Supporting Low-Income and First Generation to College Students through the College Admission Process

Andrea Flores, College Counselor
Justin-Siena, Napa

Ramiro Flores, College Advisor
Sacred Heart Cathedral, SF
What makes us “experts”?
Challenges for Low Income & First-Generation to College Students
What did you see or hear that was familiar? Conversely, what did you hear that was unexpected or new?
What are the attributes and skills necessary to support low income and/or first generation college students?
College counselor attributes
★ Empathy
★ Honesty
★ Willingness to listen
★ Unrelenting commitment to help
★ Patience
★ Passion for lifelong learning
College counselor tool kit

Begin the identification and outreach early.

★ Talk to students about taking AP, IB or honors courses to prepare for college-level work.
★ Make sure that they take a solid, challenging course load so they meet the requirements for college admission — even if they're not yet sure they'll go.
★ Educate students early about the SAT and ACT and how they are used in the college admission process; find opportunities for students to take practice exams or find free online prep resources like Khan Academy
★ Expose students to the terminology around college, and especially financial aid: FAFSA, CSS Profile, grants, scholarships, loans, work study
College counselor tool kit

“Going to college” isn’t just about the application and financial aid process; it involves deep conversations about strengths and a vision for the future.

★ Conduct early aptitude or interest assessments.
★ Talk to them about which career paths these might point to. Probe. If a student is considering becoming an architect, ask the student what architects actually do and how much education they need.
★ Be honest with them about where they are in their education and what they should focus on.
College counselor tool kit

Involve family members or other allies when possible.

★ Be prepared to encounter a wide range of attitudes about college, from supportive to obstructive.
★ Also be prepared to explain college basics (2-year/community college vs. 4-year/undergraduate college or university, types of degrees, etc.)
★ Be prepared to make a case for the value of higher education.
★ Approach each conversation without judgement and see each interaction with family or allies as an opportunity to get to know your student better and help your student achieve his or her goals.
College counselor tool kit

Increase your counselor knowledge about colleges with well-developed programs, and financial aid for these specific student populations.

★ Identify colleges that seek to serve these populations.
★ Watch for (and pre-empt) students' preconceptions that they can't afford college or that they will easily get full scholarships.
★ Discourage fixations on "name" colleges and focus on fit for each student.
★ Remind students that private colleges may be financially feasible. Use net price calculators to show them how.
★ Encourage students to visit colleges and attend fairs and college nights. Organize school-led trips, if possible.
★ Talk to students about community college. This may be a good fit for some.
College counselor tool kit

Be prepared to make resources like fee waivers available to students; explain to them cost-saving or beneficial strategies in the process.

★ Educate students about application deadlines; point out that some college have priority application deadlines for scholarship consideration (be clear that these deadlines are firm).
★ Encourage students to share their stories so that colleges can understand the context in which they have learned and been raised.
College counselor tool kit

Unpack what college is like; don’t assume that your students know what to expect.

- Picking dorms/residence halls
- Freshmen orientation
- Course registration
- Meeting a roommate
- Professor office hours
Let’s practice some skills.
Jonathan

Jonathan is a Latino male junior who is determined to go to college. He has performed in the top of his class since his freshman year, firmly sitting in the top 10% with a 4.4 GPA. Of his six classes next year, Jonathan is planning to take AP Calculus AB, AP English Literature, and AP Government. Jonathan asks what kinds of colleges he should be looking for. He doesn’t know what he wants to major in for sure but he thinks business could be good because he wants to be able to help his mother who is undocumented and who cleans offices at night when Jonathan is home so he can watch his younger brother and sister.

What more do you need to know about Jonathan to advise him about his college list? What advice would you give him about his college search?
Brianna

Brianna is a first semester senior who has done well in high school in spite of the challenges she has faced. She is currently carrying a 3.75 GPA and the SAT she took with the fee waiver you provided her came back an 1150. A survivor of child abuse who was placed in foster care when she was eight, Brianna was fortunate enough to be adopted by the third foster parent she was placed with, along with her younger sister. Her mother does not work but she does care for foster care children as well as her own biological daughter who has special needs. Brianna knows she can get into some colleges but she is really worried about how she will pay for college and she has come to you to ask for your help.

What more do you need to know about Brianna to advise her about paying for college? What resources do you know of that may help Brianna?
Sterling

Sterling presented a host of new challenges since you first met him as a sophomore. An African American male student, he lives with his mother who is a certified nurse assistant and his two younger siblings. His father died in prison when Sterling was 11 years old. He is rough around the edges; he doesn’t feel like he belongs at your predominantly white high school and he often accuses his mostly white teachers of not liking him or being racist. Academically speaking, Sterling’s grades don’t reflect his real ability. He has a 3.6 GPA and has taken one or two honors classes each year. He earned a 26 on the ACT in May of his junior year. He has never been out of state before and you learn of a fly-in program in Michigan for a private, liberal arts college that might be a great fit for him.

What more would you need to know about Sterling before you meet with him about this opportunity? If he is open to it, how would you prepare him for this fly-in program?
Joshua

Joshua is in his senior year of high school and really worried about affording college. His cum GPA is 3.44 (w) with 3 AP courses in his senior year. Joshua had a rough transition to high school. He finished his first year with a 1.77 GPA. His mother is disabled and his father has been chronically unemployed. Joshua frequently came to school tired during that first year of high school from working a job as a busboy. He found support and encouragement from his teachers after that first year but is really worried about the blemishes on his transcript. He’s a gifted debater and one of the strongest writers in the senior class.

What more do you need to know about Joshua to advise him about his college list? What advice would you give him about his college search?
Sabrina

You’ve known Sabrina since she was a freshman. An African-American female who lives with her single mother (you think her mom is a bookkeeper) and sister, Sabrina came in with high hopes to your high school three years ago. However, she struggles to keep up with classes and says she is going to try harder but sees the same results. She has been under academic review (Ds at the quarter but no semester Ds) off and on since she was a sophomore. It’s January and Sabrina is now a second semester junior and she is trying to put her college list together. She has a 2.6 GPA and has no official SAT or ACT scores yet, but she scored at a 770 on the PSAT/NMSQT. She thinks she wants to go into business (she wants to have a good job) but she also volunteers at the Boys & Girls Club where she was a member and she knows that she likes kids.

What more do you need to know about Sabrina to advise her about her college list? What advice would you give her about her college search?
In summary…

And Questions.
Andrea Flores
Justin-Siena High School
aflores@justin-siena.org
(707) 255-0950 ext. 610

Ramiro Flores
Sacred Heart Cathedral
rflores@shcp.edu
(415) 775-6626 ext. 724

This presentation is available to download at: