

INTRODUCTION

As the higher education industry has grown, college admission has become big business, equipped with an arsenal of sophisticated sales pitches, computer software programs and targeted marketing techniques. Counselors face the challenge of ensuring that this increasingly complex selection and admission process remains focused on helping students find their best college match. This is a difficult job under any circumstances, but it can prove even more challenging for counselors who work in schools with larger caseloads. Because it is impossible for one person to provide effective services and programs for all students, in these instances, counselors must approach the process strategically. They must create a college-going culture in which the entire school community is focused on students' preparation for a full range of postsecondary options. This model requires that the counselor re-think and expand his or her professional role as a leader and manager whose daily work is aligned with the performance goals for the entire school community.

for all public schools, was 470:1 in 2011–12, and the public secondary school ratio was 418:1. These ratios vary substantially by state. In 2011–12, Arizona had the highest number of students per counselor (863), followed closely by California (818). Results of NACAC's annual Counseling Trends Survey indicate that student-to-counselor ratios are significantly lower at private secondary schools than those at public schools. At schools with high caseloads, fewer students enroll in four-year colleges. Counselors at schools with the highest proportion of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch, a proxy for family income, report much lower four-year college enrollment rates and total college enrollment rates for their graduates (Clinedinst, Hawkins, Shanahan, Addington & West, n.d.).

For school counselors who work with larger caseloads, the key question is, "How do I reach students and parents to let them know their options, and which colleges will best meet their needs?" This chapter offers two conceptual frameworks for serving large caseloads of students, as

Research clearly shows that counselors, when consistently and frequently available and allowed to provide direct services to students and parents, can be a highly effective group of professionals who positively impact students' college-going rates.

Within schools, no professional is more important to improving college enrollment than the counselor (McDonough, 2008). Research clearly shows that counselors, when consistently and frequently available and allowed to provide direct services to students and parents, can be a highly effective group of professionals who positively impact students' college-going rates.

However, in many schools, counselors spend too much of their time with what are often referred to as "STDs"—scheduling, testing and discipline. That is, scheduling students for classes, administering standardized tests as part of a broader accountability system and dealing with student behavioral issues (McDonough, 2005). As a result, counselors are not able to spend significant time on college or career readiness counseling.

According to an analysis of U.S. Department of Education data published in NACAC's 2014 *State of College Admission* report, the national student-to-counselor ratio

well as techniques, activities and strategies that counselors can use to help students and families navigate the complex college admission process. Finally, this chapter reviews the use of college-going data in school accountability systems and provides two tools for counselors to use in measuring their interventions and counseling services.

When advising students, counselors impact college preparation by:

1. Providing an understanding of college and its importance
2. Structuring information and organizing activities that foster and support students' self-assessment and college aspirations
3. Educating parents about their role in fostering and supporting college aspirations, setting college expectations and motivating students toward action
4. Focusing the school on its college mission.

Often, counselors who serve large caseloads work in low-income schools where students need greater assistance with the college admission process. A 2008 national survey revealed that 87 percent of all young people want to go to college, and parental aspirations are even higher (Bridgeland et al., 2008). For those underrepresented in higher education, 92 percent of African-American parents and 90 percent of Hispanic parents consider college to be very important to their children. Yet, many underrepresented students do not receive the necessary guidance to navigate the process. Despite the evidence that poor and low-income children benefit enormously when they attain a college education, they are not only less likely to enroll in either two- or four-year colleges, but also less likely to complete a degree once they have enrolled (Isaacs, Sawhill, & Haskins, 2008).

Research on counselor intervention frameworks reveals that academic preparation for college is more important than socioeconomic status in terms of college enrollment (Alexander et al., 1987). More specifically, completion of what are referred to as the “Pipeline Steps” play a key role in the attempt to eliminate the disparity in college participation rates between low socio-economic status (SES) high school graduates and their middle- and upper-SES counterparts. The Pipeline Steps provide a framework for counselors to effectively work with large caseloads, because the information is presented to students and their parents in an easy-to-understand and focused sequence.

THE PIPELINE STEPS

The Pipeline Steps are offered as a research-based framework for organizing and focusing counselor duties, all of which lessen role confusion and ambiguity and result in more efficient and targeted services for students.

