
Of students who take calculus
31% retake calc
32% take pre-calc
17% take stat or bus math

Many students take it because it gives an edge in admissions.

Calc is elitist

How many colleges require calc? Survey done

The majority said calculus plays a big role. It's looked at as the golden standard.

Does it give an edge? Yes, but it's mostly white, wealthy students.

Hierarchy and calc is at the top.

Students who take calc are more likely to be admitted to elite or highly selective colleges.

Calc will be the next frontier for battles of access and equity.

Talent exists everywhere, but opportunity does not. Cal Tech used to require calc. Chem, physics, and calc were non-negotiable.

Now, it's just to showcase mastery in Chem, physics, and Calculus - through Khan Academy and Schoolhouse World. If they pass, they can enroll.

Not all stem majors require calc. Med school is the only major that should require it

STEM institutes are different than other institutions and shouldn't have the same requirements.

Cal Tech is unimpressed by pay-to-play research. It should be a rare student who does this.

Only certain types of kids like research.

Letter of rec from the counselor should indicate the student can handle a STEM program.

Moving Forward: The Future of College Admission in Challenging Times

Presenters:

- Robert Massa- VP Emeritus for Enrollment and College Relations (retired) Dickinson College
- Mike Sexton- Retired VP for Enrollment Management-Santa Clara University
- Audrey Smith-Vice President for Enrollment Emerita - Smith College

Session Notes & Key Take-Aways:

Navigating the next 10 years will require a keen sense of market preferences and the ability to articulate value - why is it worth it? New directions and new programs and a new approach.

Demographics

Enrollment projections will dip into 2030. The bottom drops out after this year.

Many HS grads won't go. It was 62% of grads but now 52%. South is growing. Migration domestic and international

Will International students bolster enrollments? India surpassed China. Other countries are also recruiting internationally.

Adult students are 3% of the student body. Not enough to fill the gap. Small rural liberal arts colleges are in trouble.

Males are declining nationwide

What stands in the way of getting older students?

Geography, class teaching schedules, programs, money, family obligations, work obligations

Price vs. value and public perception

How much are we charging for it? The public does not believe the cost is worth it.

Annual salaries are higher w/college degree

Only 41% thought that college was worth it in 2019, and 73% thought so in 2013

Everything in the US has declining American confidence: small businesses, military, police, higher ed, health system, Supreme Court, presidency, congress

The cost of attendance has really increased. Very few students pay the sticker price. 1995-2019 went from 50%-26% paying full price

Prediction for future -continued skepticism for the value of higher ed

Future of Student Recruitment

Increased use of data to make decisions. Where to recruit, how to stand out in the marketplace.

Track past performance as a guide to the future. If we develop new programs to recruit young men or FT workers, we need programs to keep them there. Will direct admissions play a role?

Maybe for the regional public's. Doubt it!

Develop partnerships

Community colleges and businesses -training their employees or giving tuition breaks)

How can we use tech to our advantage? Make sure AI is correct. Content on the website needs to align with the questions students ask. AI needs to be trained. Use clear text phrases to answer specific questions so it can be picked up in a search through AI

Admission managers will need to be brand managers! Your brand translates your mission and vision into a competitive advantage and a critical strength. Your brand promises an experience that the student will have. Staff must be able to articulate brand values. Messaging and marketing needs to be consistent among all channels

Student retention

1 in 3 college students don't return for year two.

