

# Opening Doors...Changing Lives

Empowering First-Gen Students  
Toward Selective College Success



# Introductions

**Stephanie Sutton**



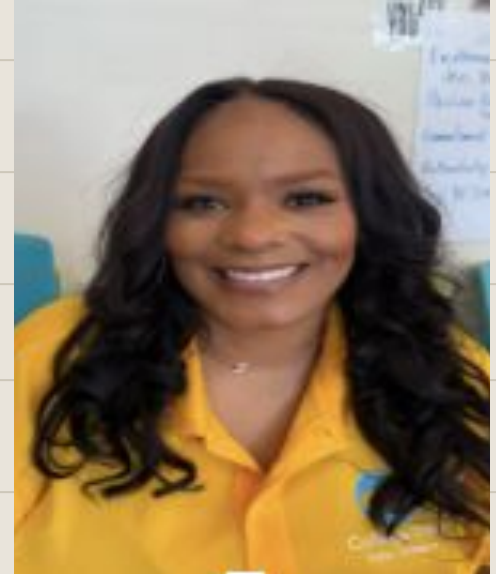
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# Agenda

01. Scholar Storytime

02. Why Selective Schools

03. Exposure & Access

04. Financial Benefits

05. Family Engagement

06. Q&A



# Objectives

Participants will be able to...

## Objective 1

Understand the unique barriers and opportunities for first-gen, low-income students pursuing selective colleges.

## Objective 2

Explore effective exposure strategies (college fly-in programs, summer enrichment, alumni panels, campus immersion trips).

## Objective 3

Use family engagement techniques to demystify the selective college process, emphasizing affordability and financial aid.

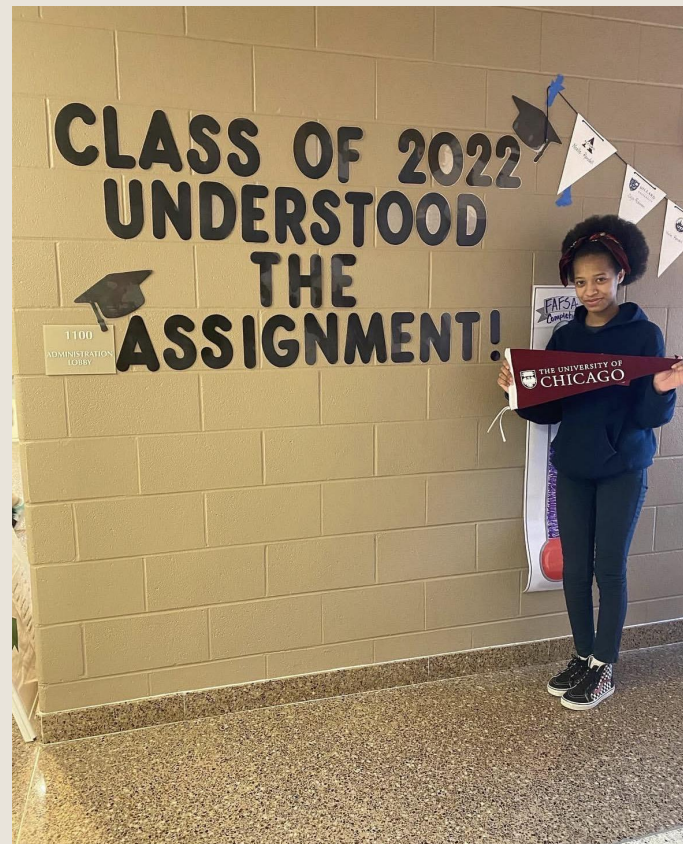
## Objective 4

Share best practices for sustaining student motivation, identity-affirming advising, and post-matriculation support.

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# Storytime

1



# Why Selective Schools?

"Most Selective" Colleges by State



# Earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment

Unemployment rate in 2013 (%)

1 Education matters

Figure 18 (Continued)

College Graduates Are More Upwardly Mobile from the Bottom and Less Likely to Fall from the Top and Middle

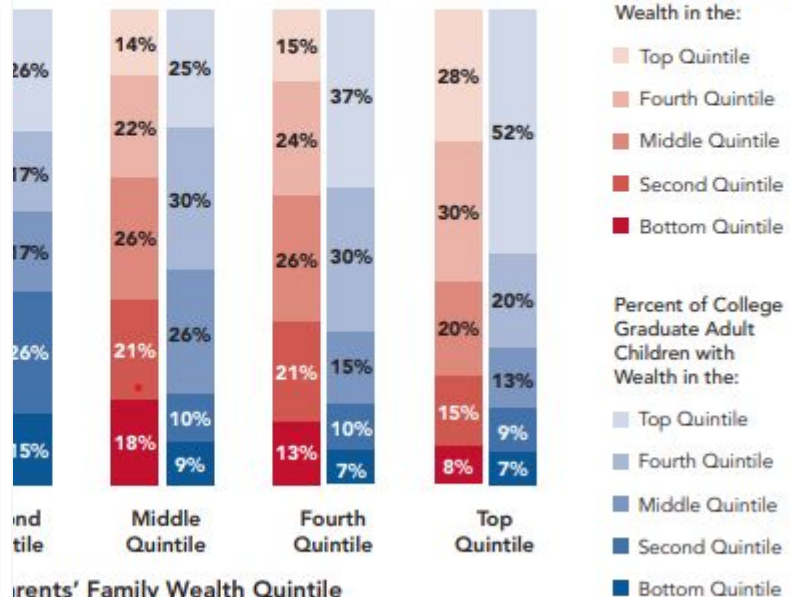
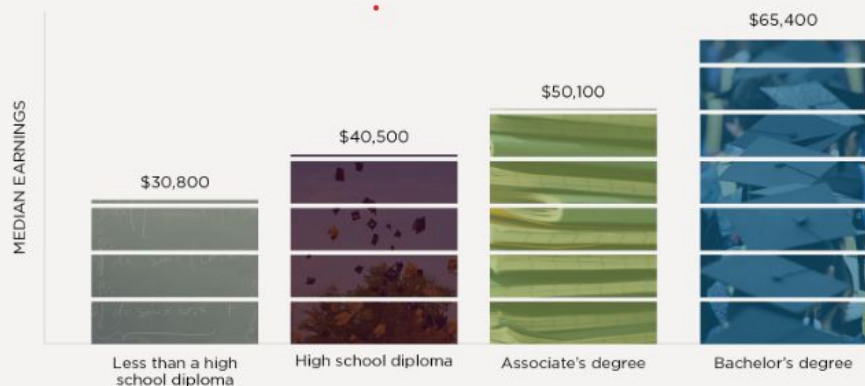
Chances of moving up or down the family wealth ladder, by education and parents' quintile

Family Wealth

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO TO&THROUGH PROJECT

**On average, bachelor's degree holders receive a higher wage than those without a college degree**

Median yearly earnings of full-time year-round workers age 25 and older: 2018

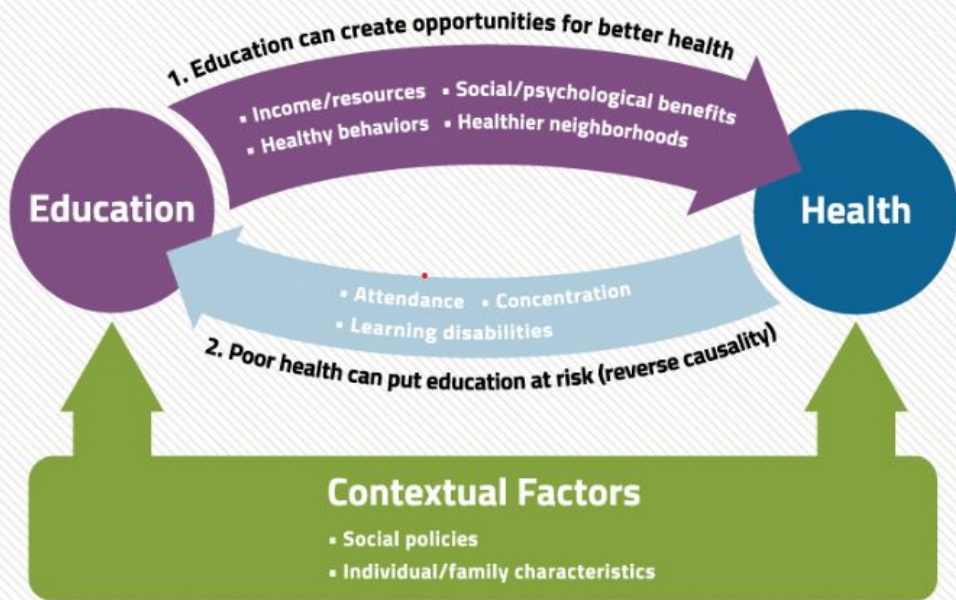


Parents' Family Wealth Quintile

includes home equity.



# Health than Ever Before

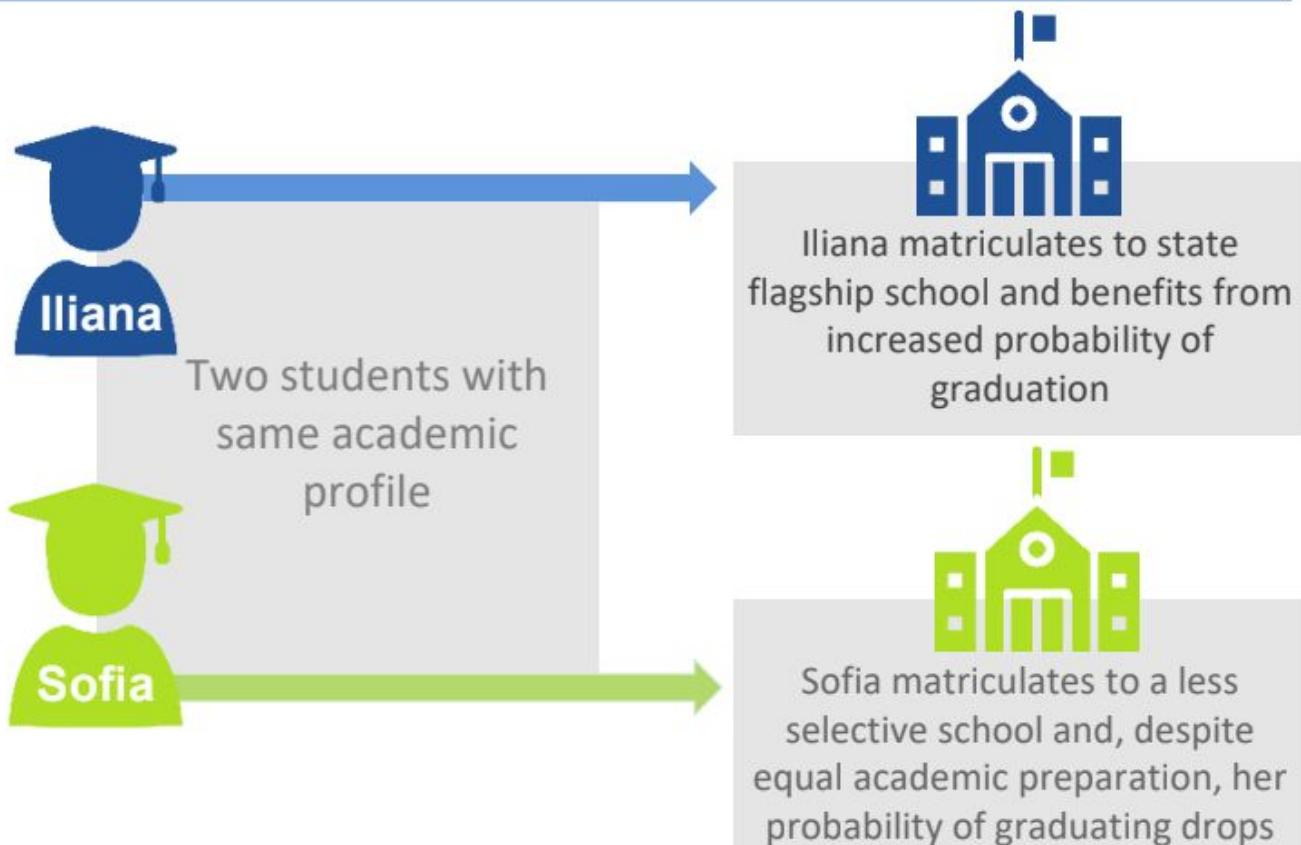


3. Conditions throughout people's lives can affect both education and health

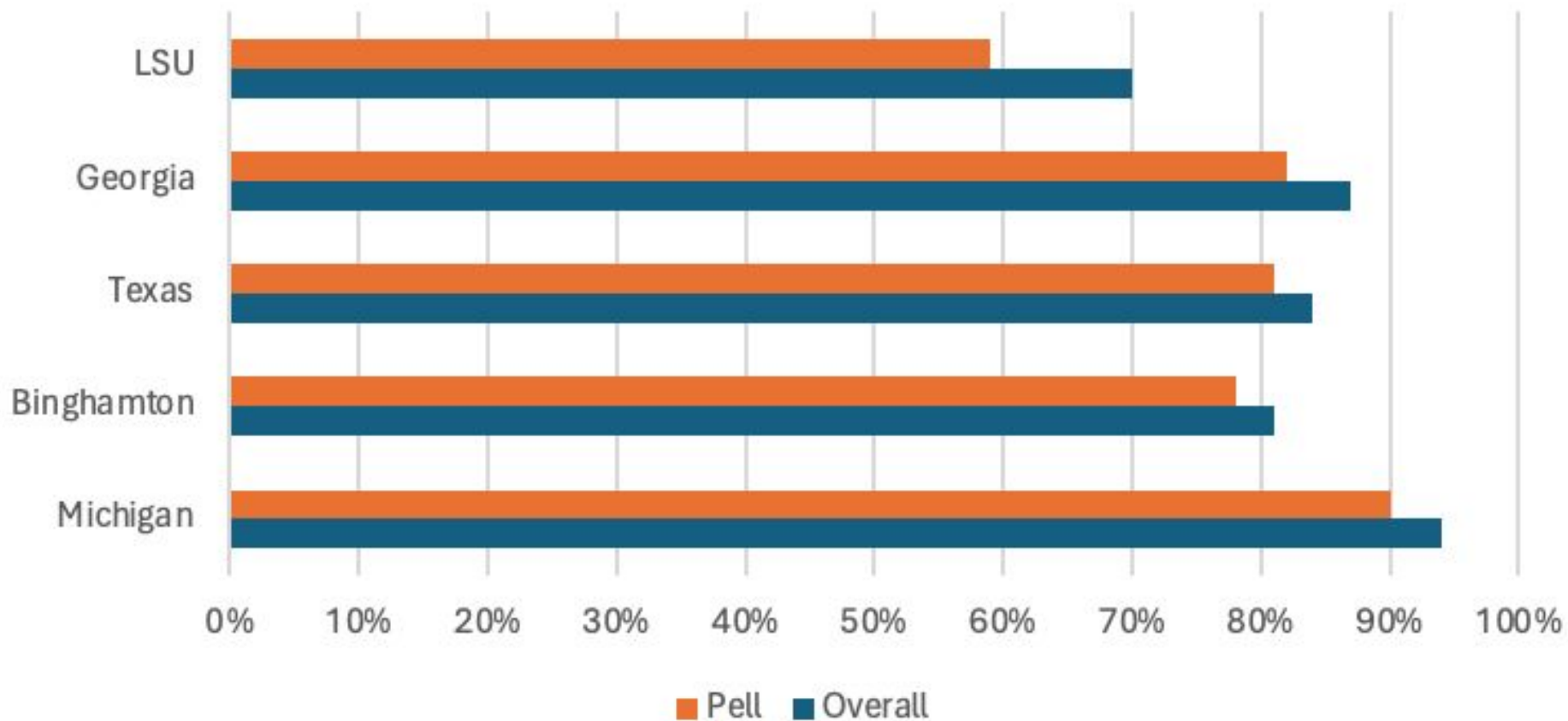
by race, gender, and educational attainment: United States, 1990–2010

| Year | Non-Hispanic Black |      |      |       |      |      |      |      |      |
|------|--------------------|------|------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|
|      | Men                |      |      | Women |      |      | Men  |      |      |
| 2010 | 1990               | 2000 | 2010 | 1990  | 2000 | 2010 | 1990 | 2000 | 2010 |
| 10.9 | 46.0               | 45.2 | 45.4 | 49.9  | 49.5 | 51.8 | 39.6 | 42.2 | 45.5 |
| 11.9 | 48.7               | 50.0 | 50.5 | 49.2  | 50.4 | 52.7 | 41.4 | 43.9 | 46.5 |
| 12.7 | 49.7               | 52.3 | 52.8 | 49.6  | 51.6 | 54.2 | 43.1 | 48.6 | 50.9 |
| 13.2 | 52.1               | 54.9 | 57.3 | 51.8  | 54.5 | 56.5 | 46.5 | 50.4 | 54.1 |
| 13.9 | 49.3               | 51.1 | 52.5 | 50.8  | 51.6 | 54.0 | 42.2 | 45.3 | 48.5 |

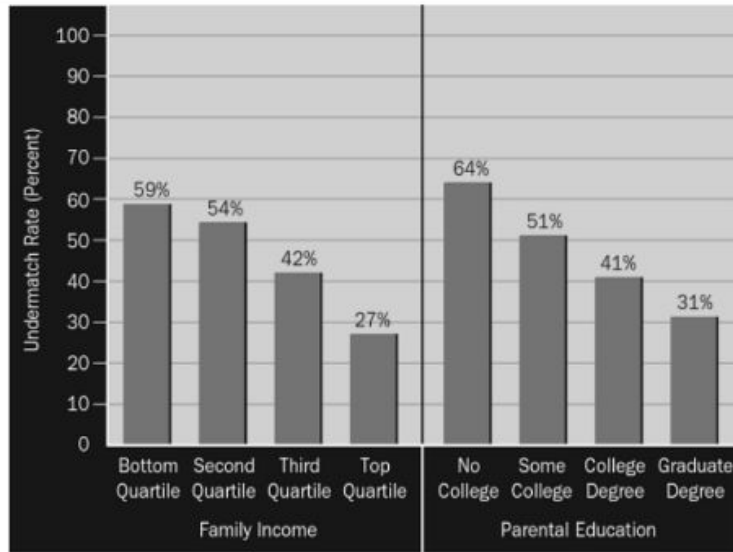
## Similar Students - Different Paths



## Graduation Rates at Flagship, BA-Granting Institutions



Students from low-income families and those who are first time college-goers are *much more likely to under-match*



And, students who under-match are *less likely to earn a degree*, or have *longer time-to-degree*

Figure 5.5. Undermatch Rates by Family Income and Parental Education  
Source: North Carolina High School Seniors Database.

# What are the Benefits of Attending Selective Schools?

**-Financial aid:** Many selective schools provide significant financial aid, which can make them more affordable than expected, with some offering a zero-cost education for low-income students. *These schools Meet Full Need*

**-Academic and career support:** These institutions often have superior facilities, more extensive academic support services, and better counseling, which can help students succeed and build strong professional networks.

**-Strong outcomes:** Research shows that high-achieving, low-income students who attend selective colleges perform just as well academically and graduate at the same rates as their peers.

**-Higher earning potential:** Attending a highly selective school can increase a student's likelihood of entering a high-earning percentile in their career.

**-Equity and social mobility:** Encouraging more low-income students to attend selective colleges is a key way to promote greater financial opportunity and equity.

# Why Selective Schools?

*The Jack Kent Cooke foundation conducted research that shows that when high-achieving, low-income students attend selective institutions, they perform equally well academically, earning similar grade-point averages, and graduating in equal numbers to their high-income peers.*

# Why Selective Schools?

## Why low-income Students may not Apply

**-Misinformation about costs:** Many low-income students overestimate the cost of attending selective schools and don't know about the extensive financial aid available.

**-Lack of preparation:** Some students worry that their high school did not adequately prepare them for the academic rigor of selective institutions.

**-Procedural barriers:** The college application process itself can be a significant barrier.

## How to Overcome Barriers

-Seek out and utilize college advising services that can help navigate the application process and financial aid applications.

-Look into programs designed to help low-income students get into and succeed at selective colleges.

-Consider applying to a variety of selective schools to find the best fit for your academic and personal needs.

# Selective Schools Benefit

- Students who are NON- FAFSA eligible (Undocumented Scholars) benefit immensely from selective colleges and universities.
- Since selective colleges use the CSS Profile (College Scholarship Service) to determine financial aid, non FAFSA eligible scholars will receive institutional aid to pay for school.
- Not all selective colleges and universities have enough funding to cover the full COA for non FAFSA eligible scholars.
- Scholarships such as: [Dream.US](#) can help scholars win money to attend partner institutions associated with the scholarship.
- Scholarship organizations such as Posse and Questbridge also help fund the COA for non FAFSA eligible scholars.

# ALL Scholars!

## Things to Think About

- How will scholars travel to their school?
  - Amtrak
  - Greyhound
  - Family driving
- How will scholars adapt to being so far away from their families given our political climate?
- How will families support scholars with their college decisions given the political climate?



# Exposure & Access

How to Introduce Selective Schools as Viable Options



# Building a College Going Identity Early

## Start With Belonging, Not Just Information

Let's start in middle school, building a college identity means helping scholars see themselves as future college students. This is done by:

- Using affirming language (“When you’re in college...” vs. “If you go to college”).
- Embedding college visuals and rituals in the environment (college pennants, alumni shoutouts, “Decision Day” walls).
- Sharing counselor and alumni stories that normalize the path and the challenges.

College should be framed not as a distant achievement but as part of who they already are becoming.

## Developing Awareness and Agency

Early exposure must go beyond campus visits, it should nurture agency and ownership. Counselors we can help students:

- **Understand** the “why” behind college (purpose, access, mobility, and impact).
- **Set** academic and personal goals connected to postsecondary pathways.
- **Learn** to navigate systems, understanding their GPA, transcripts, financial aid, and pre-college programs early.
- **Celebrate** milestones publicly to make progress visible and meaningful. Ex: submitting applications for pre-college programs, getting into an honors, AP, or IB course or taking the Mock ACT.

Building identity means equipping scholars with the language and literacy of college before they ever apply.

# Building a College Going Identity Early

## Cultural Relevance and Representation

A college-going identity is strongest when scholars see reflections of their culture, story, and community in the college journey. Counselors we can:

- Invite alumni or local college students from similar backgrounds to speak about their experiences.
- Incorporate discussions about race, first-generation identity, and imposter syndrome into college-readiness programming. Because even as adults we also experience imposter syndrome after we received the degrees.
- Help students connect their cultural capital (family values, resilience, creativity) to success in higher education.

Students' lived experiences aren't barriers, they're assets that shape how they show up in college spaces.

## Connecting College to Purpose and Passion

Counselors we strengthen the college-going identity by helping scholars connect college to meaning:

- Linking coursework and extracurriculars to future majors and careers.
- 
- Encouraging reflective exercises (“What do I want to change in my community?”).
- Offering micro-moments of exploration: Case Studies, Admission Visits, resume building classes, college-themed weeks in your schools, we want them to see their future self in real time.

When scholars can articulate “why college matters to me,” the identity sticks.

# Building a College Going Identity Early

## Sustaining Confidence Through Relationships

A college-going identity develops through relationships, not programming alone. We as college counselors model consistency and belief by:

- Using one-on-one advising to name growth and potential (“You’re already practicing the skills that college requires”).
- Partnering with families to co-build the vision early, addressing fears or misinformation. We are a team with same goal.
- Celebrating small academic and social-emotional wins that affirm progress toward college readiness.

College Counseling isn’t just about access, it’s about affirmation.

## Practical Examples (College Track / School Context)

- **9th Grade “College 101” Series:** introduces GPA, degree types, and student panels.
- **“College Clinics” Workshops:** link self-care, financial literacy, and academic habits to postsecondary success.
- **College Culture Moments:** “College Sweatshirt Fridays,” “Major of the Month” highlights, early FAFSA simulations, ACT Prep, and Apply for College Track New Orleans.
- **Reflection Practices:** Journals, vision boards, or student-written “College Commitment Statements.”

Building college-going identity early means shifting students from asking “Can I go to college?” to confidently saying, “I am college-bound, and I know why.”

# Summer Experiences: Pre-College Summer Programs

## Benefits of Attending

- **Early Exposure to College Life:** Living on campus, experience dining halls, attend mock classes
- **Build a Support Network:** Programs such as LEDA (Leadership Enterprise for a Diverse America) connects students with mentors, peers, and professors that help guide them through the college process
- **Develop Academic Confidence:** Success in college level classes empowers students to believe they can thrive in rigorous environments.
- **Expanding Access and Opportunity:** Many programs are fully funded for first-gen students, ensuring access to resources and experiences that will help them along the way.



# College Scholar Fly-Ins

## What are College Scholar Fly-Ins?

- Fly-ins are all expenses paid visits for high school students to visit the campus. Fly-ins are typically a more immersive experience than a regular college tour.
- These programs often target first generation and underrepresented students to give them an opportunity to visit campus before applying to the school.



## How Do They Help With Exposure?

- The purpose of these programs is to experience the campus culture, learn about campus support services, and connect with current students and faculty on campus.
- Acceptances to fly-in visit programs can signal demonstrated interest, admissibility, a likelihood to yield and can help on any application.
- College fly-ins are often more selective than the actual application. If students are accepted there is a higher likelihood of acceptance in that school.



# Counselor Fly-Ins

## Why You Should Attend A Counselor Fly-In?

- A chance to meet and build relationships with admissions counselors which could help with advocacy.
- You can see the campus and envision which scholars would be a good fit.
- There's an equity and access impact: counselors from underrepresented populations, especially first gen populations, gain tools to bridge gaps in the application process
- It is Professional Development: Admissions trends, financial aid updates, and knowledge to help support students
- It is FREE! And, If not free, they will reimburse.

## How Does This Experience Benefit Students?

- Expanded college options: discover and enhance your knowledge on lesser known colleges (small, selective, liberal arts)
- Improved application support with insider tips from the admissions team, essay guidance, interviews, etc.
- Access to resources: Summer programs, special initiatives for students from certain regions or backgrounds...
- Increased cultural competence: deeper understanding of the campus environment that prepares them socially, emotionally and academically.

# List of Counselor Fly-Ins

Finger Lakes: Ithaca College, Cornell University and Hobart & William Smith College

Tulane University- Krewe of Counselors Fly-In

Wake Forest University - Counselor Fly-In (Invitation Only)

Rice University - Discover Rice

Vanderbilt University Counselor Conference (Invitation Only)

CBB Counselor Tour- Colby College, Bates College, Bowdoin College

Five College Consortium- Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, UMass Amherst

BEANS Counselor Tour- Brandeis University, College of Holy Cross, Emerson College, Simmons University, Worcester Polytechnic Institute

Decemberfest- Caltech, Claremont McKenna College, Harvey Mudd College, Occidental College, Pitzer College, Pomona College, University of Redlands, Scripps College, and Whittier College

University of Miami College Counselor Fly-In

Connecticut Counselor Tour- Trinity College, Wesleyan University, Yale University

US Naval Academy- Centers of Influence



# Community Based Organizations



1. Organizations like College Track New Orleans expose scholars to selective institutions as well as popular in state options.
2. College Track New Orleans partners with 12 colleges and universities across the country to help students receive full need scholarships. Some of these colleges include: Tulane University, Middlebury College, and Trinity College.
3. College Track also provides scholars with a College Counselor and Academic Advisor for every grade level. Scholars receive assistance with ACT test prep, online dual enrollment opportunities with Arizona State University free of charge.
4. Scholars also have the opportunity to earn community service hours, attend college tours in state and out of state to also aid with exposing scholars to different opportunities.



# College Case Study/College Fairs

- Hands on college counseling event designed to help students (and families) experience how the college admissions decisions are made.
- Great way to teach students about the holistic admissions process, and how to strengthen their own applications when it is time to apply.
- School run college fairs are a great opportunity to get face time with admissions representatives, and to ask questions that may not be found on the website.



# Financial Benefits

Foster meaningful relationships that result in students' academic and financial needs being met



# Benefits of Institutions That Meet Full Need

- **Little To No Financial Debt:**
  - Colleges that promise to meet financial need mean they will cover the expenses that a scholar's family cannot afford.
  - Some institutions meet financial need without federal loans.
- **Access to Extra Resources:**
  - Selective schools who are well funded often have funding to provide study abroad (same as current tuition and room and board)
  - Emergency funds (unexpected expenses, flights home, money for winter clothes)



**Barnard College**  
**Camaria Polk**

Academic Profile:

- LCA GPA - 4.129
- Extra-Curricular Involvements
  - National Honor Society
  - College Track
  - Key Club
  - Soccer
  - Track
  - LEDA Scholar
- Scholarships Received
  - Full Merit Scholarship

**STRIVE FOR THE GOLD!**

‘23

# Selective Colleges and Universities In Action

## Email from John Hopkins University



our financial aid offers and meet 100% of demonstrated need for all students.

Building on what was already a premier financial aid program, we are providing students from low- and middle-income families with a new tuition promise program. As a part of this change, we are simplifying our approach to make it easier for students and families to understand exactly what they'll pay to attend Hopkins.

### **New Financial Aid Structure**

Starting this spring, our undergraduate financial aid program will offer:

- **Free tuition for families earning up to \$200,000.**
- **Free tuition + living expenses for families earning up to \$100,000**, allowing students from these families to attend Hopkins with a \$0 parent contribution.

# **Family Engagement**

**Foster meaningful  
relationships with  
students and  
parents**

# This is a Family Decision!

## Families of First Gen Students Face Unique Challenges:

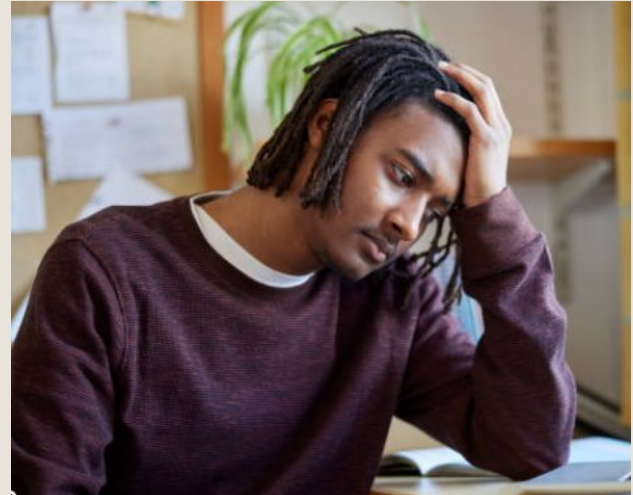
-**Lack of knowledge:** Families often don't know how to navigate the complex financial aid system, such as filling out the FAFSA, which can limit access to funds

-**Guilt and obligation:** Students may feel guilty for leaving their families, especially if they are needed at home for financial or emotional support.

