



THE JOURNAL OF COLLEGE ADMISSION

Winter 2021 / Number 249

What are
students
thinking?

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RETHINKING HOW
WE SERVE STUDENTS
AND FAMILIES

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THE COLLEGE
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Plus Technology and Equity
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I Wish Everyone Knew About
College Admission, and So You
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“I was most surprised by their level of resiliency. They haven’t been able to finish out a pivotal year in the way they would like, which is very tough. But they seemed to remain optimistic and maintain their interest in higher education.”

-Warren Quirett,
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THE JOURNAL OF COLLEGE ADMISSION

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ID STATEMENT

The Journal of College Admission (ISSN 0734-6670) is published quarterly by the National Association for College Admission Counseling, 1050 N. Highland St, Ste. 400, Arlington, VA 22201-99914. Subscriptions are \$75.00US.

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“THERE IS NO TOUGHER ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONALS THAN OUR NACAC COMMUNITY, AND NO ONE ELSE I’D RATHER JOIN IN THE TRENCHES, SOLVING AND TACKLING THE PROBLEMS OF THE DAY.”

21 THOUGHTS FOR SUCCESS IN ‘21

In the fall of 2019, I wrote a column titled “What Just Happened?” in reference to changes to our code of ethics and how that would affect our profession. Little did we know that revising our ethical principles would be the least of our problems as we transitioned to 2020. The number of items that “happened” are too extensive to list, but we should take pride in our innovation, resilience, and commitment to our profession. 2021 will continue to test our patience and perseverance—especially as we are still staggered and deeply disturbed by the events of Jan. 6.

But, to quote NACAC CEO Angel B. Pérez, “I am more energized than ever to fight for education. As evidenced... an educated citizenry is necessary for democracy and freedom to prosper.” We certainly have a better understanding of the landscape and possess the strength and hope to land in a better place in future years. There is no tougher association of professionals than our NACAC community, and no one else I’d rather join in the trenches, solving and tackling the problems of the day.

As we embark on the journey of 2021, I’ve assembled some reflections of the past year, but mostly insights, goals, and a few requests and reminders to ensure continued success in the new year.

1

NACAC will continue to emphasize diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Examples of our accomplishments and future commitments are the naming of NACAC’s first director of DEI, Dr. Crystal E. Newby, and the launch of the Antiracist Education Institute.

2

We should take pride in all we have learned and implemented on both the high school and college side of managing admission in a pandemic. The difficulties of counseling and engaging

3

NACAC created a new position to provide greater member services and value. Please welcome Shantel Goodman-Luckett as our new chief experience officer!

4

NACAC promoted and redefined the role of our long-serving executive, David A. Hawkins, who will serve as our inaugural chief education and policy officer. This enhancement will greatly increase our ability to research, advocate, and develop policies to better serve our members and students.

5

The board will continue to further examine and define NACAC's mission, vision, and goals.

6

Another key board goal is to expand representative governance. As part of this effort, we'll be recommending an all-member voting model.

7

We continue to strengthen relationships with our 23 affiliates and their leaders.

8

NACAC staff plans to greatly enhance the technology and communication tools used to engage members. You can count on a new website in NACAC's future!

9

The innovation and transition to remote learning will continue. Count on more virtual professional development.

10

Remember that our national conference "monthlies" will continue through June with educational webinars and panels.

11

Virtual college fairs were launched and will continue!

12

The NACAC *Journal* is now completely digital and better than ever! (This issue has 70 pages!)

13

NACAC staff are planning (and hoping) that we'll have an in-person experience for both GWI this summer and our national conference in Seattle this fall. Fingers crossed!

14

More podcasts are coming!

15

Join or create a Special Interest Group (SIG). The scale and scope of the SIGs are growing and so is the list of new groups.

16

All NACAC members should work together to make the admission process more equitable, transparent, and student-centered. Let's challenge ourselves to remove unnecessary and inequitable barriers.

17

I encourage colleges and universities to finalize and announce their testing policies for Fall 2022 applicants as soon as possible. Current 11th graders and school personnel would benefit greatly from having this information.

18

While our *Guide to Ethical Practice in College Admission* is no longer monitored or enforced, the principles still form the foundation of our values and guide the way on how we should serve students. The credibility, trust, and respect of our profession depend on NACAC members modeling exemplary behavior and doing the right thing.

19

I hope colleges and universities continue to support and practice honoring all admission and scholarship offers through May 1. Let's provide students the proper time to make an informed decision on what is best personally, academically, and financially. Earlier deadlines and pressure tactics should not exist!

20

Live in the moment and take each day one at a time. Extend grace to colleagues and assume best intentions.

21

Take care of yourself! Create work-life balance throughout the year, not just on Self-Care Sundays.

The entire NACAC staff and board of directors wish you the best as we embark on a new year filled with optimism for health, happiness, peace, and safety. Let's go 2021! [👉](#)

Todd Rinehart is vice chancellor for enrollment at the University of Denver and NACAC President.

Spring 2021

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- Feb 28
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MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

AROUND THE TABLE

“

I'm excited to see how different the freshman classes at selective colleges will be after this current cycle. I'm excited to see students test less often. I'm excited the college application process will never be the same again as it becomes more equitable. I look forward to seeing colleges value a student's life experience, rigor, and grades more than three to four hours on a single day.”

-Danny Tejada
page 7



ERIN GREY

Counselor

Lyman High School (WY)
NACAC member since 2020

Lyman High School, a public high school in Lyman, Wyoming, is proud of its excellent academic, vocational, and extracurricular programs. Each student will find something there that will lead to current enjoyment and future success.

HOW DID YOU FIND YOURSELF IN THIS PROFESSION?

All of us have a story and our story starts with someone helping or not helping us along the way. I was an involved high school

student, got average grades, and knew I wanted to go on to college. When the time came, there wasn't anyone to help me. In our high school, counselors only tended to help the bottom 10 percent and the top 10 percent.

I attended a trade school, got my associate degree, and started working. When I turned 25, I recognized the need to finish college. I had an opportunity to begin working as an admission counselor and found great passion working with students like me. Fifteen years later, I was working in Wyoming as a director of admission and partnering with our local high schools. When a school counselor position opened, I realized that I could help students on the other side of the fence and help plant seeds in high school.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST EXPERIENCE WITH NACAC?

I have been involved off and on with our local ACAC over the past 15 years.
continued on page 6



CARLOS O. CANO

Director of Admission Communication and Marketing

Georgian Court University (NJ)
NACAC member since 2015

Georgian Court University, a private Roman Catholic university in Lakewood Township, New Jersey, is a coeducational, forward-thinking institution that encourages intellectual inquiry, moral analysis, and social dialogue.

HOW DID YOU FIND YOURSELF IN THIS PROFESSION?

I was a student ambassador and tour guide turned admission counselor at my alma mater, William Paterson University (NJ). I worked there from my second week of freshman year through my super senior semester.

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST EXPERIENCE WITH NACAC?

The San Diego Conference in 2015 was the first conference I attended

and I was one of the NACAC Assembly delegates. I've attended NACAC's National College Fairs since starting in admission in 2010. I've known about NACAC since Day One.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BEST EXPERIENCE AT YOUR CURRENT INSTITUTION SO FAR?

Ironically, it's everything that has happened with the pandemic. It brought my team closer together, especially through the enrollment

cycle. We really rallied and made our enrollment goal. That's the most prominent among many others.

WHO INSPIRES YOU?

Professionally, my former boss, dean of admission at Maritime College (NY), who has been my mentor and role model. Personally, my family, wife, and daughter.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOURSELF AT THE AGE OF 15?

Looking back, my advice would be to take school more seriously. I was a decent student in terms of grades, but just a touch more effort probably would have meant more dollars for school and less debt now.

HOW DO YOU APPROACH TOUGH DECISIONS AT WORK?

I try to get a full understanding and perspective on the situation at hand,
continued on page 6

Erin, from page 5

In March, I had the opportunity to attend Advocacy Day on the Hill and met with staffers from the offices of US Sen. Mike Enzi and US Rep. Liz Cheney to discuss opportunities for students in my area and what they need from our government.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR BEST EXPERIENCE AT YOUR CURRENT INSTITUTION SO FAR?

I am amazed at the bravery our students have to tackle tough situations. This generation seems to know what they want and will not allow anything to prevent them from getting it. Their grit and determination is inspiring.

WHO INSPIRES YOU?

There is a quote by Mr. Rogers, “Frankly, there isn’t anyone you couldn’t learn to love once you’ve heard their story.” I grew up watching Mr. Rogers and what he taught us about caring for one another and how we should treat each other is something that I can strive to do.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOURSELF AT THE AGE OF 15?

Ask for help and advice. I was always so intimidated to speak to adults, I never asked for advice when I needed it most.

HOW DO YOU APPROACH TOUGH DECISIONS AT WORK?

I always think about what’s in the best interest of the student when I am faced with making tough decisions.

WHAT DO YOU DO TO RELAX?

TRAVEL! This year, 2020, has been one of the hardest for everyone because our “fun” has been taken away or put on pause. I always look forward to vacations and this year, my trip was canceled without the possibility of rescheduling.

WHERE WOULD YOU WANT TO TRAVEL IF YOU COULD GO ANYWHERE?

I have Ireland and Bora Bora left on my to-do list!

WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WATCHING OR READING?

I love reading! I read about 25-50 books a year. Right now I’m reading *The Book of Two Ways*, by Jodi Picoult and watching *The Queen’s Gambit*.

DESCRIBE YOURSELF IN THREE WORDS.

Structured. Caring. Achiever. 📌

Carlos, from page 5

as well as trying to understand every potential outcome and what the repercussions and consequences may be of those potential outcomes. In most cases, depending on timing, I consult with someone else. I consult with someone who may be connected to the situation and someone who isn’t directly connected in any way, shape, or form. This allows me to get some kind of outside-the-box perspective. I also rely on fact more than opinion.

WHAT WAS YOUR COLLEGE ADMISSION EXPERIENCE LIKE?

It was okay. My school counselor was available, but in hindsight, my counselor was limited to what he could provide because of the caseload. It’s evident to me that the notion of caseloads for school counselors across the country is a longtime problem. It’s not anything that’s new. My high school pushed the college experience, so that was always in the cards because of where I went. In terms of guidance of search, there wasn’t a ton because of time. Maybe there was someone else who needed more of my counselor’s time.

WHAT DO YOU DO TO RELAX?

I spend time with family, play video games, and watch Netflix. Now that there’s no drive home and my office is my dining room table, I must close my laptop and deliberately disconnect.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE QUOTE?

It’s from Bruce Lee and it is in the signature of my email, “Adapt what is useful, reject what is useless, and add what is specifically your own.”

WHERE WOULD YOU WANT TO TRAVEL IF YOU COULD GO ANYWHERE?

I love college admission because I do get to travel and I’ve seen a lot of the US. The countries at the top of my travel bucket list are Cuba and Ecuador, where my parents are from; I’ve never had the opportunity to visit their home countries. Another country on the list is Japan.

WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WATCHING OR READING?

I read a lot of *Inside Higher Ed*, NACAC’s *Today in College Admission*, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. I am constantly reading, especially right now. I recently binged *Tiger King* and *Social Dilemma* is on my watch list. I’ll most likely re-watch the first season of *The Mandalorian* in preparation for season two.

DESCRIBE YOURSELF IN THREE WORDS.

Loyal. Committed. Fun. 📌

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2021?

How will this year be different?

While I'm looking forward to visiting colleges and seeing friends at conferences in 2021, **I'm more excited about seeing college counselors encouraging high-achieving, low-income Black and brown students to apply to schools they usually wouldn't have a shot at, as selective colleges stay test-optional and test-free.**

I'm excited to see how different the freshman classes at selective colleges will be after this current cycle. I'm excited to see students test less often. I'm excited the college application process will never be the same again as it becomes more equitable. I look forward to seeing colleges value a student's life experience, rigor, and grades more than three to four hours on a single day.

—**Danny Tejada**, Lead College Counselor, We Go To College, LLC (MO)

We serve on the Board of Directors for The National Catholic College Admission Association. Our organization has launched a bimonthly newsletters for our high school counselors that focus on topics of interest during this time while also bringing in mindfulness and stress management discourse, which are of great value during COVID. We have also launched Catholic college virtual college fairs and virtual counselor town hall sessions. These successes represent our commitment to the tireless work being done in service to students.

As counselors and admission professionals alike have been jettisoned into thinking creatively and uprooting best practices, we want everyone to know **we are in this together and look forward to strengthened partnerships post-pandemic.**

—**Norma Gutierrez**, Director of College Counseling, Saint Thomas Academy (MN), and **Ryan M. Konkright**, Director of Admission, Division of Enrollment Management and Student Engagement, University of St. Thomas-Houston (TX)

Whatever we knew K-12 education to be like in Feb. 2020 will never be seen again. This fall brought many new challenges for our K-12 schools and to all educators. Almost every student and parent has gone through the most traumatic event of their lives and the pandemic is far from over.

School counselors have had to work even harder to reach our students, especially those who need us the most. If a student doesn't come into the school building, but instead learns remotely and wants to stay hidden, they can very easily disappear. Emails, phone calls, texts, and even the threat of failing or being retained does not engage a student who does not want to be engaged. It's like they have vanished from the educational landscape.

Many of us are worried about the mental health of our students. Others worry that students won't apply to college, fill out their FAFSAs, or attend next fall. And there are those who just worry that students are lonely and disconnected.

There are some bright spots, however. We have learned how to better utilize technology to deliver curriculum and instruction. We have learned how to be more efficient in teaching the most important and relevant topics. We have also learned that we can still communicate without being face-to-face in an office. **And mostly, we have learned how to appreciate what is really important while letting some of the other stuff go.**

—**Bob Bardwell**, Director of School Counseling & School-to-Career Coordinator, Monson High School (MA)

I am looking forward to a sense of normalcy in 2021. I am looking forward to seeing my students in a safe environment and making sure that their physical health, mental health, and academics are not compromised; connecting with parents to ensure their children are given the resources they need to apply to colleges; and reconnecting with teachers, staff, and admission reps.

2021 will look different in the way I approach college counseling. I know the needs of our students and parents will be different—how they select colleges, financial responsibilities, social aspects of being a freshman on campus, admission testing, campus tours, job market opportunities, and so much more. I hope to be able to continue to have meaningful and open conversations within admission deans/directors as we move towards the many changes of college admission.

—**Linh Snyder**, College & Career Counselor Malibu High School (CA)



By Zak George

INCLUSION IN A VIRTUAL SETTING

Creating Safe Spaces by Sharing Pronouns

Hi, my name is Zak, and I use he/him/his pronouns.

My introduction and inclusion of my pronouns signals to you that I am aware of and acknowledge that, if you would like, this is a safe space to share and discuss your own pronouns. In providing my pronouns, I'm working against cishnormativity and taking the first step toward respecting an individual's gender identity by providing insight into my own. In short, my introduction helps create the framework for the rest of our conversation. Just as I use "Zak"

over "Zachary," I use "he/him/his" pronouns when describing myself and encourage you to do the same in conversation and virtually.

As a profession, we interact with hundreds of students and other professionals daily. Including your pronouns as part of your introduction is a simple practice that we can all participate in and one that makes everyone feel more welcome in any space. In this new virtual space, that interaction may be through an email, over a

Zoom meeting, via a Skype interview, or through their admission application.

GLSEN (The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network) provides great [resources](#) for the inclusion of pronouns in an educational capacity. NACAC's LGBTQ+ Special Interest Group wanted to add some tips that are mindful of the virtual space for you to take back to your communities.

- **Include your pronouns in your email signature.** This takes about two

minutes, but is a huge step in showing your acceptance and acknowledgment of the importance of pronouns.

- **Add your pronouns to your Zoom name.** For example: Zak George, StriveScan (he/him/his).
- **Lead by example.** Start your information sessions with your pronouns and encourage your colleagues to incorporate this into their practice, too. Small changes lead to big impact.
- **Embrace the singular *they*.** Check your communications to students and families and replace *he/she* with *they*.

Every week or so, I see another discussion of how *they* can't be a singular pronoun, even though it has been in use that way for years. If you're interacting with a student or professional and they have not told you their pronouns, using the singular *they* is a perfectly acceptable way to refer to them. (See, I did it three times in one sentence!) In many cases, we casually use *they* without even thinking: "Where is Jenny? *They're* on *their* way!"

If you're not familiar with the terms "cisgender" and "cisnormativity," you're not alone. Your privilege may allow you to live in a space where your gender identity (your personal, self-identified conception of male, female, neither, or any

// For some individuals, seeing those pronouns in your signature or hearing those pronouns in your presentation acts as a signal that this is an inclusive and welcoming space."

gender expression along its spectrum) is aligned with your gender expression (your clothes, behaviors, and ways you communicate outwardly to others). I, too, have that privilege as a cisgender male. But as a cisgender male, I still want to provide space for gender non-binary, gender non-conforming, transgender, and cisgender folk to all feel welcome and included.

What does this look like in practice? In short, when I email individuals, people don't often misgender Zak, as it's a common male-identified name. When they meet me, because my gender identity and gender expression are male-presenting, I don't often get misgendered, either. Yet, I still have my pronouns in my signature, and I still like to lead with my pronouns in my interactions, because I want to open the space up to be inclusive to others. For some individuals, seeing those pronouns in your signature or hearing those pronouns in your presentation acts as a signal that this is an inclusive and welcoming space.

Regardless of your identity in the LGBTQIA+ community, the inclusion of pronouns is not just self-serving. It allows everyone the opportunity

to be included in the space and may even teach your cisgender students and colleagues a thing or two about the importance of pronouns. Yes, even allies could and should be mindful of this practice.

We take great care to learn about our students, their classes, their passions, and their futures as they navigate the college search process. If we start by recognizing a defining part of their identity (whether that's *Zak* versus *Zachary* or *they* instead of *he* or *she*) we can move toward a better understanding and acknowledgment of their identity.

