

Underrepresented College Students' Experiences With School Counselors

Donna J. Dockery

Virginia Commonwealth University

Susan McKelvey

Virginia Commonwealth University

Abstract

School counselors should focus on helping underrepresented students access higher education in efforts to close achievement gaps. Limited information is available regarding how first-generation and ethnic minority students view school counseling efforts to promoting post-secondary opportunities. Participants in this study indicated school counselors could provide more support for college planning and transitions. Students of color held lower expectations that school counselors could help with college planning. Although more first-generation students received career information compared to second generation students, there were no significant differences in perceived support for college admissions. Because parents had the greatest influence on college decision-making, counselors should provide college programming for all students, with an emphasis on parents and on underrepresented students.

Underrepresented College Students' Experiences With School Counselors

Many current and future employment opportunities rely on skills in technology, verbal and written communication, and a knowledge base that requires post-secondary education and training. One of the critical roles of professional school counselors is to provide the academic, psychosocial, and career preparation students need to access higher education in support of these opportunities. In particular, school counselors should target underrepresented college students in order to encourage their career aspirations. In addition to assisting individual students, school counselors should address and remove barriers to higher education for first-generation college students, students of color, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Reid & Moore, 2008).

Professional organizations provide clear expectations that school counselors will support students in their efforts to access higher educational opportunities. The ethical standards of the American School Counseling Association (2010) mandate that school counselors promote equity and access to all school programs, close achievement and opportunity gaps, and prepare students for a variety of postsecondary options. The College Board (2010) agrees, and expects that school counselors will identify gaps in student achievement and access to higher education, design and implement appropriate interventions to close gaps, and measure progress towards equitable student outcomes. In addition, The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (2009) expects school counselors to conduct needs assessments and use data to create and evaluate services designed to support students' transitions to postsecondary opportunities. Despite guidelines from ASCA that

school counseling programs provide services to all students (ASCA, 2010), limited research has been published regarding the effectiveness of school counseling efforts to support postsecondary planning. The ASCA National Model (2012) expects school counselors to advocate for systemic changes by identifying and removing barriers to achieving college and career readiness for all students, with a focus on those who have historically been underrepresented in higher education. Despite these recommendations, there is a dearth of research regarding school counselors' college advocacy with first-generation students and students of color.

Underrepresented College Students' Experiences With School Counselors

Underrepresented college students are viewed as those students who have historically been denied access to higher education. These students may not receive equitable services compared to more traditional college students. Generally underrepresented students include such populations as first-generation students, those from low-income backgrounds, and ethnic and racial minority students who have been underserved in post-secondary programs.

First-generation students are a population that is underrepresented on many college campuses. First-generation status has been defined in several ways, ranging from students whose parents never entered college to those for whom neither parent earned a bachelor's degree. Herrold and O'Donnell (2008) report that nationally almost 60 percent of K-12 school-aged students are first-generation, defined by neither parent attaining a college degree. While 93% of second-generation students enroll in college, only 59% of first-generation students moved on to higher education (Choy, 2001). Both college enrollment and graduation are highly correlated to parent's educational

attainment, therefore institutions of higher education have focused attention on how to support and encourage first-generation students. Because many first-generation students either don't enroll in post-secondary programs or drop out before earning their degrees (Choy, 2001), it is also imperative that school counselors better assist these students in preparing for and transitioning successfully to higher education.

Although school counselors are encouraged to support underrepresented students (Matthay, 1989) there is limited research published regarding expectations these students have about school counselors' assistance with the college process. The purpose of this study is to begin to bridge this gap. The limited research regarding underrepresented college students' experiences with school counselors will be reviewed. Recommendations and strategies will be proposed to help professional school counselors more effectively assist underrepresented college students and their parents better understand and access post-secondary opportunities.

