



[CENTER FOR ENROLLMENT RESEARCH, POLICY, AND PRACTICE]

DRAWING UPON SURVEY DATA FROM 12TH GRADE STUDENTS

following a 45 minute survey within participating high schools, the College Access and Success Assessment (CASA) will provide a valuable snapshot of each high school's college-going culture and offer statistical measures, reports, and expert guidance to inform continuing efforts to more effectively target resources in ways that will create and foster a college-going and college-ready culture within America's high schools. CASA is currently being developed by the USC Center for Enrollment

Research, Policy, and Practice at the USC Rossier School of Education. The center's research team conducted a pilot study this past April during which approximately 3,000 high school students within the Long Beach and Fresno Unified School Districts in California were surveyed. Data from this pilot study is currently being analyzed and researchers expect to validate and refine the tool over the course of the next several months. In 2012, the center intends to implement CASA in up to 100 urban, high-need schools throughout the United States. ■

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH LLOYD THACKER AND THE EDUCATION CONSERVANCY, the USC Center for Enrollment Research, Policy, and Practice will host, "The Case for Change in College Admissions" in Los Angeles on January 26-28, 2011.

This is a purposeful meeting of approximately 150-200 prominent scholars, policymakers, college leaders, and admission practitioners to discuss what is right about college admissions at class-crafting institutions, to identify what is wrong, and to collectively formulate a framework for changing college admissions to better serve the public interest and meet the nation's attainment goals.

Participants will actively learn about the current state of our admissions

system from one another and from our distinguished speakers through a variety of presentation and discussion formats. Scheduled speakers include Andrew Delbanco, Robert Zemsky, Michael McPherson, Sandy Baum, Harry Brighthouse, and William G. Tierney.

A tangible outline of specific admissions areas in need of change will be produced from this event. This important document will identify individual, collective, legal and leadership considerations that lie at the heart of a reform agenda, paving the way for a national admissions summit in 2012 that will draw upon this framework to develop an actionable plan for change. **For more information about this event, go to: www.usc.edu/cerpp.** ■



[FROM THE DEAN]

Rossier Reach is a new quarterly publication from the USC Rossier School of Education designed to inform our colleagues around the country and abroad about the latest research being generated by our six research centers.

This issue of *Rossier Reach* focuses on college access – a priority of the Obama Administration and a critical field of scholarship in which USC Rossier continues to make significant contributions. We highlight the recent work of three of our research centers, the Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis (CHEPA), the Center for Urban Education (CUE), and the Center for Enrollment Research, Policy, and Practice (CERPP).

USC Rossier continues to distinguish itself by research that is practitioner focused, as this publication will attest. Please contact me or any of our centers if you have questions or comments.

Karen Symms Gallagher, Ph.D.
*Emery Stoops and
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[RESEARCH INNOVATION]

college access

OBAMA'S PRIORITY : ROSSIER'S COMMITMENT



THE U.S. HAS FALLEN TO 12TH PLACE in college graduation rates for young adults among developed countries, leading President Obama to set an ambitious goal for Americans. He has called on the United States to once again have the highest rate of college completion in the world by 2020. In order to get there, the nation's graduation rate needs to reach 60 percent in 10 years, compared with about 40 percent today.

"Today we have flat-lined, while other countries have passed us by," Education Secretary Arne Duncan has said, calling the president's 2020 goal "the North Star for all of our educational initiatives."

College access is a major component of Obama's "cradle to career" education agenda. Successful college completion has to start with access to college. To increase our odds of success, the President has implemented a number of reforms that target access to higher education, including student debt reform, increasing Pell grants, simplifying the financial aid application process, and a \$2 billion investment in community colleges.

Higher education has become "the economic issue of our time," according to Obama, and increasing the number of college graduates has become an imperative to the nation's economic recovery.