Our SIG is open to any member of the NACAC community. The LGBTQ+ SIG works to provide space for professionals to discuss topics that are pertinent to LGBTQIA+ students as they navigate the college admission process, but also to provide space for LGBTQIA+ professionals in our professional organization. We have strived to include pronoun ribbons at the national conference, provided a college search resource guide for students and counselors, and assisted in the review of local affiliate bylaws to be more inclusive. LGBTQIA+ members and allies are always welcome to join our conversations about making the admission process and profession a more inclusive space for future students and counselors. ▢

Zak George is director of college and fair relations at StriveScan and co-chair of NACAC's LGBTQ+ Special Interest Group.

NACAC Special Interest Groups (SIGs) nurture the growing diversity in our association by providing "micro" communities within which members can network and add value to their NACAC membership experience. It's easy to get involved with one or more of NACAC's Special Interest Groups. [Learn more](#) about a SIG, join the SIG's social media groups, and contact the SIG's leaders. **NACAC members and nonmembers are welcome to join the LGBTQ+ SIG.** [Learn more](#) about the SIG on the NACAC website and [join the Facebook](#) or [Exchange group](#).

NACAC is so much stronger with you.

NACAC is working to ensure that the pathway to postsecondary education is accessible to every student who aspires to attend college, and we need you to help us make a difference.

We need your voice, your dedication, and your energy to continue the important work that supports students and their families as they navigate the college admission process. *Can we count on you?*

Invest in yourself.

Transform your profession.

Inspire your students.

RENEW OR JOIN NOW

Don't let
this be your
last issue!

Renew today.



NACAC

JOIN

PAYING OUR DUES

NACAC's New Membership Model Welcomes More Professionals into the Fold

By Nancy J. Herndon



It's time to pay your dues. As always, being a part of NACAC supports our professional growth and makes us part of a larger entity that truly can make a difference for our students—on a national and even global scale. But, as in most things this year, “paying our dues” is different. We have found many new ways of being held accountable.

We have learned we need to be tech-savvy to do our jobs. That the only way we can stay connected with our colleagues is to be a Zoom expert. That our conferences and fairs can be virtual, but have greater value in person. That the opportunities in the current reality are plentiful, but without this group of like-minded professionals, we would be less informed, less supported, and left to navigate some very tricky waters on our own.

Long before we knew 2020 was going to be a very different year, the Member Relations Committee made a recommendation to change NACAC's membership structure. The goal was to open

this wonderful group—and all the advantages membership entails—to more of our colleagues, especially to those who couldn't previously afford the “price of admission.”

The new membership model allows entire offices to be welcomed into the fold, instead of charging per member. In the affiliates where this model has been utilized, public high school participation has grown substantially. The benefits of having one fee include all members of a team of school counselors are two-fold. Each individual gains entry into a professional association that will enrich their work life going forward, and the new voices will enhance and inform the

association as a whole. The insights and opinions of our public high school counselors are welcomed and long overdue.

Both sides of the desk, as they say, are members of the club to which we belong. Please continue to “pay your dues” as it enriches the fabric of many professionals who lead and care about our youth. Welcome to all who can now come along on the journey! ▢

Nancy J. Herndon is director of college counseling at Hamilton Southeastern High School (IN).

[*Visit the NACAC website](#) for more detailed information about the revised membership model and your options to renew or join.

UP TO 8 STAFFERS*

- \$300 — SECONDARY SCHOOLS / CBOs
- \$525 — POSTSECONDARY SCHOOLS / NON-PROFITS
- \$650 — CORPORATIONS

INDIVIDUALS

- \$225 — FULL MEMBERSHIP
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THE OPPORTUNITY NETWORK

Serving the Big Apple's Underrepresented Students



Fellows meet 500+ professionals through summer internships and volunteer engagement events. Now, they're doing so virtually! (Photos courtesy The Opportunity Network)

While still undergraduates at Yale University (CT), Jessica Pliska and Brian Weinstein noticed an utter lack of resources, access, and free choice among students of color and students from low-income communities.

As they researched, among the many inequities they found were these startling statistics:

- In the US, non-white public schools are allotted \$23 billion less in funding than white school districts with the same number of students.
- New York City students get only 38 minutes of college counseling per year.
- Eighty percent of jobs and internships are secured through networks and an exclusionary “hidden job market.”
- The graduation rate is only 30 percent for underrepresented students who start college.
- Internships remain inaccessible to those relying on summer income—only 50 percent of internships are paid.

The culprit? Historic and systematic injustices that anchor educational inequity, and, in the process, create an opportunity gap.

To tackle these injustices, Pliska and Weinstein founded the Opportunity Network.

Since 2003, the [Opportunity Network](#) has ignited the drive, curiosity, and agency of underrepresented students on their paths to and through college and into thriving careers through its carefully formulated programs:

- **Fellows Program:** The Opportunity Network’s flagship program, an intensive six-year college and career success program, works with more than 1,000 New York City youths.
- **Career Fluency Partnerships:** Work alongside mission-aligned schools and community-based organizations.
- **UninterruptED Open Access:** Virtual learning opportunities for educators and students nationwide.

- **Opportunity Ignited:** Customized consulting and advisory services for employers looking to create more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplaces.

If it could, the Opportunity Network would offer a helping hand to all students in New York City. As it stands, it makes a major impact on a small slice of students from the Big Apple. “All of our students are from New York City—all five boroughs are represented,” said Emmanuel Moses, associate director of college guidance and transition at the Opportunity Network.

The Opportunity Network works with public schools, including charter schools, and has recently partnered with selective high schools to offer resources to underrepresented students who could use additional support. “You can still get lost navigating [the process]. It’s our job and duty to give that opportunity to students,” said Moses.

The Opportunity Network’s flagship program, the Fellows

Program, is an intensive six-year college and career success program that works with over 1,000 New York City youths who attend primarily public high schools. The program, which includes an application process, starts in 11th grade.

“We work with students from the summer after 10th grade to college graduation and into their careers,” said Moses. The Fellows Program changes lives by connecting students to internships, career opportunities, and personal and professional networks, according to Moses. Internship partners include ESPN, Google, HBO, the “I Have a Dream” Foundation, Morgan Stanley, Deloitte, and many more big names.

Moses said junior year starts off with a bang and covers the very basics. He cites the importance of exposure to the professional landscape and even introduces the differences between professional dress and business casual for students. “We talk about career exposure, we visit HBO, museums, talk about things they don’t know, in addition to community-building and networks over those two weeks. We build off that first introduction through junior year,” he said.

The program works off its patented career fluency model, which includes a focus on the following:

- **College access, transition, and success:** Students participate in activities and workshops to prepare to choose colleges and launch their professional careers.
- **Career awareness and exposure:** Students set college-to-career goals, learn about professional paths, and learn about the professional training for those careers.
- **Professional and workplace skills:** Students learn and apply fundamental skills

Ninety-two percent of the students graduate from college in six years—a full 93 percent of students are the first in their families to graduate from college. More impressive is the fact that 89 percent of students secure meaningful employment or graduate school admission within six months after graduation.

and concepts including interviewing and listening.

They also gain the skills they’ll need to work with a range of individuals in the workplace.

- **Networks and social capital:** Students learn the skills they need to build strong social networks to achieve college and career goals.

The program even includes a speed networking component to help students learn how to initiate conversations with professionals and how to exchange business cards. “It continues to build on navigating the college process as they’re trying to decide what they want to do,” as well as determine what travel abroad experiences or pre-college programs may interest them, said Moses.

Opportunity Network also works with employers. Ray Reyes, managing director of programs, said the organization’s Opportunity Ignited program is specifically for employers seeking to build equitable workplaces. “It’s for those looking to retain first-generation students of color and Black and Indigenous people of color in response to racial injustice in the country. It’s one of the conditions that needs to change in these corporations. First-generation students coming into these spaces and changing and adapting to these biases and structures can be problematic,” he said.

COVID-19 has added some challenges to the Fellows Program, but the team has worked to adapt, Reyes said. “We needed a platform to reach students and speak to their learning styles. We added weekly classes and added sessions to talk about the college application process once we start our transition to college curriculum in the spring,” he said.

The statistics speak for themselves: The Opportunity Network delivers. Moses said 92 percent of the students graduate from college in six years—a full 93 percent of students are the first in their families to graduate from college. More impressive (and what points to the long, storied success rate of the Opportunity Network) is the fact that 89 percent of students secure meaningful employment or graduate school admission within six months after graduation.

“We have a dedicated team to listen to the voices of the population we serve—our students,” Moses said. “The most important thing is our Fellows, all 1,030 of them. We’re always continuing to reflect, improve, and be better—to grow, listen, and learn.” 📌

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Melissa Brock is a 12-year veteran of college admission, founder of [College Money Tips](#) and Money editor at Benzinger. She loves helping families navigate their finances and the college search process. Check out her [essential timeline and checklist](#) for the college search.

A woman with dark curly hair, wearing a white blazer and a patterned scarf, is smiling and looking towards the right. She is at a professional event, possibly a conference or trade show, with other people and booths in the background. The background is slightly blurred, showing other attendees and what appears to be a booth with a blue tablecloth.

PROFESSIONAL TRENDS

AROUND THE TABLE

“

Admission isn't a crap shoot, but it ain't rocket science either. Very few colleges admit many, if any, unqualified students into their institutions. And while it's easy to predict how a class will perform, it's much harder to predict how an individual *student* will perform. That's what makes admission so frustrating and so rewarding at the same time.”

-Jon Boeckenstedt
page 21

COMPOUNDING CRISES

Technology and Equity
in the COVID Era

By Rachel Fried



Salinas, California – August 2020: Viral photo shows two girls studying outside Taco Bell to use the free Wi-Fi.

MAKING CONNECTIONS
Fact: Some students are well-connected...and some are...*not*.

We used to talk about connections as in professional networks; who you knew helped you get ahead. Today, the concept of connectivity has new meaning. Being disconnected means being unable to learn, unable to take advantage of opportunities.

No doubt, there is a massive equity crisis surrounding technology and education. The sudden shift to virtual learning nationwide exposed devastating disparities.

True, some schools provided seemingly seamless transitions. Using high-tech platforms, they connected students with high-functioning devices in highly wired homes for full-time synchronous (“live”) instruction that rivaled its in-person equivalent. *Impressive*. And so lucky.

Most districts did whatever they could—providing hot spots, distributing classroom laptop sets, uploading instructional content.

Ostensibly, they did everything right. And yet, countless students are still unable to reliably connect...unable to realistically pursue their educations regardless of aspirations.

According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, approximately 16.9 million students lack reliable internet access at home. And yet 85 percent of public districts are using at least some virtual instruction, as noted in a recent *Education Week* story. That means nearly one-third of students are unable to dependably engage with school.

Even in the best circumstances, keeping in touch with students through virtual methods is a nightmare. We send email after unanswered email, wondering if our words are being read. A few students might get in touch when they need help with something specific. Our emotions, as educators, are all over the map. It feels like we’re scrambling to keep kids from free falling, and the tech equity crisis is making catching them much harder.

Recently I got this text from a senior. “Can you help me do an essay? The application is due next week.”

Classic. Of course, I replied immediately. “For sure! Let’s chat. When is good for you?”

No response.

A day later I followed up. “Checking in. Still want essay help? Let me know!”

No response.

Then, “Hey! How’s the essay? You good?”

I was elated to finally get a reply. “*I’m stuck. Can you meet with me?*”

“Yes! Today? When is good for you?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Cool, what time?”

No response.

And so it goes. Pre-COVID-19, we’d snag this kid in the hall, look up their schedule and wait for them outside of class... whatever it took. We’d find them. We’d help them. We’d move them forward. Now, we’re at the mercy of technology to connect us, and some of our students are simply...unreachable.

TECH EQUITY

The digital divide disproportionately affects students who are already facing serious systemic injustices. Of families with annual incomes under \$50,000, 33 percent lack

reliable connectivity, as do one-in-three Black, Latino/a/x, and Native families, according to the Alliance for Excellent Education. Even when some connectivity exists for live instruction, teachers may never see their students' faces as districts err on the side of caution regarding student privacy.

Imagine trying to meaningfully connect with young people you've never met...online, without video feed. How would you know who is listening? How could you tell if someone was confused or in need? It's painfully ironic. The tech equity crisis is forcing the most underserved schools to revert to the least effective and least equitable education tools simply because they *can* be done online.

Our most in-need students are, quite simply, falling through the cracks...and we all see it happening. As is too often the case with student outcomes, zip codes (shouldn't, but definitively *do*) matter. Where young people live very much determines their educational realities.

And the same goes for schools. Underserved students are often learning in underserved schools, taught by underserved educators. Where students have grown hopeless, unable to sign on, teachers and counselors are becoming desperate, resorting to posting materials in a dozen different places because at least students have a fighting chance to access it. This is essential context. Equity solutions *must* be community-wide as we innovate in the "new normal."

RURAL REALITIES

The ripple effect of the connectivity crisis will be felt for years in postsecondary access and success narratives. For too many, the crisis is amplified due to circumstance.

// The tech equity crisis is forcing the most underserved schools to revert to the least effective and least equitable education tools, tests, because they can be done offline."

This is certainly true for rural communities. The geographic realities of rural life directly affect educational opportunities.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) reports that nearly 40 percent of rural students in the US lack high-speed internet access at home and many more live without reliable connection at all. To overcome the tech equity challenge, a lot of underserved schools have been, as one of my favorite rural principals puts it, "relying purely on people and paper."

Sometimes, it's about devices. Yet, who hasn't experienced the "fancy paperweight" scenario? A device rendered useless because everything a student would use the device for is...*online*. And for millions of well-intentioned students, "online" just isn't happening.

Plus, said with love, devices break down all the time. In rural areas, a broken-down device might mean no connectivity for a while, because the person who can fix it lives two hours away. Even with functioning devices, rural internet access is frequently limited by lack of infrastructure. In southern Appalachia, lines are often run to the centers of towns where commercial interests are clustered. But most people live in the surrounding hills, outside the reach of existing fiber.

One of my students walks to the top of the nearest hill to get strong enough cell service to sign onto her online dual enrollment classes. Another student takes his younger

siblings into town every morning to do school using free Wi-Fi in the church parking lot.

And if access is available? Rural communities are often at the mercy of a single service provider, which can increase costs and decrease quality. Any internet helps, but good internet is best. For some of my students to do basic homework, everyone else in the family has to temporarily go offline.

MORE THAN CONNECTIVITY

Technology-fueled disparities exist far beyond connectivity. The relationship between students, families, and the educational system is fundamentally changing right before our eyes. Only 27 percent of rural, public school districts set expectations in 2020 that teachers provide remote instruction, compared with a still-modest 51 percent of their urban peers. Additionally, less than half of those districts expected teachers to monitor student progress, according to the Center on Reinventing Public Education. Real (rural) students are missing out.

The way students are, or are not, learning now has massive consequences for the way they will, or will not, learn in college and beyond. Too many are missing out-on classroom discussions, personalized support, and curiosity-driven collaboration. The extent of learning loss must not be ignored; their experiences now directly influence not only how they will learn on our campuses,



but what aspects of learning they will prioritize in their college search and selection processes.

In rural communities, reputation and word of mouth are everything. Trust grows over time through familiarity. As we all know, it only takes one or two negative (or positive) stories from students to completely shift the conversation in a community...and to reinforce or decimate years of work growing a college-going culture.

The sheer amount of postsecondary melt we're seeing in Appalachia, for example, is staggering. The number of students applying for and participating in postsecondary education opportunities is sharply declining. One school I work with typically sees 15 to 20 students submit in-state four-year applications by October. As of Nov. 15, this school had only four applications submitted...roughly 75 percent reduced engagement. That's real.

Any snag can cause underserved students to derail and technology

equity issues are amplifying *all* snags at an alarming rate.

CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING

So now, more than ever, when it comes to understanding underserved students, context is *everything*.

But we can't consider context we don't know about. We can't put students' achievements in context if we don't realize their communities' daily realities. And schools have been making all kinds of coronavirus-driven decisions that influence student pathways. From omitting grade points for spring classes to dropping courses mid-semester, high schools in particular have had to get creative in the name of being realistic. Is every school's situation widely understood?

Reality check: We are in an acute "context crisis." The very students whose context is most critical to their success in the admission process are those least likely to have ample context in their application files, because

they, and the schools that serve them, are least likely to have good information about what to share.

This is fixable, not negotiable. It is incumbent on all of us to proactively identify and contribute critical context. The inequities in technology and education exacerbated by COVID-19 make it evermore essential that we do everything we can to take into account the experiences of individual students as we evaluate their potential and adjust to support their growth.

Assume there's context to be had. Ask for context you don't see. Add context when you know it. Let's move forward together—because we cannot, we must not, let our students fall through the cracks. Young people deserve better. Educators and schools deserve better. Communities deserve better. It's time to act. [👉](#)

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Rachel Fried is a social justice educator serving public schools and rural communities nationwide. She can be reached at rachelfried@outlook.com.



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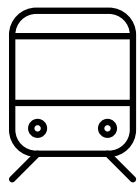
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THE 8 THINGS I WISH EVERYONE KNEW ABOUT COLLEGE ADMISSION



By Jon Boeckenstedt

Perhaps it's our own fault: We selected this very esoteric profession and we have to put up with the confusion. At least most of us did.

When I started in admission in 1983, it wasn't an active choice—it was mostly out of necessity. My student loans were coming due and I had to come up with \$52.79 every month for the next seven years to repay the \$3,500 I had borrowed to get a bachelor's degree. The economy was tough and I traded one job talking to strangers (selling cable TV door-to-door) for another with a starting salary of \$11,000. But at least in this job, the people were interested in talking to me, which makes all the difference for an introvert.

Back then, few people I met or talked to socially seemed to be interested in what I did or even inquired about the facts or the nuances of my job. It was just a job to me and to people who were my friends. They didn't care about college admission and I didn't ask about ledgers or legal briefs or journalism.

