

College Access Plan: A Community Opting In to Post-Secondary Success^{1,2}

Executive Summary

Current research shows that six years after graduating high school, only 11% of low-income, first-generation college students have achieved a bachelor's degree, compared to 55% of their more advantaged peers. College access organizations exist to bridge persistent post-secondary achievement gaps between low-income, first-generation college-going, and racial-ethnic minority students and their middle- or upper-class, continuing-generation, and white peers. To work toward the goal of parity in college outcomes among students across differences of race, class, and college-going generation, college access organizations provide access to information and resources.

Communities where students have high rates of college matriculation and where students match well with post-secondary institutions based on academic achievement are said to have a "college-going culture." College access organizations seeking to cultivate such a culture face two challenges: (1) to work both *with* and *beyond* existing school structures and (2) to bridge secondary and post-secondary pathways not just for some under-represented students but for all, spanning the full range from high-achieving students to those caught in the "school-to-prison" pipeline. This paper describes the approach taken by one organization, College Access Plan, to meet these challenges and foster a college-going culture in the entirety of a highly diverse California community.

First, College Access Plan engages in community collaboration, partnering with the City, school district, and local community organizations to develop a cohesive web of support for students' post-secondary goals. Second, College Access Plan uses an "opt-in model" of service provision to place *students'* as the central figures in their own achievement and to foster strong, supportive relationships between students and staff. Thanks to these strategies, CAP is able to serve the full diversity of students in its community, to support 4-year college going among *non*-high-achieving as well as high-achieving students, and to support low-income students in particular to attend highly selective colleges.

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² This paper was supported by a grant from the Rosalinde and Arthur Gilbert Foundation.

Introduction

The city of Pasadena, California, is home to great entrepreneurial, cultural, and intellectual resources alongside great socioeconomic inequality. This inequality is especially manifest among school-aged youth; a third of local PUSD-eligible students attend private schools instead, and those that attend public schools are disproportionately low-income students of color. The majority of students graduating in PUSD will be among the first generation in their family to attend college.

College Access Plan (CAP) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that prepares under-served students in Pasadena to succeed in college. CAP was founded in 2006 by Pasadena City College professor Monique Hyman and John Muir High School English teacher Kathleen Parent to help students in Pasadena Unified School District (PUSD) think of college as an attainable goal. Recognizing a distinct lack of college-oriented information and services for the students they served on a daily basis, Mo and Kathy created CAP to provide comprehensive pre-college advisement. CAP's programs are free, on-site, and open to all students. Because no two students are alike, CAP provides individualized support to help each student find his or her own higher education path.

CAP began at one school – John Muir High School. There, CAP developed its model of after-school drop-in programs combined with in-class presentations targeted to each grade, recruitment and retention activities on campus, and as-needed specialized workshops. Over the course of eight years, CAP has expanded to all four of the district's comprehensive high schools and to the Washington Middle School STEAM magnet. In addition to after-school advisement and in-class presentations, CAP now offers original SAT prep courses and an original college awareness curriculum (for middle schoolers). CAP provides tools for parents and families to understand the college application process. And CAP's I Heart College alumni program provides continuing support to PUSD graduates in college through completion.

CAP's development reflects the organization's close ties to the Pasadena community and its commitment to provide holistic pre-college resources to PUSD students. In the upcoming year, CAP will expand further to offer targeted post-secondary counseling services to Rose City High School (a continuation school) and Pasadena's California Independent Study program as well as at a local charter school, Learning Works. Yet even as CAP continues to expand its services, the centerpiece of CAP programming remains the high school drop-in after-school program, which is designed to provide support to any student who has a question about higher education. Assistance can range from basic answers to comprehensive help with college searches, personal statements, application completion, college correspondence, and financial aid depending on the student's needs and desires.

Sociologist and education scholar Roberta Espinoza identifies the importance of "pivotal moments" that set working class students on the path to college.³ Pivotal moments are instances where a trusted educator provides an individual student with needed information and confidence to move toward college. College Access Plan recognizes that some students will have experienced many such moments by the time they reach their senior year while others will have experienced few. CAP's central model for service provision, consisting of (1) *community collaboration* and (2) *opt-in programming*, is intended to create as many opportunities as possible for pivotal moments with CAP staff and with other school adults. CAP firmly believes that, whatever a student's previous

³ Espinoza, Roberta. 2011. *Pivotal Moments: How Educators Can Put All Students on the Path to College*. Harvard Education Press.

academic trajectory and with the right supports, he or she can find a personal path to post-secondary success.

Given its unique model of service provision, CAP represents a different kind of college access program from organizations selecting a particular cohort of students based on demographics or school performance.⁴ First, by partnering with the school district, the City, and local community organizations, CAP aims to improve college-going outcomes for an *entire* population of students in all of its diversity in terms of race, class, and academic ability. Second, by inviting students to “opt in” to its programs, CAP fosters student aspirations and accountability on their path to post-secondary success by enabling students to collaborate with their peers and to define the nature of their relationships with adults.

Likewise, this paper is written to provide a different kind of white paper. Rather than target the organization’s funders, this paper is designed for an audience of other college access programs, educators, and scholars. It will present evidence from CAP’s quantitative program evaluation of the graduating class of 2014 showing the program’s effectiveness. But the paper is not designed to establish *that* CAP is effective, but to describe *how* – and to expose areas where CAP has room to grow.

This paper will first review the literature on the challenges facing college access organizations. It will then provide a clear and explicit description of CAP’s program model. The paper then presents the quantitative program evaluation showing CAP’s impact on college-going rates among Pasadena students. It then describes in detail each element of CAP’s community collaboration at the level of school, district, City, and post-secondary institutions to show how CAP participates in the coordinated and systemic partnerships needed to develop a district-wide college-going culture. It then details CAP’s opt-in model, which provides flexibility to support a fuller range of students and fosters trusting student-staff relationships that support college attendance. The paper concludes with a discussion of what CAP gets right and its growth opportunities. CAP offers this research to contribute to an important dialogue in the college access community on developing multiple pathways to college for underrepresented and under-served students.

⁴ “Unlike counselors who aim (though not always successfully) to serve all students, the vast majority of outreach programs select students based on socioeconomic status or race/ethnicity and often also on academic achievement or staff recommendations.” Stephan, Jennifer and James Rosenbaum. 2011. “Can High Schools Reduce College Enrollment with a New Counseling Model?” Institute for Policy Research Northwestern University Working Paper Series.

Contemporary Challenges for College Access

College access organizations like CAP exist to bridge persistent post-secondary achievement gaps between low-income, first-generation college-going, and racial-ethnic minority students and their middle- or upper-class, continuing-generation, and white peers. Current research shows that six years after graduating high school, only 11% of low-income, first-generation college students have achieved a bachelor's degree, compared to 55% of their more advantaged peers.⁵ Though factors of individual background influence this difference, it is largely rooted in disparities in high school experiences: these students are less likely to have participated in school success activities, to have had positive interactions with faculty, and to have felt socially integrated into their schools. Many first-generation college students never enroll in four-year institutions because of failure to meet admissions requirements, a lack of family support (or a lack of connections to information and institutions that would bolster family support),⁶ and a lack of familiarity with the college application process.⁷

According to researchers at the USC Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis, schools can cultivate a college-going culture in part by providing comprehensive services that include guidance, preparation, and information and resources.⁸ Support for college-going must be coordinated and systemic, spanning academic and non-academic activities within the school and bridging to post-secondary institutions outside the school. But schools serving diverse student populations are caught in a Catch-22, where the teachers, counselors, and administrators facing the greatest need have the least time and financial support to provide targeted pre-college services.⁹

College access organizations supplement the hard work of school professionals to expand post-secondary enrollment and completion. These organizations work to bridge gaps between underrepresented students and their more privileged peers by providing advising and practical help in the critical areas of financial aid, college applications, and transfer pathways and by encouraging a college-going culture through the development of positive relationships with peers and school-based adults.¹⁰ But despite private and public investments of hundreds of millions of

⁵ Engle, Jennifer and Vincent Tinto. 2008. "Moving Beyond Access: College Success for Low-Income, First-Generation Students." The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education.

⁶ Susan Auerbach. 2004. "Engaging Latino Parents in Supporting College Pathways: Lessons from a College Access Program." *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 3(2):125-145.

⁷ Choy, Susan. 2001. "Students Whose Parents Did Not Go to College: Post-Secondary Access, Persistence, and Attainment." National Center for Education Statistics.

⁸ Blumberg, Corwin and William G. Tierney. 2007. "Getting There - and Beyond: Building a Culture of College-going in High Schools." University of Southern California Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis.

⁹ Oakes, Jeannie. 2004. "Education Inadequacy, Inequality, and Failed State Policies. A Synthesis of Expert Reports Prepared for *Williams v. State of California*." UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies/ UC All Campus Consortium on Research for Diversity

¹⁰ Engle, J. and V. Tinto. 2008. *ibid.*

dollars in college access programming, service provision remains uneven. Depending on factors such as location, school administration, and even personal characteristics like race, class, and academic performance, high school students may receive no support at all for their post-secondary transition or confront a patchwork of services and requirements.¹¹

Two key challenges face college access organizations: (1) to work both *within* and *beyond* existing school structures and (2) to bridge secondary and post-secondary pathways not just for some under-represented students but for all, spanning the full range from high-achieving students¹² to those caught in the “school-to-prison” pipeline.¹³ The sections below describe College Access Plan’s model for meeting these two challenges in a single district – Pasadena Unified School District. By targeting its service provision to supplement the community’s existing resources to fill identifiable needs and by providing an array of “opt-in” programs available to *all* students — including those who do not qualify for other college access organizations and/or those who face nuanced challenges that add layers of complexity reaching beyond what schools have the capacity to provide — in this primarily low-income and racial-ethnic minority school district, CAP has succeeded in improving college-going rates for diverse students.