Starts with summer melt

Staff retention and burnout

Invest in staff. More will be expected of enrollment professionals

Need strong communication and interpersonal skills but also:

Relationship mgrs

Media savvy

Tech/ai savvy

Data savvy

Able to exercise human skills

How To Survive the Computer Science Hunger Games

Presenters:

Meredith Graham – College Counselor, Collegewise

Jonathan Hoster – Associate Director for Undergraduate Admissions and Recruitment
College of Engineering and Computer Science, Syracuse University

Becky Motta – College Counselor, Oaks Christian School

Yuqing Wu – Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the College, Pomona College

Session Overview:

Computer science is one of the most sought-after degrees in college admission. CS graduates are in high demand and colleges are inundated with applications, yet students have a narrow view of what it means to study CS and aren't generally familiar with the varied pathways into and through the field. As counselors, how do we better support students in their pursuit of CS? How do we understand CS and its possibilities — it's more than just coding — and how do we convey that information to students? What does it look like for students to launch CS careers from liberal arts colleges, or from programs other than direct-admit CS majors at a handful of very popular colleges, and how do we help students find their own great-fit options? Our veteran panelists will talk about computer science as a discipline and provide talking points and examples for counselors who want to expand their understanding of CS as a discipline. They will also share insights on when and why students might want to consider pursuing CS admission at liberal arts colleges, regional public universities, and private universities beyond the most applied-to programs.

Salient Notes:

(email MeredithG@CollegeWise.com for all links from the presentation)

Computer science is one of the most sought-after degrees in college admissions. CS graduates are in high demand, and colleges are inundated with applications. Yet, students have a narrow view of what it means to study CS and aren't generally familiar with the varied pathways into and through the field.

- As counselors, how do we better support students in their pursuit of CS? How do we understand CS and its possibilities — it's more than just coding — and how do we convey that information to students?
- Student interest in CS has not diminished even though the job market prospects have diminished

In past few years, # of students earning degrees in CS has more than doubled

- oversaturation of field, oversaturation of particular colleges / programs (too many applicants for too few positions)
- Students don't necessarily know what CS is and whether this is a pathway they'd want to pursue – there may be more closely related fields that they would thrive in

What is CS?

- Study of computation

- Theoretical: algorithms, theory of computing, information theory
- Applied: design & implementation of hardware & software
- Study of computing. How to design a chip, and what algorithms should we use? It's a science. It's a study. It is a hammer and a nail but not an architect. Understand art and psychology for game design.
-
- CS is not just coding (at tool), game design (requires other disciplines like art, psychology), web design or data analysis
- Majors w/computing as key component:
 - Computer Engineering
 - Making the computer hardware work
 - Data Science
 - Informatics
 - X-informatics (ex: Bioinformatics, Chemical informatics)
 - Computational-X
 - ex: Computational Design – using computing to enhance certain fields

REMINDER and university considerations:

- In general, the majority of universities in US offer admission to the majority of their applicants
- ASK: Is the CS Admit rate different than overall admit rate? How does admissions work? (EX: to a the college? to a major? are there xfer opportunities?)
- You can study CS at a small liberal arts college or a medium/large university
- Admission to college uni OR direct CS admission?
- ABET Accreditation
 - about 300 ABET-accredited CS programs in US
 - If a school doesn't offer engineering, they may not decide to have ABET accreditation for CS
- Over 1,00 options for studying CS in the US?
- CS Degrees can have many opportunities:
 - EX: Aerospace, Automotive, Big Tech (ex: Amazon, Google, Meta), Consulting, Defense, Finance
 - Look for Dept. of Defense SMART Scholarship

CHALLENGE: How do we better address the false correlation between admit rate & quality of the program?

- Computer Science Open Rankings - <https://drafty.cs.brown.edu/csopenrankings/>
 - What's important for the student?
 - Connection to faculty
 - Experiential learning - students have a different capacity for this
 - Pursue passion or interests
- Alternate CS specific rankings: Computer science open rankings, aggregates ranking sources & takes into different categories. There's a screenshot of the source, but she hasn't mentioned what the source is
- First Destination Survey –
 - Where do graduates of specific colleges get employed?