When admission work—and admission in general—became something else I can't quite pinpoint. But when our national fascination with the quest for the best came to the forefront, friends

and neighbors started asking me a lot of questions, and it was kind of fun to talk about it. What was once just another job became a subject of interest and while I could never fully explain it, I felt it my duty to give it a shot. Looking back, I'm guessing it would take three years of doing the job—the weeks on the road; the file review; the parent, student, and counselor interactions; the same question a thousand times—to have the experience necessary to explain this profession to others.

So, it was interesting and puzzling to me at about that time, to see people who had never done our work start to write about it, opine about it, and make general pronouncements about it.

This has turned out to be considerably less fun than the job I've grown to love, because too often, I've found, they're wrong. They might have their facts straight but lack nuance. They might see a few examples and make general pronouncements that don't hold up under scrutiny. They often make comparisons that seem disparaging or even mean

between what we do and what other professions do. They might be victims of their own privileged upbringing, which makes them think their little slice of reality is the only reality.

I'm under no illusions, of course, that a piece in a professional journal will disabuse people of the notions and prejudices they carry with them, but I have a bad habit of, in the words of the late great newspaper columnist Molly Ivins (quoting a politician from Texas), "beating my head against a dead horse." As someone who almost didn't go to college at all, I think making a difference in the lives of students is worth it, even if I'll never know how many—if any—I've influenced. And, of course, I think the work we do is special and worth defending. So, here I sit with my keyboard, trying to distill over 35 years into a few thousand words.

To that end, I've pulled together a list of the big things people misunderstand or get wrong about what we do for a living, and I've added a few thoughts to steer them in the right—excuse me—in my direction. Here goes:

Admission is not a process of skimming the "best" off the top.

In the first place, we can't define "best." But even if we could, selecting a class of nothing but "the best" would be pretty boring, the process wouldn't need people to do it, and the outcome wouldn't be very interesting. With intellectual life at the center of any university, "interesting" is important, but that's hard to explain. Parents know they don't always hire the applicant with the most years of experience, or the best GPA, or the one who graduated from the brand-name university, but it's still hard for them to grasp how admission works, especially at the most selective institutions. In the words of Femi Ogundele at University of California-Berkeley, admission should be looking for "excellence, not perfection."

Of course we think about money. A colleague once told me, "Without margin, there is no mission." You can't run a university on good deeds and goodwill. The electric company wants cash each month; the faculty expect their paychecks will hit their accounts on the last day of the pay period; and test tubes and superconducting nuclear magnetic spectrometers aren't free. Too many people think "not-for-profit" means "charity." It doesn't and it shouldn't. What makes us different is where we draw the line: Profit is not our motivator.

Graduation rates are inputs, not outputs. Malcolm Gladwell clarified selection effects and treatment effects in his terrific article on college admission in *The New Yorker*. You don't become beautiful by going to modeling school; you're selected because you're beautiful to start with. That's a selection effect. You don't get chosen to become a marine; what happens in basic training makes you one. That's a treatment effect.

Congratulations to the 2020 Muir Award winner, Jon Boeckenedt, who won for his *Admitting Things* blog, which is widely respected and seen as a clear, passionate voice backed up by data. With his finger on the pulse of college admission and enrollment management, his fearless writing insightfully supports our profession and the students we serve. We appreciate him contributing this column.

Similarly, if your selection process admits mostly children of wealthy, college-educated parents, who have known since third grade that they're expected to graduate from college, or if you can provide extraordinary financial assistance to that small group of students who don't fall into that category, your graduation rates are going to be high. It's another example of selection effect. Your graduation rate is inversely related to the amount of risk you take in the admission process. If you take few risks in admission, your graduation rates are going to be a lot higher.

We don't really live in a meritocracy. I once heard University of Wisconsin-Madison professor Harry Brighouse speak about the differences in the US and British education systems and a point he made has stuck with me. In America, he said, we think merit and achievement are the same thing. But no one, he pointed out, gets to achieve anything unless someone invests in them, so students who are the beneficiaries of that investment might have achieved a great deal—but that's not the same thing as merit. It does explain, however, why people who can invest in their children might equate the two.

It means that wealth looks good on applications when trying to measure "merit" if what you're really looking for is achievement.

And it means, of course, that "merit aid" flows to students who have had the benefit of parental or societal investment, and those students are not always the ones who need it or deserve it. It's just a way to justify the practice. Instead of being agents of social change, the admission office may be at the heart of the problem of educational inequity, usually, at the behest of the powers in the university.

Standardized tests aren't academic qualifications. Some parts of the SAT and ACT clearly measure what a student has learned. If that's all they measured, they'd maybe (big maybe) be useful tools in the admission process. They also—to a greater or lesser degree—measure emotional control, speed processing, and formal preparation and practice, among other things, which may or may not be valuable in college. Choosing the "right" answer from four given might be a skill you'd rather have than not, but good luck applying it in philosophy class.

We have no standardized American high school curriculum, so we're giving these tests to many students who have never had the opportunity to learn the content, through no fault of their own. The tests don't measure "aptitude" or "native ability" and never have, despite the monikers once attached to

them. And as barriers to the gated communities of academia, they serve merely as minor obstacles to the wealthy, and impenetrable impediments to those without the social, financial, and cultural capital to overcome them. In that sense, they are great tools to use in perpetuating inequality.

Virtually every lawsuit suggesting that admission processes are illegal is based on the premise that “I was more qualified because my test scores were higher.” Pull that premise out from underneath and watch the argument collapse on itself.

classes available at well-resourced schools, great personal statements honed for weeks or months with professionals; high test scores bolstered by months of test prep; letters of recommendation written by teachers who are trained in workshops by the very people reading them; leadership or stellar accomplishments enabled by private lessons or the freedom from after-school jobs; and often college-educated parents who call the institution their alma mater. Only when colleges consider race and ethnicity do lower-income and first-generation students with high

can and should serve as the nexus between external markets and the internal workings of the academy, but it doesn’t always work out that way. Boards of Trustees are often filled with businesspeople, some of whom don’t understand—and don’t always like—the way colleges run.

Admission isn’t a crap shoot, but it ain’t rocket science either. Very few colleges admit many, if any, unqualified students into their institutions. And while it’s easy to predict how a class will perform, it’s much harder to predict how an individual *student* will perform. That’s what makes admission so frustrating and so rewarding at the same time. The average GPA of the freshman class after one year is almost pre-ordained; but some superstars will flunk out and some of those students you took a chance on will become stars themselves. The illusion of precision in admission is a fairy tale we tell ourselves.

I couldn’t have imagined when I set out on my first admission trip that I’d still be connected to the profession almost four decades later, and I suppose I couldn’t have believed we’d have to be explaining and defending what we do and how we do it. It’s important, I think, for us to admit when we don’t live up to the expectations we set for ourselves, but it’s also important to defend and provide context for the people who talk about, write about, and legislate for our profession. We’re the ones who live the reality of the work, both the rewards and risks, and at certain times, it’s an 18-hour a day job we all love.

I hope you agree that what we do is worth defending and worth fighting for. [↪](#)

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Jon Boeckenstedt is vice provost for enrollment management at Oregon State University.

Admission isn’t a crap shoot, but it ain’t rocket science either.

There is no such thing as need-blind admission. While it’s true that at many colleges the admission officer can’t see FAFSA data, that would be *FAFSA-blind* admission.

The fact is that you can see need in almost every line of most applications and you’d have to be willfully ignorant not to recognize it. Put aside for a minute that most colleges don’t have sufficient application volume to even have the luxury of considering ability to pay. Those that do expect successful applicants to have most of the trappings of wealth: the AP

need get a chance at a break in the process. That, of course, is the one thing people with all the other advantages like to complain about the most.

We don’t always set the agenda, but we’re expected to carry it out. People who blame the admission office might be right to a point. But the university mission and the strategy to accomplish it, as well as the objectives the dean or director or vice president gets measured against, are set much higher up the food chain. A good admission or financial aid function

ABOUT THE MUIR AWARD

The award is named for John Burke Muir, who was NACAC’s vice-president for publication and research from 1983–1986. In that position he served as editor of *The Journal of College Admission*. An English teacher, drama coach, and college counselor, John Muir was an ardent advocate for his students, an inspiring theatrical director, and an exemplary professional colleague who brought humanity, humor, and excellence to all of his work.

Since 1984, this award has been limited to *Journal* articles. Because the nature of *Journal* content (and delivery) has changed, NACAC opened the criteria to appreciate and recognize the varied content-creation efforts and talents of our members.

By David A. Hawkins



ADVOCACY OUTLOOK

On Election Day, 78.9 million Americans cast a ballot for Joe Biden, while 73.2 million voted for Donald Trump. In the framework of the Electoral College, Biden received 306 electoral votes to Trump's 232. Yet despite local and state certifications of the results, and despite scores of court decisions affirming the results, it was only after a violent mob invaded the United States Capitol building—incited by Trump himself—with the intent of disrupting Congressional certification of the election results that Trump acknowledged that he would be leaving office. The deep roots of Trump's white nationalist movement, combined with the shocking spectacle of an unruly, violent mob attacking the capitol building, will cast a dark pall over the government for years to come. Yet the work of government must continue, as evidenced by Congress' determination to reconvene on Jan. 6 to certify the presidential election results just hours after the violent insurrection.

However, Biden will face a closely divided legislature that will present a significant challenge to large-scale initiatives, regardless of where they originate on the political spectrum. Democrats maintained a slim majority in the House of Representatives, and effectively won the majority in the Senate after winning runoff elections in two Georgia Senate races. Despite the unified control of Congress and the administration, the prospects for major new initiatives in education remain uncertain, given narrow majorities

in both chambers and a legislative agenda that will be dominated by fallout from the Trump administration.

At the state level, according to the [Education Commission of the States](#), Republicans control 61 state legislative chambers, while Democrats control 37. (Nebraska is the sole state with a unicameral legislature where candidates are not elected with a party affiliation.) Likewise, 27 governors are Republican, while 23 are Democratic. State governments are critical to public K-12 and higher

education, because they, along with local school districts, are responsible for the large majority of education funding and policy.

In addition to forming his cabinet and filling appointed positions throughout the federal government, Biden will confront a complex landscape dominated by COVID-19 concerns. His appointment of [Ron Klain](#), who led the Obama administration's Ebola response, signals that bringing America out of the COVID-19 pandemic will be Biden's highest priority. While public health measures will occupy center stage, the administration's transition team has also been working on the many-faceted outgrowths of this pandemic, including those related to education. Biden has signaled his commitment to robust public education by nominating Connecticut Education Commissioner Miguel Cardona as Education Secretary, a former public school teacher, principal, and district administrator.

Education issues that are high on the transition team's agenda include student loan relief,

particularly for those who are unemployed or have been targeted by predatory (often for-profit) colleges; relief funding for K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions; and funding to close the equity gap that has widened considerably in education due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Beyond the immediate transition, the issues that loom large for the Biden administration will continue to be driven by COVID-19. In order to implement its policy priorities, the administration will have to work with a closely divided Congress, particularly to obtain funding for COVID relief, education, and student aid. With the promise of a continued economic crisis and significant budget gaps at both the state and federal levels, Congress will play a pivotal role in the nation's ability to recover from the pandemic. Beyond the COVID-19 crisis, Congress has yet to renew the [Higher Education Act](#) (HEA), which governs federal higher education policy, including student financial aid.

In September 2020, NACAC released [Roadmap for Change: Reimagining Higher Education as a Public Good](#), a long-term vision to guide education policy in accordance with the association's core values. NACAC has already encouraged the Biden transition team to focus on several of the plan's priorities in the short-term, and will continue to press Congress, the administration, and state legislatures for long-term policy initiatives to ensure equitable access to educational opportunity.

As the Biden transition team works to assemble its administrative structure, NACAC has [asked](#) that the new administration provide student loan relief to struggling borrowers, double the Pell grant, extend DACA protections, and roll back harmful regulatory provisions enacted by the Trump administration that led to a decline in international student enrollment and prioritized predatory colleges over students and taxpayers. In addition, and in light of recent events, NACAC will remain committed to equal educational opportunity for all students as a critical step toward healing our country's wounds.

As 2021 approaches, consider getting involved with NACAC's advocacy initiatives—whether related to public policy, institutional practices, or just in support of the college admission counseling profession. For government relations issues, news, and policy updates relevant to your work, follow @NACACWonk on Twitter. [🔗](#)

—David A. Hawkins



Helping students reach their post-secondary goals has never been more critical. And, yet, many may face systematic barriers in the college application process. Common App is evolving the application to clear a path to college for all students.

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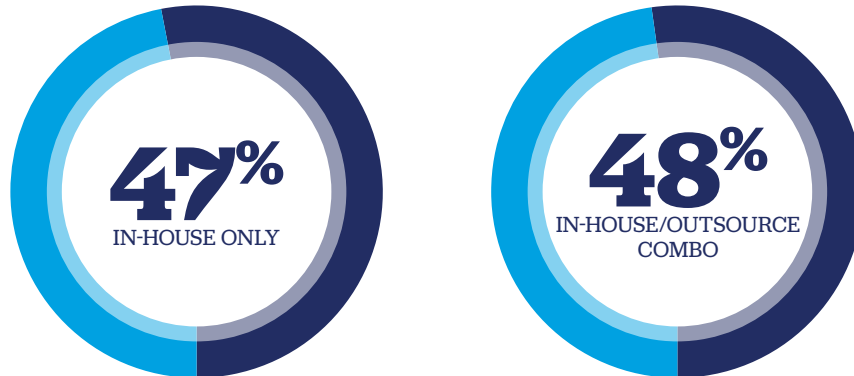
STRATEGIC DATA ANALYTICS REPORT

NACAC, with support from Salesforce.org, conducted a survey of 1,194 four-year NACAC-member colleges and universities to better understand how admission offices are using data strategically to inform and support institutional goals. (Respondents from 377 admission offices completed the survey.) Two findings stood out especially:

DATA ANALYTIC FUNCTION

The results indicated that a vast majority of four-year colleges either kept all admission data analytics in house (47 percent) or used a combination of both in-house and outsourced expertise (48 percent). Among survey respondents that outsourced any of their data analytic function, a large majority reported using only one vendor (50 percent) or two vendors (37 percent). The data analytic functions most likely to be outsourced included prospective student search and enrollment predictive modeling.

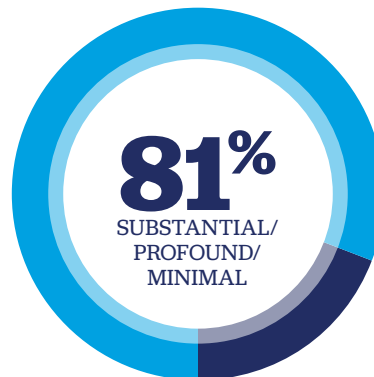
A vast majority of four-year colleges kept at least some admission data in-house.



IMPACT OF COVID-19

Due to disruptions in the typical admission process caused by COVID-19, most colleges expected to see some impact on their ability to build a pool of prospective students—7 percent profound, 46 percent substantial, and 28 percent minimal. To mitigate the impact, colleges reported increasing their typical prospect sources and/or parameters and finding ways to better utilize available data.

Most colleges expected COVID-19 to impact their pool of prospective students.



Complete survey results, which include information on strategic enrollment management plans, data analytic capabilities, enrollment predictive modeling, and barriers to maximizing strategic use of data, can be found in the [full report](#). —Melissa Clinedinst



WORKING FOR YOU

AROUND THE TABLE

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Trauma happens: Each of us is living through a pandemic that has pushed us in ways that will impact us for the rest of our lives. Life was already complicated without COVID-19, am I right? Due to the coronavirus crisis, more and more students will experience trauma and need mental health support. For this reason, college admission counselors and consultants need to be trauma-informed in their practice and approach their work using a healing lens to ensure students are adequately supported during the essay writing process.”

-Ashley Y. Lipscomb
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By Crystal E. Newby

Seattle, Washington - Jun 4, 2020: Flowers at the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone

SO YOU WANT TO BE ANTIRACIST?

On my first day of kindergarten, I was called the N-word for the first time. I don't remember what I wore that day or what I had for breakfast, but I distinctly remember a little white boy calling me that derogatory word on the playground. I burst into tears.

I may have only been 5 years old at the time, but I understood what the word meant. However, I didn't understand why he would address me by such a hateful name. Later in life I realized that the little boy was only using language he was taught or he heard at home. I mean, who is inherently racist at that age? It's a learned behavior and unfortunately, some five-year-olds grow up to be 35-year-old racists.

White supremacy has been embedded into the very fabric of the United States since its inception. Black people have been on the receiving end of racist attacks—verbal and physical alike—for hundreds of years. We have been whipped, spit at, brutally beaten, and lynched all because we wanted equal treatment and access to human rights such as education, voting, sitting at the front of the bus, sitting at the lunch counter, and even drinking out of a shared water

fountain. When we showcased glimmers of success or resistance, our communities were burned to the ground, and our people were murdered. If you need points of reference, Google the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921 or the MOVE bombing in Philadelphia in 1985.

Most recently, white supremacy once again reared its ugly head when a mob of far-right rioters stormed the US Capitol—something that hasn't happened since 1814—to protest the results of the 2020 presidential election. Incited by falsehoods spewed by the 45th President of the United States, these domestic terrorists pushed past barriers and law enforcement officials in an attempt to stop the Electoral College convening to declare Joe Biden the 46th President. They destroyed property, overtook the offices of political leaders, and even took selfies during these horrendous

acts, while declaring, “this is the people’s house.”

The law enforcement response to this attack on the Capitol is in stark contrast to the response during the Black Lives Matter protests in DC last summer, when the Capitol building steps were heavily guarded, and peaceful protestors were met with tear gas, rubber bullets, and violence so the President could pose for a photo op in front a church. Had the individuals who stormed the Capitol been Black or brown, it's safe to say we know what the outcome would have been.

The saying “the more things change, the more they stay the same” rings true even in the year 2021. Racism is still prevalent and rears its ugly head in schools, workplaces, and politics—everywhere. There is evidence of racism and implicit and explicit bias in the college admission and counseling profession, not only against BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) students, but against BIPOC professionals.

To ensure equity and access in the admission process, admission and counseling professionals must learn how to become antiracist.

Let's be honest, it's difficult to look ourselves in the mirror and critically examine our faults and recognize how we may be complicit in racist admission practices and policies. *New York Times* bestselling author of *How to be an Antiracist*, Ibram X. Kendi, said, "Being an antiracist requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination."

NACAC recently hosted the first session in its Antiracist Education Institute, led by consultant Lawrence Alexander and 10 past and present Guiding the Way to Inclusion (GWI) faculty members. Alexander began the session noting it would be "cognitively dissonant" and that he hoped participants chose to join the session for authentic reasons and not superficial ones. Throughout the session, Alexander and the faculty challenged participants to evaluate where they are on their journey in racial equity and justice, as well as identify how racism shows up in their

// We are at a crossroads in our country. It is time to roll up our sleeves and do antiracist work. Our lives and livelihoods depend on it. Our families depend on it. Our students depend on it. Our country's future depends on it."

work, how systems of oppression monetize and incentivize their work, and how admission and counseling professionals can confront these issues in their practice, within their offices, and on their campuses.

Alexander also identified structural inequities present in the college admission process, such as testing policies, which impact students of color at higher rates than white students. By the end of the session, participants were left to reflect on how antiracism challenges them personally, how their professional practice may change if they commit to antiracism, and how to identify

the "easy wins" in their offices regarding antiracist work.

We are at a crossroads in our country. It is time to roll up our sleeves and do antiracist work. Our lives and livelihoods depend on it. Our families depend on it. Our students depend on it. Our country's future depends on it. It's not enough to sit idly by and say, "I'm not racist." It is imperative to be antiracist. As my good brother, Lawrence Alexander, noted "No more spray tans over white supremacy." We can no longer put a Band-Aid over a gunshot wound. We must face white supremacy head on and dismantle it. ▢

—Crystal E. Newby

NACAC is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Crystal E. Newby as the organization's first-ever director of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). She has served the association for seven years, most recently as the senior associate director of education and training. Her educational credentials include a BA and MA from the University of Scranton (PA) and an EdD from Johns Hopkins University (MD).

Newby will have wide-ranging involvement in all NACAC endeavors, developing an organizational strategy to identify, address, and assess DEI priorities through the association's endeavors. She will continue to oversee the Guiding the Way to Inclusion program and the Antiracist Education Institute.

She is also part of the staff team implementing a grant NACAC received from the Lumina Foundation to develop recommendations on creating racially equitable college admission and financial aid practices. The position will be housed in the Educational Content and Policy division within NACAC.

"Issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion remain prevalent in the college admission and counseling space and the challenges of 2020 have only exacerbated matters. In this role, my goal is to collaborate with those who serve in the admission and counseling profession—as well as those who serve in spaces dedicated to DEI—to disrupt the status quo and dismantle systems and processes that do not support our students," said Newby.

JOIN US FOR NACAC DEI EVENTS/ TRAININGS

ANTIRACIST EDUCATION INSTITUTE
FEB. 10 | APRIL 14 | JUNE 9
NACACNET.ORG/
ANTIRACIST

GUIDING THE WAY TO INCLUSION
JULY 25–28 | CHICAGO
NACACNET.ORG/GWI

NACAC TOWN HALLS
NACACNET.ORG/
TOWN-HALLS

By Ffiona Rees



INTENTIONAL ABANDONMENT

The NACAC Board of Directors drops preconceived notions as they plan to bring NACAC into the future

What a bizarre confluence of events to occur predominately in 2020: a Department of Justice order; practical and philosophical questions about NACAC’s revenue streams; the retirement of former CEO Joyce Smith and Angel B. Pérez starting as the new CEO; oh yes, and a global pandemic! (If you accurately predicted them all, please let me know, I’d love to go to Vegas with you!)

As unlikely as this combination of events is, it has catapulted NACAC into the future. It’s an exhilarating, stimulating, and highly-evolving time for our organization! At our first board meeting/retreat of the year, just before Thanksgiving, we asked some difficult questions that must be answered if we are to set a course for the association’s new direction: *Who are we? Who do we really serve? What projects are no longer critical to the mission of NACAC? What things have we been doing for years, or worse, decades, because that’s how we’ve always done them? How can we really be more inclusive, transparent, and equitable in every aspect of our work?*

During the two days, the board listened to—and grilled—the CEOs of NACAU, NASFAA, and NASPA to learn how other education associations are governed. We spent time dissecting, debating, and deliberating the mission of NACAC. We poured through feedback from the CEO listening tour to compare and contrast it to the recommendations provided by Ad Hoc Committee on Leadership in College Admission and the Ad Hoc Committee on Governance Restructuring. Additionally, we combined the expertise of returning board members with the fresh perspectives of the new elected members, Robyn Lady, Sanjay Mitchell, and Mark

Steinlage, and the two newly appointed members, Don Yu and Dan Lugo. ([Learn more](#) about the new board members.)

If there was one theme that emerged from our two days together, it was “Intentional Abandonment” (a term that was coined in our required retreat reading, *The Path to Relevance*.) We left understanding we must use our past knowledge as the foundation for the road ahead, but we must not hold onto our preconceived notions and opinions if NACAC is really going to adapt, evolve, and morph into a leading organization.

There’s a lot of work to do, and it won’t always be smooth, but the NACAC’s board, CEO, and staff are buckled in for the ride, eager to help steer a new course for the future. ▢

Ffiona Rees is deputy director at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and NACAC president-elect.

ADDRESSING TRAUMA IN THE COLLEGE ESSAY WRITING PROCESS

By Ashley Y. Lipscomb



Trauma happens: Each of us is living through a pandemic that has pushed us in ways that will impact us for the rest of our lives. Life was already complicated without COVID-19, am I right? Due to the coronavirus crisis, more and more students will experience trauma and need mental health support. For this reason, college admission counselors and consultants need to be trauma-informed in their practice and approach their work using a healing lens to ensure students are adequately supported during the essay writing process. I developed the Restorative & Transformative Writing Process (RTWP) to offer a practical approach to building a trauma-informed practice for those working with students writing college admission essays.

A trauma-informed practice in college admission consulting seeks to provide an experience of safety, choice, collaboration, and empowerment, and is well aware of larger interconnected systems of domination that shape our world, according to David Treleaven, an expert in trauma-sensitive mindfulness. It is a starting point that centers healing, wellness, empathy, acceptance, and self-care.

CREATING A TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE IN FOUR STEPS

1. Be Present and Check In with Yourself

First and foremost, I know you are (probably) not a therapist or psychologist; however, as the counselor or consultant, you are listening to stories that require an

immense amount of compassion and empathy. Conditionally, you may experience what Laura van Dernoot Lipsky and Connie Burk—authors of *Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others*—call a trauma exposure response. This response occurs when you are “affected by the suffering of others” and it “takes a toll on [you] personally and professionally.” Therefore, it is imperative you check in with yourself on a regular basis to ensure that you are not internalizing the struggle of your students or assuming their struggles as your own. Be intentional about developing a practice that centers your care, especially if a student triggers a trauma response within you. If you are triggered when working

with a student, model how to prioritize self-care. Be honest, let them know you need a break, and consider asking someone else to support that student. As we have heard it said before, you can’t pour from an empty cup. Journal; set boundaries; meditate; get outdoors; do whatever it takes to ensure that your mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being is taken care of because students deserve to work with the version of you that is the most grounded and present.

2. Determine What Type of Student You’re Working With

Students approach the prospect of writing about trauma in various ways. You’ll generally encounter four different types of students in the essay writing process. Although RTWP can work for a range of students, some parts of the process are more helpful for certain types of students and those students should be encouraged to utilize them more fully than others.

The Not-At-All Student: This type of student is not willing to engage in any form of storytelling about trauma or traumatic event(s). Regardless of whether the student needs to explain

extenuating circumstances in their college application, there are other topics they can explore in their essay. Extenuating circumstances can be disclosed in other parts of the application.

The “Ok, Maybe” Student:

This type of student is hesitant to write about their experience with trauma in their college essay, but decides to anyway. Again, remind them of other options. If, however, they are committed to writing a particular story, suggest they use plenty of anchoring and mindfulness techniques to assist in the writing process.

The “Yup, Let’s Do It”

Student: This type of student wants to share their experiences living through and with trauma. Be mindful of trauma responses that may arise. If a student is writing about these experiences for the first time, it can be jarring when they deeply reflect on emotions that they have either dissociated from or avoided.

“Each of us has traversed a gauntlet of traumas, shames, and fears to be where we are today, wherever that is. Each day we wake to a planet full of social, political, and economic obstructions that siphon our energy and diminish our sense of self.”

— **Sonya Renee Taylor**, award-winning performance poet, activist, and founder of *The Body is Not An Apology*

The Extenuating Circumstances Student:

The name says it all: It’s in the best interest of this type of student to address extenuating circumstances (lower grades, test scores, performance, etc.) somewhere in their college application. If, in your professional opinion, a student can beautifully express their story in the form of an essay, be sure to get to know them more fully as they may have trouble

articulating their thoughts on the topic.

3. Remind Students They Have Options

Encourage students to use Ethan Sawyer’s *Values Exercise*. This exercise helps students go beyond solely focusing on what their challenges may be by exploring their values. For some students, the two may be interrelated. Having students try out something like the *Values Exercise* helps them understand who they are and what they care about. Those discoveries will help them decide which qualities they’d like to demonstrate in their application.

4. Acknowledge and Affirm

When working with students who are writing about adversity, hardship, trauma, or a traumatic event, acknowledge that the student did not have to share those vulnerable parts of themselves and mention specific details about their storytelling that resonated with you. Affirm that you know the student is more than what they can share in one essay. Affirm that their value is not predicated upon the decision letters they will receive from any college or university.



FIVE WAYS TO PUT RTWP IN ACTION

1. Invite Students to Establish an Anchor

- In any pre-work applications or documents that students complete before meeting with you, ask them to list items, images, colors, toys, cards, gifts, etc., that make them feel emotionally safe. Provide space for them to write a sentence or two that explains why that item reminds them of safety.
- At the beginning of your sessions, take two minutes to have students physically grab one of those items and remind them to have it present when they are writing their college essay. When they feel anxious, they can look at their anchor and be reminded to take a break and use a [quick breathing exercise](#).

2. Encourage Students to Journal and be Attentive to Their Feelings

- [Journaling](#) is a self-care technique that is essential to a healing process. There have been proven physical and mental benefits to journaling.
- Have a list of journal prompts prepared to send students who need more support articulating their experiences. A few examples to get you started:
 - Write about the emotion you are feeling right now and explain the physical

experiences you are having. (How does your head feel? Are your palms sweating? What sounds do you hear? What is the temperature? What's happening around you?)

- Things happen in our lives and tension builds up. It's important to find a healthy release of emotions. Some people cry; others scream; some find a creative outlet. What's your release? How does it help you to feel more grounded?
- It's five years from now and you're being presented with an award. What award is it, and what are you being recognized for? Who are

you thanking for being there and supporting your journey? Why are you thanking them?

3. Help Students Determine if Their Experiences Might Make for a Good Personal Statement

Encourage students to brainstorm a potential personal statement using Sawyer's [Feelings and Needs Exercise](#). All they need is a blank sheet of paper, their favorite pen, and the [Feelings and Needs Exercise PDF](#). To get the PDF and to watch Sawyer's demonstration of this exercise, just Google "Feelings and Needs Exercise College Essay Guy."



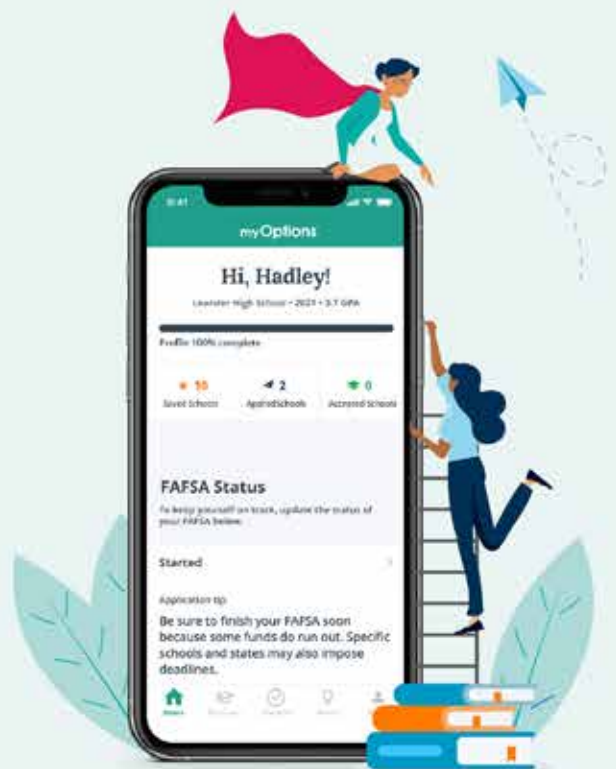
Things happen in our lives and tension builds up. It's important to find a healthy release of emotions. Some people cry; others scream; some find a creative outlet. What's your release? How does it help you to feel more grounded?

No-Cost College & Career Planning Tools

Any student at any school should have access to the tools they need to accomplish their goals and improve education outcomes.

- College Matching
- Progress Monitoring
- Scholarship Discovery
- Application Management

SEE IT IN ACTION AT [MYOPTIONS.ORG/NACAC](https://myoptions.org/nacac)



4. Remind Students to Take a Break and Pay Attention to Tensions

- Our bodies send us messages when we are anxious, have tension, or are uncomfortable. Have students jot down any reactions they are feeling in their bodies as they write their essays. These reactions can be twitches, headaches, nausea, shoulder tension, etc.
- Remind them to schedule breaks often. Breaks can include getting something to drink, going for a walk, doodling, or reading something fun.
- Encourage students to talk to someone who makes them feel safe or makes them feel valued—especially if they are processing big emotions.

5. Release Perfectionism

- Remind students they are not writing to seek anyone’s approval or validation.
- Acknowledge and affirm: “This essay is not a full reflection of who you are. It is only telling a part of your story.”
- Remind them to extend more grace to themselves; they are experiencing many emotions and thoughts right now.
- Send students a few affirmations that they can refer to when they feel overwhelmed during the writing process. Instruct them to take a deep breath, exhale, and speak the affirmation out loud. A few examples include:
 - The only standards or expectations I need to meet are my own.
 - I owe no one perfection.
 - I am not my insecurities. I am more than my apprehensions.
 - My essay is not performative; it is my experience.

Being trauma-informed in your practice will provide your students with an experience of safety, choice, collaboration, and empowerment within the college admission process. All of us, but especially young people, need more positive encounters and relationships to successfully weather the coronavirus crisis. By employing this process, you are creating a world where students can thrive. [🔗](#)

Ashley Y. Lipscomb, M.Div., is co-founder and CEO at The Institute for Anti-Racist Education, Inc.

Ashley Y. Lipscomb and **Ethan Sawyer**, The College Essay Guy, developed and co-presented a workshop that corresponds to this article. Sawyer contributed support and feedback to help shape the final version of this article.

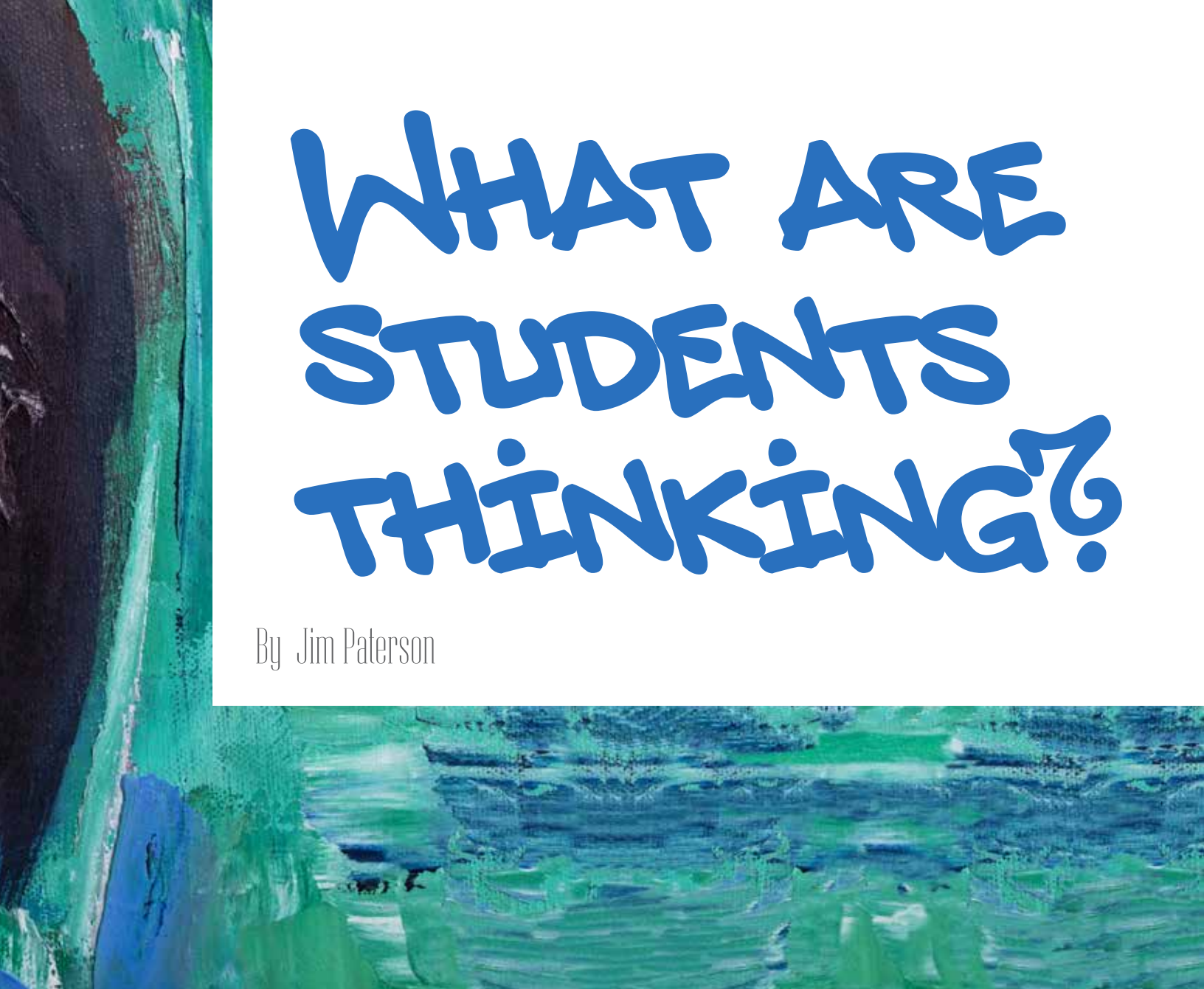


COVID-19 has changed the college search and selection process. Transforming our focus according to student need will continue to be important as we work to support and recruit the next class.