The Pipeline Steps, all of which may be facilitated by the school counselor, include:

1. Aspiring to a bachelor’s degree
2. Taking the “right courses” (college-prep curriculum)
3. Preparing for and taking entrance exams
4. Applying to and enrolling in a four-year institution

Although the Pipeline Steps play a critical role in closing the socioeconomic college enrollment gap, they are relevant to students and schools from all economic backgrounds. New counselors who wish to organize services

for larger populations should consider focusing their counseling programs around these four Pipeline Steps. This focus relieves counselors from ancillary tasks (other duties as assigned) and results in a streamlined and research-based program proven to close achievement gaps between low-income and high-income students. Instead of merely reacting to whatever happens during the school day, the counselor becomes focused on an organized and proactive program of services.

Creating Aspiration to a College Degree

Counselors can encourage aspiration to college by promoting the PSAT or PLAN, and exposing students to college and university representatives through college visits or “college night” activities. Messages about what it takes to get to college should be clear and expressed often, on bulletin boards, school Web sites, and in communications sent home to parents and students. By condensing the college admission process into steps, the counselor consciously removes barriers and increases understanding about the application process.

Taking the “Right Courses”— a College-Preparatory Curriculum

According to NACAC’s 2014 *State of College Admission* report, academic performance in college preparatory courses has been consistently rated as the top factor in admission decisions over the past decade, with about 80 percent of colleges rating it as considerably important. Other top factors include strength of curriculum, standardized admission test scores, and overall GPA. Although admission test scores are among the top factors, they are rated considerably important by about 55 to 60 percent of colleges, substantially lower than grades in college prep courses. (Clinedinst et al., n.d.).

Academic preparation through a rigorous and challenging course load is more important to access and success in college than performance on standardized tests. Counselors can significantly influence students’ course-taking patterns by:

- clarifying the courses needed for college
- encouraging faculty members to clearly label their course syllabus descriptions as “college-preparatory”
- encouraging students to attempt honors or Advanced Placement coursework

- providing chances for students to enroll at local community colleges
- providing interventions and support for students who need additional help or who may wish to opt out of these courses.

In 2011, the National Office for School Counselor Advocacy (Bruce, 2012) reported that 59 percent of high school counselors surveyed said they believe it is fair to use "completion of college prep sequence of courses" as a measure to assess their effectiveness.

Preparing for and Taking Standardized Examinations

A counselor's role may include making students aware of the exams, promoting and clarifying fee waiver procedures, securing outside agencies to assist in preparation, and helping students and parents understand test scores and develop testing strategies. An abundance of Web-based programs provides teachers and students with options to familiarize themselves with exam format and content. The PSAT or PLAN may be used as counseling tools—they provide the impetus for college planning and provide concrete feedback as students begin shaping their college identities. Students start to see themselves as college material when institutions initiate communication with them—contact that is often facilitated by exams taken early in high school. Many students will take the PSAT as early as ninth grade. At such an early stage, focusing on the experience of taking the test rather than the score itself is a strategy many counselors use to help students "jump start" the college admission process. Returning score results to students and parents in an evening meeting format offers the opportunity to explain the college process, review the importance of college visits, preview the financial aid process, and discuss next steps in college exploration. This practice also helps to develop the relationship between the school, the counselor, and parents and students.

Completing Applications

While it might be easy to tell a student, "If you don't apply, you can't get in," remember that counselors influence student decisions. Students need assistance and guidance to create a college list, write insightful personal state-

ments or essays, and secure letters of recommendation. Research indicates that receiving assistance with college application essays during the school day increases a student's chance of applying to college by 8 to 11 percent (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001). For students who may not have access to computers, the counselor might hold application and financial aid workshops in computer centers or school libraries.

The Pipeline Steps provide an operational framework for counselors who serve low-income students and large caseloads by breaking down the college search and application process into a series of manageable steps for students and their families. Research notes that low-income high school seniors who regularly consult with a high school counselor regarding postsecondary plans are more likely to plan to attend college (King, 1996). That is, according to King (1996), low-income students who encounter difficult courses not only rise to the challenge, but also develop greater confidence and higher aspirations as a result. As such, low-income students probably will attend a four-year college if they frequently see a school counselor who recommended they attend a four-year college, took the PSAT, received information on colleges and financial aid directly from postsecondary institutions, or planned to finance their education through need-based grants. King's (1996) research reinforces the pivotal role of the school counselor in the college planning process.

