Commission on the Future of Higher Education
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Non-Academic Issues Related to Improving College Access for Underserved Students

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Large numbers of low-income students with college aspirations do not go to college, and among those who do, only a small percentage complete bachelor's degrees by age 24.

- 90% eighth graders say they want to go to college, yet only 68 of every 100 students beginning ninth grade graduate from high school, and only 40 of these students enroll in college. (NCHEMS 2004)
- 59% of low-income high school graduates enroll in college immediately after high school compared with 88% of high-income graduates. (Mortenson 2005)
- Only 21% of low-income students who start college earn bachelor's degrees by age 24, while 93% of high-income students enrolling in college do so. (Mortenson 2005)

Large numbers of college-qualified low-income high school graduates do not go to college or complete college degrees.

Only 52% of college qualified low-income graduates attend 4 yr. colleges, compared with 83% of high-income graduates. (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Aid, 2002)

- 22% of college qualified low-income graduates do not attend college at all, compared with 4% of high-income graduates. (Advisory Committee, 2002) In real numbers this means that approximately 168,000 college-qualified graduates annually are not enrolling in college.

Low-income high school graduates in the top quartile on achievement tests attend college at the same rate as high-income high school graduates in the bottom quartile on the same tests - 78% for both groups. (Advisory Committee 2001)

Only 21% of college qualified low-income graduates complete bachelor's degrees, compare with 62% of high-income graduates. (Advisory Committee, 2002)

Low-income students face significant non-academic barriers to achieving college dreams that are related to 1) lack of motivation, family and peer support; 2) expectations of parents, teachers and guidance counselors, 3) inadequate college planning resources and support, and 4) paying for college.

Motivation, family and peer support:

College-going indicators	Barriers faced by low-income students
• Student aspirations for college • Career goals that require college • Parents talking with children about college plans, high school course-taking and achievement • Perceived ability to pay for college • Parents saving for college • Peers who plan to go to college, study hard, and get good grades	• Lack of cultural and social capital • Lack understanding of benefits of college education • Lack of career aspirations, understanding of career options • Parents lack academic background to help children with their schoolwork • Lack of financial resources and knowledge about financial aid • Peers with negative attitudes toward college-going

Expectations:

College-going indicators	Barriers faced by low-income students
Parents' college expectations Teacher and guidance counselor college expectations • School with college-going culture and expectation of high academic achievement for all students	• Parents not expecting college going because of inadequate understanding and misperceptions of benefits • Parents' fears of encouraging college-going because of lack of financial resources and familiarity with college and financial aid Teacher and counselor beliefs that some students are not capable of being prepared for and succeeding in postsecondary education Some teachers giving low-income students less instructional time, encouragement, academic support • Schools not assigning all students to college prep curricula (28% low-income compared with 49% middle-income and 65% high-income)

College planning resources and support:

College-going indicators	Barriers faced by low-income students
• Attending a high school with high college-going rates Access to information about college and financial aid Participating in college planning activities and support with planning Completing college admission applications • Applying to a four-year college • Applying for financial aid • Participating in pre-college enrichment programs	• Lack of information abut college options, admission requirements, financial aid, and application processes Misconceptions about college costs Inadequate systems for delivering college and financial aid planning information to students and families Limited access to college planning and application assistance Lack of connections between schools and students' families

Paying for college is major challenge for lower income students.

- The percentage of family income needed to cover net college costs (after grant aid) has increased significantly for students lower income quartiles from 1992-93 to 2003-04. (College Board, 2005)

	Lowest quartile 2003 (1992)	2nd quartile 2003 (1992)	3rd quartile 2003 (1992)	Highest quartile 2003 (1992)
Public 2 yr.	37. (29.)	19. (15.)	13. (13.)	7. (6.)
Public 4 yr.	47. (41.)	26. (22.)	18. (16.)	11.(10.)
Private 4 yr.	83. (60.)	41. (33.)	29. (25.)	19.(17.)

Lowest quartile: 0-$34,000; 2nd quartile: $34,000-62,000; 3rd quartile: $62,000 – 94,000; highest quartile: $94,000+

- Between 1990 and 2004, unmet need increased significantly in constant dollars (adjusted for inflation) for students in the lower two income quartiles. (Mortenson, 2005)

	1990	2004
Lowest quartile	$ 3,063	$ 5,527
2nd quartile	322	3,391
3rd quartile	-4,586	-1,814
Highest quartile	-15,158	-16,365

- Low–income families and under-represented minorities lack information about paying for college and financial aid. (Sallie Mae Fund Harris Poll 2004)
  - 45% of low-income parents have "no idea" how to pay for college
  - 62% low-income parents did not name grants as a source of aid
  - Minority families expressed great need for aid information. Latino parents received aid information 2 yrs. later than others.