Ella Fountain and Dakota Brown have a lot in common, but their last few years have spun out in quite different ways.

They both grew up in small cities along the western border of rural Idaho—Fountain in Moscow and Brown in Lewistown, about a half hour to the south. They both are excellent students with an interest in English, writing, and perhaps teaching. And they are nearly the same age.

But for Brown, who had settled into her freshman year at the University of Idaho when COVID-19 swept through the nation and then spiked in Idaho, the pandemic brought with it a tiresome stretch of days in front of the computer taking classes when her campus closed. This year, although she has options for face-to-face instruction, she primarily chose to take online classes to avoid getting the virus.



WHAT ARE STUDENTS THINKING?

By Jim Paterson

“I really dislike studying virtually and meeting over Zoom. I feel like it shortens my attention span and lowers my motivation to learn,” Brown said. “I’m still doing well, but I feel drained a lot working behind a computer all day.”

For Fountain, a senior at Moscow High School, the last year instead has been packed with uncertainty. Simply taking standardized tests was impossible when she and her family got the virus and needed to quarantine. Tests were repeatedly canceled or postponed. She couldn’t visit her dream schools, California’s Claremont Colleges, and began looking at state schools nearby. The entire process of exploration and application was frantic at times and consuming, but like so many exciting and highly anticipated high school senior traditions and routines, it seemed empty and unsettling too.

“I was always planning to go to college and looking forward to the whole process, but so much has been up in the air in so many ways,” she said. “It’s been very frustrating.”

While Brown and Fountain experienced the pandemic in different ways, both experiences are familiar to professionals working with students headed to postsecondary education. There is some mix of a dreary dullness to the studies and social life for those attending college, and confusion and frustration for high schoolers.

Some experts say the pandemic will forever change higher education and young people’s attitudes about it, but others believe the crisis has shown most colleges can adapt and thrive, as long as they are aware of the various student mindsets.

“They are just worn out by it all,” said Cheri Barad, an educational consultant in Overland Park, Kansas, and board member of the Higher Education Consultants Association. “There has been a lot of disappointment and serious issues with testing and

college visits—and even being able to meet with their high school counselors or teachers who are valuable resources. We all have a lot of work to do.”

“My general impression is that there is a lot of unstated, perhaps unformed, dread out there,” said



and maintain their interest in higher education,” he said.

Other professionals agree that students have developed ways to move ahead, but researchers have seen potential shifts in attitudes about higher

education’s value, frustration with the exploration and application process, and concern about college costs.

A spring [survey](#) of nearly 81,000 high school and college students conducted by Niche, a college search platform that does research on higher education, shows that 57 percent of seniors were reconsidering schools on their list, around 40 percent planned to choose a college closer to home, and 9 percent who had been planning to attend were instead taking time off. Nearly 90 percent of seniors reported being more concerned about paying for college.

In another [survey](#) in October, Niche found that 92 percent of students were fearful or anxious about college attendance. The most frequently cited fear? Not being able to afford the college they hoped to attend.

Niche also found that 70 percent of current college students reported that how their school handled the pandemic would determine if they returned next year, and 20 percent said they might take time off or transfer. Meanwhile, 93 percent of respondents were concerned about how to pay for their education.

But despite their experiences navigating one of the most unsettling and challenging years ever for higher education, Fountain, Brown, and scores of other students have been resourceful and persistent—and generally still have a good feeling about higher education.

“I WAS MOST SURPRISED BY THEIR LEVEL OF RESILIENCY. THEY HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO FINISH OUT A PIVOTAL YEAR IN THE WAY THEY WOULD LIKE, WHICH IS VERY TOUGH. BUT THEY SEEMED TO REMAIN OPTIMISTIC AND THEY MAINTAIN THEIR INTEREST IN HIGHER EDUCATION.”

Margaret Jenkins, founder and director of Palouse Pathways, a community-based organization helping students from Idaho’s rural areas and small towns with college access. “There is a lot of lost momentum and lack of engagement.”

Experts say students have been frustrated by those problems and a variety of others—even just the safety of being on campus or the stability of the college they’ve chosen and the availability of financial aid.

DATA ON ATTITUDES

Warren Quirett, associate director of college counseling at Episcopal High School in Alexandria, Virginia, said his students have struggled and considered gap years or attendance at a closer or cheaper college. But he believes they have remained positive.

“I was most surprised by their level of resiliency. They haven’t been able to finish out a pivotal year in the way they would like, which is very tough. But they seemed to remain optimistic

WHAT YOU CAN DO

To help students facing college exploration or a return to college during the pandemic, recognize that each situation is different and understand their very unique concerns—reinforcing with them that things will at some point return to normal.

“Counselors will need to work with students to understand their timeframe and how they can help them feel prepared to make decisions because they may just be paralyzed with anxiety right now and need small steps that they can accomplish,” said Will Patch, an enrollment marketing specialist at the education research firm NICHE, which conducted a wide-ranging study of student attitudes amid the pandemic.

Patch said there are several considerations for professionals working with high school students and those enrolled in college, and they often revolve around empathy and attention to the specific individual needs of a student.

Bill Hancock, senior associate dean of college counseling at the Cranbrook Schools in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, agrees, noting that each student’s concerns and needs are very different.

“Context is so important. I’m working

A separate [survey](#) of seniors and college students for New America and Third Way, two think tanks that study education, showed that about a third of high school students were less likely to attend college because of the pandemic and nearly 70 percent said they did not feel college was worth the cost. Among those not planning to enroll, 40 percent of respondents said their decision was related to the pandemic.

New America also reported that enrollment would decline, but probably not as significantly as institutions believed at the beginning of summer, at least for currently enrolled students.

Its report also showed that 41 percent of the students were applying to schools closer to home due to the pandemic, while over one-fifth were prioritizing applications to schools offering online classes or lower tuition rates.

Will Patch, an enrollment marketing specialist at NICHE and the author of the survey report on student attitudes, said there are a number of ways that the pandemic is not only affecting current and prospective college students, but will continue to affect young people for some time to come.

“Lower retention and more transfer activity are coming,” Patch said, noting that there are also “more students reporting they plan to take loans while feeling less confident that they can afford the college they enrolled at.”

Rachel Fishman, deputy director for higher education research at New America and one of the authors of its report, notes that the data from any particular time may be skewed because the environment changed quickly. For instance, high school students who were surveyed last spring and over the summer were in the middle of

a particularly disappointing and confusing period.

“The shift to online education was much more dramatic for high school students, and it probably soured them somewhat on higher education, especially if it’s online. They have (a) certain vision of what college is and what they want it to be...When they can’t have that dorm and college green experience they may ask ‘do I want to sign up for that?’” said Fishman.

A STUMBLING START

Those who work with high school students say they were initially frustrated by the process of investigating their college options, a problem likely to continue this year.

The Niche research showed that about 70 percent relied entirely on search sites to investigate colleges and a similar number used virtual tours without much firsthand experience on campuses. Use of college rankings also increased.

Bill Hancock, senior associate dean of college counseling at the Cranbrook Schools in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, said his students utilized online resources reluctantly at times, but effectively.

“It would be nice if they could have a more firsthand experience, but I think the kids understand we are in an unprecedented time right now. They know this is not normal and they are going to take advantage of whatever is available,” he said. “They have visited schools virtually, met coaches and professors on Zoom, and made other connections online. Colleges have done a great job of providing them with those experiences, and I think that colleges may continue to make use of these approaches.”

Barad, however, believes that students are dramatically affected by the inability to visit a campus,



with kids who may be very different than those at other schools, yet each family has their own needs and other personal circumstances in the midst of this pandemic. These matter; they have an impact.”

“Just coping with the stress of the times is the main issue right now,” said Jennifer Reeves-Eisbach, a school counselor at Roosevelt High School in Portland, Oregon, a school with a majority of students from minority families and a large number of students who hope to continue their education but are stressed financially.

Here are some other suggestions for working with young people bound for college.

Cooperate. “Students need all the support and counseling they can get now,” Patch said, recommending that college counselors support high school staffs and that counselors at different schools support each other. Connect students with people in academic departments or other services on campus and follow up to be sure that they made the connection. Students will appreciate it if their path is made easier by adults working together for them—and they need it now.

Do virtual carefully. Students may be suffering from online overload so make sure you direct

meet with college representatives face-to-face, use resources at their school, or get other supports at their high schools.

“Also, when people ask me about how to just get a student interested in college, I tell them to take them there. Just the excitement of being on a campus does it. But that is gone—at least for now,” she said, noting that she even knows high school freshmen who are already thinking about how the pandemic might affect the process for them.

Joan Koven, an independent educational consultant in Havertown, Pennsylvania, said students are missing that “time in the car” on the way to a college visit and other opportunities for excited discussions about selecting a college.

“You spend a year and a half getting off the runway and looking for the way that you can spend what you’re told will be the best four years of your life, and then the pandemic hits,” Koven said. “So, I think students struggled. They wanted to be cautious but move ahead. There was a lot of conflict. It became a matter of calculated risk rather than an exciting process.”

Some professionals believe students will continue to take such risks, but Hancock said students will be more deliberative about their choices. “I have noticed that kids are being more thoughtful in balancing their lists. Yes, they are going aggressively for dream schools, but when I suggest that they have a safer school or one nearby on their list, they quickly

“THE TRADITIONAL STUDENT WANTS THAT TRADITIONAL EXPERIENCE, BUT OTHERS MAY ALSO BE SEEKING HELP WITH FINANCIAL AID, ADVISING, OR MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT THAT MAY BE HARDER TO ACQUIRE.”

“It’s just not the same, although colleges have done a very good job of getting resources on their site. The students and parents want to get on campus and walk around and get a sense of whether they fit in,” she said.

Koven also said students are concerned about how colleges are handling student safety, noting that Colgate University (NY) got additional attention because of thorough safety measures.

OTHER PATTERNS

For the students who navigated the search process last year and enrolled, things suddenly changed.

agree—or they have already done it,” he said.

Jennifer Reeves-Eisbach, a counselor at Roosevelt High School in Portland, Oregon, believes that students are being practical about their education now, and also believes they are more often considering safer options.

“My seniors are mostly concerned with trying to make it through online learning right now,” she said. “In relation to their college choices, I have seen many of them looking at staying closer to home and applying to state colleges and local community colleges.”



Hancock noted that parents are also driving changes because they “want to be able to reach their kid. Some of the colleges closed down last spring with just one- or two-days’ notice and the students had to be out of the dorms for the rest of the year. Being closer makes an emergency evacuation like that easier to pull off.”

Fishman noted that research hasn’t shown a dramatic increase in students choosing alternatives. Community college enrollment, for instance, actually is down about 11 percent, she said.

“Enrollment patterns do not appear to have shifted dramatically at this point,” she writes in the report. “But there are signs that college students are questioning the value of a degree....”

She believes that while students generally are considering the importance of academics, current dissatisfaction is driven by their

feeling that they aren’t experiencing college fully, and they don’t have other support services available.

“The traditional student wants that traditional experience, but others may also be seeking help with financial aid, advising, or mental health support that may be harder to acquire,” Fishman said.

According to Patch, students also are “more focused on institutional safety and response now, and that will be the case going forward as well.” They want to know how an institution handles the student safety amid a pandemic, as well as its future plans under such circumstances.

TESTING AND MONEY

Two familiar topics in the college search process have new significance: testing and college costs.

Professionals and students have reported that one of the biggest

problems students last year dealt with was testing. Both Fountain and Brown faced canceled or postponed test dates several times, and Hancock said that was common with his students.

He also believes the move by many schools to become test-optional didn’t help because students were suspicious about whether their chances would be diminished if they didn’t present test scores—even though in some cases it simply was impossible to take admission exams.

(In his most recent research for Niche, Patch reported as of mid-October, 42 percent of high school students had not taken a standardized test and 36 percent of those who did say they won’t submit a score. He did not yet have comparable data from other years.)

Hancock thinks reliance on testing will change going forward, and other experts suggest that

professionals in the field should be prepared for that shift and for changing student attitudes—and suspicions—about testing and the reliability of school policies.

Quirett agrees and looks for more fairness in the process that will perhaps provide opportunities for students who may have previously been hindered by testing.

When it comes to finances, student concerns range from the stability of certain institutions and the availability of financial aid to worries about their own family finances because of the pandemic. Some also are essential workers or have had to work longer hours or hours that conflict with their education.

“Cost has always been a big deciding factor, even before the pandemic, so now it’s really prominent in the minds of my students,” said Reeves-Eisbach. “It is not unusual for my seniors to work 20-40 hours a week while going to school in a normal year and this has increased with the loss of jobs in their families.”

The Niche survey found that 89 percent of seniors and 87 percent of juniors are more concerned about being able to pay for their education and the New America/Third Way report indicated that those concerns were, predictably, higher for caregivers and minority and low-income students.

“People are more suspicious of the price of college,” Fishman said. “It is hard to justify spending \$60,000 when you are going to be online. I understand that colleges need to survive, but it is a hard pill to swallow.” □

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Jim Paterson is a former counselor living in Lewes, Delaware.

them to the best online resources and give them plenty of guidance about how to use them. Only use online contact when it is necessary and don’t load them down with messages. Virtual events should be less than 45 minutes and fun and engaging. (Patch has several [recommendations](#) about virtual events from an October survey of 31,000 students, including insights about what events they want to hear about.)

Be strategic. Hancock said some students are complaining about too much contact from colleges—and even suggesting it turns them off and makes the schools look desperate. Nearly 50 percent of students surveyed by Patch said all the communications from colleges “look and sound the same.” He suggests quick informative notes with headlines, such as “Wonder what’s up?” followed by details students care about. Make communications more personal, Patch recommends.

Understand emotions. It might seem like an easy transition to online classes or working at home for a period, but research is showing that students generally don’t like working excessively online and distinctly miss the college experience and atmosphere—and their social lives. Consider some may have significant emotional fragility, and counselors can let them know it’s common and normal.

Touch up tours. Make virtual tours useful and engaging—“instead of showing off your buildings,” Patch said. Feature videos, student voices, and offer a sense about what the campus is about.

Be flexible. “While hundreds of schools already have pushed back their decision deadlines, and hundreds more were already rolling admission, this is not the time to stand by your historic reply date,” Patch said. He said schools also should adjust their application review, perhaps for the next several years. “Transcripts are going to look a little funny for a while,” he notes. “Students are not focused 100 percent on their education right now and that will certainly affect GPAs. Staff should be empathetic...”

Help with testing. The process will likely get better, but many students have complained about it. Help students find reliable testing dates and sites and help them get good information about how campuses are treating test-optional plans.

Be open to all options. Rachel Fishman, a researcher with New America on higher education issues, notes that the number of students transferring, deciding late, and being undecided will increase, along with the number choosing to postpone college. Those helping these students should accept these paths.

Understand safety concerns. No matter how good you may feel about the safety of a campus or the status of the pandemic, understand that students and their families all have had different experiences and have different attitudes about this event. If you want to attract students, keep things safe and make students feel comfortable no matter what level of concern they have.