Clearly, schools influence college preparation and choice through expectations and assumptions, the flow of content and information, and via the provision of student assistance services that distill college choices to a feasible few. Another research-based approach for managing large caseloads can be found in the second model framework: Nine Critical Principles for a College-Going Culture.

NINE CRITICAL PRINCIPLES FOR A COLLEGE-GOING CULTURE

Dr. Patricia M. McDonough's model for building a comprehensive college culture specifies that students must have access to information and guidance in a school that fosters college enrollment. The counselor serves as instructional leader in that effort.

In this model, McDonough and McClafferty (2002) offer a template for creating a school environment with a

college culture that strives to prepare all students for a full range of postsecondary options through structural, motivational and experiential college-preparatory opportunities. In addition, the school leadership is committed to building a college-going culture, and school personnel provide supportive, consistent messages to students. Counselors, teachers and families are partners in the effort, and all counselors serve as college counselors.

The template's principles for building a college culture in a high school include college talk, clear expectations, information and resources, a comprehensive counseling model, testing and curriculum, faculty and family involvement, college partnerships, and articulation. Examples of the principles and indicators of their presence at school sites are outlined in Table 1.

As is shown in Table 1, all constituents must work together. This is evidenced through clear communication among faculty, administrators and students. Examples of college talk might include an updated Web site, regularly published newsletters and posters displayed throughout the campus.

In my practice as a public school counselor, I compiled all college acceptances in a "Goes to College" list that simply featured student names and their college acceptances. (The waivers that students and parents/guardians had signed in the beginning of the year to receive peer

counseling services—explained later in this chapter—also included permission to publicize students' college acceptance information.) The list was organized with the most selective schools first, followed by state colleges and universities and private schools. The last page of the list featured out-of-state colleges and universities. We also repeated the names of students admitted to more than one college or university. As this list was published, more student acceptances were verified and reported, and the list was continuously revised. While many college counseling offices display college acceptances on an annual map, the list is more portable.

Not only did the "Goes to College" list provide evaluative data on the effectiveness of the school's college program, the list also served several other purposes. The list informed students and parents that we know what we're doing—students from our school are successful in gaining acceptance for college. The list helped seniors become more focused on the process and lessened anxiety for juniors, as they saw where their older friends had been admitted. Ninth and 10th graders saw their friends' names listed and made personal, role-model, real identifications. The message to faculty was, "Look what we accomplished; your outstanding teaching made these students attractive to colleges," while the message to administrators was, "Thanks for your leadership and supporting us in our work. We are a successful school."

Table 1. Nine Critical Principles for a College-Going Culture

College Talk—Clear, ongoing communication among students, teachers, administrators, and families about what it takes to get to college.	Clear Expectations—Explicit, clearly defined goals, communicated in ways that make them part of the culture of the school.	Information and Resources—Comprehensive, up-to-date college information and resources, easily accessible for all students, families and school personnel.
Comprehensive Counseling Model—View of counseling that makes all student interactions with counseling staff opportunities for college counseling.	Testing and Curriculum—Information about and access to "gate-keeping" tests (PSAT, SAT, ACT, etc.) and college-preparatory courses for all students.	Faculty Involvement—Informed, active participation of school faculty in the creation and maintenance of a college culture.
Family Involvement—Meaningful engagement on the part of family members in the process of building a college culture.	College Partnerships—Active links in a variety of forms between the school and local colleges and universities.	Articulation—Ongoing coordination between counselors and teachers among all schools in a feeder group.

Source: McClafferty and McDonough, 2002.

The list was also mailed to all middle schools in the area, so that middle school faculty saw where their perhaps once mischievous students ended up, and to the local realtors and chamber of commerce who partially establish the profile and reputation of the school.

Clear expectations become embedded in college talk communications, as the goals must be articulated as part of the daily business of the school. To understand the importance of expectations, complete the sentence, "Around here, we go to..." or "You can't walk down the hallways without seeing..." Indicators of clear expectations are the explicit statement of postsecondary options in the school's mission statement, development of four-year curricular plans for all students and ongoing opportunities to discuss college preparation.