Research centers at the USC Rossier School have been ahead of the President's curve in designing and implementing innovative tools to address the issue of college access and college success, and are putting these tools into the hands of the students and practitioners who will most benefit. ■





A NEW BOOK TO BE PUBLISHED IN 2010

by the University of Southern California spotlights the critical issue of creating a pipeline to college for the students for whom no clear pathway exists. *College Bound: Strategies for Access and Success for Low-Income Students* examines the obstacles to college access and success, and highlights proven strategies that help remove these barriers.

College Bound features an introduction by Dean Gallagher, and scholarly articles by USC faculty across the university that focus on college access and success. USC Rossier faculty members author key chapters in the book: Jerome A. Lucido authors a chapter on the key components to college readiness and access, and the role the research-based College Access and Success Assessment (CASA) plays in assessing the college-going culture of high schools. William G. Tierney writes about research-based strategies that work for high schools to increase college access for low-income students. Estela Mara Bensimon and Alicia Dowd co-author a chapter on African American and Latino students who fail to exit the community college system with degrees, jobs, or transfer to four-year institutions. And Kristan Venegas argues in her chapter that dominant theories that shape student affairs programs and college recruitment efforts are inadequate.

To receive copies of *College Bound*, contact: tjenkins@usc.edu. ■



chepea

THE GAME OF COLLEGE LIFE

THE CENTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY ANALYSIS (CHEPA) under the direction of Dr. William G. Tierney, took on the issue of college access nearly a decade ago. Its established mentoring and college-preparation programs for Los Angeles area urban high school students, Increasing Access via Mentoring (I AM) and SummerTIME, have resulted in thousands of high-need students gaining access to college and succeeding there. A recent report released by the Educational Testing Service found the two CHEPA programs provided the greatest impact for the resources and costs, compared to other mentoring programs in the region.

The I AM mentoring program provides one-on-one mentoring for low-income, high-achieving high school students, many of whom are the first in their families to apply for college. They attend “college knowledge” workshops, meet with advisors and learn how to navigate the college application and financial aid processes. Ninety-eight percent of the program’s 2009-2010 participants went on to attend college in the fall of 2010.

SummerTIME was launched in 2002, and targets local high school graduates who have been admitted into a selective four-year university the summer before their freshman year. These students learn skills, such as time management and study habits, to help them succeed in college. They also receive intensive writing instruction in anticipation of the many papers assigned at a university.

In 2009, Tierney chaired a U.S. Department of Education Access to Higher Education panel. The panel released its findings on emerging research on higher education access to all students in a practice guide, *Helping Students Navigate the Path to College: What High Schools Can Do*.

CHEPA’s current initiative is yet another approach to helping underserved students get into college. It teamed up with the USC Game Innovation Lab (GIL) to create a prototype for an online, multiplayer game called *Pathfinder* that gets students to start thinking about the college application process and hones their strategies for getting into college. According to Tierney, while the recommended high school counselor to student ration is 250:1, California has one counselor for about every 800 high school students and the ratio is 400:1 nationally. Recent cutbacks to school budgets threaten the ability of college counselors to effectively assist students.

The *Pathfinder* game helps students learn about setting personal goals, the implications of attending public vs. private universities, how to make strategic choices about extracurricular activities, how to accumulate necessary resources, including high grades and references, and how to meet deadlines.

The game has been piloted with more than 200 Los Angeles-area high school students during 2010. USC’s Game Innovation Lab is looking to secure \$1 million in grants and funding to take the program online and implement a Facebook application. Currently, the game is in a card game format. Preliminary results show a positive impact.

Why a Game?

- * Games are systems that are governed by rules.
- * You can win a game once you learn those rules.
- * The college application process is also a system with rules.

Observational and survey data show that the game promoted qualities conducive to preparing for college, including awareness about the college admission and financial aid processes; increased knowledge of college jargon; development of collaboration among students; and ability to apply role-playing to real life applications.