Prepare for new attitudes. There has been a bump up in the number of students questioning the value of college, so those working with prospective students shouldn’t assume they appreciate the value of higher ed the way those in the past have. You may have to take a step back to remind them in various ways. □

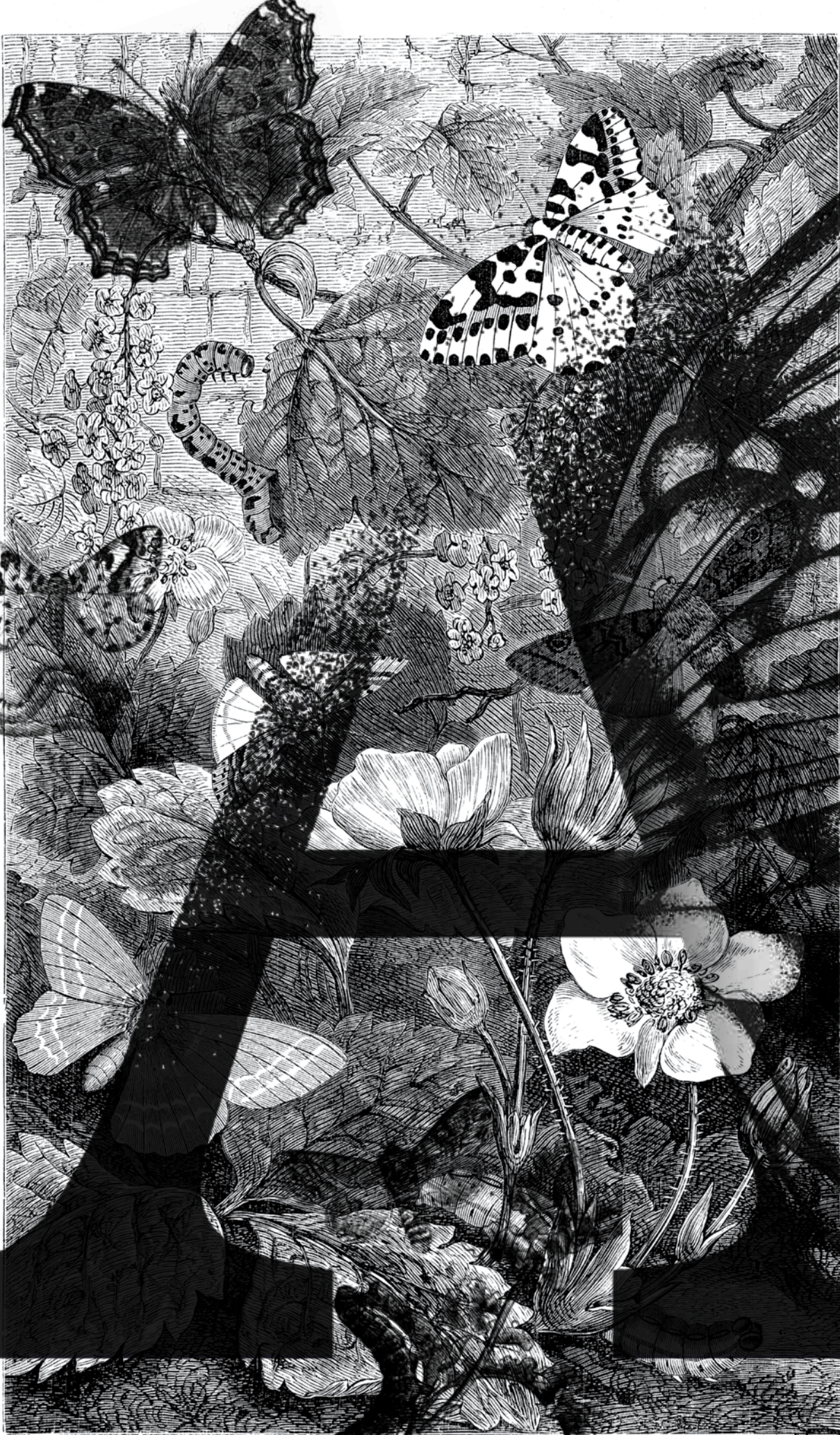


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Time to Transform

COVID-19 forces college admission professionals to rethink how they serve students and families

By Jamaal Abdul-Alim

Ana Almeida had only been on her job as a college admission coach for two months before COVID-19 forced her organization to move operations online.

Prior to the switch, Almeida said she found it difficult to conduct college application sessions with substantial numbers of students because they were scattered at different high schools throughout Rhode Island.

“So just getting them all in one place was extremely hard,” said Almeida, who works for The College Crusade, a Rhode Island-based nonprofit that seeks to help students get admitted to selective colleges.

But the task got easier once things moved into cyberspace.

“Having to go online kind of opened up this opportunity where, ‘Hey I can just have these sessions online,’” Almeida explained. “I can just meet with these students anytime.”

Almeida is one of thousands of college advisers forced by COVID-19 to adapt the services they offer to effectively reach students online. While many say they have discovered more innovative and efficient ways to reach students, they also report a fair amount of challenges that have made certain tasks—such as protecting student privacy or working through the convoluted FAFSA—more difficult.

As the nation anxiously awaits distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine that will enable people to gather in the same physical space, some advisers say it’s important for the college admission community to take to heart the lessons they have learned by moving online to improve how they provide services to students.

“I hope that we will take things from this disruption and not go back to normal, but that we transform the work that we do so that we can reach more people,” said Stacy Sneed, coordinator of data management for Get2College, the signature program of the Jackson, Mississippi-based Woodward Hines Education Foundation.

In that spirit, *The Journal of College Admission* reached out to several nonprofit and school system leaders throughout the United States to collect concrete examples of not only challenges posed by advising students virtually, but—whenever possible—how they were able to overcome those challenges and what practices they plan to keep even after schools resume in-person teaching.



EQUIPMENT MATTERS

When the pandemic hit in March, Sara Woods, executive director of Philadelphia Futures, a non-profit that helps low-income students in Philadelphia get admitted to college, wasted no time in making a special appeal to donors to help ensure the students her organization serves did not have their college dreams derailed.

So the organization set up a special Opportunity Fund to help students with pandemic-related emergency expenses.

That's how Reya Ahmed, a high school sophomore in Philadelphia, got a laptop to help her stay connected once school went online.

"As many activities and schools have gone virtual, a laptop is vital in

these times," Ahmed said in a letter shared with the *Journal*.

"I am thankful for receiving a laptop and being able to get work done and even do my own research for colleges and scholarships," Ahmed said. "Dealing with the loss of outside contact and being on lockdown at home, having a laptop also helped me look for activities I can do online and video-chat friends to chat and study in a safer way. If I didn't receive a laptop, I don't know how I would've stayed on top of my schoolwork and commit to virtual activities."

But not all students are so fortunate. Sneed, the Get2College data coordinator, said her organization has had mixed results with FAFSA completion since going virtual.

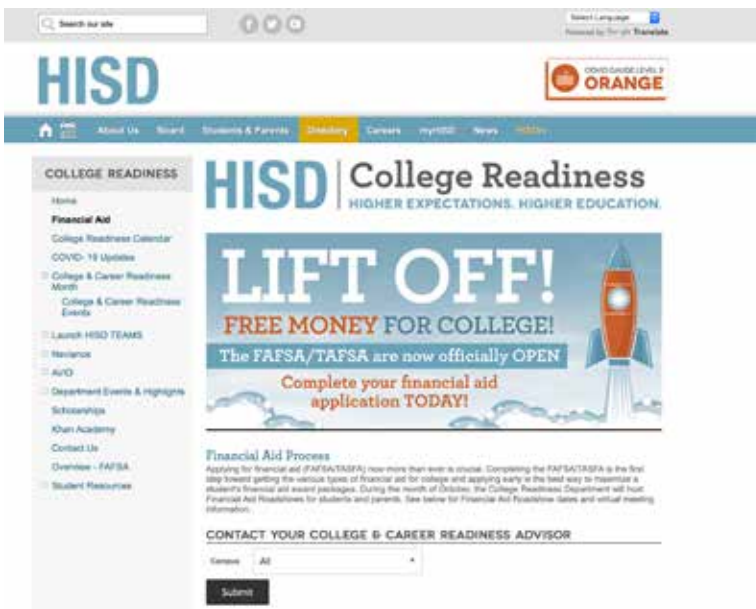
"For parents and students who have access to the internet, who have a device to call and make an appointment, the virtual FAFSA completion is working beautifully and it's going great," Sneed said. "But the school FAFSA days that have directly gotten most of the FAFSAs done in the state of Mississippi are not going well."

Nationally, Sneed noted in mid-November, FAFSA completion is down 16 percent. In Mississippi it was down 30 percent.

"The [school-based] counselors have to be super-invested in the program, helping kids get on to the Zoom link," Sneed said of her program's FAFSA completion days at schools in Mississippi, many of which have remained open despite the pandemic.

Sneed said a typical thing that happens during school-based FAFSA days is that the first wave of students will get set up in the morning. But the counselor will often get pulled to other duties as the day wears on.

"We had a FAFSA day all day long and the high school counselor helped all the nine o'clock appointments get on the Zoom link; she facilitated that and made sure they were all on. We put people into Zoom break rooms," Sneed said. "It was going beautifully for the first hour and then we never saw her the rest of the day and they saw eight students, where we should have seen 40 students, and it's because [school counselors] are being pulled. They have kids who are being quarantined. They come back to school for two weeks and they're being quarantined again and [the counselors] just have more to do than FAFSA completion. So we're going to rethink this."



Above: Javier Juarez speaks with College Crusade students about about “Celebrating the Journey.”

Left: Department of College Readiness for the Houston Independent School District’s financial aid webpage.

that mail worked very well,” he said. It also helped that the district provided laptops and Office 365 to its students.”

Counselors in the Houston Independent School District are able to work flexible hours since they are dealing with students and families at different times of the day due to the pandemic and many students opting to attend school remotely. Houston has offered both remote and in-person instruction in the fall semester of 2020.

Johnston reported that 3,427 students in his school district had completed their FAFSA applications in mid-November, compared to 4,860 at the same time the year prior. All things considered, he said those numbers are good because the district began working on FAFSA applications two weeks later than usual. He said he expects to catch up to last year’s figures before the FAFSA application season is over.

EXPANDED MEETINGS

Johnston said counselors have been able to expand the number of colleges it does for virtual college events.

“One of the things we’ve become much more adept at is virtual college events,” Johnston said. “We used to sort of be campus-by-campus. Now we’re able to do large events.”

He said the district is working with Zoom to add a simultaneous interpretation for students who are still learning English.

“None of those types of solutions we had before the pandemic,” Johnston said. “The pandemic has taught us how to really use platforms like [Microsoft] Teams and Zoom to really meet students where they are.”

NEW MODES OF OPERATING

In Houston, one of the first things that David Johnston, executive director of the Department of College Readiness for the Houston Independent School District, did once the school system began to offer classes remotely was to update the website to include new contact information for the 40 or so college advisers in his department.

“We knew we had to get students connected quickly with their adviser,” Johnston said. “We made all the advisers Google phone numbers and then we put that Google phone number in a drop-down menu on our website. We also created a booking page so students can book a time.”

Johnston said the district also sent students and parents postcards with their adviser’s photograph and new contact information. “We found



College Crusade alumna and Providence City Councilwoman Nirva LaFortune gives the keynote address for the organization's first-generation celebration to open the afternoon's events.

COST SAVINGS AND COLLABORATION

Houston Independent School District is by no means alone in discovering bigger and better ways to do virtual meetings.

Stacy Richardson, director of college counseling at Georgetown Visitation Preparatory School in Washington, DC, said the Washington Association of Independent Schools, a group of college counselors at schools in Maryland, DC and Virginia, wanted to provide additional opportunities for students to learn about colleges in lieu of the typical in-person college fair and virtual presentations given by admission officers in the fall.

“We were trying to think of ways to help our students get to know these colleges since they can’t visit, but we wanted it to be different from the typical high school visit from admission reps,” Richardson said. “And so we asked the representatives to bring at least one student with them to the Zoom meeting so that students could ask questions about student life and sort of get that perspective. It’s always good to have someone closer to their age to speak with them about what’s going on on campus.”

Similarly, when Georgetown Visitation conducted its summer application workshop virtually in August, the school was able to get representatives

from a wider array of colleges than they did when they held the workshop in person.

“I think we’ll continue to do it online because it allowed us to have so many more admission officers,” Richardson said of the summer application workshop. “Normally we ask people who are just local because we don’t have the resources to pay for airfare, hotel, and all that sort of stuff for the four days that we do this workshop. And so because it was virtual, we’ve had people in California, all up and down the East Coast, all over the country join us to give students feedback on their essays and interview skills and do presentations.”

At The College Crusade in Rhode Island, officials have discovered that they have reaped huge savings in transportation costs by holding various events virtually instead of in person.

“We’re saving at least \$125,000 (conservatively) this year in transportation costs from moving our programming online as a result of the pandemic,” Kristen Cyr, director of marketing and communications for The College Crusade, told the *Journal* in an email.

One of the biggest savings came from holding the organization’s annual first-generation college student celebration online as opposed to flying in Crusader scholars from colleges around the country to share their experience with Crusader high schoolers. Being online also has enabled greater attendance.

“We’re seeing some benefits from it where you can have more students participate, because they can pop on right from their bedroom or right from their dorm room. Certainly, a firstgen day on a Monday afternoon would be tough for students...”

“We’re seeing some benefits from it where you can have more students participate, because they can pop on right from their bedroom or right from their dorm room,” said Naglaa Gaafar, director of postsecondary success at The College Crusade. “Certainly, a first-gen day on a Monday afternoon would be tough for students at other colleges and universities across New England to attend.”

But it’s easier to attend, Gaafar said, when you can “just log on from wherever you are.”

CHALLENGES REMAIN

Nancy Leopold, interim CEO at College Tracks, a nonprofit based in Montgomery County, Maryland, said one of the challenges with going remote is that many tasks take much longer than they would if counselors were sitting next to a student. The FAFSA, she said, is a prime example.

“We’ve had to develop some tools to help students and families through these processes remotely,” Leopold said. “So we have developed, for example, a line-by-line FAFSA instruction packet that tells students and families precisely what they have to do to fill in each line.” The document, she said, resembles a PowerPoint presentation and is 70 pages long.

Even though the FAFSA is filled out online, figuring out what to put in each of the spaces “remains challenging for many families,” Leopold said.

“It’s a tax document,” Leopold said. “It has the complexities of a tax document. It’s quite complicated, particularly for families who don’t speak English as a first language, who don’t have a lot of experience in filling out forms like this, whose finances may not fit neatly into the categories that the FAFSA has.”

Being online has also curtailed the organization’s ability to rely on volunteer help because of school district regulations that govern who can meet one-on-one with students via Zoom.

“Plus you have the technology issues,” Leopold said. “And it’s hard-to-impossible to supervise volunteers, whereas the volunteers worked entirely under our supervision when we were in schools.

“The other thing that we can’t do is we can’t tap students in the hallways,” Leopold continued. “We can’t send passes to students asking that they come see us at lunch or after school.”

To make up for the lack of spontaneous contact, College Tracks has set up a Google Classroom for students to make Zoom appointments to see advisers at the organization. Still, it has its limitations.

“I don’t want to create the impression that there are advisers sitting and waiting for students to do things in Google Classrooms, but they’re very responsive,” Leopold said.

SILVER LINING

Gaafar, of The College Crusade, said she is optimistic that the field of college advising will emerge better after the pandemic.

“I just want to emphasize the silver lining...Being online and delivering these materials online forced us to be very innovative in looking at students’ needs and pinpointing these needs and transferring our programs online in phenomenal time in order to address these needs,” Gaafar said. “So whatever we developed is here to stay. It’s not going anywhere. It’s only going to expand our offerings and our connection to the students moving forward, even when we come back in person.” ▢

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Jamaal Abdul-Alim is writer living in Washington, DC.

INTERSECTIONS OF SPECIAL POPULATIONS

There is no doubt that 2020 has put a number of professions through their paces—college admission and recruitment included. The longer it takes to secure widespread COVID relief, the worse our economic situation becomes. These challenges are broad, sweeping, and beyond the scope of one institution’s individual strategies. We have a long hard road ahead of us. That daunting prospect can leave the individual admission professional disheartened and burned-out. That said, one framework has shown up time and time again to offer clarity.

By Megan Grady, Torri Henson, and Brittney Jackson



INTERSECTIONALITY AND ADMISSION

Intersectionality: An intellectual framework championed by Black, queer, and Latinx feminist scholars in the 1970s, and popularized by Kimberlé Crenshaw in a 1991 law article, claims that identities like race, gender, and class can't be examined in isolation. They must be considered as reinforcing stressors that compound the level of oppressing forces an individual might navigate.

How do we apply intersectionality to the college admission process? A partnership between the National Association for College Admission Counseling and the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators was announced in early November. The strategies that emerge from this collaboration could help to address the growing financial challenges to college enrollment, as well as the increasing demands for an equitable and antiracist admission process. In a recent interview with *The Chronicle of Higher Education* about the new partnership, NACAC CEO Angel B. Pérez was quoted as saying, "We can't be having these conversations in silos."

So why are we? We invite you to think about the silos themselves and how they inform our work, rather than structure it. That is where we find ourselves: three admission counselors, tasked with the recruitment and support of three populations with very different needs—and three distinct silos. With so many thinkers and administrators from across our industry coming together, we are hoping to offer a specific, and rather vulnerable, anecdote to the larger conversation.

Changes in the national landscape will necessarily change the way in which we recruit.

As the prospective student population decreases and colleges compete ever more strenuously to fill their seats, admission professionals must expect their roles to evolve. Gone are the days of gatekeeping; instead, we must function as both counselor and concierge, educating and eliminating barriers for those who have been traditionally underserved, while facilitating a smooth enrollment process for those students in high demand, such as musicians, athletes, and international students.

Of course, admission offices across the nation have long appointed counselors to work with these special populations. Our ranks are filled with transfer admission counselors, recruitment coordinators for the visual and performing arts, multicultural admission counselors, international counselors, athletic liaisons, and more. And to the extent that students remain neatly in their specified lanes, this siloed model works; after all, who is better to guide a musician through the stressful application and audition process than a music recruiter? Having a

knowledgeable and reliable contact for program information, application deadlines, and audition requirements is an excellent resource for a prospective music student.

But what if that musician also happens to be a transfer student who is faced with conflicting application requirements and deadlines? What if that prospective transfer is also a first-generation student who has not received sufficient counseling to navigate a circuitous route through higher education? What if that first-generation student is also a recruited athlete who needs help understanding NCAA guidelines?



admission review may give the student unrealistic expectations for their admission outcome or financial aid award. When admission abdicates its role in educating and guiding applicants through the process, the students suffer.

Allowing students to be pigeonholed by aspects of their identity creates problems well beyond skewed expectations. Colleges must provide information relevant to the student and necessary for their understanding of the institution and admission process. But reducing students to a series of discrete identities fails to acknowledge their desire for the full college experience. For transfer students and those from traditionally marginalized populations, it can create an even more pernicious effect, creating a sense that they will forever be marked by their application status—always seen as “less than” and never a true member of the campus community.

Not only do students who fall into special populations face a multitude of challenges through the application process, but their equivalent admission professionals do as well. These special population students do not live solely in their applications and acceptance letters, but are often in a counselor’s inbox or Zoom room weekly with new questions. They require more nuanced and focused attention, requiring the counselor to be a guide through the entire admission process, not just their specific area.

they’re shunted from counselor to counselor—even as their inboxes fill up with targeted correspondence from each office. Repeatedly introducing and explaining oneself to a succession of staff members is annoying at best, but it can be truly disaffecting and demoralizing for those who already feel like outsiders to the process.