Students need access to college information and resources, and such information falls within the purview of not only the counselors, but also the faculty. Counselors must have updated resources and create online access for students. This helps reach students in ways in which they are familiar, so creating a Facebook page or a Twitter account might generate awareness and access to programs, services and deadlines.

During the fall, the counselor is often focused on the seniors who are unsure about the process. As such, it is important to regulate services as much as possible during this time. Application workshops on regularly announced days are an effective way to meet the needs of seniors with limited attention spans. For example, I hosted application workshops every day during lunch. Mondays and Wednesdays were reserved for the University of California application, for example, and Tuesdays and Thursdays served as California State University application days. Fridays were reserved for students applying to out-of-state and private colleges and universities. This regular schedule made it easier for students to come to the college center on a specific day. Occasionally, I would conduct application workshop sessions outside on the senior lawn. This encouraged seniors to apply and made them aware of application and testing deadlines. For counselors with large caseloads, it is critical to have organized programs during lunch or the morning break, when students are free to come to the college center.

It is important to note that all resources must be easily accessible for students and their families, as well as school

personnel. The counselor's calendar of activities should be posted around the school and distributed at every parent meeting.

Counseling for college must be integrated into the school's comprehensive counseling model. One way to provide more counseling services is to design and implement a college-focused peer counseling program. A peer counseling program enables the counselor to work with larger numbers of students and to disseminate more information and provide more contact and interaction about college admission.

College Peer Counseling

The counselor can use a variety of resources—including students, faculty, administrators, and the community to communicate the college-going message. At the public school in which I worked, I organized a college-focused peer counseling program that used students as counselors. Because I was the only college counselor for the 2,100-member student body, I knew I needed help in reaching such a large caseload. I was also aware of research that indicated that teens are subject to strong peer pressure. Having college peer counselors capitalized on that peer pressure in the best way possible. With peer counselors, the college center continued to serve students—even if I had to be out of the office. As a result, we reached far more students than we would have if I had been working alone.

These college peer counselors were specially trained seniors who assisted their peers in the college admission and financial aid process. Due to confidentiality laws, we had participating students and their parents/guardians sign waivers at the beginning of the year, granting permission to receive college-counseling services from other seniors. These peer helpers agreed to abide by strict ethical standards, including confidentiality. They were also assigned a caseload of approximately 20 students and were responsible for a specific area of expertise, such as maintaining the scholarship board, coordinating field trips, publishing the student bulletin, or taking care of visiting college representatives. They made quick classroom presentations called "college commercials" to remind students about financial aid deadlines, college application workshops or SAT/ACT preparation programs. These counselors sorted mail, kept the computers in the college center running and assisted in organizing College Night.

It was crucial to recruit and select peer counselors carefully. Qualifications included students who were academically strong, independent thinkers and workers, and good writers. Also, I made sure to select a representative group, including those who were tech-savvy, great speakers, leaders, athletes, and cheerleaders. The peer counselor application process involved submission of a brief essay, recommendations from English teachers, interviews, and counseling simulations. These students had first access to the college information center and were highly regarded by the entire school community. Peer counselors were given tests and assigned grades. Several college peer counselors secured jobs in university admission offices after graduation. During our school's regional accreditation program, the peer counseling program earned five commendations.

Training began in the summer and occurred throughout the year, typically before the application or financial aid season. The peer counselors completed their forms early (another form of training) so they could assist other students without worrying about completing their own applications. Peer counselors were trained in counseling skills and technical information. During the fall semester, peer counselors were assigned a caseload of seniors, whom they called into the center, reviewed college plans with, and served as resources to facilitate application completion. During the spring, peer counselors worked with the junior class. Their final examination was to recruit and help train the incoming class of peer counselors.

Standardized tests, such as the PSAT, SAT and ACT, are typically requirements for the college admission process. Therefore, it is vital that schools make the commitment to provide resources to prepare students for these exams. When I worked as a counselor, I would contact test-preparation companies early in the school year and ask them to deliver free test-preparation workshop materials for my students. Sometimes we charged students a nominal fee that was refunded if they attended all workshops. Companies were happy to provide this pro bono service, and my students received excellent test preparation.

The PSAT or PLAN can serve as a counseling tool to educate younger students and their families about the college process. Research shows that having college plans in place by the 10th grade increases the likelihood of enrolling in a four-year college by 21 percent (McDonough, 2008).

Our "Getting Started" meeting, held in January, focused on distributing and interpreting PSAT scores. The principal spoke briefly, and I provided some strategies for students and parents to launch their college search process. Then, a college representative interpreted the PSAT score report. Among our younger students, we always emphasized the experience of taking the test; focusing on the score at this early date is not as important as the experience, because few ninth and 10th graders are accustomed to sitting down and concentrating for a three-hour block of time. Then, a college admission representative provided ideas on how to critically evaluate the communications and mail from various colleges. A financial aid professional previewed the process and offered tips for planning. The other school counselors involved in the program spoke about the upcoming registration process. Frequently, these counselors saw a student only when there was a problem. The "Getting Started" meeting provided them the chance to meet students and families in a positive way. Also, as I worked with the counselors as a team, I felt less isolated in my efforts. Repeating the meeting each year facilitated overall understanding about the college process.

PSAT in the Potty

Another strategy for reaching a mass audience about standardized testing involved the use of a single-colored sheet of paper, which I called "PSAT in the Potty." A college peer counselor perused the SAT and ACT prep books and identified the shorter practice questions, which were typed out in larger print. The questions, both verbal- and mathematics-related, featured a hint to help with the question and the answer. I printed up enough to cover all the bathroom stalls in the school, and college peer counselors would tape the questions on the back of the bathroom stalls each week. One day, one of my students came into the college center and said, "Mrs. Hugo, after I saw your college questions in the bathroom, I thought that you had gone too far. Then I realized that you were just trying to remind us about college."

Creative Communication Strategies

These activities, programs and strategies provide ways to assist students and parents in the school-to-college transition. College preparation and advising must start when

students arrive in the ninth grade, if not sooner. Research supports the efficacy of approaches in which the college counselor employs multiple communication methods and involves faculty, parents, external agencies, and institutions.

Research indicates that a high-intensity, college-preparatory curriculum is the single most important factor in college success (Adelman, 2006). In every school-wide mailing, a list of college-preparatory coursework was included (and sometimes translated) so that parents knew which courses counted for college. In addition, we created posters listing college-preparatory courses and displayed them in all classrooms.

The partnership model requires that faculty play an active role in building the college culture by encouraging students, organizing activities in the classroom and engaging in college-related interactions with parents. Teachers can be valuable allies. For example, if I received an invitation for a college tour or field trip that I had already experienced, I would invite faculty members to go, and I covered their classes. With their classes, I would conduct application or essay workshops, while the teachers experienced an enriching and informative day away from school.

It was easy to organize a College Awareness Day, during which faculty members wore their college sweatshirts or hats and talked about their college days during the last five minutes of class.

I also asked teachers for permission to make presentations in their classrooms. I timed the requests to coincide with report card deadlines, so that teachers could sit in the back of the room and grade their papers (while listening to my college-going message). The teachers had a break, and I gained valuable exposure to and interaction with students. I found classroom presentations effective because students felt comfortable asking questions in a smaller group setting. It was important to have a 20- to 30-minute bank of activities that included a study skills, activity-based component. Some sample topics included:

- Calculating your GPA—a discussion about the importance of curriculum and which classes and years count for college
- Getting cash for college—students need to hear the message that college is affordable

- Choosing a college—an introduction to the system of higher education
- Planning your four years—an opportunity for students to understand the connection between curriculum and college requirements
- Managing your time—an explanation of the ways in which college is different from high school and the need for students to adapt to a new schedule and way of thinking and acting. NACAC's *Guiding the Way* series (2010) provides a bank of activities that can be adapted for any school setting or grade level.

Another critical faculty interaction occurred at the beginning of the school year, during the opening faculty meeting. At that time, I conducted a workshop on writing letters of recommendation, explaining the finer points of the faculty letter and what colleges expect from teacher recommendations. Too many teachers were simply summarizing a student's brag sheet, which said little about the student's classroom performance. Once they had concrete examples, the letters of recommendation improved.

