

Running head: INCREASING URBAN STUDENTS

Increasing Urban Students' Knowledge of the College Admissions Process

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## Abstract

There is a subsequent need for college admissions advising for urban, minority, or low income students. Urban high school students typically are ill-prepared and uninformed of some of the key components in the college admissions process such as choosing a college, considering academic programs of study, researching colleges' GPA and SAT requirements, searching for scholarships, and applying for financial aid. All of which can be deterrent to students who have aspirations to attend college. Respectively, the lack of information, discussion, and planning are also impediments to student success in the college admissions process. Because of poor planning and preparation in this area, urban high school students often rush applications to schools without giving much thought to what the college may offer, miss deadlines, or fall short of the requirements needed for admission to some colleges. This thesis discusses a strategy that can be used to educate urban students on the college admissions process as well as offer an eight-session model for school counselors to use in college admissions advising.

### Increasing Urban Students' Knowledge of the College Admission Process

“Wake up! You can’t dream your way into college. There are actual steps you have to take.” The message was clear-cut as the narrator informed a student who dreamt that a dean came to his door to invite him to college as a pep rally cheered him on in the background. The mini-script was taken from one of many radio, television and print public-service announcement series directed at low-income and minority students in efforts to raise public awareness about the steps required to prepare for college (Field, 2007). The “Know How to Go” campaign, which has been in syndication for the past two years was sponsored by the American Council on Education, the Lumina Foundation for Education, and the Ad Council. These sponsors sought to reach students in grades 8 through 10, while they still have time to academically and financially prepare for college (Field, 2007). David Ward, president of the American Council on Education was quoted, “One of the major themes of the campaign is for students to know it takes more than good grades and big dreams to get into college” (Field, 2007). Ward’s comment rang true as reality for many urban students in their perceptions about preparing for college.

In an urban high school in the northeastern region of the United States, students were provided with little or no information on completing college applications, applying for scholarships and financial aid, and understanding admission requirements prior to their senior year of high school. A few out-dated handbooks were found to generate information pertaining to colleges, academic majors, and scholarships to a student body of 430 students. Students in their senior year of high school seem disconcerted in the college selection and application process. They were uncertain of when and why they should take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). They considered attending top tier

universities without considering the college or university's academic programs or admission requirements. They knew very little about the differences between public and private institutions. Some students completely missed or fell short of meeting application deadlines and registration dates. Other students were completely oblivious in choosing a college. But generally, these students were cognizant of the fact they would need financial assistance to pay for their college education.

As counselors were replete with the frequent bombardment of incomplete or overdue college applications, seemingly never-ending or recurring questions from students during the first few months of their senior year in high school, they often contemplated on strategies to alleviate this often strenuous and time-consuming process. The purpose of this study was to educate urban high school students on the college admission process. In addition, how can school counselors better assist urban high school students in college admissions advising?

For the sake of this study, it was integral to determine the characteristics that constitute what was meant by "urban." What is an urban school or urban students as referenced in this paper? According to a recent article, the term *urban school* "evoked an image of a dilapidated school building in a poor inner-city neighborhood populated with African American or Hispanic children" (Jacob, 2007). By definition, urban schools were located in large central cities (Jacob, 2007). These communities were often characterized by high rates of poverty, but note poverty can be found in many schools throughout the nation's rural areas as well. According to the Schools and Staffing Survey of 2003-2004, roughly 64 percent of students in central cities were minority. Also, 56 percent of students in urban cities participated in free lunch programs and 40 percent

received services under the Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (Jacob, 2007). On average, urban students scored lower on standardized achievement exams than suburban counterparts (Jacob, 2007). It was also noted, that counselors in schools with a high proportion of students who qualified for free or reduced-priced lunches spend less time on admissions counseling than their colleagues in schools with more advantaged populations (Klein, 2008). These characteristics deemed the importance and relevance of studying student's practices in the college admissions process. Typically these students lack the exposure as well as adequate information about college choice and decision making. Because urban students also tend to be first-generation college students, they may also lack familial support in the process, thus making college admissions advising critical for access to higher education.

The study of college admissions advising should not be confused with college awareness and preparatory programs such as Education Talent Search, Upward Bound, or Liberty Partnerships Program. However one should be cognizant that college admissions advising can play a significant role within these types of programs. For the sake of this study, it was essential to understand that college admission advising was a separate and much smaller entity than that of college awareness and preparatory programs. As the two units interweaved, the relevance of both college prep programs and college admissions advising was discussed in this paper. College admissions advising is a way to assist students in exploring the criteria in which colleges select students for admission such as grades, SAT scores, GPA, financial aid, essays, and recommendation letters (Kennedy, 2007). Essentially, this study intends to prove that as urban students are educated on these processes, their knowledge of the college admissions process will increase.

### Review of the Literature

There has been a great deal of literature that has found some inconsistencies in urban or minority students' performance in higher education. Studies have introduced the relevance and need for college preparation among urban or minority students. The literature discussed in this paper was relevant to college preparation programs, which included college admissions advising or similar informative methods.

In the 1960s, findings in a research study indicated that African-American male undergraduate students attending a large mid-western state university were proportionately less adequately prepared for college level work than their white counterparts (Bindman, 1966). Approximately 70 percent of the 154 respondents had pre-college test scores which ranked them below the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile of the specific college of their choice within Midwest State University (Bindman, 1966). The data used to measure college preparation were the pre-college test scores from the American College Test (ACT), or their School and Ability Test (SCAT) and high school ranks of the African-American male undergraduates (Bindman, 1966). The African-American students in this study came from various socio-economic backgrounds (Bindman, 1966).

The findings of this study strongly suggested that poor high school academic training was the basis for inadequate preparation of African-American students for college (Bindman, 1966). Bindman (1966) made additional implications in which high schools and schools board would enhance the African-American students' preparation by examining their practices, procedures, curricula and staffs. He also suggested that subjective measures such as personal interviews about motivation for attending college would benefit African-American students (Bindman, 1966). In addition, Bindman (1966)

believed that post-high school enrichment programs, tutorial services and special summer enrichment sessions, counseling, and encouragement should be given by college staffs for African-American students to seek academic aid from those qualified and willing to assist. In addition, it assisted with student housing arrangements that maximized study conditions and access to academic aids that were organized and encouraged by university administrators (Bindman, 1966).

In the mid-1980s, college participation by minority students had declined following a period of sustained growth (Nora, 1996). African Americans and Hispanics were among those students who exhibited the lowest participation rate along with the highest propensity to *drop out of college* (Nora, 1996). The 1988 National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) provided a database that tracked a national cohort of students from 8<sup>th</sup> grade through college, (NCES, 1996). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) made substantial use of the database for studying access to higher education (NCES, 1996). The model defined the following steps:

- Step 1: Aspirations
- Step 2: Academic preparation
- Step 3: Entrance exams (SAT/ACT)
- Step 4: College admissions applications
- Step 5: Enrollment

The analyses using the model systematically overlooked the idea that finances would also influence enrollment behavior (NCES, 1997).

*College Awareness and Preparation Programs*

College awareness and preparation programs have been implemented across the country, especially within the urban city schools with the intent to increase college access among minorities (Freeman, 1997). These programs for minority youth living in low-income neighborhoods enable students to develop the skills, knowledge, confidence and aspirations they need to enroll in higher education (Oesterreich, 2000). Studies had shown that college preparation programs were most effective when they were of substantial duration and focus on “readiness” rather than “remediation” (Oesterreich, 2000). These programs offered students services and information about college and financial aid as early as possible with the intention of enhancing the educational outcomes for the students (Oesterreich, 2000).

Effective urban college preparation programs consist of the following characteristics:

- Program Duration – with the focus on readiness rather than remediation, begin offering students services and information about college and financial aid as early as possible, beginning no later than the seventh grade and continuing throughout the twelfth grade
- Educational Strategies – provide students with the information and experiences necessary for post-secondary attainment, using a wide variety of teaching strategies to offer students different types of relevant experiences and to ensure learning, including the following: direct teaching, summer enrichment programs, individual and group counseling, tutoring, college visits and courses, peers and adult mentoring, and motivational speakers

- Also pipeline courses to help students gain the knowledge necessary for standardized testing, strategies to improving study skills, test preparation, and setting high expectations
- Social Support – parent involvement, peer support, cultural affirmation, community involvement
- Financial Support – Funding, aid application process, resource procurement (scholarships and grants), admissions process, college visits
- Necessary Competencies – social and cultural capital (the availability of information-sharing networks about college and financial aid), social critique (assist students in understanding the realities of the social and economic hierarchy that impacts college admittance (Osterreich, 2000).