ALLOWING STUDENTS TO BE PIGEONHOLED BY ASPECTS OF THEIR IDENTITY CREATES PROBLEMS WELL BEYOND SKEWED EXPECTATIONS.

For intersectional students such as these, the road to college can be particularly daunting. Not only are the problems more complex, but in the absence of a clear point of contact, they are often unsure to whom they should even direct their questions. They risk slipping through the cracks as

In the absence of clear messaging and coordinated information from the admission office, many of these students simply give up. Others, especially recruited students such as artists and athletes, may seek guidance elsewhere on campus. While coaches and faculty may be excellent judges of talent, their lack of experience with holistic

This places a different kind of pressure on specialized counselors, who must not only provide students with general institutional information, but also educate them about the overarching admission process and identify how their individual talents or identities will impact their experience with the institution. By the very nature of their role, special population counselors must often focus more on determining the right fit for the student than selling their specific institution, and as such, they are more likely than others to have to share hard truths with students and their families. Those difficult conversations about financing the education, academic or program preparedness, and general institutional fit can be emotionally wrenching for counselor and student alike.

Juggling a large caseload of high-attention applicants and their support networks (families, counselors, other advocates) can feel overwhelming. That stress is often exacerbated both by institutional pressures and feelings of isolation from the rest of the admission team. Colleagues may not be aware of the additional enrollment demands placed on special populations or understand the single-minded focus that is sometimes required to meet them. Without the proper background information, they may push back on requests for project work that goes beyond the “norm” or grow to resent the constant pleas for inclusion by special population counselors. What may feel like nagging is often intended as advocacy.

Each of us struggled with these challenges in our own way while serving in our respective roles as music recruitment coordinator, multicultural admission coordinator, and



#specialpops is a working group specifically for special population counselors that hold regularly scheduled meetings to discuss intersectional students.

transfer admission coordinator. As we began communicating about our intersectional students, we discovered a number of commonalities, both in our work and in the challenges that we routinely faced. Our supervisor suggested we form a working group specifically for special population counselors, and with that, #specialpops was born. We began holding regularly

scheduled meetings to discuss intersectional students and to ensure we were serving them as a cohesive team.

Beyond the obvious benefit of coordinating our work with specific students, the meetings also gave us the space to pool our knowledge and discuss more broadly the challenges of working with higher-touch applicant groups. Those conversations allowed each



IDENTIFYING AND ASSISTING THOSE STUDENTS AT THEIR PARTICULAR INTERSECTIONS—WHATEVER THEY MAY BE—REQUIRES THE WORK OF AN ADMISSION TEAM THAT RECOGNIZES, UNDERSTANDS, CELEBRATES, AND SUPPORTS INDIVIDUAL NEEDS THROUGHOUT THE PROCESS.

of us to develop a more nuanced and thoughtful approach to our work, both individually and as a collective, which in turn helped us better navigate our roles within the larger framework of the admission office.

Getting buy-in from our colleagues was crucial, not just to our professional identities, but to the way our students were (and are) seen as applicants. Identifying and assisting those students at their

particular intersections—whatever they may be—requires the work of an admission team that recognizes, understands, celebrates, and supports individual needs throughout the process. With our united advocacy and intentional communication, we were able to reframe the lens through which our applicants were seen. This work takes thoughtful, incremental change and is not a short-term project. As much as we might like

it to be so, we've yet to build a foolproof system or create a perfect method of coordination. But we have made progress.

With support from admission leadership, special population counselors were added to the weekly staff meeting agenda, an act that not only served to highlight the importance of our groups to the overall recruitment process, but also helped remove the aura of mystery from our work. Our respective applicant populations were further integrated into the broader office mission when we each began conducting specialty training sessions for the entire admission team, including the student employees in our campus visit program. This training has helped to ensure that special population applicants feel welcomed and valued throughout their experience with our office, from first contact with a counselor or tour guide all the way through to deposit and beyond.

The communications and data teams also became crucial allies in our effort to create a cohesive admission experience for special population and intersectional



applicants. Providing each student with the appropriate messaging and information to navigate their specific admission process is critical, but so too is ensuring that they don't feel pigeonholed by their application status. Being a "special population" applicant should not define or constrain an individual's identity as a student, so it is important to ensure each student receives the full gamut of information about life on campus, in addition to the program-specific information needed to apply.

Clear communications and intentional collaboration, both within our trio and within the admission office at large, have come together to inform the #specialpops strategy. Ultimately, this has allowed us to be better partners and facilitate a deeper understanding of our students across the entire team.

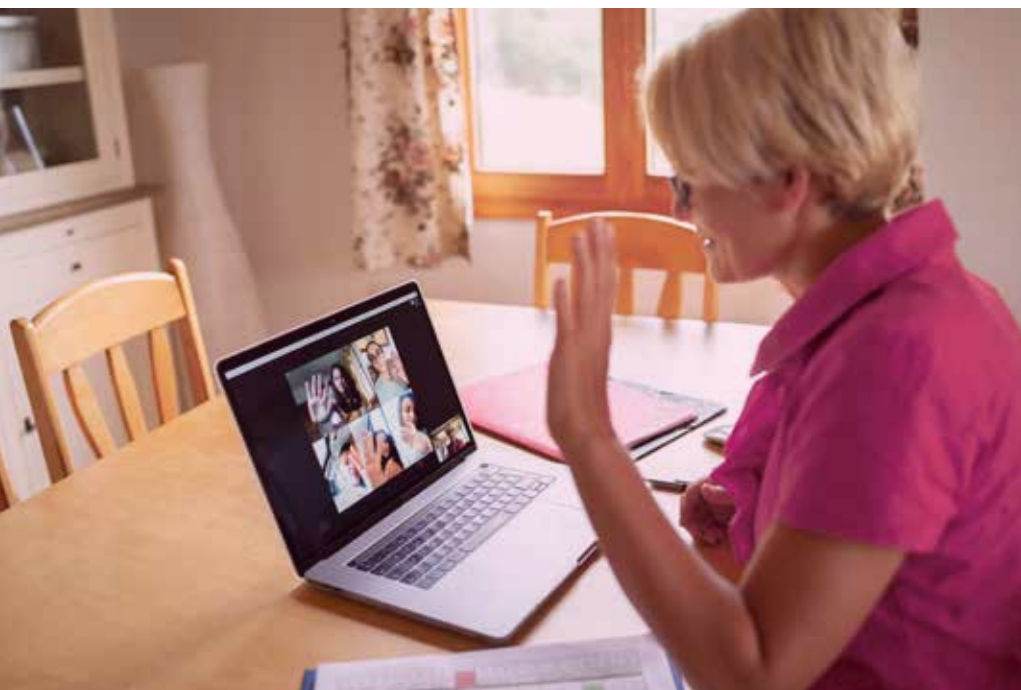
article, one of us made several references to "FTIC applicants" before being gently reminded of transfer students present in the applicant pool. That telltale Freudian slip speaks to the amount of intentional work that still needs to happen. Our profession often favors solutions that are concrete and quantifiable. That framework not only shapes our understanding of the students we serve, but also each other. We have been taught to see ourselves as enrollment managers, class "shapers," and gatekeepers. Incorporating intersectionality into recruitment practices means taking a critical eye to the competitive energy that fuels our profession.

We are proposing a shift in perspective. Instead of seeing ourselves as separate from the special populations we serve, we

career. For a brief moment in time, we meet that student when the relationship with their high school counselor, registrar, or employer is transitioning, but their connection to student affairs staff has not yet begun. We are an intersectional profession. Liaison and recruiter. Educator and gatekeeper.

To not acknowledge that duality in our profession means we risk missing out on intentional and impactful solutions that can bring us that much closer to the seamless admission experience we're hoping to provide. Or more to the point, as writer and activist Audre Lorde said, "Only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable." 📌

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 NACAC members **Megan Grady**, director of recruitment & enrollment for the School of Music at Carnegie Mellon University (PA); **Torri Henson**, assistant director of admission and transfer admission coordinator at the University of Puget Sound (WA); and **Brittney Jackson**, assistant director of admission and multicultural admission coordinator at the University of Puget Sound (WA), work with special population students at their respective institutions.



Successes and strategies aside, integration isn't easy.

Even as the three of us came together in preparation for this

need to see ourselves as more like them. Intersectional. We stand at an important crossroad in a student's educational



BLACK MEN AND THE COLLEGE ADMISSION ESSAY

Creating a Counter-Narrative

As a practitioner who has scored many admission essays, I've noticed that numerous colleges and universities include questions that seek to expose and evaluate students' interactions with diversity, equity, and inclusion. Frequently, applicants are encouraged to disclose a difficult moment in their life and share how they overcame it.

By Michael R. Williams

Such questions were originally developed to give voice to the diverse experiences students encounter in their homes, neighborhoods, and schools. But as a Black male liberator who has spent his career providing training and anti-deficit literature to support the holistic existence of Black men, I've seen firsthand the problematic nature of such questions, as well as the negative effects the prevailing narrative has on the population I serve—Black men.

Perhaps unwittingly, the types of questions described above encourage Black men to champion their trauma. This practice harms individuals and it prevents all of us from confronting the adverse effects of failed policies, procedures, and practices aimed at addressing racial and educational inequalities in the US.

FRAMING THE ISSUE

The approach to college admission described above undoubtedly affects a wide array of students, but this piece is focused solely on how those practices impact Black men.

The way I approach this issue is framed by my positionality; the support I provide to Black men; and the ways I work to push back against the deficit model used most frequently to examine the recruitment, retention, and matriculation of Black males in higher education.

With that in mind, let's take a step back and consider the ways these questions work to uphold and support existing structures of inequity while also erasing the unique identities of applicants, particularly Black males.

Black men deserve to exist. Our existence is not dependent on the ways we perform and exclude others from engaging in masculinity. Nor is it dependent

on our hyper-visual bodies in a capitalistic society. Yes, there are rigid structures Black men must navigate in any attempt to achieve both educational and social aspirations. But we should neither highly score and praise Black men's ability to navigate poverty and disfigurement, nor should we employ that practice as deserving of scholastic funds.

The move away from glamorizing grit and trauma must first come at the acceptance of the many failed attempts to explicitly combat oppression.

Uncovering and removing the barriers faced by Black men requires a multifaceted approach to examining housing discrimination, access to adequate health care, food insecurities, culturally relevant psychological health practices, and wage inequality, just to name a few. Yet instead of taking on these tasks, we reward students for their perseverance. We praise their ability to be resilient in situations wherein Black men have learned to cope without having their most basic of needs met. The ritualistic coping and subservient mannerisms developed remain unique to Black men, having been labeled as *cool pose*. This posturing serves a dual purpose—intracommunal messaging among Black men and a mask against societal pressures due to racial and gender inequalities. More recently select scholars have praised the coded resilience as *grit*.

EMBRACING A COUNTER-NARRATIVE

My vision for education is to develop student supports, engage in student success, and dismantle

social systems that hinder student learning. The fascination with grit in college admission, and its manifestation in essay questions, run counter to those goals.

Researchers define grit as the capacity to sustain effort and interest in projects that take months or even longer to complete. While the ability to remain focused on short-, mid-, and long-term goals

is commendable, issues arise when we overlook the barriers in traversing the mountain. Embracing the notion of grit and rewarding trauma narrows our field of vision to focus on the narrative that Black males can persist and attain long sought-after goals. But the influences of oppression are completely ignored when you focus on the end goal and adopt the grotesque association of trauma and grit as acquirable skills. The cool pose coping mechanism employed by Black men serves as just one example of the effects that narrative can have on Black men, both as individuals and collectively.

A counter-narrative exists in the ability to name the real-life experiences that hinder progression and to develop plans to deconstruct the barriers. Such a shift proved powerful for me in my own personal and professional development and is long overdue within the realm of college admission where we frequently reward Black men for their athleticism in jumping breaches when, as educators and

practitioners, we should have built a bridge.

The move away from glamorizing grit and trauma must first come at the acceptance of the many failed attempts to explicitly combat oppression. Both colleges and society are comprised of free-thinking individuals. As individuals, we must consistently challenge the ways in which we internalize oppression through unlearning and (re)learning. Interrogate your own ideology toward Black men, African Americans, and marginalized communities as a whole. And to my fellow Black men, I ask you to examine whether you suppress your own interactions with oppression. As a concept within masculine performance, there is an underlying reward for remaining silent when confronted with pain.

We also must contest the institutional oppression that exists within society, as well as the college and university context. The impact of college application essays remains seated in this area, as it rewards retaining grit in the face of oppression.

Reflecting back on the scenario of climbing the mountain, it's time to remove that boulder and not praise those who passed it. The higher education community must reimagine the connection between grit, trauma, and the identification of academic promise. Changing college essay questions to embrace a counter-narrative is a critical first step. [↗](#)

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Athens, Georgia - August 20, 2020: During the COVID-19 pandemic on the first day of the fall semester, students in protective face masks gather at a crossing light in front Bolton Dining Commons at the University of Georgia.

THE TRANSFER EXPERIENCE

Getting Them There and Helping Them Succeed

Nearly 40 percent of all college students are transfer students, yet they may be the most overlooked student population in higher education. As declining numbers of high school graduates causes the pool of traditional college students to decline, transfer students will be increasingly important to the enrollment health of colleges and universities. However, many campuses have underpowered transfer recruitment strategies. They do not address the unique needs, behaviors, and expectations of a group that has already been through the enrollment process, often has very specific reasons for changing institutions, and tends to conduct very focused and accelerated searches for a new campus destination.

Understanding student behaviors during the transfer planning process can help institutions effectively plan to meet their needs, ultimately improving recruitment of this important group of students.

SURVEY DATA

The data used in this article comes from two surveys of nearly 3,000 students conducted via email in spring 2020 by Ruffalo Noel Levitz.

Forty-four percent of student respondents were current transfer students, and 56 percent were prospective transfer students. Ninety percent were born in 1999 or after, making them first-year students, sophomores, or juniors in college at the time of the survey.

Over 40 percent of survey respondents identified as white, 19 percent as Black, 18 percent as Hispanic, and 9 percent as Asian.

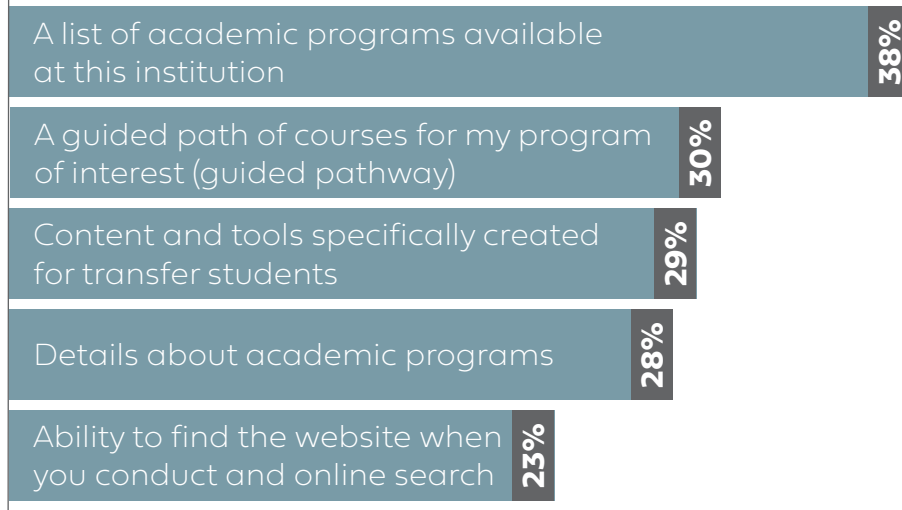
All students lived in the United States, with 26 percent from the West, 36 percent from the South, 18 percent from the Midwest, and 20 percent from the Northeast.

TRANSFER PLANNING: HALF OF TRANSFER STUDENTS ALWAYS PLANNED TO SWITCH INSTITUTIONS

Transferring is not an impulsive decision but something students consider for months or even longer—or is part of their planned enrollment journey from the beginning of their college careers. Nearly half (47 percent) of respondents had always planned to transfer. Fifteen percent had planned to transfer for three months, 17 percent for six months, and 12 percent a year or more. Four out of 10 also said they had applied to the institution

MOST IMPORTANT WEBSITE CONTENT AND FEATURES

RNL, Cappex, Omni Update, & Plexus (2020) Transfer students' E-expectations. Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Ruffalo Noel Levitz.



they were transferring to as a high school student, so this may explain why so many arrived at their current institutions with the intent to transfer.

Over half of the students surveyed were local to the institution they had transferred to or were transferring to, and nearly half said they had always known about the institution.

Although respondents had considered transferring to six institutions, on average, over three-quarters of the students in our sample had only considered up to three institutions and 40 percent had applied to only one institution.

More than 90 percent of students listed academics (programs, majors, minors) and the ability to pursue a bachelor's degree as their top reasons for transferring. Other top reasons included: tuition and cost (84 percent), financial aid (83 percent), and career opportunities (83 percent).

To sum it up, the vast majority of transfer students know they want to transfer well before they

actually do; they know why they want to change institutions; and they know which institutions they are considering.

So who are these students? Chances are, you already "know" each other. Forty-two percent of transfer applicants applied to that same institution as first-time freshmen. If applicable, consider honoring their freshman scholarship. Transfers typically know what they want out of the process, so skip the fluff and get down to business with them: What courses will transfer and how quickly can you provide them with that information? And how quickly can you confirm housing availability (or exemptions), finalize an aid package, etc.?

RESOURCES TRANSFER STUDENTS USE

Three out of four transfer students listed college websites as the most useful resource for their planning. Yet one out of every four students thought finding information specifically for

transfer students had some degree of difficulty. Although it may not seem like a large percentage, it was particularly hard for first-generation students. Institutions should take this into account as they make sure first-gen students have the information they need if they are considering transferring. The college planning process for transfer students is not as linear and sequential as it is for high school students. Ensuring transfer-specific information is available and easily accessible on your institution's website is a must.

Personal connections also seem to be especially strong for this group of prospective students, with 57 percent rating recommendations as a useful resource. Nearly half of the students surveyed had a friend or family member who currently attended the institution they were interested in, and 32 percent had received a recommendation or referral from someone who knew the institution well.