Family involvement is key, and parents must be provided with opportunities to learn about the college planning process. Parents can also act as the college center's external voice. I developed a cadre of parent champions who became access and equity models. They conveyed to other parents the importance of meeting deadlines, completing financial aid materials and seeking resources if their students were undocumented. They served as resources and provided bilingual support services to parents who needed additional information and encouragement.

I involved parents in organizing the college center at the beginning of the year, through filing and sorting catalogs and books. They also helped develop a speaker list and media list. Whenever I organized an event, I asked a parent to send press releases to the local media, which helped build community awareness and enhance public relations for our program and school. All upcoming college-focused events were advertised on the local cable television's public service bulletin board. The parents were adept fundraisers, helping purchase supplies and providing funds for scholarships. At information evenings and programs, parents provided decorations and refreshments.

One of my most successful fundraisers was Muffin Mania, a bake sale during which I sold muffins to students. At a local warehouse club (Costco), it was possible to purchase a dozen muffins for about five dollars. A parent picked up the muffins on Tuesday to sell them on Wednesday morning. A parent and teacher supervised the sale of muffins for one dollar each. Sales were promoted on our weekly college-focused broadcast, which was written and delivered over the school public address system by a peer counselor with a flair for humor and drama. We raised about \$4,000 annually through muffin sales, which we invested in Advanced Placement materials and student scholarships. Of course, administrators were offered free muffins.

The underlying message of engaging faculty and parents in the counseling programs is that preparing students for college is a team effort. The college counselor orchestrates and manages this effort, ensuring consistency and accuracy of messaging so that all students are hearing the same information and headed toward the goal of securing postsecondary options.

Forming partnerships or interactive links between the school and local colleges and universities facilitates college-related activities, such as field trips and enrichment programs. Some college systems send outreach personnel to high schools. My school benefited from such outreach personnel, and to maximize their weekly or bi-weekly visit to the school, a peer counselor completed summons slips a day in advance or organized classroom presentations for the college representatives. This person became a valued resident expert who was knowledgeable about that particular college system (e.g., community college) and often made presentations in several classrooms during the day. Schools that do not already have such a relationship in place with a local university might consider initiating one through an admission office.

We also enjoyed a steady stream of college interns from local colleges and universities. Each year, I made a presentation in the local university's graduate counseling department, during which I described the wonders of my job. At the end of the presentation, because I knew students were looking for places to do field work, I always offered opportunities at my college center. The program grew so that each semester, two or three in-

terns assisted me. These graduate students ran counseling groups, assisted the other counselors and learned to make classroom presentations. One intern wrote a federal grant for a non-violence program that was funded. After her internship ended, she recruited her friend to work in the center to implement the grant. When she completed her internship, she recruited another graduate student to do the program evaluation. This was a tremendous benefit for my school that brought additional resources and did not involve additional work for me. During the financial aid season, staff members from the local university helped with the workshops and presentations. Research indicates that increases in the amount of financial aid information provided by the counselor positively correlates with students' likelihood of applying to college (McDonough, 2005). For those crunch-time dates when applications are due, and because we know that teenagers are professional procrastinators, we organized a "Panic Room" in the computer lab that was staffed by outreach personnel, graduate students, college admission officers, and college peer counselors.

College Representatives

When college representatives wanted to visit our campus, a college peer counselor organized the visits, completed reminder notes to my students a day ahead of time and sent the notes on the day of the visit. Representatives were greeted with a school profile, a "Goes to College" list and a bottle of water. We asked each representative how much time they could spend on our campus, because I had already identified a group of teachers who always appreciated a drop-in guest speaker from a college. If the representative had extra time, presentations would be made in the speech, drama or debate classes. Involving representatives from four-year colleges provides another communication and role model for delivering the college message.

Articulation and communication between schools are essential to continuity of services. In this model, building the college culture is dependent upon clear communication and experiences that occur from kindergarten through 12th grade. Middle school is midway to college; early outreach to middle school parents helps them understand what will be expected when their students reach high school. I served as the guest speaker at

the middle school's eighth grade College Night so that parents and students would be aware of the college-preparatory curriculum and college programs in place.