Programs like the Dream Project, founded by a student of the University of Washington, Alula Asfaw, sought students who did not know how to apply for college or for financial aid (Weggel, 2007). Students were often challenged in this area because many of their parents didn't go to college, or because English was not their families' first language (Weggel, 2007). The Dream Project developed in 2004, paired students at the University of Washington with first-generation and low-income students in six Seattle high schools (Weggel, 2007). The college students assisted the high-school students in SAT preparation, college and scholarships applications (Weggel, 2007). This program was unique to other college preparation programs because it was paired with a course on its campus. Students discussed social justice, educational opportunity, and socioeconomic mobility in the classrooms (Weggel, 2007).

Asfaw's goals in creating the program were to promote access and provide support for underprivileged high school students who want to attend college. An integral factor of the program was to teach college students about barriers that limit access to higher education (Weggel, 2007). Essentially, the program was run by students who managed the budget, fundraised, designed and also maintained the website (Weggel, 2007).

Building rapport with the students seemed to be an integral factor in the program's success. The Dream Project encouraged college students to volunteer at the high schools they attended. Many of the college students (mentors) knew the students in high school because they have or continued to play sports with them on the weekend, or had classes with them in the past (Weggel, 2007).

The Dream Project allowed the high students, who were mentored the opportunity to become mentors themselves which drew students to the University of Washington. Although students were accepted to other schools they chose University of Washington in an effort to give back to their own schools, (Weggel, 2007). Dr. Chernicoff, a professor who was actively involved in the program said "the project allows incoming students to be a part of an organized and supportive group that not only meets regularly for class, volunteering, and social activities but also run an important part of the university's outreach beyond campus" (Weggel, 2007).

#### *A "Systems" Approach from a Higher Education Perspective*

Stampen and Hansen (1999) made implications on how to make college more accessible to a wide range of students and how to ensure that they persist in their studies and graduate. They coined "quality function deployment" or QFD, an approach proposed

to analyze how to enhance higher education access and persistence and, simultaneously, improve the nation's education system (Stampen et al, 1999). In essence, the approach was designed to help organizations develop products and services that met important stakeholder needs (Stampen et al, 1999). Awareness of such needs comes from studying the mission-bounded needs of an institution's intended beneficiaries (Stampen et al, 1999). In short, higher education access and attainment were improved, in part because of considerable agreement among politicians and scholars about the major goals of higher education and public needs (Stampen et al, 1999).

Stampen and Hansen's (1999) study concluded that more resources should be invested in improving K-12 collaboration aimed at motivating at-risk youth to succeed academically. In addition, such investments were believed to yield substantial benefits only if participating institutions are committed to increasing their own effectiveness and operating with a reasonable degree of efficiency (Stampen et al, 1999).

### *Aptitude*

Chapman (1981) believed that aptitude influences high school achievement and performance on the aptitude tests that are associated with college entrance examinations. Since the two were used widely by colleges in describing their range of competitive applicants and was a basis for screening applicants, students often self-selected the colleges to which they apply to reflect what they believe the colleges will consider (Chapman, 1981). Colleges often reinforced this by displaying the test scores and class rank of their entering class and sometimes directly discouraging applications from students with low test scores or with poor high school records (Chapman, 1981). Thus, students tend to self-select institutions with enrolled students of similar aptitude as

themselves (Noffi, 1978). Noffi (1978) indicated that the “attractiveness of educational alternatives first increases with the average quality of other students enrolled in them, peaked at a point where average ability is above the ability of the student in question, and then falls with further increases in average quality.” In short, students did not want to be with others whose aptitude was very different than their own (Noffi, 1978).

### *Student Attitudes and Perceptions*

In the effort to increase awareness and participation of higher education by urban students, how do students’ attitudes and perceptions about attending college factor in? Although there was much that researchers know about the process of choosing a college education, there is still much to learn about the decision making process of minority youth (Freeman, 1997). There are many unanswered questions:

“Are the influences that determine the choice to go to college the same for different cultural groups? At what age does the process to choose higher education begin? What role does econometrics really play in the process for groups such as African Americans? What role does secondary school play in the college choice process of underrepresented groups?” (Freeman, 1997).

Across school types and cities, four themes emerged regarding students’ responses about their participation in higher education (Freeman, 1997). The responses were grouped into two broad categories: (1) economic barriers and (2) psychological barriers (Freeman, 1997). Most responses found relating to economic barriers were described as a fear of (a) not having enough money to attend college, (b) not getting a job that pays appropriate to the level of education after completing higher education (Freeman, 1997). In regard to psychological barriers, which appeared to pose even

greater challenges to educators and policy makers, the students' responses stressed three issues: (a) college never being an option, (b) the loss of hope, and lastly (c) the intimidation factor (Freeman, 1997).

Educational expectations and aspirations both influenced students' college plans but operate in different ways (Chapman, 1981). Expectations referred to what a person perceived he/she will have done or will have had accomplished at some future date, which incorporated an estimate of reality, or judgment about their performance (Chapman, 1981). Brookover et al (1967) described aspirations as "wishes or desires expressing an individual's hopes about the future. Chapman (1981) noted that considerable research on the level of educational aspirations and expectations have been related to students' decisions to go to college. For example, Tillery (1973) reported that more high school students who report great confidence in their college ability attended independent private or Catholic universities and this also held true to students who aspired to continue on to graduate study.

### *High School Performance*

High school performance was one of the biggest predictors of students being accepted or rejected to college (Chapman, 1981). Colleges often described the type of student they attracted by those students' high school GPA or class rank (Chapman, 1981). Thus prospective students used this information in deciding whether a particular college would be of interest to them (Noffi et al, 1978). High school performance also ignited responses to the student that may affect college choice (Chapman 1981). Chapman (1981) described that students with good academic records received more encouragement to further their education from teachers, family, and friends. They were also more apt to

receive college advising from the guidance counselor and to receive college scholarships (Chapman and Gill, 1980).

*Parent Involvement and Family Support*

In recent years, along with the extensive research on college access were disputes about strategies states and the federal government used to expand access (St. John et al, 2004). Some analysts argued parents' education was the major determinant of college enrollment (Choy, 2002) and school improvement was the primary means available for government to expand access (King, 1999).

In selecting a college, students were strongly persuaded by the comments and advice of their friends and family (Chapman, 1981). Chapman (1981) described that the influence of these groups operate in three ways: (1) their comments shape the student's expectations of what a particular college is like; (2) they may offer direct advice as to where the students should go to college; and (3) in the case of close friends, where the friends themselves attend college will influence the student's decision.

In several studies conducted at various institutions, first year college students reported that their friends and family members were very influential in their own college decision (Chapman, 1981). In 1966, School to College Opportunities for Post Secondary Education (SCOPE), asked high school seniors the name of the most helpful person whom they had consulted about their college choice, parents ranked the highest with 43 percent. Other rankings were listed below (Chapman, 1981):

- Parents 43 %
- Counselors 22%
- Other students 16%

- Teachers 10%
- College admission officers 9%

As parents appeared to have the greatest influence on students' future plans, students with more extensive educational goals were more worried about discussing with parents which college to attend (Trent & Medsker, 1969). Tillery and Kildegaard (1973) noted that parent' perceptions of the cost or affordability of the college were also major influences to the college decisions of the student. Fitzpatrick and Loening (1996) suggested that parents be their child's greatest allies in the admissions process because they were most likely to help fund the student's college education. Parents should at least know in which direction their child is heading (Fitzpatrick & Loening, 1966).