¹¹ Tierney, William and Linda Serra Hagedorn (Editors). 2002. *Increasing Access to College: Extending Possibilities for All Students*. State University of New York, Albany Press.

¹²Hoxby, Carroll and Christopher Avery. 2013. “The Missing One-Offs: The Hidden Supply of High-Achieving Low-Income Students.” Brookings Papers on Economic Activity. The Brookings Institute.

¹³ Wald, Johanna and Daniel Losen (Editors). 2003. “Deconstructing the School-to-Prison Pipeline.” An issue of *New Directions for Youth Development: Theory, Practice, Research*. Jossey-Bass publishers.

College Access Plan - Program Description

College Access Plan is a small organization. In 2013-2014, the year evaluated for this paper, the staff consisted of the Executive Director, the Director of Programs, three AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers, and three Program Coordinators. The AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers provided capacity-building services only, so on-site programs were run by the Director of Programs and the three Program Coordinators. Each Program Coordinator was responsible for a school site (or, in some cases, two school sites). Program Coordinators were also supported by trained volunteers who attended the after-school programs and SAT Prep courses. The program staff run the following range of programs directly on site at the schools CAP serves:

Middle School Program

College Access Plan partners with Washington Middle School, where 95% of the students receive free or reduced-price lunch,¹⁴ to offer comprehensive college and career readiness education to students in the 6th-8th grades in alignment with Pasadena Unified School District's goals for career and college readiness. CAP's program at Washington MS provides fun, engaging activities for students both in the classroom and after school. CAP's Washington Middle School Program served approximately 200 students in 2013-2014. The middle-school program involves two components:

8th Grade Pre-College Coursework: During the shortened 30-minute course periods on Mondays, the CAP Program Coordinator delivers a year-long curriculum to 8th graders. Over the course of the year, the Program Coordinator delivers 40 lessons comprising 4 modules: Study Skills, School Management, High School Prep, and College Prep.

After-School Program (6th and 7th): The Program Coordinator leads a nine-week activity based program that meets after school twice a week and enrolls 10-15 students. The program provides entertaining activities based in drama, arts-and-crafts, and creative writing. The activities are divided into three modules focused on Goal-Setting, Career, and College.

High School Program

CAP partners with four high schools (John Muir High School, Blair High School, Pasadena High School, and Marshall High School) to offer college advisement and application support services. These programs include in-class presentations, the after-school drop-in program, targeted workshops, and SAT/ACT Preparation.

In-Class Presentations: CAP offers in-class presentations to English courses; these presentations provide unique information targeted by grade level. The presentations also serve as a recruitment tool, letting students know about college application requirements and the many areas where CAP staff can offer specialized support. Approximately 1700 students received presentations in 2013-2014. CAP also provides in-class, topic-specific workshops as requested by teachers.

After-School Drop-In Program: Two hours a day, two days a week after school in each school, CAP runs its drop-in program in a computer lab, which directly addresses the reality that many students do not have computer access at home. The Program Coordinator welcomes each student as he or

¹⁴ California Department of Education. (2015). "DataQuest." Retrieved from <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

she enters the classroom, and asks about his or her intention for that day. First-time students take a survey and receive guidance on searching colleges or on beginning applications. Because the computer lab setting is open, experienced students often support one another as they work on applications or financial aid. Student work is self-guided, but the Program Coordinator and volunteers provide expertise to answer questions and to help with research. Students are made aware that they can work on anything college-related during CAP time and that they can bring any questions about applying to and attending college to CAP staff. CAP staff often work one-on-one with students on personal statements or college correspondence. Students are encouraged to come often and to bring friends but are also told that they can come as much or as little as they need and stay as long as they like. CAP's after-school program served 324 students who dropped in *more than once* in 2013-2014 and 564 students who dropped in *one time or more* in 2013-2014.

Targeted Workshops: CAP provides one-off workshops in classes or after school at all schools on topics like personal statements, PSAT preparation, creating a FAFSA Pin, and other areas of focus. Generally, students receive foundational information on the topic or participate in a group exercise, and then follow up by attending the drop-in after school program for additional support.

SAT/ACT Preparation: College Access Plan's SAT class takes advantage of free content from College Board and the ACT and an original curriculum developed by CAP staff to prepare students to take the SAT and ACT tests. In the spring semester, CAP offers four 8-week courses (meets once a week after school for 2 hours) to juniors at John Muir High School, Blair High School, Pasadena High School, and Marshall High School. In summer, CAP partners with Pasadena Educational Foundation to offer rising sophomores, juniors, and seniors throughout the city a summer course that runs four hours a day, four days a week, for five weeks. In fall, CAP offers seniors an intensive SAT prep class that meets for two hours once a week for five weeks. CAP staff act as instructors for all classes. CAP's SAT prep courses served 100 students in 2013-2014 and the program has since expanded.

Alumni Services

I Heart College: Every year, College Access Plan invites up to 100 graduating students who were engaged and regular participants in CAP's after-school program to participate in the I Heart College alumni program. Students who opt into I Heart College are invited to a Summer Summit to prepare for campus life and learn "soft skills" for college the summer after graduation. They are also matched with a student mentor on their campus through the Southern California College Access Network's Level Up program or with an adult CAP volunteer for professional development advice. CAP staff send out regular newsletters and mail care packages with items donated from community businesses to college freshmen during finals. CAP also hosts workshops and networking events, such as a winter break check-in for all I Heart College alumni. CAP staff are available by phone, email, or in person for life advising during college.

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is a source of trouble for many nonprofit service providers, but especially college access organizations. According to education scholar Patricia Gándara, few programs provide evaluations that are explicit about how they recruited participants and that account for participant attrition; that is, some college access organizations base their final evaluations only on those students who successfully stuck with the program.¹⁵ To assess programs both for internal improvement and for external grant reporting, College Access Plan tracks the daily attendance of all students who “drop in” to the after-school program and who attend CAP’s daily programs and does not remove any students from data analysis. At the drop-in program, students also use a sign-out sheet to indicate the items they worked on in CAP that day so the organization can track specific areas where staff provided support. In addition, all students who attend the drop-in program are asked to take a “first-time student survey” where they provide contact information and a final student survey where they reflect on the year.

In addition, thanks to a Memorandum of Agreement with Pasadena Unified School District, CAP is able to track students after graduation through the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) – both CAP attendees and non-attendees – to compare college attendance rates. The district provides detailed information, including student demographics and A-G course completion.¹⁶ CAP is able to use the demographic information to generate descriptive statistics on the graduating class as a whole and on the population served by CAP. CAP uses academic information to conduct detailed data analysis on CAP’s impact on the college going rates of 2-year and 4-year ready students.¹⁷ The analyses presented below compare graduating seniors who attended CAP more than once in 2013-2014, students who joined CAP’s “I Heart College” Alumni program, and graduating seniors who did not attend CAP in 2013-2014.¹⁸

¹⁵ Gandara, Patricia. 2001. Paving the Way to Postsecondary Education: K-12 Intervention Programs for Underrepresented Youth. Report of the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative Working Group on Access to Postsecondary Education. NCES, U.S. Dept of Education. NCES, U.S. Dept of Education.

¹⁶ In California, the “A-G requirements” are the required high school courses for admission into University of California and California State University schools. Students must pass these courses with a grade of “C” or higher. Please see csumentor.edu/planning/high_school/subjects.asp and ucop.edu/agguide/a-g-requirements/ for more information.

¹⁷ For the 2013-2014 program evaluation, a large number of students chose to opt-out of reporting through NSC, especially students at Pasadena City College, the post-secondary institution serving the largest proportion of PUSD graduates. This may be because of wording on the PCC XL Pathways application. The author was able to use NSC opt-out reports to impute missing data by category of A-G completion and CAP attendance. However, this made it impossible to do a more detailed analysis of differences in college-going by GPA, race, and class across these categories.

¹⁸ Students who showed up on CAP attendance only once were included as non-attendees. This is because CAP partners with the district after-school programs and with the local community college to hold one-time events such as “Pizza and PIN night” (for FAFSA PIN registration) and PCC XL Pathways registration (the local community college’s student support program). Only a small handful of students attended two or three times; the vast majority of students attended CAP four times or more, indicating CAP’s relevance to these students as a resource. Some students attended over 40 times.

First, Tables A and B show that PUSD is a district serving a large proportion of students traditionally underrepresented in post-secondary institutions in terms of both racial-ethnic characteristics and class. The demographics of CAP students very closely resemble those of the broader population of PUSD alumni.¹⁹ In addition, Table 2 shows that whereas most college access programs serve significantly fewer boys than girls, the number of boys CAP serves is only slightly depressed in comparison to the overall population. Finally, only about 43% of PUSD students graduate with the coursework they need to attend 4-year public colleges in California, and CAP serves a high proportion of these students – likely because these students self-identify or identified by school adults as needing application support.