CHEPA is about to embark on a large-scale mixed methods study to measure students’ knowledge and attitudes toward the college application process before and after playing the game. ■

LENDING EXPERTISE TO A NEW INITIATIVE IN MASSACHUSETTS

closing the opportunity gap

ED BY DRS. ESTELA MARA BENSIMON AND ALICIA C. DOWD, the Center for Urban Education (CUE) uses socially conscious research to close the racial-ethnic equity gap and has developed the process, data and benchmarking tools to assist higher education systems and institutions in achieving President Obama’s college completion goals, especially for students from underserved racial and ethnic communities.

In partnership with the National College Access Network (NCAN), CUE is lending its expertise to a project aimed at improving college readiness programs at two high schools in Boston, Massachusetts. This will mark the first time that CUE will use the innovative Equity Scorecard™ at the high school level. Historically, the Center’s focus has been on two- and four-year colleges to address racial and ethnic disparities in educational outcomes.

The project will explore the alignment between student academic achievement outcomes and college access intervention programs using participatory action research, a method of creating new knowledge that involves a group of practitioners coming together to conduct collaborative research through an inquiry process into their own organizations’ practices.

Improving this alignment is critical because there’s a significant knowledge and achievement gap between the supplemental services offered by college access programs and the outcome goals set by high schools. This disconnect means that school leaders are often not fully aware of who is receiving services, what services the students are receiving, or if the services are being provided to the students who need them the most.

“For many in the underserved population, college access programs represent the only avenue to receive assistance in navigating the college preparation and application process,” said Bensimon, a professor of higher education at USC’s Rossier School of Education. “CUE’s research-driven data tools will make it possible to assess, by race and

ethnicity, who gets access to which college access programs and the Equity Scorecard™ will make it possible for the high schools to know the progress being made by students of color in getting prepared for college.”

The two high schools involved in the pilot project – Community Academy of Science and Health and East Boston High School – have a diverse student population, a need to improve student academic achievement, and multiple college access programs with supplemental student support services.

The project will involve an inventory of college access services, along with the identification of targeted students; articulation of the school’s desired outcomes through interviews and focus groups; a student survey to assess the utilization of college access services; and the examination of current student achievement levels to identify deficiencies among subgroups.

Researchers from CUE will train high school administrators, counselors and teachers to examine their own data using the Equity Scorecard™ to improve college going rates.

The culmination of the project will include a jointly produced report on the results of the pilot project and outline the likelihood of CUE’s processes being replicated in high school settings.

The impetus for the project began during the summer of 2009 when Dr. Tia McNair, the assistant director of NCAN, became a Fellow during the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) Institutes on Equity and Critical Policy Analysis organized by CUE and funded by the Ford Foundation. The session she attended, “Principles and Methods of Participatory Critical Action Research,” was led by Bensimon and Dowd.

McNair attended the same Institute the following summer but the focus for her had changed. This time, the Institute functioned as an initial three-day training session to familiarize the participants of the Boston initiative with the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of participatory action research and give them dedicated time to develop their school-based projects in detail.

“Everyone on the team plays a critical role,” said McNair, who is based in Washington, D.C. “It’s groundbreaking and it’s empowering to people who interact with students on a daily basis and who want to participate on a research team to address disparities. Solutions are based on common knowledge and common understanding. It’s a more realistic way of looking at how ideas are generated and how conclusions are being created and implemented.”

Statistics point to the fact that only 35% of Boston Public Schools college-bound graduates from the class of 2000 had earned college degrees by 2007.

College access programs address a significant need in many schools. These programs provide targeted services (e.g., tutoring/academic enhancement, career exploration, ACT/SAT test preparation, college admissions and financial aid counseling, scholarships, mentoring, etc.) to low-income, first-generation, and/or racially and ethnically diverse high school students.

Given their heavy workload and limited resources, many school professionals cannot deliver these services. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the student-to-counselor ratio was 475:1 for the 2006-2007 school year. The American School Counselor Association recommends a ratio of 250:1. The result is many students are underserved.

“The Equity Scorecard is exactly what our country needs right now, exactly what is needed to drive change, especially with the changing demographics,” McNair said. “You have to look at data this way. It’s not even an option anymore.” ■