College preparation programs (also known as early intervention and pre-collegiate outreach programs) were an increasingly common approach to increasing the college enrollment rates of minorities, specifically African Americans and Hispanics along with other groups of students who are underrepresented in higher education (Perna et al, 2005). Thirty nine percent of African American high school graduates were enrolled in college in 1999, while 32 percent of Hispanics enrolled compared to 45 percent of whites in the same age group enrolled in college (Perna et al, 2005). College preparation programs such as the TRIO program established in the 1960s had been supported by the federal government (Perna et al, 2005). Since then the federal government extended its role in 1998 with the establishment of Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness through Undergraduate Preparation also known as GEAR-UP (Perna et al, 2005). State governments, not-for-profit organizations, and individual colleges and universities also sponsor college preparation programs (Perna et al, 2005).

Perna and Titus (2005) determined that college preparation programs, involving parents offer a helpful approach to addressing the continued under-representation of African Americans and Hispanics in higher education.

#### *Socioeconomic Status*

Students from families of different socioeconomic status, or SES, entered higher education at different rates and vary in the types of colleges and universities they attend (Chapman, 1981). Students from homes with higher SES were more likely to attend four-year colleges and universities than students from homes with average or below average SES (Chapman, 1981). Family income which was an important aspect of SES was a critical influence on college choice as it involves institutional cost and financial aid to limit what students believe were their realistic options (Chapman, 1981). Davis and Van Dusen (1975) reported that upper income students seem to prefer private universities, and lower income students were inclined to community colleges, state colleges, and to a lesser degree state universities.

#### *Cost*

Tillery and Kildegaard (1973) suggested that college tuition and other expenses were probably more of an influence on whether or not students attend college than on what particular college a student attends. While most students deciphered which schools they would attend based on their family income, Mundy (1976) claimed there was a lack of relationship between family income and cost of college attended. Mundy (1976) concluded that the “stratifying variable is not the cost of college but social background or family income of the students who attend.”

Despite the previous claims, research suggested that cost was a significant factor in college selection (Chapman, 1981). For example, Davis and Van Dusen (1975) concluded that cost was a determining factor and of why students did not attend the particular institution or college of the institutional type they preferred. At least 70 percent of all college students were receiving financial assistance to help defray the cost and without this assistance, a high percentage of students would be severely restricted in college choice (Ihanfeldt, 1980). In a number of studies, students frequently identified cost as a significant factor in determining a college (Chapman, 1981).

Economists Kane and Avery (2002) at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, created the College Opportunity and Career Help (Coach) Program. Unlike many other programs across the country that aim to raise college aspirations of students from low income families, Coach's goal was to try to determine why low-income students were much less likely to go to college than their more affluent counterparts (Burd, 2002). The Coach program tried to find ways to overcome barriers that keep low income students out of college (Burd, 2002).

### *Financial Aid*

The influence of financial aid in college choice was one of the most widely researched issues in college choice, largely because it had such direct implications for institutional, state, and federal policy (Chapman, 1981). The Higher Education Amendments of 1976 were passed in order to reorganize financial aid to channel funds directly to the student rather than the institution (Chapman, 1981). Therefore identifying the particular influence of financial aid in college choice had been a chief interest of many of research models (Chapman, 1981).

Many financial aid experts and college lobbyists claimed that a primary problem with government student aid programs was that they have never been adequately financed (Burd, 2002). Many officials sought Congress to double spending on Pell Grants, which was the major source of federal aid for low-income college students (Burd, 2002). Kane and Avery (2002) suggested that increasing aid was not the right approach, but instead, claimed that low income students did not understand the steps they need to take to gain admission to college or to receive financial aid (Burd, 2002).

Brian K. Fitzgerald, staff director of the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, which reported to Congress on student-aid issues, thinks differently. He suggested that early-intervention programs were most effective when they guarantee grants to participants who enroll in college (Burd, 2002). Indiana's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars program, for example paid the full tuition for any student who graduated from high school with at least a 2.0 grade-point average and attended a college within the state (Burd, 2002). Fitzgerald opposed the Coach's program and claimed that inadequate grant aid robbed early-intervention programs like Coach of their power (Burd, 2002). "We can't provide low-income students with real opportunity unless we do something about the aid piece of the access equation," said Fitzgerald (Burd, 2002).

Kane and Avery (2002) continued to refute Fitzgerald's notions. The success of the Coach program was a result of better counseling and not increased aid money (Burd, 2002). Students in the program attended college with aid they were unaware of, and it was by discovering that aid, which Kane and Avery (2002) claimed to have made the difference. Their goal was to get policy makers to focus on making the student-aid process more understandable for parents and families (Burd, 2002).

Kane discussed that the financial aid process would be less complex if students and their families would know before they applied how much financial aid they could expect to receive (Burd, 2002). This would be possible if Congress permitted the Education Department to discontinue to factor family's assets when determining a student's need (Burd, 2002). Instead, Kane described that that need would be based on two characteristics: family income and family size (Burd, 2002).

The Coach program made a significant impact in the enrollment process at the Dorchester High School in Boston, MA. Before the Coach program was implemented, an average of 60 percent of seniors enrolled in post-secondary education programs immediately after graduating (Burd, 2002). The number increased to 77 percent of seniors enrolling in college or vocational-education programs within the first year of its launch (Burd, 2002).

#### *What School is Right for You?*

In efforts to assist students in the college admissions process, U.S. News asked two veteran high school counselors, Bonnie Fitzpatrick and Marge Loening to discuss their collective 47 years of experience to address questions that are often on the minds of prospective applicants and their families (Fitzpatrick & Loening, 1996). Here are a few of the questions typically asked by college bound students that were discussed by Fitzpatrick and Loening (1966) are mentioned below:

- How do I begin? Students should start by taking a personal inventory asking themselves questions such as (Fitzpatrick and Loening, 1996): What kind of students do I want around me? What do I expect to get out of the college experience? Then students should take an academic inventory which entails an

unweighted GPA in academic courses, the best combined SAT and ACT scores. If a high school ranks students, they should know where they stand among their peers. Also students should be able to map out their interests, academic profile and goals, which will enable them to focus as they develop a list of potential colleges (Fitzpatrick & Loening, 1996).

- How do I devise that list? Students should think very specifically about the geographic location of schools, the kind of setting that appeals to them, the nature of social life they desire, the course offerings they want (Fitzpatrick & Loening, 1996). Is religious affiliation a factor? Is the student interested in single sex or coed institutions? Is cost a factor in their selection process? (Fitzpatrick & Loening, 1966).
- Should I trust my counselor to come up with a list of schools for me? Fitzpatrick and Loening (1996) suggested that even if a student develops their own list initially, high school counselors will often be able to help students narrow it down by identifying the best schools and realistic options.
- If I have narrowed my list to six to eight colleges, what should I do next? Students should visit as many schools as they can and try to obtain a campus interview so they can learn as much as possible. Students should seek to talk to a former student from their high school, a friend, relative, or recent graduate from one of their choices (Fitzpatrick and Loening, 1996).
- How many colleges should I apply to? If students choose wisely, five or six schools should be enough, Fitzpatrick and Loening (1996) claim. Typically

students apply to one or two dream colleges, and then find two or three others where they would be satisfied.

- Are certain extracurricular activities favored by highly selective colleges? Fitzpatrick and Loening (1996) suggested that students let their interests be their guide. In other words, students should get involved in something they feel passionate about. Commitment, leadership, and success in what students do are what matters most colleges (Fitzpatrick & Loening, 1996).

### *Counseling First-Generation Students*

A recent article, found on the CollegeBoard website discussed eight strategies for counseling first generation students about college (CollegeBoard, 2008). First-generation students or those who would be in the first generation of their families to go to college can be challenging and yet rewarding (CollegeBoard, 2008). CollegeBoard (2008) briefed on what counselors can do to assist and guide first-generation students with particular needs.

First-generation students typically come from families with low incomes, or middle-class families without a college-going tradition (CollegeBoard, 2008). Some students have parents who are supportive of their plans for higher education, while others are under family pressure to enter the workforce right after school (CollegeBoard, 2008). Many times these students don't know what their options are regarding higher education, have fears about attending college, and have misconceptions about college and its costs (CollegeBoard, 2008).