When recruiting for your ambassador or student tour guide teams, seek out recent transfer students. You'll have great representatives on the front line who you can easily match with prospective transfer students. Make these students accessible via a weekly chat function, a texting platform, or some other format where communication can easily be initiated by prospective students. Also consider modifying your traditional tour route and script to something a little more à la carte for transfers. For example: A second-year transfer in bio may only be interested in seeing the science facilities, labs, and possibly specific amenities like the campus gym. Allow the student to identify what they are interested in and customize their tour.

Most transfer students know what they want and are not shy about asking questions. Seventy-three percent reported initiating communication with institutions, mostly by emailing admission.

Knowing this—and that nearly 80 percent of respondents thought the institution’s website was the most significant source of information in their transfer planning—is crucial for any transfer recruitment plan. Transfer students let you know when they’re ready to connect, but you also need to make it easy for them to connect with you. Your website must allow them to access needed information quickly (given the shorter search timeline for transfer students) while also enabling real-time connections with admission staff who can both answer key questions and make a case for attending your institution.

Here are some practical things you can think about when assessing your web presence:

- Make sure transfer students can easily find your webpage.
- Develop a content-based SEO strategy that pushes your programs to the top of search results.
- Focus on branded, local, and programmatic searches.
- Assess how you rank for key universal search results (voice, images, videos, etc.).
- Focus content on what students can study and how they can complete the degree.
- Emphasize program benefits and outcomes.
- Provide a transfer calculator so prospective students can calculate their credits.
- Make it easy for transfer students to contact admission staff who can answer specific questions about transferring.

The credit calculator, in particular, appears to be a key

opportunity for institutions to attract more transfer students. The vast majority of students who used a calculator (88 percent) said they were satisfied with their experience. However, only one out of three students said they had used a transfer credit calculator. Knowing that this group of students is specially focused on outcomes and getting the information they need to plan the transfer process, we can only assume that those respondents who did not use a credit calculator could not find one on the institution’s site or the institution did not have one. Providing an easy-to-use credit calculator is a must for your transfer recruitment plan.

- Transfer students are critical members of the campus community.
- Assist with a success plan, as they are looking beyond graduation.
- Remember this is not their “first rodeo.”
- Focus on their experience and outcomes.
- Make it easy for them to connect with you.
- Answer questions with specific answers and point to resources on your website.

Remember that as the “traditional” student population shrinks due to demographic changes, transfer students will become increasingly important

Your website must allow them to access needed information quickly (given the shorter search timeline for transfer students) while also enabling real-time connections with admission staff who can both answer key questions and make a case for attending your institution.

TRANSFER STUDENT ORIENTATIONS

Three out of four students said they attended transfer student orientations. When planning these, make sure that they really are oriented toward transfer students, not simply the same program you offer to first-time-in-college students. Transfer students are as committed to graduating as any student at your institution. Your commitment to their success needs to start on Day One by ensuring they have the best experience from the get-go.

Some final takeaways:

- Don’t penalize transfer students for not choosing your institution first.

to meeting your enrollment goals. Give this population the right resources and attention, and you’ll be able to attract transfer students who are a great fit for your institution. Their success is your success! ▢

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FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE US

By Miriam Feldblum

Advocacy and the Biden-Harris Administration

The November 2020 presidential election results brought a powerful sense of relief to international and immigrant students and their advocates across the country. After four years of being in a defensive posture and uncertain about what harmful rules, unwelcoming rhetoric, or damaging executive orders may come next, students and higher education leaders are looking to the incoming administration to fulfill its promise to roll back exclusionary policies and create more inclusive, forward-looking policies in recognition of the value of international and immigrant students.

In November, new data was also released by the Institute for International Education (IIE) and NAFSA: Association of International Educators, indicating that the United States continues to lose ground in the global competition for talent. IIE's Open Doors [analysis](#) showed new international student enrollments declined for the fourth consecutive year in 2019-20, falling approximately 8 percent

since 2016. Overall international enrollment declined nearly 2 percent from 2018. Even more dramatic, an IIE fall 2020 survey showed a 43 percent decline in new international student enrollments due to COVID-19; and, taking into account only those new international students physically in the US, fall 2020 enrollments of new international students [tumbled 72 percent](#). These declining enrollments are having a negative economic impact on our institutions and local communities. The [NAFSA data](#) showed that international students contributed \$38.7 billion to the US economy, a 4.4 percent decline from 2018 to 2019. While there are myriad causes for these trends, they have been accelerated at least in part due to the unwelcoming environment created by Trump administration policies and the country's lack of a proactive nationwide strategy to recruit international students to the US.

To understand how the incoming Biden-Harris administration may affect the recruitment and retention of international students at US colleges and universities, we need to review the harmful impacts of recent immigration

policies, where we stand now, and the challenges and opportunities ahead. How do we not only undo the damage but also catch up with other countries' initiatives to recruit international students and facilitate their entry into their national workplaces? The harsh policies enacted by the Trump administration did not take place in a vacuum, and the rest of the world did not stand still. Prior to the Trump era, international education advocates were calling for a more comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy of international students to attract and retain global talent in the US. The need for such a national strategy has only grown more urgent, especially when we factor in the financial devastation and international student enrollment declines experienced by many institutions amid the pandemic.

WHAT POLICIES NEED TO BE ROLLED BACK? HOW DO WE UNDO THE DAMAGE OF THE PAST FOUR YEARS?

Since the travel bans of January 2017, a constant flow of harsh immigration policy developments has affected international students

as well as undocumented and other immigrant students, and it is not anticipated to stop until Trump leaves office. Just in 2020 alone, campuses and students felt the impact of the proposed rule to end duration of status (or D/S); continued threats to reduce Optional Practical Training (OPT) or eliminate STEM OPT; attempts to substantially revise the H-1B visa rules, including the proposed changes to the H-1B visa lottery; the dramatic impacts of restrictions and visa delays related to COVID-19; as well as the ongoing delays and administrative hurdles that pre-date the pandemic. The administration's rhetoric and actions have sent the message that the US is an unwelcoming environment for international students and immigrants. And some government actions have literally closed the doors, turning international students and exchange visitors away from the US, contributing to downward enrollment trends, and increasing anxiety levels for international students and scholars already on campus.

Take the proposed rule to end duration of status. In September, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) proposed eliminating duration of status for nonimmigrants with F, J, and I visas, replacing it with admission for a fixed time period. If implemented, the rule would create uncertainty and unpredictability for international students considering studying in the US.

Yet, even as the proposal to end D/S was just one of a series of rules and cumulative actions undercutting the ability of international students to come, study, and work in the US, the response by campuses and international education advocates

to this and other challenges has been robust. During the past four years, US institutions have increasingly spoken out in support of international students. They have invested in greater international student support services, turned more frequently to legal counsels to resolve visa delays and denials, reached out to congressional offices and administrative agencies, and joined litigation to halt the enforcement of unlawful, harsh, and unfair policies.

BLUEPRINT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION'S FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

This recent pattern of active engagement gives colleges and universities a blueprint on how to start undoing the damage of the Trump era and how to work with the incoming administration to advance forward-looking, welcoming, and long-term policies to support international student recruitment, enrollment, and retention in the US. It includes

Higher education has a huge stake in US immigration policy—both because it impacts international and immigrant populations and because the future sustainability and vitality of colleges and universities depend on a robust, welcoming, and inclusive immigration system.

While the Supreme Court upheld an iteration of the travel ban, higher education won other court cases. Notable victories include [halting the enactment of a new unlawful presence policy](#), reinstating the [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals \(DACA\)](#) program, rescinding a [July 2020 ICE SEVP policy](#) that sought to bar international students from remaining in the US if their academic programs had moved online due to the pandemic, striking down implementation of the [interim final H-1B visa rules](#), and ensuring a [strong defense of OPT](#). In the waning weeks of the Trump presidency, colleges and universities need to continue to be vigilant for “[midnight regulations](#)” that could include efforts to issue final rules to end D/S or significantly revise the H-1B visa system, even in light of [recent court wins](#).

immediate action steps and longer term plans, a focus on national policy and campus practices, and creative and collective coalition-building. Higher education has a huge stake in US immigration policy—both because it impacts international and immigrant populations and because the [future sustainability and vitality](#) of colleges and universities depend on a robust, welcoming, and inclusive immigration system.

The first steps are to call on the new administration to issue clear messaging and take immediate action to demonstrate international students are welcomed. We in higher education need to keep track of the relevant rules impacting international students and urge the new administration to withdraw any detrimental rules that have not yet been finalized and rescind any harmful policies already in place. We also must

direct the Department of State to improve visa processing and adjudications. For example, the Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration has [called on the Biden-Harris administration](#) to clarify and expand dual intent for international students in part by issuing a new cable to consular officers, similar to the 2004 Rice cable, which provided consular officers more expansive discretion. In addition, the group has asked DHS to utilize its authority in determining when US employers may directly sponsor F-1 students for lawful permanent resident status.

In the mid- to longer-term, US higher education leaders, along with partners beyond the education sphere, must work with the new administration to modernize the [international education policy](#) outlined by President Bill Clinton in 2000 and ensure the new plan includes an explicit, forward-looking national recruitment and retention strategy for international students, scholars, researchers, and alumni. Individual institutions and national education organizations must also continue to participate in the collective, collaborative, and creative cross-sector coalition-building of the recent years. This focus on international students aligns strongly with the Biden-Harris administration’s stated goals to re-engage in the international sphere. As Samantha Power [points out](#) in *Foreign Affairs*, one of the best ways to restore faith in US leadership will be “to showcase the United States’ ingenuity and know-how [and] again make its universities the most attractive in the world to foreign talent.”

A future national plan will go beyond endorsement of “stapling a green card” to the diplomas of



international students receiving doctoral degrees. Instead, it must encompass the full educational lifecycle of international students, from expanding dual intent to offering international students graduating from US colleges and universities at all levels with facilitated pathways to stay, work, and contribute to the US economy. Higher education organizations, including [NAFSA](#), [APLU](#), and the [Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration](#), have begun to lay out (again) what such national plans could include. The collective and national-level work needs to strengthen and complement the recruitment, support, and retention goals of individual institutions. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and strained resources, there is increased discussion about the ways colleges and universities can pursue internationalization and the diversity of international education “virtually.” While these are vital conversations, the focus must also return to international student mobility.

Finally, advocating for international students should also mean advocating for refugee students seeking protection and to access higher education in the US. Looking ahead, and even taking into account the devastating financial hardships being experienced by many campuses, US colleges and universities have an important opportunity to embrace and help meet a pressing, global need to increase access to higher education for refugee students. The [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees](#) (UNHCR) found that only 3 percent of refugees globally are able to access higher education and has set a goal that 15 percent of eligible refugees will access higher education by 2030. While the Trump administration’s travel bans and decimation of refugee admission halted attempts to enroll refugee students, US colleges, universities, and higher education organizations can now redirect attention to the plight of refugee students. We can join with partners in the refugee resettlement community, international education, and the incoming administration to advocate for new pathways, including [refugee student visas](#), and other support mechanisms for refugee students.

The siege on higher education is nearing its end, but our work is far from over. The next few years will be vital for building back sustainable, flourishing international student recruitment and enrollments, and new national strategies to embrace and support the futures of immigrant, international, and refugee students. ▢

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Miriam Feldblum is the executive director of the Presidents’ Alliance on Higher Education and Immigration (DC).



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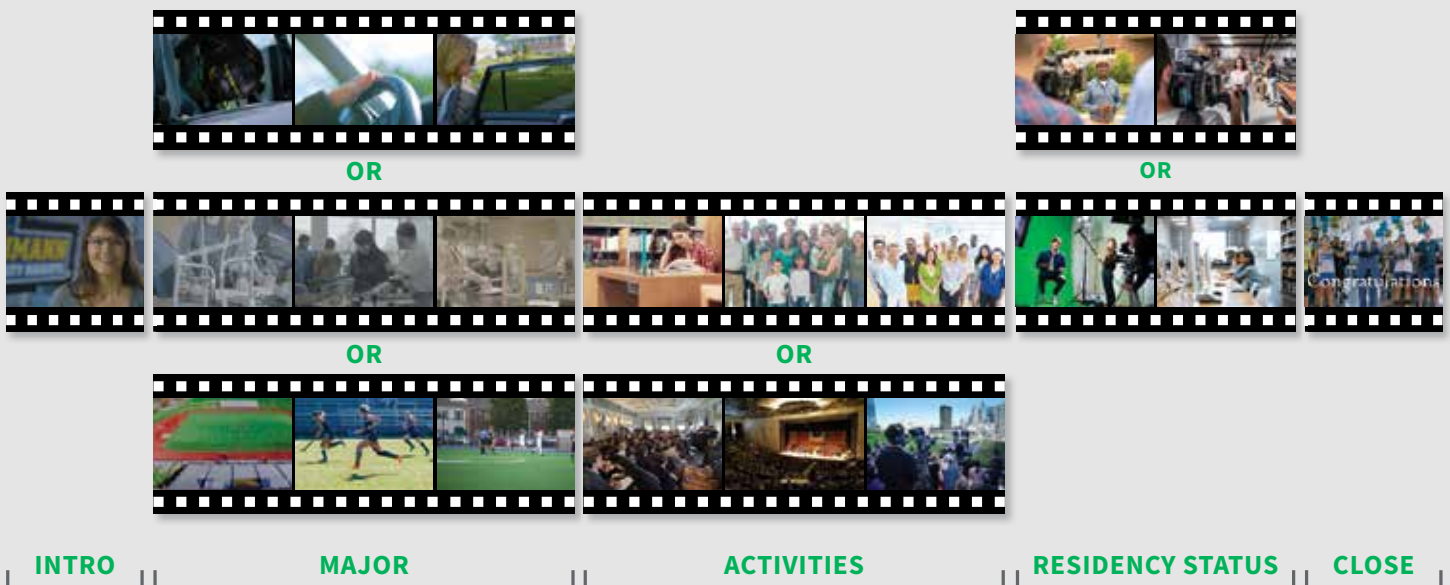
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DON'T WASTE A SECOND

By Celeste Surís-Rosselli

Hurricane Maria aftermath in Puerto Rico. Storm damaged elementary school in Vega Alta, Puerto Rico which has been permanently closed.

Have you ever held your breath for 182 seconds? Most people can't hold their breath for more than 30. How about 182 days? That's how long hurricane season in the Atlantic is, and for those 182 days, every community silently prays they'll be spared the worst nature has to offer.

Three years ago, when the class of 2021 was in ninth grade, Hurricanes Irma and Maria struck Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands within two weeks of one another. Considered two of the worst storms on record, they upended the lives of millions of students, as the infrastructure was no match for gale-force winds and torrential rains.

At the time, I was living in New York City, as part of the admission team at NYU and felt utterly helpless as I witnessed the damage caused by storms and the resulting sins of bureaucratic red tape. Notwithstanding, I knew my community would thrive, as our characteristic optimism and camaraderie would be the fuel to keep us going even when basic necessities were scarce.

It took over a year to restore power to the entire population and schools often operated with reduced resources. My old high school, Academia del Perpetuo Socorro—a private, parochial school in San Juan—was without electricity until January 2018. Nayda Gaztambide, Academia Perpetuo Socorro's college counselor who also had sons who graduated in 2018 and 2020, shared that despite the economic and social hardships students and their families have faced, they were grateful to be with their friends and the teachers. They didn't care if the school lacked electricity. DJ Meehan, college counselor at Saint John's School, also in San Juan, recalled how care packages sent by admission counselors created pockets of

joy for the students during this challenging time.

The routine of homework, friends, and sports was vital in helping students heal. For a time, it felt like we'd turned a corner, and social and economic stability was slowly rising. Then came the political upheaval of the summer of 2019, a swarm of earthquakes that started in November of last year, and now COVID-19 has us back at square one.

Students island-wide have been distance-learning since Mar. 13, 2020, and the earliest we hope we can welcome them back will be this month. Strict government measures prevented standardized testing until mid-October, and countless test centers have chosen not to open out of an abundance of caution.

We're grateful to the colleges that implemented test-optional and test-flexible policies, removing a significant barrier in the college application process. In the future, we hope that more join the ranks

of those who accept the PAA, a standardized admission exam offered in the Caribbean and Central America. The exam measures the same constructs as the SAT in Spanish, English, and math. It's the chief exam used for admission to higher education in Puerto Rico. In the class of 2020, 3,483 students took the SAT while more than 10,000 took the PAA. Wider acceptance and understanding of the exam would further remove obstacles in the admission process for students from Puerto Rico.

Every counselor I've spoken to since 2017 has highlighted the resilient nature of their students, one I've had the privilege of seeing upon returning to Puerto Rico last year. Without a second thought, students across schools have come together to rebuild their schools and neighborhoods, delivering thousands of packages containing food and PPE equipment, installed power generators in strangers' homes, and used every resource at their disposal to lift those around them. Even now, students from all over Puerto Rico are gathering supplies to ship to areas affected by Hurricane Eta, the 76th storm of the year.

The pandemic has taken its toll on all of us, but one thing it has not lessened is our students' idealism and resiliency. To quote baseball Hall of Famer Roberto Clemente, the Pride of Puerto Rico and Pittsburgh, "Any time you have an opportunity to make a difference in this world, and you don't, you're wasting your time on Earth." The students of Puerto Rico don't waste a second.

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Celeste Surís-Rosselli Esq. is director of college counseling at the The Baldwin School of Puerto Rico and co-chair of NACAC's [Puerto Rico Special Interest Group \(SIG\)](#).



Students at the The Baldwin School of Puerto Rico participate in community service. (Photos used with permission from The Baldwin School of Puerto Rico.)

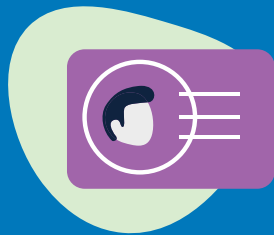




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