- Assists students & families in feeling confident that the college is a “good college” and they are able to be employable
- look for [Case Western’s example on Tableau](#)
- How do we decouple admit range and quality of education?
 - [Gallup-Purdue Index](#)
 - The ‘big six” (experiential learning opportunities & support systems on campus)
 - Correlation: more answers of agreeing w/support & experience opportunities on campus, higher confidence that they will graduate w/skills needed for job market success
 - See Cal Newport’s [research on Major v Career](#)
 - Also look for Scott Carlson & Ed Laff(sp??) – Hacking College: Why the Major Doesn’t Matter
 - Visualization of different majors & careers – i think through UMichigan

CS Major Combos & Alternate Pathways

Has Computing as Key Component:

- Computer Engineering
- Data Science
- Informatics / X-Informatics
- Computational - X

Applied Fields

- Game Design, Web Design
- check combo programs at UIUC
 - Math is VERY IMPORTANT
 - Example: University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign - CS-related majors found in:
 - College of Agricultural, Consumer, & Environmental Sciences
 - College of Education
 - Grainger College of Engineering
 - College of Fine & Applied Arts
 - College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
 - College of Media
 - U of Minnesota: Actuarial Mathematics, Mathematical Biology/Genomics/Physiology

What does “preparedness” look like for your college or this major?

What are your expectations (both content & experiential) prior to admissions?

Some schools prefer testing - transparency would help alleviate stress

- Transparency about testing; Transparency about CS & Eng admit rates

MATH. MATH. MATH. MATH.

Calculus much more preferred over Stats; Precalc is a must-have

Suggestions:

- Career Speaker series (what do you do & how did you get there?)
- How to unpack “what is a good school?”
 - Are you wanting other people to make choices for your life, or are you willing to look into what might be a good fit for your interests and skills?

Main Takeaways:

1. Encourage exploration of “adjacent” majors and what the work will actually look like.
 2. Similarly, explore how Tech is applicable in a wide variety of industries/fields, so that a breadth of experience can help propel future careers
 3. Highly selective schools aren’t the only “good” CS schools – explore other factors (experiential learning, access to profs, student happiness, price) that would be a better fit & highlight what makes those schools great
- Philosophical
 - Preparing students to learn how to embrace new things, be the ones to design for tomorrow
 - Practical
 - Preparation: Math and logic are foundational
 - Broaden the search when developing college lists
 - Consider whether the application of CS to a specific field is of interest to the student

Regardless of major, students/graduates should be able to tell you how they would solve a problem. Not just what their degree is in. Learn to solve problems that we’ve never seen before!

College Admissions Trends You Need To Know

Presenters:

- Murphy Miller- Director membership experiences and global engagement
NACAC
- Cameron Hair- Senior Associate. Research Initiatives and Partnerships, NACAC

Session Notes & Key Take-Aways:

What is NACAC - nonprofit non-gov membership for college access founded in 1937

Publishes guide to ethical practice in college admission.

23 affiliates. Share a common mission

Big themes in college admissions

Renewed focus on grades!

Most colleges are seeing reduced selectivity and yield

23-24 saw a 36% increase in submitted apps

7% increase in apps per student

Student created two common app accounts to apply to 40 colleges

We need to remind students to make an intentional list

selective schools keep getting increases in apps, but for the first time, growth in the most super-selective has slowed

Steady growth over time

Trickle-down impact because of this. Impacts yield

State of college admissions at NACAC great charts

Asked how important each factor is when making a decision. Only 4.9% place considerable importance on testing

This one is EVERY 4 year college in US

Pretty much the same results

Only 7.2% require test scores

Students overemphasize the importance of test scores and under emphasize rigor

Only 33 colleges accept less than 10%

36 accept 11-20%

35 accept 21-30%

The vast # of students are applying to schools from 0-30%

Thus country has come to equate selectivity with quality. It's not true

Yield rates are going down. Because they are submitting more apps
Rise in ED. Tool colleges are using to build class because of the uncertainty

Only 23% reported SAT score in 2022
Affluent areas had higher level of reporting rates
FGLI have other responsibilities

Only 7.2 percent requiring testing
Only 6.6 went BACK to requiring

It's here. Number of students graduating from high school will begin decreasing this year.