-**"Culture shock":** A student may feel like they don't belong in either their college environment or at home, leading to isolation

-**Imposter syndrome:** Without a family history of college attendance, students may feel they don't belong and are not as capable as their peers

-**Lack of guidance:** Families can't provide guidance on navigating college because they have not been through the process themselves



# Building Trusting Relationships With Families

- Parent information sessions explaining successful programs (Posse, Questbridge, Gates, [Dream.US](https://www.dream.us), Selective Schools, etc.)
- Financial Aid Nights (tiered meetings)
- Put families in touch with helpful organizations (College Track, College Beyond, LOSFA, etc.)
- Required Family Engagement Nights (Parent meeting with Admissions)
- Coffee with the Counselor Events
- Ask Parents to volunteer
- Attend school events including sporting events, parades, community events, etc.





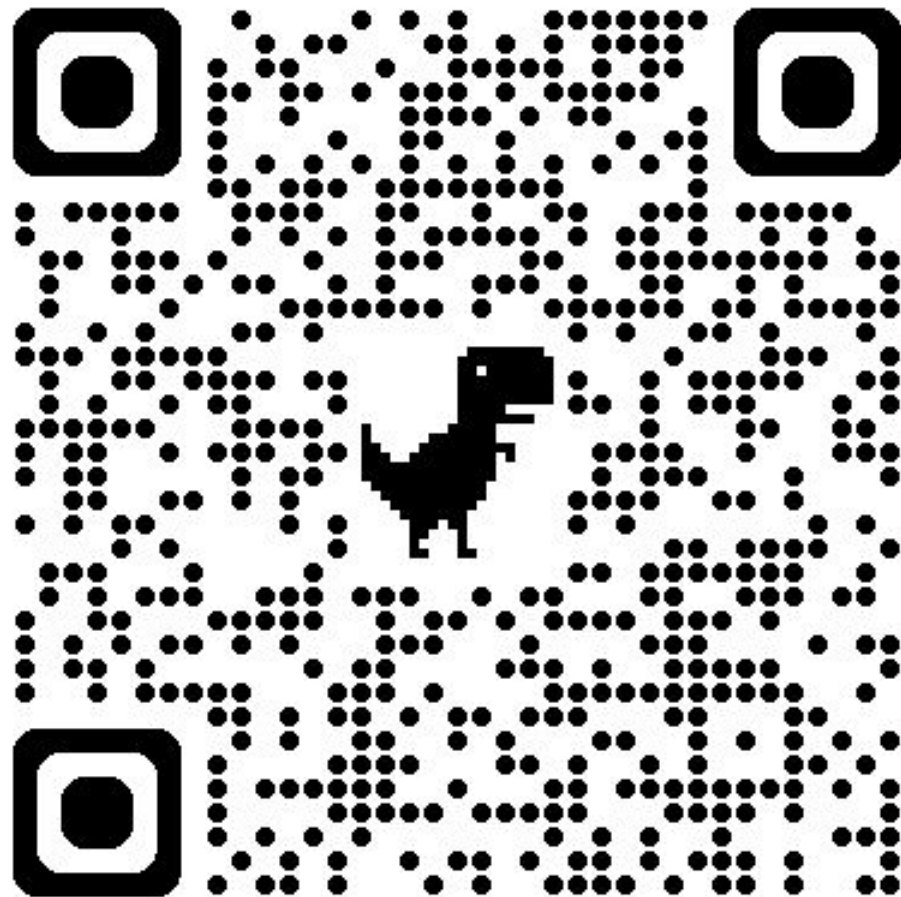
# Q & A

Stephanie Sutton: [ssutton@collegetrack.org](mailto:ssutton@collegetrack.org)

Jessica Medlock: [jmedlock@collegetrack.org](mailto:jmedlock@collegetrack.org)

Gabrielle Jones: [gjones@collegiateacademies.org](mailto:gjones@collegiateacademies.org)

# Resources



**THANK  
YOU!**