Table A. CAP and PUSD class of 2014 alumni racial-ethnic demographics²⁰

	Latino	African American	White	Asian/Pacific Islander
CAP Student	166 51.2%	54 16.7%	37 11.4%	25 7.7%
I Heart College	47 51.1%	15 16.3%	11 12%	8 8.7%
High Schools Total	497 49%	189 18.6%	151 14.9%	57 5.6%

Table B. CAP and PUSD class of 2014 alumni other demographics

	Free/Reduced Lunch	Male	A-G Eligible
CAP Student	245 75.6%	140 43.2%	211 65.1%
I Heart College	73 79.3%	36 39.1%	71 77.2%
High Schools Total	715 70.4%	478 47.1%	440 43.3%

¹⁹ The data here only represent the graduating class of 2014. Demographics vary slightly across schools, programs, and years.

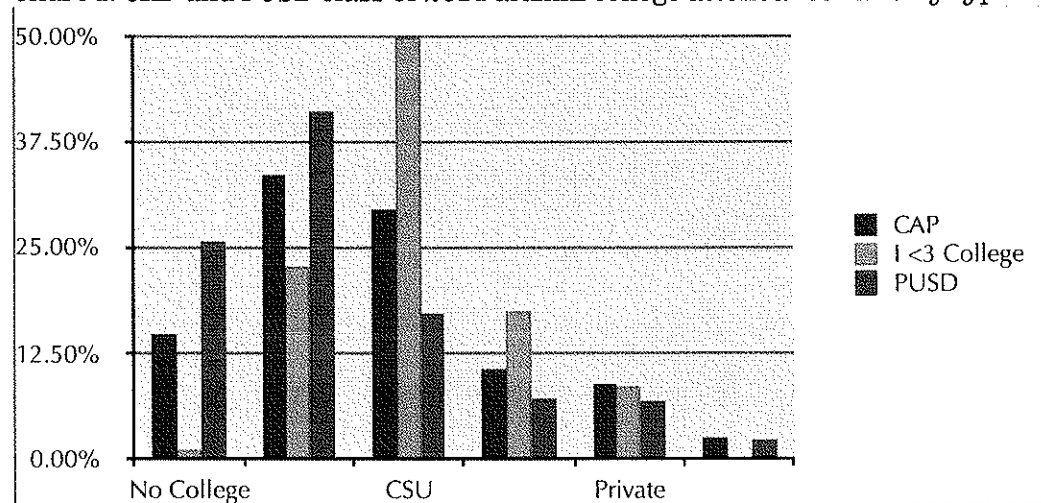
²⁰ The categories of American Indian, mixed-race, non-report, and other have been left off this table, so percentages will not add up to 100.

Second, Table C shows the college attendance rates of PUSD class of 2014 alumni in general and CAP alumni in particular by college type, including no college,²¹ community college, California State Universities, University of California campuses, private colleges, and out-of-state public colleges. Chi-square analysis of this table shows a strong significant difference ($p < 0.001$) between CAP alumni and alumni in the high schools as a whole in their rates of college attendance. Reading the table, it is clear that CAP students in general and I Heart College students in particular are substantially less likely to not attend college and substantially more likely to attend CSU and UC schools. These differences are also illustrated in Chart 1.

Table C. CAP and PUSD class of 2014 alumni college attendance rates by type.

	No college	CC	CSU	UC	Private	Out-of-State Public
CAP Student	48 14.8%	109 33.6%	95 29.3%	35 10.8%	29 9%	8 2.5%
I Heart College	1 1.1%	21 22.8%	46 50%	16 17.4%	8 8.7%	0 0%
High Schools Total	259 25.5%	418 41.2%	175 17.2%	73 7.2%	69 6.8%	21 2.1%

Chart 1. CAP and PUSD class of 2014 alumni college attendance rates by type.



²¹ No college may be over-reported by a few percentage points due to irregularities in reporting from NSC. However, false reports of “no college” based on student opt-outs have already been accounted for in this data analysis. There is no reason to believe that false reports of no-college would vary systematically across CAP and non-CAP students. The “no college” category also includes for-profit institutions. This is both because these institutions are the least likely to report to NSC and because enrollment in these institutions is a non-preferred outcome for low-income students because of their low completion rates combined with high student debt.

Tables D and E break down the differences observed in Table C to examine whether CAP's high numbers of college attendance simply reflect the high proportion of A-G eligible students it serves. Is CAP simply helping students who are already on the path to college?

The answer is no. The differences presented in Table D are highly significant ($p < .001$) according to chi-square analysis, showing that CAP in fact supported A-G *ineligible* students to attend four-year colleges. This difference is possible because of alternative paths for A-G ineligible students including the Cal State Educational Opportunity Program, private colleges, and out-of-state public colleges.²² CAP also affected the college-going rates of A-G eligible students (Table E), though this effect was not as strong and fell outside of the range of statistical significance ($p = 0.109$).