Resources- on NACAC website-tool HS counselor preparation , policy and practice

Getting the Message: Strategies for Talking About College Affordability with the Families Who Need It Most

Presenters:

- Peggy Jenkins, Founder of Palouse Pathways
- Alana Haitzuka-Fernandez, District Resource Teacher, West Hawaii
- Caitlin Brown, Dir of Enrollment Communications and AD of Admissions, Bryn Mawr – not able to make it

The presentation was put together with Input from:

Ashley Garcia – PP intern

Kristen Paz – MIT MBA student, class of 26, 1st gen

Phil Levine, Prof. of Econ. Wellesley, Founder and CEO of MyinTuition Corp

Session Notes & Key Take-Aways:

“Spoiler Alert:” No simple answers

Held listening sessions

Heard from mostly high school college counselors (71%)

Also, some IECs (8%)

Admissions, Financial Aid people (21%)

Challenges:

Information overload/when to unveil what information?

Gaps in understanding – we don’t live in the same world as our students (credit card story)

Reluctance to discuss finances

FAFSA/CSS confusion

Need trust

Help needed from the college side

No one strategy for everyone

Challenges mentioned by the audience:

Confusion about what terms mean

How to advise families w/o SSNs

Student reluctance to ask for help

Families afraid to share info

Families’ secrets

Solutions:

Start Early – better relationships between parents and kids early in high school.

Need different communication strategies: emojis, etc.; send via multiple ways.

Curate resources, super important!; monthly budget numbers, scholarship system,
school-specific info for popular schools
Teach the teachers about resources
Peer and Near Peer mentoring
Direct families to specific resources and ignore the rest because there's just too much info out there.

Good for schools that meet 100% need:

MyinTuition – Quick College Cost Estimator, six basic financial questions, and then compare school costs – a little clunky

College Greenlight

Get School

Colleges need to clearly identify who to contact with questions – not a w/s students.

Clarity is key

From the audience:

Remember that “tuition” does not include room and board

The Urgency of Simplicity: Lumina Foundation’s Great Admissions Redesign

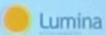
Presenters:

- Melanie Heath (Strategy Director for Participation), Lumina Foundation
- Rathi Sudhakara (Associate Director, Strategy & Partnerships), Washington Student Achievement Council
- Bob Voytek (Mobility & Social Impact), Northern Arizona University

Session Notes & Take-Aways:

- More than half of students aged 16-22 say applying to college has been more stressful than anything else they have done academically. This is often their first touch point with higher-ed. That system was built more on exclusion than inclusion.
- So, the Lumina Foundation launched its own Great Admissions Redesign to focus on three initiatives specifically: Simplicity. Opportunity. Innovation.
 - By simplifying today’s college application process, perhaps we can finally make it more equitable.
- Today’s event showcased two of the seven Great Admissions Redesign grant winners:
 - The Washington Student Achievement Council designed a data-sharing system combining guaranteed financial aid messaging with guaranteed admissions for families on public benefits.
 - Northern Arizona University removed the denial barrier so that NAU applicants receive only one of two responses: “Yes, you have been accepted to NAU!” or else “Yes, you have been accepted to the community college of your choice.”
 - Both are meant to promote greater inclusivity in the Higher Ed application process.

| Great Admissions Redesign Winners (!) | |
|---|--|
| Illinois Board of Higher Education | To implement direct admissions for community college transfer students and high school seniors statewide, using Common App |
| California State University System | To automate admissions to the CSU system through California's official K-12 college & career readiness platform |
| Northern Arizona University | To expand NAU's universal admissions program to nine Arizona community college districts |
| Louisiana Board of Regents | To plan for automated admissions for Louisiana's universal transfer pathway students and high school seniors |
| Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board | To develop direct admissions pathways for Texas students using the state's official college & career readiness platform |
| Washington Student Achievement Council | To plan for a proactive admissions process that ties in financial aid eligibility |
| Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education | To plan for the alignment of existing initiatives toward a simplified admissions process for Kentucky students, including considering the use of AI to alleviate admissions office capacity issues |