Here were the CollegeBoard's (2008) strategies for working with first-generation students that can be helpful to school counselors:

1. Reach out early. Talk to these students about taking AP and honor courses to prepare for college level work. Make sure they take a solid course load that will meet the requirements for college admission- even if they are not yet sure if they want to attend. Encourage them to take PSAT in 10<sup>th</sup> grade.
2. Extend the scope of your counsel; cover the basics of self-assessment, college, and careers. First generation students may never have been encouraged to assess their talents and weaknesses with a view toward higher education. They are also likely to have slim knowledge of what educational requirements are needed for certain professions.
3. Involve the family. Working successfully with the families of first-generation students may take different strategies. You will likely meet a wide range of attitudes about college (from supportive to obstructive) and may have to explain college basics or make the case for the value of higher education.
4. Give special help with college search and selection. Discuss different types of colleges, preconceptions about not being able to afford college, fixation on “name” colleges, encourage students to visit colleges and college fairs, etc.
5. Give special help with college applications. First-generation students from families with low incomes may qualify for waivers of test fees and of college application fees. Educate students about application deadlines. If they file paper forms, stress the importance of neatness and of making copies of all parts of an application, remind them to use their full name consistently, review forms with students before sending them to colleges.

6. Give special help with financial aid applications and packages. Families unfamiliar with college financing are easy targets for scams. Let students and families know that they should not pay anyone to help them find scholarships, fill out the FAFSA, or handle any other aspect of the financial aid process.
7. Explain what college will be like. According to the book *New Directions for Community College*, first generation students report being challenged by their lack of experience with time management and money management; by the economic realities of college, and by the impersonal nature of institutions of higher learning (Richardson and Skinner, 1992)
8. Work with other organizations. Consider developing college-awareness events with the local middle schools. Let students know that they can take classes at local community colleges and earn both high school and college credit. Develop relationships with community groups and outreach organizations that provide academic help to young people. Research programs for first-generation and other “at-risk” students such as AVID, CollegeEd, Talent Search, Upward Bound, Urban League, and summer bridge programs (CollegeBoard, 2008).

### *College Admissions Process*

The CollegeBoard published the *College Admissions Process: A “How To” for GEAR UP Professionals* (Petraitis et al, 2003). In addition to the guide, professionals were provided two days of technical assistance training sessions with helpful information on guidance skills to assist students on the road to college (Petraitis et al, 2003).

Counselors and other professionals learned from other experts in the fields of college admissions, financial aid, and school counseling (Petraitis et al, 2003).

The manual provided vital information on the following topics such as:

- (1) Writing and the College Admissions Process
- (2) The Application,
- (3) Financial Aid
- (4) How to Choose the Right College
- (5) The College Transition
- (6) and lastly Exam Readiness (Petraitis et al, 2003).

Counselors should be abreast of the components of the college admissions process to effectively educate students and parents in what could potentially be a time consuming and strenuous process. In the following section, the researcher discussed the implementation of an eight-session model which can be used to assist counselors in college admissions advising.

#### Method

This study examined the knowledge of the college admission process among urban students, or those living in low-income neighborhoods. The purpose of the study was to increase urban high school students' knowledge of the college selection process and help them to begin exploring different colleges. This study also developed a model to assist high school counselors in college admissions advising. Also, the intention of this strategy was to help students determine what college(s) and academic program(s) they were interested in prior to admission. The following research question was examined:

1. Will urban high school students' knowledge of the college admission process increase after an 8-session psychoeducational intervention?

#### *Participants*

The participants were comprised of seven male students and one female student. Four of the participants were of African-American descent and the remaining four were of Hispanic descent.

The participants attended a public high school, grades 9-12, located in the Northeastern region of the United States, with a population of 430 students. Approximately 43 percent of the students are eligible for free lunch while 7 percent are eligible for reduced lunch (Public School Review, 2008). The following data detail significant demographics of the high school and its area location and demonstrate the relevance of this study (Public School Review, 2008).

Table 1

## Student and Faculty Ratios

Total Students	430 students	
% Male / % Female	41% / 59%	
Total Classroom Teachers	39 teachers	
Teacher : Student Ratio	(This School) 1:11	(State Average) 1:14

The table depicts the student body, which consisted of 41 percent of males and 59 percent of females. The student ratio was 1 teacher to 11 students (Public School Review, 2008).

Table 2

## Student Demographics and State School Average

<i>Students by Ethnicity</i>	This School	( State) School Average
% American Indian	n/a	1%
% Asian	n/a	6%
% Hispanic	14%	20%
% Black	79%	20%
% White	7%	55%

Table 2 depicts the student demographics by ethnicity. There is a large population of Black students with 79 percent. Hispanics make up 14 percent of the student population while whites make up 7 percent (Public School Review, 2008).

Table 3

District Profile

	This School's Agency	(State) District Average
Number of Schools Managed	60	3
Number of Students Managed	33,938 students	<i>1,633 students</i>
District Total Revenue	\$583,593,000	<i>\$23,223,000</i>
District Expenditure	\$555,539,000	<i>\$23,302,000</i>
District Revenue / Student	\$17,196	<i>\$14,476</i>
District Expenditure / Student	\$16,369	<i>\$14,358</i>
District Graduation Rates	49%	<i>93%</i>

Table 3 details significant information regarding the school district's profile compared to its state's district average. Approximately 49 percent of the students in this school graduate compared to its state district average of 93 percent (Public School Review, 2008).

Table 4

City School Location and State Demographics

	School	State Average
Population (Approximate)	29,187 people	<i>18,208,943 people</i>
% (age 25+) w/College Degree	20%	<i>32%</i>
Population Average Age	35 years old	<i>35.9 years old</i>
Average Household size	2.6 persons	<i>2.6 persons</i>
Median Household Income	\$37,707	<i>\$41,961</i>
Avg. # of Rooms in Household	5.6 rooms	<i>4.6 rooms</i>
Median Age of Housing Structure	47 years old	<i>56 years old</i>

Table 4 illustrates the demographics of the population of which the school is located. It was integral to mention that only 20 percent of those living in the area who are 25 years of age or older have a college degree (Public School Review, 2008).

### *Instrument*

A questionnaire was designed by the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of a 5 point scale which asked respondents to determine how much they knew about factors in the college admissions process. The scale rating was as follows: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Not Sure; 4 = Agree; and 5 = Strongly Agree. The questionnaire also asked respondents their perception of school and professional (counselors, teachers) and familial (parents, relatives) assistance as it pertained to college awareness.

### *Procedure*

The study was conducted in an advisory class, which was similar to a study hall period that enabled students to receive academic assistance and build personal relationships with their assigned teacher in a 45-minute period once a week while school is in session. Students did not receive any credit towards graduation but the advisory period was a scheduling requirement. The sessions were held on Tuesday from 7:25am-8:10am (first period) for eight consecutive weeks.

The researcher met with the students four weeks prior to the start of the experiment and explained the purpose of the study to the class. She shared her own experience in her former years in search for a college. The participants were given the option to take a pass to the library in the event that they did not want to participate in any of the class sessions. Each of the eight students assigned in the advisement class displayed an interest in participating in the study. They were sent both parent (Appendix

A) and student consent (Appendix B) forms upon participation of the eight sessions. Most of the sessions were held in the classroom while other sessions were conducted in the computer lab for access to the internet. Following each session, the PI recorded notes in a logbook and locked it in a file cabinet. The model below was developed to assist high school counselors in college admissions advising:

*Session 1.*

The participants were seated in normal classroom style (row by row). The researcher asked the students to complete a questionnaire (Appendix B). The participants were asked to put their school ID number on the top of the page instead of their names to protect anonymity and confidentiality. Once the questionnaires were completed, the researcher collected and placed them in a manila folder which was stored in a locked file cabinet. The researcher debriefed with the participants and addressed any questions or concerns.

*Session 2.*

The researcher further discussed various college majors. The participants were seated in the computer lab for this session. They were asked to complete the registration and questionnaire (Appendix C) found on the MyMajors.com (2007) website. Upon completion of the questionnaire (Appendix C), the program made 5 majors recommendations according to each participant's academic strengths/interests, and extra-curricular interests. The participants were then asked to print out their results. The researcher debriefed with the participants and addressed any questions or concerns.