Table D. College Attendance of A-G ineligible class of 2014 alumni; CAP v. non-CAP

	No College	2-year College	4-year College
Attended CAP	33 29.2%	54 47.8%	26 23%
Did not attend	186 40.3%	239 51.7%	37 8%

Table E. College Attendance of A-G eligible class of 2014 alumni; CAP v. non-CAP

	No College	2-year College	4-year College
Attended CAP	15 7.1%	55 26.1%	141 66.8%
Did not attend	25 10.9%	70 30.6%	134 58.5%

²² In addition, CAP staff and school counselors often work together to help international students and other students identify their classes as A-G courses to apply, though this identification would not appear on PUSD data reporting.

Finally, to illustrate that CAP is able to support the success of a full range of students who are traditionally underrepresented in college, Table F shows the percentage of alumni who attended highly selective colleges who were low-income.²³ Because high-achieving, low-income students are likely to “undermatch” to less-selective schools,²⁴ CAP’s ability to place these students in highly selective schools is important to measure. Though the number of PUSD students attending highly selective schools was too small to show statistical significance (only 35 of 1015 students), Table F clearly shows that CAP supported low-income students to attend top-tier colleges. In addition, though CAP served less than a third of PUSD graduates overall, it served *over half* of PUSD alumni who matriculated at highly selective colleges.

Table F. Income status of alumni attending highly selective colleges; CAP v. Non-CAP

	Free/Reduced Lunch	No Free/Reduced Lunch
Attended CAP	10 55.6%	8 44.4%
Did Not Attend	7 41.2%	10 58.8%

²³ Barron’s Top 200 Selective Colleges: <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/04/04/business/economy/economix-selectivity-table.html>

²⁴ Hoxby, Carroll and Christopher Avery. 2013. “The Missing One-Offs: The Hidden Supply of High-Achieving Low-Income Students.” Brookings Papers on Economic Activity. The Brookings Institute.

The Components of CAP's Success

Community collaboration

College Access Plan's objective is to serve one whole community responsively, fostering a culture of access to various post-secondary options among community members representing a variety of backgrounds underrepresented in college: African American and Latino students, students with no or limited family history of college attendance, unauthorized immigrant students, language minority students, students in the foster system, and low-income students. CAP seeks to increase the percentage of PUSD alumni who graduate college in alignment with district goals as well as the Americorps VISTA initiative to reduce community poverty.

The report from the USC Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis cited earlier in this paper argued that "college-going culture" is developed only through intentional, comprehensive collaboration among school personnel and with partners, including institutions of higher education.²⁵ To develop a strong, consistent college-going culture across community based organizations, schools, and classrooms, CAP has cultivated relationships with schools across the entire district, with the City of Pasadena, and with outside partners.

At the school level, CAP staff take care to develop long-term relationships with teachers, counselors, and after-school program providers. Because of these relationships, teachers are comfortable inviting CAP into their classrooms to give presentations or run workshops, which serve as a major form of recruitment for drop-in programs. Michael Dakan, an English teacher at Blair High School whose classroom CAP uses for drop-in after school programs, says, *"Professionally, I feel very comfortable with CAP's staff in my room, with my students. I treat [CAP's] staff like they're just teachers."* He adds, *"I trust the program because of the personal warmth and one-on-one attention that I've seen myself that [students] respond to."*

Likewise, counselors feel that CAP provides a useful supplement to their work. For example, Program Coordinator Joyce told the story of a student who had to use the paper form to sign up for the SAT because of a religious conflict with the Saturday exam. Her high school counselor knew the paper form would be time consuming, so she was able to refer the student to CAP where Joyce spent an hour figuring the application out with the student – *"an hour that the counselor just doesn't have to spend with a single student."* In schools with high student to counselor ratios and high student need, relationships with trusted organizations like CAP allow counselors to focus their energies to support more students.

At the district level, CAP provides its after-school drop-in program in partnership with PasadenaLEARNs, a grant-funded and district department overseeing nearly all after-school programming in PUSD. Through its partnership with LEARNs, CAP is able to access needed resources such as computer labs and photocopying. CAP is also able to engage in targeted initiatives like "Pizza and PIN night" designed to entice all seniors to sign up for their FAFSA PIN. In addition to the programmatic partnership with LEARNs, CAP's Executive Director is also a member of the steering committee for the Linked Learning Pathways (college and career academies in the district high schools) and served on the committee to set PUSD's new graduation

²⁵ Blumberg, Corwin and William G. Tierney. 2007. "Getting There - and Beyond: Building a Culture of College-going in High Schools." University of Southern California Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis.

requirements and transcript format. And CAP regularly partners with PUSD to offer services typical of college access organizations, including college fairs and college tours.

According to PUSD Linked Learning Pathways Director Dr. Sarian, *“CAP [is] an essential partner in making our high schools and their college and career pathways the quality program our students need. The personalized guidance provided by CAP staff is life-changing and powerful.”* The trust built with school and district-level staff through successful programming and involvement with district initiatives allows CAP to respond to emerging district needs. For example, CAP’s Executive Director and PUSD’s Department of Student Support Programs worked together to identify the need for college programming to support Washington Middle School’s transition to become a STEAM magnet. CAP’s middle school programs developed from this emerging need and from additional conversations with school staff at Washington.

PUSD is invested in its relationship with CAP not only financially through contracts that partially fund the after school and middle school programs but also through collaborative initiatives. This mutual investment is the key ingredient to developing and sustaining a college-going culture over the long term. PUSD Board Member Kim Kenne’s thoughts on the CAP/PUSD partnership are directly in line with the programs’ overall goals for student access and participation: *“CAP is a very valuable partner to Pasadena Unified because they believe that college is within the reach of any student that is willing to participate in the process and they offer customized assistance and support to students on the nuts and bolts of the process.”* Through collaboration, CAP is able to offer students practical support in addition to contribute to building a college-going culture.

Reaching beyond the district and into community partnerships, CAP collaborates with other local youth serving organizations to provide college readiness workshops, offer college visits, and disseminate college focused resources to students. CAP is also involved in two interlocking community initiatives currently active in Pasadena: 1) The Partnership for Children, Youth, and Families — CAP’s Executive Director is on the steering committee for this collaborative of local organizations that seeks to optimize access to quality and relevant resources for children, youth and families by elevating issues and facilitating successful community collaborations. 2) Collaborate PASadena – CAP’s Executive Director serves on the leadership council for this initiative to build key collaborations among the cities of Pasadena and Sierra Madre and the Township of Altadena, the public schools, CBOs, and business to engage the underserved portions of the community and improve health, safety, accessibility, and education throughout the city²⁶. These initiatives extend the development of college-going culture well beyond the site of schools and foster a strong sense that the Pasadena community believes in its diverse youth – a necessary component to defeat the “stereotype threat” that inhibits under-represented students’ academic performance.²⁷

College Access Plan is a valued partner in these collaborative efforts that bridge the City, the school district, and community based organizations. According to Linda Machida, a PUSD parent whose child participates in CAP and Collaborate PASadena Partnership Coordinator: *“We have wonderful national and statewide programs that provide great opportunities for kids who meet the specific criteria, but when you don’t meet that criteria, you do not have the same opportunity to*

²⁶ Collaborate PASadena: <http://collaboratepasadena.groupsie.com/>

²⁷ Steele, Claude and Joshua Aronson. 1995. “Stereotype Threat and the Intellectual Test Performance of African Americans.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 69(5):797-811.

live to that full potential. As our local partner, CAP is really responsive to the entire community of our kids. With just a little bit of support, students can have important opportunities that they otherwise do not have access to."

Finally, bridging to post-secondary institutions, CAP partners with Pasadena City College, the local community college, to enroll students not just in college courses, but in the PCC XL Pathways program, which provides students who opt in from the local community college district with academic supports and streamlined remediation courses for those who need it. The program also offers free test prep for the assessment tests that students are required to take before starting both California Community Colleges and California State Universities to avoid unnecessary remediation. By partnering with PCC, CAP is therefore able to support its students to move quickly through remediation and towards a transfer path – a key element to the success of low-income students highlighted in the 2014 White House Report on "Increasing College Opportunities for Low-Income Students."²⁸ Beyond this relationship with PCC, CAP meets with admissions officers from local and national colleges to assist with targeted recruitment. CAP's relationships with admissions officers also help the organization to arrange admissions interviews for its students and identify opportunities for students to visit colleges.

Collaboration between city and school bureaucracies and community based organizations increases opportunities for community-wide change. Participation in community initiatives and responsiveness to community-identified priorities enables CAP to identify resources to better support the students it serves. It also leads to a model that, because CAP avoids issues of siloing by only providing services through partnerships, is cost-effective and sustainable, enabling it to be adaptable as community needs shift over time. CAP does not impose a set curriculum on dynamic school environments; instead, it actively seeks opportunities for mutual engagement to develop a cohesive college-going culture that will support college access and success for all Pasadena students. CAP's goal is to cultivate a community where students feel accountable to envision post-secondary schooling in their future and to opt in to the services and programs that will help them achieve their goals.

Opt-in Programming

"One day I saw one of CAP's yellow flyers saying that if you needed help, drop on by. I took the flyer and went to CAP's program that very day. And that was the moment my entire life changed. I knew CAP was different when I walked in, because they made me feel really comfortable. That was really important since so much of a college application is learning how to talk honestly about yourself, your background, and your accomplishments. CAP wants you to feel comfortable talking about yourself in a positive way." (Courtney, first-generation, African American CAP student 2013).