Below the Water's Edge: A Reflective Deep Dive to Aid Students' Supplemental Essay Writing

Presenter:

- Carolyn Siegel (Associate Director of College Counseling), Pinewood School, Los Altos, CA

Session Notes:

- Siegel introduced a model approach that she practices with her own students to better share their identities in “community” supplemental essays...especially after last year's Supreme Court decision on affirmative action and its impact on the college application process.
- Siegel relies on an approach that focuses on different social identities.
- Her process involves a mixture of reflection questions and mapping
- I'm glad that Siegel encourages students to rise above the simple “This is why my school club is important to me, and this is what I have accomplished in my club” supplemental essay.

The Introvert's Guide to Success in the College Admission Profession

Presenters:

- Ashley Hardy (Assistant VP for Admission, Dean of Admission), DePauw University

Session Notes & Key Take-Aways:

- Assess whether meetings might be overlooking the needs of the more introverted colleagues among us. Consider sharing agendas before meetings. Consider breakout rooms.
- Tips & Tricks for introverts to succeed better in the college admissions profession:
 - Be yourself
 - Understand how your team receives and gives information.
 - How do CEG staff want to receive information?
 - Maybe introverts need more time to process the information rather than in the moment during a meeting.
 - Set boundaries
 - Prepare for meetings and deadlines
 - Introverts want specific agendas, as well as timeframes for how long we'd spend on each agenda item.

Practice public speaking

Owning Your Lived Experiences: Supporting All Students in Answering Application Questions About Community, Identity, and Diversity

Presenters:

Ruby Bhattacharya, Director of Admissions Barnard

Carmen Lopez, Executive Director College Horizons, Inc.

Andrea Pien, Counselor at Village Coaches

Carly Valenzuela, Assoc. Director of College Counseling at Springside CHestnut Hill Academy

Session Overview:

In the wake of last year's Supreme Court ruling on the role of race in application review, many colleges have added supplemental questions encouraging students to share stories about their communities, identities, and lived experiences. These prompts have resulted in discomfort for many counselors and students who are being asked to confront these issues. This session will provide counselors with a toolkit that will enable them to lean into these often-sensitive issues surrounding identity and empower students who are asked to write about these topics on college applications. An executive director at a community-based organization, a school-based counselor, and an independent education consultant/teen coach will walk participants through strategies and resources for how to encourage students to talk about their identities while an admission counselor at a highly selective institution will discuss how these types of supplemental questions are utilized and helpful in the application review process. Through a series of interactive exercises and case studies, panelists will address the following questions: How can counselors support a marginalized student who may feel self-conscious about answering these questions? What do you do if you are working with a student who is highly privileged and doesn't feel as though they have anything worth sharing about themselves? How does a counselor's own lived experiences and identities affect their capacity as a professional to support students in answering these questions? How do we as professionals understand race as it relates to identity?

Salient Notes:

- Why are colleges asking these questions in their supplemental essays
- Challenges we are seeing
 - Overall confusion of what the supreme court ruling means for students, counselors and teachers
 - Student: "I have no culture"
 - How to approach identity from an uplifting/empowering perspective
 - How far should we nudge?
 - Educating students on the broad definition of and importance of diversity
 - College/University & Deans/VP of Admission—understanding diff btw race, ethnicity and Tribal Citizenship for American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students and why this distinction matters