*Internet Assessment Tools.*

Some on-line internet tools provided students with fast and easy to use browsers in helping to determine a college major for free. These on-line methods were also more cost-efficient especially for schools which have difficulties trying to locate funds for additional resources. By using the school's computer lab with internet access, the cost and time spent ordering and purchasing college handbooks can be defrayed. The online assessment tool found on MyMajors.com (2007) allowed students to take a short interview and receive five majors matching their interest and academic experience. An advisement report was obtained by a user which summarized his/her inputs and offered ten ranked major recommendations (<http://mymajors.com/index.html>, 2007).

### *Session 3.*

The participants were seated in the classroom for this session. The researcher provided the participants with one college majors handbook and several college handbooks. They were asked to search for one or two colleges that offer a program or major for their career interests. The participants were asked to fill in a "College Blueprint" form (Appendix E) which listed the significant characteristics of that college. The researcher debriefed with the participants and addressed questions or concerns.

### *College Handbooks.*

College handbooks like the College Board College Handbook (2001) which was one of the sources used in this session, gives students the most complete and trusted source of college facts in print. It is often referred to as "the bible" of college directories where students can get in-depth information on:

- College admission policies, academic requirements, deadlines, and acceptance rates
- SAT and ACT score ranges
- Sports, activities, and student services
- Special academic programs
- Internet addresses (2001).

*Session 4.*

The participants were seated in the computer lab for this session. They were asked to choose 3 majors and list 3 possible careers of interest to them that one can obtain from that major. The participants were asked to use the Majors to Career Converter (Appendix F) found on the MonsterTrak (2007) website. The participants were then asked to record their findings on a handout (Appendix F). The researcher debriefed with the participants and addressed questions or concerns.

*Majors to Careers.*

According to the Mental Measurements Yearbook (2008), the theory behind the College Major Interest Inventory or CMII is that “students will more likely persist in college if they take courses that match their academic attitudes, interests, values, and goals.” This is relevant in this study because the CMII focuses on the “educational” rather than the “vocational” objectives of students (MMY, 2008). Developers, Whetstone and Taylor (1990) developed the CMII for students from grade 10 through college sophomores. The CMII compared student educational interest and patterns with students between the ages of the 17-19 who resided in Colorado (MMY, 2008). These students

had declared an academic major, completed at least half their academic course work, and attained a passing GPA (MMY, 2008).

*Session 5.*

The researcher discussed the importance of having a progressive GPA and taking the SAT for college admission. The researcher provided the students with a hand-out on fast facts about the SAT, ACT, and PSAT (Appendix G). The researcher informed the students on upcoming SAT dates and how they can register to take it. The researcher debriefed with the participants and addressed questions or concerns.

*GPA and SAT.*

Betts and Morell (1999) stated that for many universities, high school GPA and scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) play an important role in admission decisions. The SAT and high school grades are the most accurate predictors of first year college performance (Kobrin et al, 2002). Both the measures have a high multiple correlation of .7 with first-year college grades (Kobrin et al, 2002). High school grades typically were found to be slightly better predictors of college grades, while SAT scores appended to the prediction representing an increment of nearly .10 to the correlation (Camara and Echternacht, 2000).

Many colleges continue to thoroughly state their entrance requirements in terms of high school units, while others use a language purposely phrased to remove the emphasis from the unit requirement (Gladfelter, 1937). Gladfelter (1937) described “units” as a “subject taken for one year of not less than thirty-six weeks, in class periods of a

minimum of forty minutes per day during five days a week. Two hours of laboratory work are to count for one hour of classroom work.”

#### *Session 6.*

The researcher discussed scholarships and financial aid information and provided handouts (Appendices H & I) to the students. The researcher provided each student with a FAFSA form and briefly discussed each section of the form. The researcher debriefed with students and addressed questions or concerns.

#### *Financial Aid.*

CollegeBoard (2008) stated that “financial aid makes up the difference between what costs and what a family can afford to pay.” It was estimated that more 50 percent of students enrolled in college receive some financial aid. There were generally three types of financial aid: (1) Loans that have to be repaid, (2) Grants and scholarships that don’t have to be repaid, (3) Employment programs, such as work-study, that allow students to earn money and gain work experience while still in school ([www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com), 2008). Other helpful resources such as “Funding Education Beyond High School: The Guide to Federal Student Aid” and “Federal Student Aid Handbook” are free publications and can be found in school counseling offices or local libraries ([www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com), 2008). There were also a number of financial aid websites that can be helpful to both parents and students with concerns or questions about financial aid. Here were some helpful sites:

- <http://www.students.gov/> - the U.S. government's comprehensive guide to educational planning, financial aid, career development, military service, and budgeting for students)
- [www.ed.gov/finaid/](http://www.ed.gov/finaid/) - administered by the U.S. Department of Education and contains information regarding major student aid programs, including Pell Grants and Stafford Loans.
- <http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/> - official U.S. Department of Education site which features information on federal student aid programs including student Federal Stafford Loans and parent PLUS Loans.
- <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/> - Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) which takes students line-by-line through the financial aid filing process ([www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com), 2008).

Every student applying for financial aid must submit the FAFSA. The application can be filed on paper or electronically, which is the recommended option for a faster and easier process. For students who plan to file online, a personal identification number (PIN) will be required ([www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com), 2008). Preparing a list of documents needed for students to have prior to filling the FAFSA can be very helpful and also expedite the process. The list should include the following:

- Social security number (student's and parents')
- Federal income tax returns
- W-2 forms, current bank statements

- Records of untaxed income (such as welfare benefits, social security, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families)
- Records of any stocks, bonds, or other investments ([www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com), 2008).

### *Scholarships.*

While most student aid for may come from financial aid through loans and grants, nearly 3 billion dollars in scholarships is available annually for college (CollegeBoard, 2008). Searching for scholarships on the internet or library can be an overwhelming process for students and their families. It is integral for students to a “personal inventory” of themselves which should include personal information such as year in school, citizenship, state of residence, religion, ethnic background, disability, military status, employer (and parents’ employers) and membership organizations (CollegeBoard, 2008) when looking for scholarships. By writing down academic interests, extracurricular activities, and career interests, students will save time and effort in finding a good fit in scholarship opportunities ([www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com), 2008).

### *Session 7.*

The researcher discussed the student involvement in extracurricular activities and athletics as it pertains to college admissions. The students were asked to share their hobbies/interests and career interests, if known. The researcher debriefed with students and addressed any questions or concerns.

### *Extracurricular Activities and Academic Achievement.*

There had been objections made against extracurricular activities in that students who actively engage in many activities make low grades in their regular academic subjects

(Mehus, 1932). College admission officers are seemingly aware of this dilemma and maybe sympathetic but students must be aware that encompassing a list of activities will not compensate for mediocre grades in high school (Princeton Review, 2008). However colleges do pay attention to life both inside and outside the classroom (College Board, 2008). Undoubtedly academics are primary precursors in college admissions, extracurricular activities reveal a great deal about a student (College Board, 2008).

It was integral for students to know that quantity was less important than quality and commitment in choosing extracurricular activities. Colleges were not impressed by students with one of every activity offered at their high school (Princeton Review, 2008). Colleges search for students who rise to leadership position in exciting activities (Princeton Review, 2008). Consequently, all extracurricular activities were not equally impressive (Princeton Review, 2008). Ultimately, students need to be involved in activities that they enjoy and are good at, but need to be aware that college admission officers tend to look favorably on students who are involved in any of the following activities:

- Student newspaper, especially in leadership positions
- Student government, especially if you hold an executive office
- Choir or orchestra, especially if you are a soloist or a first-chair
- Varsity sports, particularly if you are a captain or an all-star of some kind
- Leadership positions with substantial time commitment in organizations or community service activities
- Activities with a special significance at your school or in your community

- Anything unusual that took a lot of time and effort, such as organizing a major community service project, founding a new club at school and seeing it through, or being a volunteer firefighter
- All-state anything (Princeton Review, 2008).

### *Session 8.*

The researcher discussed the overall qualities/characteristics that colleges look for in students and submitted a hand-out (Appendix J) to each student. The researcher asked the participants to complete another questionnaire (Appendix D) similar to the one they completed in the first session. The researcher thanked the students for their participation in the study and offered them goodie bags filled with treats and snacks. The researcher debriefed with students and addressed questions or concerns.

### *Overall Qualities and Characteristics.*

In an article, found on the Family Education (2008) website, there were ten things that colleges look for in a high school student:

1. A high school curriculum that challenges the student. Academically successful students should include several Honors and Advanced Placement classes.
2. Grades that represent strong effort and an upward trend. Grades should show an upward trend over the years. However, slightly lower grades in a rigorous program are preferred to all A's in less challenging coursework.
3. Solid scores on standardized tests (SAT, ACT). These should be consistent with high school performance.

4. Passionate involvement in a few activities, demonstrating leadership and initiative. Depth, not breadth, of experience is important.
5. Community service showing evidence of being a “contributor.” Activities should demonstrate concern for the other people and a global view.
6. Work or out-of-school experiences (including summer activities) that illustrate responsibility, dedication, and development of areas of interest. A job or other meaningful use of free time can demonstrate maturity.
7. A well-written essay that provides insight into the student’s unique personality, values, and goals. The application essay should be thoughtful and highly personal. It should demonstrate careful and well-constructed writing.
8. Letters of recommendation from teachers and guidance counselors that give evidence of integrity, special skill, and positive character traits. Students should request recommendations from teachers who respect their work in an academic discipline.
9. Supplementary recommendations by adults who have had significant direct contact with the student. Letters from coaches or supervisors in long-term work or volunteer activities are valuable; however, recommendations from casual acquaintances or family friends, even if they are well known, are rarely given much weight.
10. Anything special that makes the student stand out from the rest of the applicants! Include honors, awards, evidence of unusual talent or experience, or anything else that makes the student unique. Overall, colleges are seeking students who will be

active contributing members of the student body

(<http://school.familyeducation.com/>).

### *Statistical Design*

Percentages were calculated for each of the questions asked in the questionnaires, both the pre-test and post-test. A table was compiled to report the percentage of responses for each question. The table was used to identify an increase in knowledge of factors that consist of the college admissions process. Within the table was a column that indicated the positive or negative differentials between the pre and post tests, or questionnaires.

### Results

The main instruments used were questionnaires (Appendices C & D) which were distributed to each student in the first session and then again in the final eighth session. The questionnaires were used to record increments of change in urban students' knowledge of the college admissions process. The eight-session model was implemented in this study to demonstrate how school counselors can assist urban students in college admissions advising.

The figure below reflects the items, (questions listed on the surveys) and the pre-test mean and post-test mean of the participants who completed the study. A fourth column reflects the change (increase or decrease) from the pre and post tests. The data was collected from four of the eight students who participated in the study.

Figure 1. Student Responses to Questionnaire of College Admissions Process

<i>Item (Question #)</i>	<i>Pre-test (Mean)</i>	<i>Post-test (Mean)</i>	$\Delta$ <i>(Increment of change)</i>
Item 1 – <i>Have a favorite subject in school</i>	3.00	4.50	+1.50
Item 2 - <i>Want to attend college</i>	4.25	4.50	+0.25
Item 3 – <i>Have a specific career interest</i>	4.50	4.50	0
Item 4 - <i>Need H.S. Diploma</i>	4.00	5.00	+1.00
Item 5 - <i>Need college degree</i>	3.25	4.00	+0.75
Item 6 - <i>Participate in activities</i>	3.25	4.25	+1.00
Item 7 - <i>I am a leader</i>	3.00	3.75	+0.75
Item 8 - <i>Need attention from teachers</i>	1.75	2.50	+0.75
Item 9 - <i>Get things done on my own</i>	4.00	3.75	-0.25
Item 10 - <i>Need family support</i>	3.75	4.25	+0.50
Item 11 - <i>Receive family support</i>	3.75	4.25	+0.50
Item 12 - <i>I make friends easily</i>	3.00	3.75	+0.75
Item 13 - <i>College close to home</i>	2.50	3.00	+0.50
Item 14 - <i>College in this city</i>	2.25	4.00	+1.75
Item 15 - <i>College in this state</i>	3.50	4.00	+0.50
Item 16 - <i>College in other state</i>	2.75	3.50	+0.75
Item 17 - <i>Attend a small college</i>	1.75	2.25	+0.50
Item 18 - <i>Attend a medium college</i>	2.00	2.25	+0.25
Item 19 - <i>Want to attend a large college</i>	4.00	3.50	-0.50
Item 20 - <i>Want to attend a public college</i>	3.50	4.00	+0.50
Item 21 - <i>Want to attend a private college</i>	2.00	2.50	+0.50
Item 22 - <i>Know which college want to attend</i>	2.25	4.25	+2.00
Item 23 - <i>Must send application for admission</i>	3.50	4.25	+0.75
Item 24 - <i>May need to take SAT or ACT</i>	4.00	4.00	0
Item 25 - <i>May need to write an essay</i>	3.50	4.00	+0.50
Item 26 - <i>I earn good grades</i>	3.50	4.25	+0.75
Item 27 - <i>Will need good grades for college</i>	4.50	4.50	0
Item 28 - <i>College isn't for someone like me</i>	2.00	1.50	-0.50
Item 29 - <i>Know what colleges require</i>	2.75	4.25	+1.50
Item 30 - <i>Know what I want to major in</i>	3.50	4.25	+0.75
Item 31 - <i>Know how to apply for financial aid</i>	2.25	3.25	+1.00
Item 32 - <i>Know how to apply for scholarships</i>	2.50	3.50	+1.00
Item 33 - <i>Talk to teachers about college</i>	3.75	4.50	+0.75
Item 34 - <i>Talk to family about college</i>	4.00	4.25	+0.25
Item 35 - <i>Talk to friends about college</i>	3.00	4.00	+1.00
Item 36 - <i>Talk to counselor about college</i>	2.50	2.50	0
Item 37 - <i>Want help in searching for colleges</i>	3.50	4.00	+0.50
Item 38 - <i>I can afford to go to college</i>	3.00	3.25	+0.25
Item 39 - <i>Dad attended college</i>	1.75	n/a	n/a
Item 40 - <i>Mom attended college</i>	1.75	n/a	n/a
Item 41 - <i>Survey is too long</i>	4.00	n/a	n/a
Item 42 – <i>Overall program was helpful</i>	n/a	5.00	n/a

Figure 1 depicts the students average responses based on a five point scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Not Sure, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree. The following reflect the findings in Figure 1:

- Item 1 referred to “I have a favorite subject in school”. On average students responded with “Not Sure” in the pre-test and indicated “Agree” in the pos-test.
- Item 4 referred to “I will need a high school diploma before I can start my career.” On average students responded with “Agree” in the pre-test to “Strongly Agree” in the post-test.
- Item 6 referred to “I participate or will participate in extra-curricular activities.” On average students responded with “Not Sure” in the pre-test and indicated “Agree” in the post-test.
- Item 9 referred to “I usually get things done on my own.” On average students responded with “Agree” in the pre-test but indicated “Not Sure” by the post-test.
- Item 14 referred to “I would like to attend a college in this city.” On average students responded with “Disagree” in the pre-test and “Agree” by the post-test.
- Item 19 referred to “I would like to attend a large college.” On average students responded with “Agree” in the pre-test but indicated “Not Sure” by the post-test.
- Item 22 referred to “I know which college I would like to attend.” On average students responded with “Disagree” in the pre-test and indicated “Agree” by the post-test.
- Item 28 referred to “I don’t believe college is for someone like me.” On average students responded with “Disagree” in the pre-test to “Strongly Disagree” in the post-test.

- Item 29 referred to “I know what most colleges require from students.” On average students responded with “Disagree” in the pre-test to “Agree” in the post-test.
- Item 30 and 31 referred to students’ knowledge of how to apply for financial aid and scholarships. On average students responded with “Disagree” in the pre-test to “Not Sure” in the post-test.
- Item 35 referred to “I talk to my friends about college.” On average students responded with “Not Sure” in the pre-test to “Agree” by the post-test.

Overall, there data shows significant increases of students’ self-perception of their knowledge pertaining to the college admissions process from the pre-test to the post-test. Items such as 3 “I have a specific career interest”, 24 “I may need to take the SAT or ACT before entering college”, and 36 “I talk to my counselor about college” showed no significant changes each with the responses: “Agree”, “Agree”, and “Disagree”, respectively.

### Discussion

This study was conducted to improve urban high school student’s knowledge of the college admissions process. To do this, a questionnaire was distributed to each of the eight participants at the high school. In addition, an eight-session group was implemented to discuss topics such as academic majors, types of colleges, careers, grades and GPA, standardized test requirements, financial aid, scholarships, and overall qualities / characteristics colleges look for in students. The purpose of this study was to help students begin exploring colleges and consider attending college as an option after high school. These students typically did not have a clear understanding of what was required

of students from a college admissions perspective. The purpose of this study was to help students learn more about academic majors, careers, grades, GPA and SAT requirements, financial aid and scholarships. Also, the study demonstrated how school counselors can assist urban students in the process by implementing an eight-session college admissions advisory group.

### *Interpretation of Findings*

Overall, urban students' increased knowledge of the college admissions process was demonstrated. Figure 1 demonstrated significant increases in urban students' responses to the college admissions process. It also depicted students' perceptions of their own ability and aspiration to attend college as well as their perception of the support they solicit and receive in the college admissions process.

. Items 33-36 referred to with whom do students discuss their aspirations to attend college. Chapman (1981) stated that first year college students reported that their friends and family members were very influential in their own college decision. The students in this study responded with "Agree" to Item 34 "I talk to my family about college" in the pre and post tests, which demonstrated "family" as the leading individuals who the students discussed college with. The students responded with "Not Sure" in the pre-test to "Agree" in the post-test to Item 35 "I talk to my friends about college." Alarming, students responded with "Disagree" to Item 36 "I talk to my counselor about college" in both the pre and post-tests. This may be because most high school students often do not know or will not meet with their counselor prior to their senior year.

Students responded with "Not Sure" to Item 38 referred to "I can afford to go to college" in both the pre and post tests. Tillery and Kildegaard (1973) believed that

college tuition and other expenses were probably more of an influence on whether or not students attend college than on what particular college a student attends. Chapman (1981) suggested that family income, a vital factor of socioeconomic status, was a critical influence on college choice as it involved the institutional cost and financial aid. It is assumed that even with the education of financial aid, the students still did not believe that they could afford to attend college. Item 31 referred to “I know how to apply for financial aid” with student responses of “Disagree” in the pre-test to “Not Sure” in the post-test. Burd (2002) suggested that low-income students often do not understand the steps they need to receive financial aid.

Item 38 and 39 referred to “My father attended college” and “My mother attended college”, respectively. The student responses were “Strongly Disagree.” CollegeBoard (2008) described these types of students as “first-generation students”, or students from low to middle income families without a “college-going” tradition. CollegeBoard (2008) also suggested that counselors cover the basics of self-assessment, college and careers when working with first-generation students. The implications are that these students may have never been encouraged enough to assess their talents and weaknesses with a view toward higher education. It is conducive for the counselor to be able to motivate and encourage these students during the college admissions process.

#### *Recommendations for Further Research*

Some future recommendations for further research would be to implement more in-depth discussion about the importance of taking advanced placement courses. This was a significant limitation for this study because the high school offered no AP courses, which in itself was a huge disadvantage for those students. Also, students may benefit

from in-depth discussion on the importance of writing college admission essays and probably attending workshops on essay structure and development.

The question of whether to attend a 2-year or 4-year college was asked throughout the course of the study. Students were not sure of which route would be advantageous and / or realistic to their needs. Although, this topic was not part of planned discussion, the researcher had to improvise and tackle many of the questions asked dealing with the stigma of attending community colleges versus attending a more prestigious college or university. Counselors should be aware that when working with urban students this topic was brought up regularly.

Further discussion, more detail-specific hand-outs, and perhaps navigating online applications would have been helpful to the students learning the financial aid process and scholarship searches. Some of the students were still not sure of how to go about these processes.

The online assessment tools such as MyMajors.com (2007) and MonsterTrak Major to Career Converters (2007) were not full-proof. Although these tools were quick and easy to use, they did not always assess student's needs /interests or majors, in this case accurately. For example, a student who wanted to major in auto mechanics did not find a major listed nor did the assessment tool used in MyMajors.com (2007) ask questions pertaining to automotive interests. Counselors should keep that in mind when using similar tools and should also be prepared to alert students that these tools will not be 100% accurate.

The time of day also made a significant impact on the study. Because the study was performed during the first period (7:24am) of the school day, some students were

often absent or tardy. This was a disadvantage because they were not able to learn the information that was provided. Also, some students were very lethargic and complained of being “exhausted” or “tired”. It is integral for the counselor be able to consider these factors when implementing a program like this in the future. Also, counselors who display enthusiasm and creativity can help to keep students alert.

Another recommendation that would deem worthwhile would be to take the participating students on a college tour. This may help to capitalize on the things they have learned and also make college access a closer step in becoming reality for them.

### *Conclusion*

This study demonstrated a strategy that counselors can use when working with high school students. School counselors can conduct seminars or assemblies, classroom presentations and workshops on the college admissions process to help students understand the process. If counselors perform these strategies with younger students it may help to create access to higher education. Students who gain an understanding of the process and requirements may be apt to taking the necessary steps to ensure college entrance.

Finally, students in the study were more engaged, when motivated or encouraged. It was helpful for the students’ to share specific interests, fears, perceptions and aspirations as it pertained to college admission. Knowing students’ interests and tying that into a college or academic program helped to keep them engaged in discussions. Providing or teaching information is not enough, urban students need to be motivated, encouraged and in some cases challenged in their irrational beliefs and perceptions centered on college admission.

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Appendix A

Parent Consent Form

**Parent Consent Form**

This form describes a research study being conducted with [Participating School] students in their advisement class and will examine their knowledge of the college selection process. The research is being conducted by a graduate student at [college withheld]. The research project is being conducted to fulfill a graduation course requirement. You are being asked to give permission for your son or daughter to participate in this research. Your child will be asked to complete 2 surveys and participate in an 8 week program that will provide your child with necessary information on the following: college majors/programs, scholarships, financial aid, and general admission requirements. Any information that your child gives in this study remains confidential and will be known only to the primary researcher. Except for this consent form, all questionnaires will be given a code number and your child's name will not be on them. A master list of the students' names and ID numbers will be kept in the researcher's file cabinet. Upon completion of this research, all student records will be shredded and discarded.

The possible benefit from being in this study could be that information will be learned and allow professionals to better help students in the college decision making process.

There are minimal risks in this study. A possible risk of being in this study is the feeling that some questions asked are of a personal nature. Your child does not have to answer any questions they do not want to.

If you have any questions during this study you may call [Researcher] at [phone withheld].

Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary and at any point, he/she can withdraw from the study. If you wish to participate, and you agree with the statement below, please sign in the space provided.

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to have my child \_\_\_\_\_ participate.

I am 18 years or older: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

If you have any questions you may contact:

[Name of Researcher]

[Contact Information]

Appendix B

Student Consent Form

**Student Consent Form**

This form describes a research study being conducted with [Participating School] students in their advisement class and will examine their knowledge of the college selection process. The research is being conducted by a graduate student at [Institution withheld]. The research project is being conducted to fulfill a graduation course requirement. You are being asked to participate in this research. You will be asked to complete 2 surveys and participate in a 10 week program that will provide you with necessary information on the following: college majors/programs, scholarships, financial aid, and general admission requirements. Any information that you give in this study remains confidential and will be known only to the primary researcher. Except for this consent form, all questionnaires will be given a code number and your name will not be on them. A master list of the students' names and ID numbers will be kept in the researcher's file cabinet. Upon completion of this research, all student records will be shredded and discarded.

The possible benefit from being in this study could be that information will be learned and allow professionals to better help students in the college decision making process.

There are minimal risks in this study. A possible risk of being in this study is the feeling that some questions asked are of a personal nature. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to.

If you have any questions during this study you may call [Researcher] at [Phone Number]

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and at any point, you can withdraw from the study. If you wish to participate, and agree with the statement below, please sign in the space provided. Remember, you may change your mind at any point and withdraw from the study. You can refuse to participate even if your parent/guardian gives permission for you to participate.