  Parents with no direct experience with college (their own or another child's) have less, and less accurate, knowledge of college prices and financial aid than parents who have direct experience. (Perna, TERI 2004)

- Student aid program design and operation do not target students or parents early in the education pipeline, and early marketing efforts have minimal impact. Most students and their parents acquire college price and financial aid information during the final years of high school, likely after having made decisions (particularly academic) that influence their ability to attend college. (Perna 2004)

  Good counseling results in statistically proven differences in students' feeling that they have enough information. When they are available, counselors are seen as primary and reliable sources of information, especially for aspirations and plans in middle school, and for providing information abut college costs and financial aid in 11th and 12th grade. (McDonough, TERI 2004)

  Based on existing research, the average school counselor is relatively unavailable for any college task, and mostly uninformed about costs and financial aid. The least available and least informed counselors are in schools that serve large numbers of low-income and minority students. (McDonough 2004)

Research provides evidence of effective policies and practices for overcoming non-academic barriers to college access. Examples of research-based strategies include the following:

- Develop students/parents knowledge of economic and social benefits of college through information, role models and career exploration.

- Provide experiences for students on college campuses, beginning in elementary grades and continuing through high school.

- Provide parents with information and encouragement to help their children plan for college.

  Use media and other forums to raise public awareness of importance of college for all students.

  Organize social marketing campaigns to prompt students and parents to take actions to prepare and plan for college.

Embrace families' cultural and social values, and community values that support student achievement and college aspirations.

- Engage business and community leaders in advocating for college preparation for low-income students with parents, school leaders, and policymakers.

Infuse classrooms with college awareness and planning activities, beginning in middle school.

- Design financial aid programs that commit grant aid to students in middle school or early high school.

Create structures within schools and communities that facilitate supportive relationships for students with caring adults, mentors, and peers.

Develop partnerships between schools and colleges to provide early and ongoing college awareness activities, academic support, and college planning and financial aid application assistance.

Provide students and families with individualized assistance completing the financial aid application process.

- Use equitable criteria for merit aid so that low-income students are not excluded from these programs.

- Provide all students with opportunities to earn college credits while in high school through dual enrollment, AP, IB and early college high school programs.

Align high school graduation standards with requirement for college admission and success in first year college courses.

Focus on first-year college students, providing comprehensive support services that are prescriptive and proactive.

Integrate with teaching learning, including supplemental instruction, learning communities, and peer study groups.

Make need-baaed grants the primary form of aid for low-income students; limit loan burden and the necessity for full-time students to work more than 15 hrs. a week.

Strengthen relationships between community colleges and 4 yr. colleges to support the transition of students to bachelor degree programs.

TERI operates programs in partnerships with public schools in Boston and other Massachusetts cities, local college and universities, community agencies, and the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education that help students and families overcome non-academic barriers to college access.

- Community based access centers in Boston public library branches and neighborhood centers provide free information, advice and application assistance to young people and adult learners on a walk-in basis and by phone. TERI has helped launch similar centers at public libraries in Washington, DC, Charlotte, NC, Milwaukee, and San Francisco.

TERI's early awareness programs include Kids to College, a program that pairs colleges with 6th grade classrooms for six weeks of college and career exploration, culminating with a day on campus, and Get

Ready for College, which brings college staff and students into every 8th grade classroom in Boston to talk about what students need to do to prepare for college.

- Our federally funded GEAR UP and Talent Search programs place staff in schools two days a week, providing information, advising, and enrichment activities to students beginning in 7th grade and continuing through high school graduation. The college-going rates for participants in both programs exceed the rates for Boston Public students not receiving such support.

  High school programs include COACH, in which college students serving as coaches work with 11th and 12th grades once a week in small groups, helping them through the college exploration and admission and financial aid application processes.

- TERI also helped to launch ACCESS, a financial aid advising and last dollar scholarship program modeled after the Cleveland Scholarship Program and supported with a $10 million endowment established by Boston's business leaders to ensure that lack of financial resources would not be a barrier to college-qualified graduates of the city's public schools going to college.

Recommendations for improving college access for underserved students for the Commission on the Future of Higher Education:

1. Promote strong partnerships among federal, state, local, institutional (college and universities), and private sector entities to undertake systemic and integrated efforts to facilitate student transitions along the college pipeline, from elementary school through degree completion to work and further education.

2. Advocate for increased need-based grant aid for students in the lower-income quartiles, involving financial aid providers at all levels (federal, state, institutional and private sector) working together to create the policies and resources needed to remove cost as a barrier to college ready students enrolling in postsecondary programs.

3. Provide incentives for higher education institutions to make long-term commitments to working actively and collaboratively with K-12 schools and systems to help underserved students get ready for college and to increasing the retention and degree completion of underserved students they enroll.

4. Encourage the adoption of the research-based principles developed by the Pathways to College Network to guide actions of leaders in education and all sectors of society to advance college access and success for underserved students. The Pathways Network is an alliance of 40 national organizations and funders working collaboratively to improve the college preparation, enrollment, and completion of low-income students, under-represented minorities, students who are the first generation in their families to go to college, and students with disabilities.