- Not just about race—can be location, class, etc.
- Often confused identity/terms
 - Race vs. Ethnicity vs Nationality
 - It is important to understand the terminology and clarify what race, ethnicity, tribal affiliation, etc., actually are and are not. These are not interchangeable.
 - Race: taxonomic group into which a species is divided, arising from relative reproductive isolation of populations from one another owing to geographic and other barriers
 - Ethnicity: a group identity based on culture, religion, traditions and customs
 - Nationality: a legal relationship involving allegiance on the part of an individual and usually protection on the part of the state
 - Sexuality vs Gender Identity
 - Sexuality: inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people. Note: an individual's sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity
 - Gender identity: one's innermost concept of self as male, female, etc.
- Students surveys/questionnaires
 - Tell us about your household—besides you, who lives in your home(s)?
 - Do you communicate with your family in any languages other than English, and if so, which ones?
Tell us about the communities you belong to outside of school. Why are they important to you?
 - Tell us about a time in HS when you worked with someone who was different than you in some way to achieve or accomplish something
 - Is there anything you would like to share with us about your personal experiences living with a particular identity? Consider gender, ability, sexuality, race, ethnicity, nationality, geography, religion, class/economic status, etc.
- Family/guardian brag sheets
 - What responsibilities does this student take on in your home? How about your communities outside of home?
 - What global or social issues, if any, does your student seem passionate about?
 - Colleges are multifaceted communities seeking to enroll students who represent a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives. What perspective(s) or backgrounds will your student bring to their campus?
 - Colleges ask many questions of students on college apps. In order to help us guide them. Is there anything you would like to share with us about your student's experiences living with a particular identity? Consider gender, ability, sexuality, race, ethnicity, nationality, geography, religion, class/economic status, etc.
- Case study: Virginia Tech
 - Student cis, white, male, hetero, full-pay, neurotypical—has never been excluded
 - Have you had a new student join the class or been an older member welcoming younger people to a team or group?
 - What did you do to welcome the freshmen?—low stakes accessible way

- Have you done any readings, podcasts or other exposure to people coming from less privileged backgrounds than you?
 - If you haven't, what do you hope to do?
- Summary of ruling: Supreme Court ruled that schools cannot consider an applicant's racial status alone in the admissions process at the moment of the evaluation of the applicant
 - Racial status alone: not allowed
 - Racial experience is allowed—can consider everything in an applicant's background, life experience and perspective including where it may be associated with applicant's racial identity. Life story, goals, passions, preferences can be expressly tied to their racial experience
 - Universities must comply with the ruling, NOT applicants
 - Students can continue to bring their full selves to their apps and can self-identify
 - Check race/ ethnicity box, provide tribal enrollment, use indigenous names, languages spoken, student photos on transcripts, school profile with dem of student body, racial/ethnic and tribal breakdown of community, provide tribal community context
 - Understand when racial status is scrubbed out
 - Institutions of higher education will still collect data on race/ethnicity—racial identification on demographic sections will be removed when application is being evaluated, not the narrative sections
 - Understand the diff between racial status vs. racial experience
 - Extracurricular, home responsibilities and cultural/community activities
 - Include activities that are part of their culture, ceremonial, and community life
 - Letter of rec:
 - Letters should continue to provide full context of their student (including race/ethnicity), the school, and the community- demographics, academic, social, cultural, communal, etc. Be explicit!
 - School profile:
 - Counselors should continue to provide the racial/ethnic and tribal dems of the student body and local community. Be explicit!

Main Takeaways:

Not that much has changed on the application side after the Supreme Court ruling. It is universities that need to comply with the new law, not applicants. Applicants can continue to share everything about themselves, knowing that racial experience can be considered, and that decisions will not be made on racial status alone.