In reviewing these strategies and activities, it is important to note that counselors with large caseloads must achieve a balance between high-quality mass communication and high-quality personal communication (Hugo, 2004). An Action Plan form is available online to assist counselors in leading a team toward full implementation of the Nine Principles. By managing the programs, interventions and services, and involving others in the counseling effort, the counselor frees up time spent on routine or administrative tasks and details so that more time can be spent helping students reach their goals. With a laser-like focus on the Pipeline Steps, and a broad view of building and expanding the school's college-going culture through the Nine Principles, the counselor can successfully implement a school-wide vision and effectively "counsel the crowds."

USING DATA TO ASSESS ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPACT

While it may seem overwhelming to both serve a large caseload of students and keep track of their college-readiness data, it is critical to establish benchmarks for the counselor's work to gauge student progress and counselor effectiveness. One way might be to focus on data connected with the Pipeline Steps. The new Common Core State Standards, which feature a college- and career-readiness component, demand that schools demonstrate progress in these areas. The current movement from performance to outcome compels counselors to examine their practice. Serving as leaders to ensure that the school is focused on its mission, school counselors can promote equity and access to rigor and opportunity so that all students can reach their full potential.

When reviewing data, school counselors may realize and discover gaps for groups of students who are underrepresented, underserved or underperforming academically. With the perspective of the counselor's role as an organizer and manager of programs and services, the counselor may be asked to guide, lead, direct, or provide additional school-wide programs and activities to address gaps in achievement (Hatch, 2014). The coun-

selor's role is then to identify the troubling data, and use collaboration, advocacy and leadership skills to lead a team in identifying additional instruction and support. For example, a lack of students of color applying to and enrolling in four-year colleges and universities could lead a team to analyze test-taking and college-prep course-taking. Following the analysis, short- and long-term strategies could be developed to ensure students have access to test preparation for the SAT or ACT, are enrolled in the appropriate courses, and have an understanding and support through the financial aid process.

Counselors who serve large caseloads of low-socio-economic students might consider research from the College Board which indicates that increasing the number of college applications from one to two can increase the probability of enrolling at a four-year college by 40 percent, and increasing the number of applications from two to three can increase the student's probability of enrollment by 10 percent (Smith, 2011). This suggests that college enrollment among underrepresented students can be impacted by encouraging students to submit more applications and by developing approaches to assist these students in the application process. Adoption of this practice as a school-wide model could lead to standardization of practice and possibly more students being admitted to four-year schools.

The big data question is always, "Who's missing?" and the answer to that question guides the counselor toward action. Hatch (2014) identifies attendance, behavior and achievement as the three most important categories to measure. Data elements should always be disaggregated by ethnicity and gender, and might include such elements as:

- students taking the PSAT, SAT, PLAN or ACT
- students who complete the college-preparatory curriculum
- students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses and passing exams with a score of 3 or higher
- students' college acceptances and destinations.

The Education Trust (2004) recommends analyzing and disaggregating data on the elements outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Disaggregating and Analyzing Data

Testing Gender and Ethnicity Achievement Grade Taken ELL/LEP Policy and Practice	Enrollment Honors, Advanced Placement, College-Prep Coursework Gender and Ethnicity Special Education ELL/LEP Policy and Practice	Graduation Rate Gender and Ethnicity Special Education ELL/LEP 8th grade–12th grade
Retention Rates Subject Area Grade Level Gender and Ethnicity ELL/LEP Postsecondary Enrollment	GPA/Class Rank Gender and Ethnicity Special Education ELL/LEP	Special Education Gender and Ethnicity Disability ELL/LEP
Attendance Time of Day Gender and Ethnicity ELL/LEP Absent and Late Arrival Grade Level	Discipline Classroom Time of Day Gender and Ethnicity ELL/LEP Special Education	Dropout Rate Transition 8th–9th grade Grade Level Gender and Ethnicity ELL/LEP Reason

Source: Education Trust Conference, 2004.