I understand the information provided in this form and agree to participate in this project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Birth date of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of a witness 18 years of age or older

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

If you have any questions you may contact:

Primary Researcher:

[Researcher Name/ Contact Information]

Appendix C

Questionnaire (Pre-test)

Page 1

ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Student Survey**

Read each statement carefully. Please circle one choice for each statement below.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree			
1. I have a favorite subject in school.			1	2	3	4	5
2. I would like to attend college.			1	2	3	4	5
3. I know what I would like to do for a career.			1	2	3	4	5
4. I will need a high school diploma before I can start my career.			1	2	3	4	5
5. I will need a college degree before I can start my career.			1	2	3	4	5
6. I participate or will participate in extracurricular activities.			1	2	3	4	5
7. I am a leader.			1	2	3	4	5
8. I need personal attention from teachers.			1	2	3	4	5
9. I usually get things done on my own.			1	2	3	4	5
10. I need close support from my family.			1	2	3	4	5
11. I receive close support from my family.			1	2	3	4	5
12. I make friends easily.			1	2	3	4	5
13. I would like to attend a college close to home.			1	2	3	4	5
14. I would like to attend a college in this city.			1	2	3	4	5
15. I would like to attend a college in this state.			1	2	3	4	5
16. I would like to attend a college in another state.			1	2	3	4	5
17. I would like to attend a small sized college.			1	2	3	4	5
18. I would like to attend a medium sized college.			1	2	3	4	5
19. I would like to attend a large sized college.			1	2	3	4	5
20. I would like to attend a public college.			1	2	3	4	5

(turn over)



Appendix D

Questionnaire (Post-test)

Page 1

ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Student Survey**

Read each statement carefully. Please circle one choice for each statement below.

1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Not Sure	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree	
1. I have a favorite subject in school.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I would like to attend college.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I know what I would like to do for a career.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I will need a high school diploma before I can start my career.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I will need a college degree before I can start my career.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I participate or will participate in extracurricular activities.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I am a leader.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I need personal attention from teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I usually get things done on my own.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I need close support from my family.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I receive close support from my family.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I make friends easily.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I would like to attend a college close to home.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I would like to attend a college in this city.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I would like to attend a college in this state.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I would like to attend a college in another state.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I would like to attend a small sized college.	1	2	3	4	5
18. I would like to attend a medium sized college.	1	2	3	4	5
19. I would like to attend a large sized college.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I would like to attend a public college.	1	2	3	4	5



Appendix E

College Blueprint

**College Blueprint**

Name of college/university: \_\_\_\_\_

Location (City/State): \_\_\_\_\_

Private/Public/Religious: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Students: \_\_\_\_\_

Tuition:                      In-state: \_\_\_\_\_                      Out-of-state: \_\_\_\_\_

Test(s) Required: \_\_\_\_\_                      Essay Required (Y/N): \_\_\_\_\_

SPA Requirements: \_\_\_\_\_

Does this college offer your intended major? If so, what is it? \_\_\_\_\_

What are the most popular majors there? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What activities/athletics does this college provide that are of interest to you?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Why do you want to attend this college/university?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

List other things that are interesting to you about this college:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

---

Appendix F

Major to Career Converter

# MAJOR TO CAREER CONVERTER



List 3 of your favorite hobbies:

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

Choose a major and 3 potential careers from that major:

Major #1: \_\_\_\_\_

Career 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Career 2: \_\_\_\_\_

Career 3: \_\_\_\_\_

Major #2: \_\_\_\_\_

Career #1: \_\_\_\_\_

Career #2: \_\_\_\_\_

Career #3: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix G

## SAT, ACT, and PSAT Fast Facts

**SAT, ACT and PSAT Fast Facts**

- The SAT is three hours and 45 minutes long and measures skills in three areas: critical reading, math, and writing. Although most questions are multiple choice, students are also required to write a 25-minute essay.
- The SAT Subject Tests are one-hour, mostly multiple-choice tests in specific subjects. These tests measure knowledge of particular subjects and the ability to apply that knowledge. Many colleges require or recommend one or more of these tests for admission or placement purposes.
- The two major college admissions tests are the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) developed for the College Board by Educational Testing Service, and the American College Testing Program Assessment (ACT). Students may want to take both examinations in order to increase their flexibility in applying to college. Some colleges will accept the score from either test; other colleges will require one or the other.
- Students should take the SAT or ACT test at least once in the junior year. Ask the school or the Education Specialist in your Urban League affiliate for information on fee waivers.
- The PSAT, or Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test, is often called the practice SAT. It is taken in the 10th & 11th grades. The PSAT gives an idea of how students are likely to perform on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). There is a PACT+ or a Preliminary American College Testing Program Assessment, as well.
- The PSAT serves two important functions in its own right. First, PSAT scores and grades are used to identify students who will receive National Negro Merit Scholarship and scholarships from the National Hispanic Scholars Awards Program. Second, they are used, along with other criteria, to qualify students who wish to be considered for appointment to military academies.
- Results of standardized tests such as the SAT can be obtained from the test developer. The answer sheets and booklets are available. Reviewing them will help determine your strengths and weakness.
- Visit [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com) and [www.princetonreview.com](http://www.princetonreview.com) for more information

Appendix H

## Financial Aid Myths and Tips

Financial Aid Myths and Tips

- **Myth #1:** *You can't afford college, or you can't afford the college of your dreams.*
- **Myth #2:** *You have to be very poor, very smart, or uncommonly talented to qualify for financial aid.*
- **Myth #3:** *You can get more free college scholarships by paying someone to search for you.*
- **Myth #4:** *My child will pay for college herself, so it doesn't matter how much money I make.*
- **Myth #5:** *You can wait until you get accepted to a college before worrying about financial aid and grants.*

**Juniors:** It's never too late to save! Even if you only save enough for books, your after-school-job money will give you a head start.

**Seniors:**

**November:** Apply for your pin number for your FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). Most schools require this form to determine how much financial aid you will need. The FAFSA financial aid form can be accessed at [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov).

**January:** Start filling out your FAFSA aid form. After January 1, you and your parents/guardians can submit your information. Check with your colleges to see if they require any additional forms.

**March:** Review your SAR (Student Aid Report), a report of all the data submitted through your FAFSA, for accuracy. Be sure to update any current tax information.

**April:** Watch the mail for your acceptance and financial aid award letters. Compare your award letters, and then choose the best option for you and your family. Remember that college scholarships and grants are free money, while college loans have to be paid back.

**May:** Sign and return your financial aid award letter. Don't forget to decline the award letters from the colleges and universities that you will not be attending. If your award does not cover all your costs, you may need to apply for an educational loan through your local bank. Call your college's financial aid office for more details.

If you follow this timeline, your senior year and the financial aid process will be a whole lot smoother!

Appendix I

Top Ten Scholarship Tips

## **Top Ten Scholarship Tips**

Scholarships (or "free money") are an attractive way to pay for college because you don't need to pay them back. Scholarship awards range from a few dollars to covering the full tuition bill.



**Tip 1: Give concrete examples.**

**Tip 2: Apply only if you are eligible.**

**Tip 3: Identify the sponsor's goals.**

**Tip 4: Complete the application in full and follow directions.**

**Tip 5: Neatness counts.**

**Tip 6: Write an accomplishments resume.**

**Tip 7: Watch all deadlines.**

**Tip 8: Take steps to make sure your application gets where it needs to go.**

**Tip 9: Ask for help if you need it.**

**Tip 10: Remember - your scholarship application represents YOU!**

Appendix J

## Ten Things Colleges Look for in a Student

### Ten Things Colleges Look for in a Student



1. A high school curriculum that challenges the student.
  2. Grades that represent strong effort and an upward trend.
  3. Solid scores on standardized tests (SAT, ACT).
  4. Passionate involvement in a few activities, demonstrating leadership and initiative.
  5. Community service showing evidence of being a "contributor."
  6. Work or out-of-school experiences (including summer activities) that illustrate responsibility, dedication, and development of areas of interest.
  7. A well-written essay that provides insight into the student's unique personality, values, and goals.
  8. Letters of recommendation from teachers and guidance counselors that give evidence of integrity, special skill, and positive character traits.
  9. Supplementary recommendations by adults who have had significant direct contact with the student.
  10. Anything special that makes the student stand out from the rest of the applicants!
- <http://school.familyeducation.com/>