AI in Essay Writing: Unlocking New Opportunities Through Human Collaboration

Presenters:

- Myra Castro, Consultant
- Emily Pacheco, Ass Dir. Admissions, Loyola U of Chicago
- Juliana Stuve Koutsoftas

Session Notes & Key Take-Aways:

- This was an intro to AI and our perceptions and feelings about using it in student essay writing.
- Introduced different AI platforms
- Discussed ethics of using such platforms and tools
- Discussed ways in which essay ideas and structures could be generated with the use of AI

Artificial Intelligence and the College Essay

Presenters:

- Emily Pacheco, Juliana Stuve Koutsoftas, and Myra Castro

Session Notes & Key Take-Aways:

- Many of us are feeling a loss of control.
- There is a threat to our identity and a fear of the unknown.
- There are skeptics and cynics, and the outcomes of each perspective are different.
- There are ethical concerns, including biased data and privacy.
- Everyone wants to preserve honesty, authenticity, and academic integrity.
- AI can help with brainstorming, structuring, and getting feedback.
- For the U Chicago Nobel Prize prompt, for example, the AI app Perplexity can help research the historical context of the question, and this app provides sources for its information.
- Video of Ethan answering 20 Things I Want Colleges to Know About Me prompt as young Ethan. He tells AI his 20 things and asks for ideas of things to write about. The point is that the more specific the prompt you give AI, the more helpful the answers will be.
- Google's Gemini is included in a Google paid business account. It gives positive feedback first, just like we are trained to do.
- Some colleges use AI checkers to flag AI essays.
- Gemini's feedback is softer and friendlier, so better to use with students.
- With Perplexity, however, you can go deeper by answering the further questions it suggests, and it tracks the source of its information.
- Again, it's very important to be super specific with ai to get relevant and constructive feedback
- Different colleges, of course have different policies on flagging and on AI in general
- Presenters recommend embracing the fact that AI has the potential to enhance and expand engagement, support, and creativity between college admissions counselors/essay coaches, and students.
- Go to the presenters' site: Edhub.ai, for a collection of resources.
- Some larger questions - what does it mean if AI can write a good essay?
- We need to show them how to use this responsibly.
- Another tip: Chat GPT Privacy Settings can keep information about sources of the information from going into the black box (adds transparency of sources)
- Presenters are holding a webinar on 10/15 to detail more about their resources.

SIG: Learning Differences

Presenters:

- More of an update of sorts, this SIG is trying to decipher precisely what the focus might be

Session Notes & Key Take-Aways:

This is being renamed the Disabilities and Neurodivergence SIG

They are seeking leaders. The discussions were focused on potentially providing colleges and universities with annual surveys to assess what services are offered/what experience might be for students with disabilities and/or neurodivergence. This included both services/guides for potential student experience for physical disabilities and learning disabilities. There was a split sense of how helpful this might be for students in reality, and there was some additional discussion about the risks/benefits of disclosing vs. not disclosing disability on applications and how to decide to do so or not.

The session was full of folks who were highly dedicated to learning more about this space, and there was a sense that the folks in the room would do best by spending time with each other for 'insider' knowledge.

Annual Member Meeting

Session Notes & Key Take-Aways:

- Peggy Jenkins (Palouse Pathways, ID): In some cases (rural HS, for instance), college isn't being emphasized, and folks are being told "you don't have to go to college" (often by political leaders... who send their kids to college + grad school, etc.).
- (Name?): School college counselors don't receive a ton of training. "We need more training."
- (Name?): Colleges need to better train their tour guides to deal with difficult political questions, particularly in relation to questions that relate to the Jewish community.
- Lara Sandora (Tides Academy, Menlo Park CA): Rec letters are still creating a huge inequity issue. Selective colleges need to consider getting rid of them as a requirement.
- Rafael Figueroa (Albuquerque Academy, NM): Students from CA are coming to NM for standardized tests. Colleges say standardized testing is about inequity. That's a corrupt lie.
- Katie Murphy (Bellarmine College Prep Academy, San Jose CA): CCEP is an online college prep certification that gives counselors 10 experiences across the board. Re FAFSA: We need to use our voices to hold the org accountable... oh, and make sure the stupid form actually works. Also, let's recognize that the college-side folks are working as hard as they can, so don't blame them.
- Lisa Sommer (IEC, NY): We need a repository of college resources so folks don't have to reinvent the wheel. (Like this one, for instance?)
- Jim Rawlings (Univ California-San Diego, CA): Dept of Ed has let the US down regarding the FAFSA. In CA, 45,000 fewer students filled out the FAFSA.

Anti LGBTQ+ Legislation Goes to College

Presenters:

Brent Benner-Univ of Tampa

Carolyn Caplan-IECs for Human Rights, AdmissionsMom

Shiwali Patel-National Women's Law Center

Robert Powers-Campus Q, IECs for Human Rights

Session Notes & Key Take-Aways:

- Some states have laws that protect the rights of people in K-12 and public higher education settings. California, for example, has lots of protective state-level laws:
 - Equity in Higher Education Act
 - Gov't Code Section 11135 (non-discrimination)
 - Education Code 220
 - Menstrual Equality for All
 - SAFETY Act
- Counselors should consider how strong your state laws are
- Title 9 of Educational Amendments has been in effect for over 50 years and federal laws trump state laws; states cannot go against federal laws. The civil rights protections rely heavily on having a legally recognized sex, so if you can't list your preferred sex, it effectively removes protection. These are known as 'trans erasure laws.'
- Some states are changing laws or limiting protection that impacts the LGBTQ+ population in negative ways.
- In the last year, some states have added restrictive laws for minors cloaked as "parental rights."
- There has been an onslaught of attacks on things like bathroom and locker room use for trans students and harmful bills preventing state IDs from updating gender identification—this can mean students traveling in Florida who are unable to update gender markers on their license could be accused of fraud per state laws.
- Six states have passed forced outing bills that require schools to notify parents if a different name is used at school
- Suicide attempts are increasing in anti-LGBTQ states
- Bathroom bans, ID laws, trans erasure bills, and religious exemptions are showing up in states such as FL, UT, AL, KS, TX, MO, ID, MN, LA, TN, NE, AR, MS
- Help LGBTQ+ students identify 'safe states' for college, ask students: Do you care about the state laws where you go to college? You may find some states are more safe than others and you may also find safe schools in unsafe states.
- See the Campus Q resources for more: <https://campus-q.com/resource-hub/>

From Distant Miles to the British Isles: Tips for U.S. Curriculum Schools Applying to Selective UK Universities

Presenters:

- Ivar Moller-University of St Andrews
- Natalie Smith-TASIS The American School in England
- Eric Steere-Thomas Jefferson School, St. Louis, MO
- Roshan Walkerley-University of Cambridge

Session Notes & Key Take-Aways:

- There are many reasons why students consider the UK for university:
 - Globally recognized degrees
 - Academically focused and sometimes shorter timeframe
 - Focus on independent learning
 - Lower cost can 'draw the eye'
 - England-3 yr, Scotland-4 yr
- St Andrews:
 - Every student has a name with 12 : 1 student faculty ratio
 - 4 yr program, NOT liberal arts, can double major, 40% change major/degree
- Cambridge/England:
 - Usually 3 years, Cambridge has 31 colleges, all autonomous orgs within the university
 - Academic-led admission offices, 24k students, research-led teaching
 - 1-1 or 2-1 tutorials
- UK wants in admissions review:
 - High school graduation requirements
 - Advanced Coursework (AP/IB)
 - Final IB or AP external exam scores
 - GPA & class rank
 - Awards and Honors (such as cum laude, Duke of Edinburgh gold)
 - "Super-Curricular" experience: directly related and relevant to academics
- UK Universities are well versed in both AP and IB (doesn't matter), what does matter are that your courses relate to your major
- Predicted grades should be as evidence-based as possible, can use mock tests to give students the opportunity to show potential, predict as accurately as possible
- Personal Statement for 2025 should be heavily focused on academics:
 - 75% showing academic passion, depth of understanding of the subject, breadth of reading, "evidencing in a mature way"
 - 25% evidence of achievement and accolades
 - Note that PS is changing structure for 2026