Characteristics

Underrepresented college students may differ in a number of ways from other college attendees. For example, first-generation students are more likely to be female, students of color, or married (Choy, 2001; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). First-generation students are also more likely to be living at home or off-campus, working more hours, and receiving financial aid (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). These students are less likely to persist in higher education, graduate at lower rates, and are more likely to attend part-time and enroll in community colleges or private, for-profit institutions compared to other college students (Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

Students who have traditionally been denied access to higher education also have significant barriers that interfere with their efforts to graduate from college including lacking appropriate academic preparation, misunderstanding of financial aid and college admissions requirements, and fewer experiences with higher education. These students have less knowledge about college, demonstrate less commitment for attending and earning degrees, and may have limited support for college attendance from parents and family (York-Anderson & Bowmen, 1991). Successful transition to higher education is another challenge for underrepresented students who frequently must balance family demands, financial concerns, and cultural considerations in addition to the social and academic adjustments faced by all college students (Terenzini, et al., 1996).

Chen, Wu, and Tasoff (2010) report that despite these challenges the majority high school students expect to attend college and understand the importance of post-secondary training. Too many students, however, lack an understanding of the college admission process and are not prepared to meet the academic demands of college coursework. Another concern is whether school counselors have been adequately trained to support underrepresented students in accessing higher education. Although Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) suggest strategies for school counselors seeking to assist underrepresented students overcome barriers to higher education and Fallon (1997) recommends providing support groups for underrepresented middle and high school students, few other recommendations are found in the research literature.

Underrepresented Students' Perspectives on School Counseling

Little information has been published regarding how underrepresented students perceive school counselors and their efforts to assist with accessing post-secondary opportunities. Most of this research is qualitative in nature and conducted with small numbers of students. Studies with larger sample sizes gathered only limited information regarding the college planning initiatives of school counselors and often didn't report whether respondents were underrepresented or not.

Coogan and DeLucia-Waack (2007) surveyed more than 400 college students regarding their perceptions of the role of school counselors and included two items regarding college selection and scholarships. Although no information was provided regarding whether students were underrepresented, the respondents perceived college selection and college decision-making as the two highest priorities for school counselors, and also viewed assistance with scholarships as a priority.

A qualitative study of ten African American students enrolled in exceptional education services found that even though students expected school counselors to assist with course selection and program planning, none of the students shared expectations that the counselor would assist them with planning for the future and careers (Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008). Students who did seek out counseling services only sought help for academic scheduling and meeting graduation requirements, and not for how to plan for the future or access college, although a majority of the students aspired to higher education. First- or second- generation status was not indicated, although most of the students were from families of limited economic means and resided with a single parent who had earned at least a high school diploma.

Although Lapan, Gysbers, and Sun (1997) found that students attending schools with more fully implemented counseling programs felt that they had higher academic achievement and more career and college information available to them, although these results were measured only on a single survey item each. Females, students of color, and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, however, responded less positively regarding their school climate and academic achievement. No analysis was provided regarding students who were first- or second-generation.

Eckenrod-Green and Culbreth (2008) interviewed eight Hispanic students regarding their perceptions of school counselors. School counselors had not initiated contact with any of the participants in this study, and only three of the participants had met with their school counselor in the past year. Students indicated that appropriate roles for school counselors included academic planning and college admissions, although none of the students had met with counselors to explore college. Participants suggested that school counselors should assist parents in better understanding the school system. Davila (2003) also completed qualitative research with Latino students who shared their mostly negative experiences with school counselors. Students reported a lack of career exploration and planning, limited help with college planning, and little academic planning or support from school counselors.

Vela-Gude et al. (2009) also interviewed eight college attending Latino students regarding their perceptions of school counselors. Most students reported a lack of or inappropriate advising about academics, college planning, and scholarships. In addition, participants reported that school counselors were unavailable, had limited time to assist with psychosocial issues, and provided fewer services to students who were from lower

income backgrounds. Several students perceived that their school counselors had low expectations of them while others described their counselors as setting limits and discouraging their aspirations. Only a single Latino student described her counselor as positive, encouraging, and supportive.

Because limited research has been completed regarding underrepresented students' perceptions of school counselors and the majority of these studies were qualitative in nature with small sample sizes, this research is an initial attempt to begin to fill this gap. Research questions follow:

1. Do underrepresented college students in a pre-service teaching class at an urban Southeast university (first-generation and students of color) have different expectations of their school counselors' help with college admissions compared to other college students (second generation and white students), as evidenced on an on-line survey of their perceptions?