Table 2 provides categories and examples for disaggregating data and evaluating student achievement, attendance and school policy. This table and the tools that may assist the counselor serving large caseloads are the Action Plan and the Goal-Setting Guide. Each of these tools is available online and assists in developing a data-based plan, assessing resources, assigning responsibilities, and providing multi-level interventions designed to reach larger numbers of students and their families.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

The discussion of the use of data is a natural transition to the counselor's role in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), currently adopted by 45 states. Because of the imbedded college- and career-readiness component, the CCSS provide leadership opportunities for counselors. Coordinating the college- and career-readiness component should be the domain of the counselor. Because counselors are uniquely positioned to view the entire school's achievement and data elements, they can monitor and recommend curriculum, provide formative assessment strategies and galvanize the school toward higher college-going rates. Counselors can work with administrators to ensure equity of school-wide policies, identify performance barriers, and ensure that students are placed

in rigorous classes and have remedial support and tutoring when they need it.

As the Common Core State Standards specify K–12 expectations for college and career readiness, an action brief from Achieve (2013) recommends that counselors:

- Think across grade levels
- Develop comprehensive programs
- Provide academic supports to students
- Create standards-based college and career-focused lessons.

With the Common Core State Standards, counselors can focus on academic preparation without remediation, demonstrate their expertise in transcript evaluation and ensure students are taking a college-prep curriculum to ensure readiness for college. Career technical coursework should be a part of the school's curriculum. As assessment experts, counselors can work with teachers to design and provide intervention programs. The formative nature of the CCSS assessments allow for periodic evaluations and interventions. Finally, as experts in college and career readiness, counselors can help students identify interests linked to major selection, design aspiration-building programs for first-generation students, and provide hands-on application and financial aid workshops. CCSS

signal a key shift from high school completion to college graduation for students; and for professionals, a shift from performance to outcomes. For example, counselors will be evaluated not on how many financial aid workshops they conducted, but on how many students completed and submitted the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. A tool to aid counselors on strategic planning, goal-setting and multi-level interventions is available online.

With this view, the counselor maintains the position as collaboration expert, but also becomes a leader and architect of the college-going culture, working with faculty and administrators, students and their families. Alignment of college- and career-readiness activities with the school's overall plan makes the counselor's work relevant and pivotal.

CONCLUSION

It is always a critical time for school counselors because they can make a tremendous difference in the lives of their students. Even for those who serve large numbers of students, creativity attuned to the school's culture is an effective tool. To shape their college plans, students need access to information and guidance in a school culture that intentionally supports the goal of college enrollment. No matter the size of the school or the caseload, the counselor is the architect of that effort.

CLOSING QUESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

1. Using the framework of the Nine Critical Principles, conduct an inventory of your school's strengths and weaknesses in each of the nine areas. What is in place? What needs to change? What additional programs and services might be offered?
2. Using the Pipeline Steps as a guideline, maintain a weekly log of your duties as a counselor, and categorize each action as a part of the Pipeline Steps. How much of your time is spent in providing college- and career-readiness services to students? Share the results with your principal or counseling team.
3. In considering your school's culture, what might be the role of social media as an outreach tool for your students?
4. How effective is your financial aid program? Do you maintain records on the numbers of FAFSAs filed? How might you work to increase that number, considering how critical financial considerations are in the college decision?
5. Consider using your voice as a public school counselor to speak with your state legislator about the impact and pressures of your job. With widespread adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards, think about how you can represent your role to your policy-makers.
6. Examine the data tools provided. How might you use these tools to focus on a specific population or goal to improve your college-going program?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Esther B. Hugo teaches in the Loyola Marymount University School of Education Master's program and in the UCLA College Counseling Certificate Program. As the academic coordinator of the UCLA program, she expanded the curriculum with courses on community college counseling and international student counseling. She serves as the co-director of NACAC's Directing a Dynamic College Counseling Program and is a past-president of the Western Association for College Admission Counseling. She has twice served on the NACAC Board of Directors. In addition, Esther was elected as the chair of the National College Board Guidance and Admission Assembly Council, and is a former College Board trustee. With the College Board, she worked as the director of the Counselor Training Grant, funded by the James Irvine Foundation. The training program reached over 3,000 public school counselors in 20 school districts. Esther holds a doctorate in educational leadership from UCLA and a master's in counseling from Loyola Marymount University (CA). She continues her 38 years in public education with her service on the school board of the Making Waves Academy Charter School in Richmond, CA. Esther worked as the outreach coordinator for Santa Monica College (CA), the college counselor at Westchester High School (CA), and a secondary school teacher.