2. Do underrepresented college students in a pre-service teaching class at an urban Southeast university (first-generation and students of color) have different experiences with their school counselors' support for college admissions compared to other college students (second generation and white students), as evidenced on an on-line survey of their perceptions?

3. Are there differences in expectations and actual experiences that college students in a pre-service teaching class at an urban Southeast university have related to school counselors' support in the college admissions process, as evidenced on an on-line survey of their perceptions?

Method

Design

This research was completed with university students enrolled during spring 2012 in an introductory human development and learning course required for pre-service teachers at a large metropolitan university in the Southeastern United States. After securing institutional review board approval, the pre-service teachers received an e-mail invitation to participate in an on-line survey regarding their perceptions of the role of school counselors. After giving their assent, the pre-service teachers completed the survey; participants had the option to complete the survey as one way to fulfill the research component of the class.

Participants

Participants included a convenience sample of 126 of the 228 pre-service teachers enrolled in five sections of an introductory human development and learning class, for a response rate of 55%. The participants were asked to respond to several demographic questions. For the purposes of this paper, we were interested in underrepresented groups such as first-generation college students and students of color. More participants were second-generation ($n = 70$; 56%) than first-generation ($n = 56$; 44%). The racial/ethnic breakdown was majority Caucasian ($n = 75$; 60%), followed by African American ($n = 33$; 26%), Asian American ($n = 11$; 9%), Latino ($n = 4$; 3%), Biracial or multiracial ($n = 3$; 2%), Native American/American Indian/Alaskan Indian ($n = 2$; 2%), and Other ($n = 1$; 1%). The racial/ethnic breakdown numbers add up to more than 126 because some people chose more than one background. More participants were female ($n = 110$, 87.3%) than male ($n = 16$, 12.7%). Students were primarily

undergraduates with more juniors ($n = 43$, 34.1%) than sophomores ($n = 39$, 31%) and seniors ($n = 20$, 15.9%). The remainder of participants were post-baccalaureates ($n = 13$, 10.3%) and others ($n = 9$, 7.1%). The majority of students attended high school in Virginia ($n = 110$, 87.3%).

Survey Instrument

The survey consisted of 8 items that asked respondents to indicate what their high school counselor *could have done* to encourage them to attend college and 8 items that asked them to indicate what their high school counselor *did* to encourage them to attend college. The items were (1) Believed in and encouraged me; (2) Helped me with academic planning or course selection; (3) Helped me with career exploration or career decision; (4) Helped me select colleges to apply to; (5) Helped me with college applications; (6) Helped me with financial aid/scholarships; (7) Helped me decide which college to attend; (8) Helped me make the transition to college; and (9) Other. The other response allowed students to indicate what else their school counselor could have done or did to support college planning. Respondents were asked to check all choices that applied.

Another item asked participants to indicate on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all helpful; 7 = Most helpful) the degree to which their high school counselor assisted with the college admissions process. An additional item asked participants to indicate who had provided the greatest support for their decision to attend college. Response choices included (1) Female parent, (2) Male parent, (3) Other family members, (5) Teachers, (6) Friends/peers, and (7) Other, which was followed by a write-in option. Demographic data, information about the participants' high school, and how frequently students met

with their counselor individually, in small groups, or in classroom guidance sessions were also gathered.

Analysis

The results of the on-line Inquisite survey were downloaded into an SPSS database and analyzed to determine frequency and percentages of responses. Cases where the respondent completed only two or three items on the survey were deleted, as were cases where participants attended high school out of the country or weren't certain they had a school counselor. The null hypotheses for the research questions were that no differences exist between the under-represented students and the other students.

According to the Chi square results, a significantly higher percentage of white students than student of color felt that their high school counselors *could have* done more to encourage them to attend college on the following items: Believed in and encouraged me [$X^2(1) = 5.03 (.200)$]; Helped me with academic planning or course selection [$X^2(1) = 7.29 (.241)$]; Helped me with career exploration or career decision [$X^2(1) = 5.28 (.205)$]; Helped me select colleges to apply to [$X^2(1) = 4.38 (.187)$]; Helped me with college applications [$X^2(1) = 8.70 (.263)$]; Helped me with financial aid/scholarships [$X^2(1) = 5.43 (.208)$]; and Helped me decide which college to attend [$X^2(1) = 4.60 (.191)$] (See Table 1). There were no significant differences between first- and second-generation students expectations of what school counselors *could have* done to assist with college planning.

The Chi-square test also indicated that first-generation students had a significantly higher percentage of respondents who felt as though their high school counselors helped them with career exploration or career decision [$X^2(1) = 4.46 (.228)$]

(See Table 1). There were no significant differences between what students of color and white students reported their counselors actually *did* to support planning for college.

Effect sizes for significant findings were generally small according to Cramer's V (See Table 1), and ranged from weak (.079) to moderate (.263).

Table 1: *Frequencies for race/ethnicity and first-generation regarding what high school counselors could have done and did do to encourage students to attend college.*

Item	White Students (p-value; Cramer's V)	Students of Color	First- Generation (p-value; Cramer's V)	Second- Generation
Could: Believed in and encouraged me	*71% (.025; .200)	51%	69%	64%
Did: Believed in and encouraged me	35%	38%	56%	40%
Could: Helped me with academic planning or course selection	*85% (.007; .241)	65%	81%	80%
Did: Helped me with academic planning or course selection	53%	51%	75%	50%
Could: Helped me with career exploration or career decision	*83% (.022; .205)	65%	81%	79%
Did: Helped me with career exploration or career decision	29%	39%	*56% (.035; .228)	29%
Could: Helped me select colleges to apply to	*75% (.036; .187)	57%	75%	73%
Did: Helped me select colleges to apply to	43%	31%	50%	40%
Could: Helped me with college applications	*75% (.003; .263)	49%	63%	71%
Did: Helped me with college applications	27%	35%	25%	33%
Could: Helped me with financial aid/scholarships	*81% (.020; .208)	63%	63%	79%
Did: Helped me with financial aid/scholarships	19%	33%	25%	24%

Item	White Students (p-value; Cramer's V)	Students of Color	First- Generation (p-value; Cramer's V)	Second- Generation
Could: Helped me decide which college to attend	*59% (.032; .191)	39%	56%	53%
Did: Helped me decide which college to attend	13%	26%	19%	19%
Could: Helped me make the transition to college	59%	43%	50%	56%
Did: Helped me make the transition to college	15%	20%	25%	14%

*Significant at $\alpha = .05$

Participating students were provided with comment blocks if they selected the 'Other' response stem to what their counselors *could* have done and what they *did* do to support college admissions. Sixteen participants wrote in responses to what their school counselor could have done to assist with college planning. There were several positive responses, such as "My counselor was fantastic! He encouraged me to apply to schools I feared were above me, and even offered to pay my application fee when I used money as an excuse to not apply to Ivy League schools." The majority of responses were negative, such as "There was little involvement in encouraging me to attend college," and "I wish my counselor would have assisted me more because I only applied to a few locations because I felt so low spirited after talking with them." Only four students made suggestions about what their school counselor could have done to better assist them in the college process and recommended providing more help, offering effective career planning, providing accurate academic advising, explaining the importance of maintaining excellent grades, and discussing how college is different from high school. One student commented:

If high school counselors talked about college from the beginning (freshman year) and all throughout the next 4 years, it would have helped familiarize me with college terms and programs. I think they could have done a better job if they emphasized which classes would give us credit, and which colleges specialized in fields we were interested in. I also think it would be beneficial if they organized programs where they went over college-related issues like the FAFSA...

Six students selected the other response when asked what their high school counselor had done to encourage college attendance. Most of the comments were negative or neutral, except for one positive comment. One student wrote:

There was little involvement in encouraging me to attend college. My counselor suggested schools for me to attend but did not listen to my wants and financial needs... I also was interested in taking the AP classes at my school, my counselor discouraged me, saying that it might be too difficult and I should stick with the regular courses.

An independent samples t-test was used to compare responses of white students and students of color regarding the school counselor's helpfulness in the decision to attend college. Students of color ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 2.000$) were more likely to view their school counselors as helpful compared to Caucasian students ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.815$), and these results were significant ($T(117) = 1.988$, $p = .049$). Student reports of how frequently they met with their school counselors individually, in small groups, and in classroom guidance sessions were also analyzed using an independent samples t-test. Response selections included (1) Not at all, (2) Infrequently, (3) Occasionally, and (4) Frequently. The only significant finding was that first-generation students ($M = 1.27$, SD

= .531) were less likely than Caucasian students ($M = 1.71$, $SD = .966$) to meet in small groups with their counselor ($T(93.045) = 3.040$, $p = .003$).

Students were also asked who had the greatest influence on their decision to attend college. The majority of students ($n = 91$) indicated parents or guardians, including female parents ($n = 60$; 48%), male parents ($n = 24$; 19%), or both parents ($n = 7$; 5%). Teachers ($n = 8$; 6%), other family members ($n = 7$; 5%), and self ($n = 8$; 6%) were also selected. Peers were seen as the most influential by four respondents, and mentor, coworker, society, spouse, and the university were each listed by one student. Six students selected the "Other" stem in response to what this most influential person had done to encourage college attendance. Students mentioned receiving encouragement and support from friends, family, counselors, and advisors; getting help with course selection; and getting assistance with completing college applications.

Discussion

Students in this study indicated school counselors *could have done* more to support their college decision-making process than what school counselors actually *did*. This was indicated in all aspects of college planning and extended to academic planning, career advising, and supporting the transition to higher education. Students reported school counselors could have assisted more in college planning, applying for college and financial assistance, and making application and selection decisions. Open-ended responses also indicated a general lack of counselor support for college planning. Comments were generally negative, indicating that school counselors were not available, frequently spent time on other students' needs, and even discouraged students or provided them with inaccurate information.

Participating college students were also asked how school counselors *could* have assisted them in accessing post-secondary education. Students of color were significantly less likely to expect assistance from school counselors than were white students. Fewer students of color felt their school counselor could have encouraged and supported them, assisted with academic and career planning, helped select colleges to apply to and which to attend, assisted with completing college applications and with financial aid and all of these responses were significant. School counselors' support for transitioning to college was the only item with no significant differences between students of color and white students. The results of this comparison indicate that the students of color in this study who are attending college expected less support from their school counselors than did the white students. In other qualitative studies, most students of color reported that they rarely or never sought out services for school counselors for college admissions or for other needs (Davila, 2003; Eckenrod-Green & Culbreth, 2008; Vela-Gude et al., 2009). In addition, Moore, Henfield, and Owens (2008) found that none of the students of color they interviewed expected their counselor to assist with career and post-secondary planning. If students of color hold lower expectations of school counselors and infrequently seek out their services, it becomes even more imperative for school counselors to reach out and intentionally provide targeted support and services to students of color and other underrepresented populations. Otherwise, these students will continue to have low expectations for support from school counselors and may not be receiving critical information regarding the college admissions process.

In this study, however, there were no significant differences between what school counselors actually *did* to support college access according to students of color and white students. Approximately half of participating students reported that counselors assisted with academic planning, and only 40 percent or fewer participants reported that counselors performed the other activities related to assisting with the college process regardless of their ethnic background. Fewer than a fifth of participants indicated their school counselor helped them decide which college to attend or assisted them with making the transition to college.

These results appear to compliment earlier qualitative research with students of color who frequently reported that they received limited support, encouragement, and assistance regarding career options and accessing higher education from their school counselors (Davila, 2003; Eckenrod-Green & Culbreth, 2008; Vela-Gude et al., 2009). It is important to note, however, that low numbers of both white students and students of color reported that their school counselors assisted with their college process, and only about half of students received help with academic planning. Because earlier studies only analyzed responses from students of color, no comparisons were made as to how white students experienced their school counselors. It is possible that the students of color in this study who have successfully made the transition to college received similar support from their school counselors as did white students. It is also possible that neither students of color nor white students view school counselors as providing much support in the college decision-making process. Regardless of the reasons, student views regarding school counselors as only somewhat helpful in the college admissions process leaves room for improvement in supporting post-secondary opportunities for all

students. School counselors can design, implement, evaluate and modify programs designed to introduce underrepresented students and their parents to the college admissions process and transition to higher educational opportunities. Student and parent support groups, informational sessions, and individual and family sessions can be offered that focus on financial aid and scholarships, understanding the college environment, making a successful transition to higher education, as well as responding to other student and parental concerns.

A higher percentage of first-generation college students surveyed in this study reported that their school counselors assisted them with career planning than did second generation college students. This was the only significant difference in how first- and second-generation students in this study viewed their school counselors' support for post-secondary planning. The comparison of first- and second- generation students' beliefs about what their school counselors *could* have done indicated similar expectations of help with academic planning and career exploration; selecting colleges to apply to and attend; and assistance with completing college applications, financial aid and scholarships, and with the transition to college. Smith and Zhang (2010) found similar results when comparing first- and second- generation college students' transition to college. Although assessed on only a single survey item, the authors reported no significant differences in how often school counselors talked about higher education with first- and second-generation students.

First-generation students were significantly less likely to have participated in group counseling with about 95% of students participating in groups infrequently or not at all, compared to about 75% of second-generation students. There were no

differences in rates of participation of first- and second- generation students in classroom guidance and individual counseling sessions with school counselors, although about half of students participated in individual sessions occasionally or less, and only a fourth occasionally or less classroom guidance sessions. Support groups for first-generation students regarding how to access college and other post-secondary opportunities would be one way to bridge the college access and opportunity gap and have been recommended in the literature (Fallon, 1998).

Seventy percent of respondents to this survey indicated that their parents or guardians had the greatest influence on their enrolling in higher education. Smith and Zhang (2010) reported some significant differences in how frequently parents discussed college plans with first- and second- generation students, reporting that parents who had not earned a degree were less likely to talk about college than degreed parents. These results support the need for school counselors to provide information and encouragement to parents, with an emphasis on parents who did not attend college. Students of color, too, have also suggested that school counselors should make efforts to target parents in their programs and services (Eckenrod-Green & Culbreth, 2008).

Limitations and Further Research

Although this study extends earlier research by including responses from first- and second-generation students as well as students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, a limitation is that participants were all enrolled in an introductory education course at a single large, urban university. The majority of participants were Caucasian females who attended public high schools in Virginia. Because we did not ask about the size, structure, or design of the school counseling program, or who

students viewed as their school counselor, such factors might confound our findings. These preliminary results could be replicated with a national and more diverse sample, might include underrepresented students who successfully made the transition to college as well as some who did not, and could be analyzed based on different types and sizes of schools. In addition, these data were based on student perceptions and self-reports and may not accurately reflect the actions or priorities of school counselors. Findings should be compared to research with school counselors indicating how much time and effort they spend assisting with college planning, especially with underrepresented students. In addition, counselor educators can partner with school counselors and practitioners to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of programs designed to meet the college planning needs of underrepresented high school students.

Implications for School Counselors

School counselors are well-positioned to identify and address barriers and systemic issues that limit opportunities and access for students who have been historically underserved in our educational settings (Marsh & Kleitman, 2002). Access to data and information regarding college requirements, academic programming, student achievement, and community conditions provide school counselors with opportunities to support all students in making successful transitions to post-secondary programs.

This research and other studies indicate, however, that school counselors are not perceived as helpful according to high school students attempting to negotiate the college process (Johnson, Rochkind, & Ott; 2010). Although students view college admissions as an important priority of school counselors (Coogan & DeLucia-Waack, 2007), many underrepresented students do not seek out school counselor's support and

assistance in college decision-making or other matters (Davila, 2003; Eckenrod-Green & Culbreth, 2008; Vela-Gude et al., 2009).

Target Underrepresented Students

Thus it is imperative that school counselors design and implement proactive and targeted programs that provide information and support for all students, not only those in honors and advanced level courses. School counselors should provide regular and accurate career, academic, and post-secondary information to all students. And, because underrepresented students too frequently receive limited or inappropriate advising regarding high school curricula (Striplin, 1999), school counselors should make clear connections that link academic preparation, access to higher education, and various career fields.

Providing opportunities for all students to increase their understanding, awareness, and comfort with the expectations, requirements and demands of higher education should begin at least as soon as middle school and continue throughout high school (Fallon, 1997). In addition to encouraging all students to attend programs preparing them for accessing and attending college, professional school counselors should focus services on underrepresented students, and provide these students with additional opportunities for help and support. Because students of color, in particular, held lower expectations of how school counselors might support their college planning, counselors should actively recruit diverse student participation and reach out to include students of color in their efforts. Ongoing individual sessions and support groups should be implemented to support underrepresented students throughout the college process. Choy (2001) found that when underrepresented college students understood and

fulfilled all of the requirements necessary for college attendance they enrolled in higher education at the same rates as second-generation students. Although strategies that are effective for underrepresented students are likely to also be helpful for other students pursuing higher educational opportunities, Thayer (2000) suggests that the reverse is not likely to be true; therefore it is important to target information and services to meet the needs of underrepresented students.

Focus on Parents of Underrepresented Groups

Although the parents and families of underrepresented students may lack first-hand knowledge and experience about higher education, parents of students in this study had the greatest influence on college decision-making. School counselors can develop and offer programs that target parents and families of underrepresented students to foster their support for college enrollment and persistence, as well as referring students and their parents to existing evening, weekend, and summer programs. Second-generation students and parents can also benefit from current information regarding college opportunities and costs, employment trends, and changes in higher education. Underrepresented students and their parents should be introduced to post-secondary programs, different degree options, and financial assistance as well as the social and academic components of college life.

Prepare for Transitions

Underrepresented students are often less prepared for the transition to college. Thayer (2000) found first-generation students were less likely to understand time management, finances, and operations of higher education compared to second-generation peers, and were less aware of academic expectations and campus

environments. Some first-generation students doubt their ability to be successful in college and may need help in overcoming their fears (Striplin, 1999). Other underrepresented students face conflicting obligations that interfere with college success. For example, students who live at home may be expected to devote time to work or to assisting with family responsibilities (Hsaio, 1992), which may limit time for study or college activities.

School counselors can help underrepresented students plan for the transition to post-secondary education and also encourage participation in dual enrollment classes, vocational and technical training opportunities, and community colleges. School counselors who act as cultural brokers can help students and their families understand what to expect from college life and suggest ways to make successful social and academic adjustments (Reid & Moore, 2008). For example, underrepresented students may require help establishing places for study, and both students and their parents may benefit from knowing how much time outside of class students typically spend completing class assignments, reading material, and preparing for examinations. High school students can be reminded to join campus activities, participate in study groups and tutorials, and to regularly use writing and math labs, counseling services, and services for students with disabilities. Counselors can emphasize the importance of using available support services on campus as well as taking individual responsibility for achievement (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). In addition, underrepresented students and their parents may need help dealing with separation from home and family (Hsaio, 1992).

School counselors can encourage participation in college access and enrichment programs to support a successful transition to higher education. Designed to help

underrepresented students access higher education, these opportunities emphasize academic preparation and foster positive beliefs and attitudes about post-secondary training (Gullatt & Jan, 2003). Exposure to university campuses and completing college classes allows underrepresented students to view themselves as being capable of attending college. School counselors can assist students in integrating these experiences as they develop a vision of pursuing higher education.

School counselors can also help students understand how successful integration into the social and academic environment is an important part of transition to college. Counselors can discuss the value of living and working on campus with underrepresented students. In addition, school counselors should talk to all students about the importance of joining extracurricular campus clubs and activities in order to connect with the college community.

Implications for Counselor Educators

It is important that counselor educators consider ways to incorporate training in college admissions into their school counseling programs, perhaps with a focus on the needs and issues of underrepresented students and their families. The ASCA National Model (2012) outlines expectations that school counseling programs will address the career development and academic needs of all students in schools, with an emphasis on closing achievement and opportunity gaps through social justice and systemic change initiatives. Despite these expectations, The National Association for College Admissions Counseling reported only 42 counselor education programs offered a course in college admissions, although there are 466 school counseling programs according to the American Counseling Association (O'Connor, 2010). School

counselors are expected to identify and address achievement and opportunity gaps for underrepresented students, which will be difficult without training regarding how best to negotiate the college admissions and transitions process.

School counselors are expected to promote equity and access to educational programs, strive to close achievement gaps, and prepare all students for postsecondary opportunities. This study provides initial information regarding underrepresented students' experiences and expectations of school counseling support for accessing college. These results and future research may help provide school counselors with strategies and information regarding how to better assist underrepresented students prepare, gain admittance, and succeed in college.

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