CAP's service provision is based on the idea that students should have as many opportunities as possible to "opt-in" to post-secondary pathways. College Access Plan does not require any competitive applications (though a commitment and the potential to achieve A-G eligibility before graduation is required for SAT prep courses). Instead, students are provided information in class through presentations at the high school level and modules at the 8th grade level and then are given the opportunity to participate in CAP's drop-in programs. Through its collaborations with

²⁸ The Executive Office of the President. 2014. "Increasing College Opportunities for Low-Income Students: Promising Models and a Call to Action."

schools and other community organization, students also have multiple points of touch with CAP, so that by the time they reach their junior and senior years, most already know that “CAP takes care of college stuff.” But for those who do not, CAP also sends letters home to parents, flyers around campus, and participates in direct recruitment through tabling and approaching students at lunch and during school events. Through this recruitment, CAP invites students to “opt in” to its programs, where students set the terms for interactions with staff and where students hold *themselves* accountable for their own path to college.

Attendance at CAP’s programs mirrors the choices students make in college to opt-in to the programs, services, courses, and clubs but with greater support for these choices through CAP’s extensive recruitment initiatives and school/district/community partnerships. The programs’ elasticity encourages student curiosity. Thus, when asked to describe the quality that made CAP successful at John Muir High School, academic counselor Dr. Ben Aroyan chose to use a single word: “*Flexible*.” This flexibility means that students are never made to feel as failures when they do not attend the after-school program or struggle in school; instead, CAP staff seek to meet students where they are to help them find personal success.

CAP’s central drop-in high school program invites any and all interested students to stop by a computer lab open two hours an afternoon, two days a week. Students are told that they are welcome for part or all of CAP time – whatever fits their needs and schedule. When asked about the benefits of running the after-school program on a drop-in basis, the 2014-2015 Program Coordinators responded with the following exchange:

Joyce: That we get to serve all students. So there’s no restrictions. You don’t have to have a minimum GPA or a certain type of income. You don’t need to necessarily show up all the time. We know that everyone is really busy, whether its after-school sports, clubs, whatever, job. So I think that’s the advantage. We have to tailor more towards the student. Like, if the student knows what they need help on, they can come in for ten minutes a day if they want to or thirty minutes.

Katie: It’s based on their need.

Sarah: And I love that it’s on campus. They don’t have to go anywhere. At least at Muir [John Muir High School], it’s right by the exit door, so they can SEE us. It’s like ‘If I need help, I can just pop in, even if it’s only for ten minutes.’ ... It’s very much catering to their needs.

As highlighted in the exchange among program staff and in the quote above from CAP student Courtney, this opt-in approach offers two main benefits:

1. Programs are able to meet a broad range of student needs.
2. High quality relationships develop between students and staff.

First, seniors choose to visit the program based on previous experience with CAP on campus, recruitment through flyering and tabling at registration events, or interest generated by in-class presentations that provide critical information on the college application process. They arrive after school at a computer lab, where the program coordinator is ready to “*gauge what they know and help them fill in the gaps*” (Joyce, Program Coordinator). In line with research showing that college access programs should “orient pedagogy not around direct instruction but by allowing students to

build their own experiences and express their own concerns,”²⁹ Program Coordinators begin with the student’s own inquiry, and they tailor their help to each student’s individual needs. Program Coordinator Katie described her initial interactions with students in the following manner:

[For students who] might not know exactly what they’re looking for or where they can get in or who are struggling, I help them generate questions to ask. Like, so what’s your GPA? What’s your SAT scores? ... What are you interested in? So that they can start thinking about it that way. Whereas the more high-achieving students, they come in with all kinds of information. ‘This is what I have and these are all of the tens of schools that I’m applying to,’ like, ‘HELP me do this.’

Because CAP serves any student with post-secondary interest, some CAP students matriculate at top liberal arts colleges or research universities while most attend less-selective Cal State Universities and yet others attend two-year community colleges. The organization has an important role to play in facilitating all of these processes to support the long-term success of underrepresented students.

For high-achieving students, coordinators “emphasize the extra stuff that you’ll have to do for college admission – the writing of the statements, the potentially going on the interview, the research – exposing them to different colleges, explaining what the small liberal arts college really is... They don’t know what that is because there isn’t a lot of exposure at their schools” (Sarah, Director of Programs). This kind of advising is critical to prevent the endemic under-placement of low-income students, which recently attracted national attention after the publication of the White House Report on Increasing College Opportunity for Low-Income Students.³⁰

Yet the report also suggested that to increase the college success of low-income students, community college transfer rates must improve.³¹ Students who are not academically ready for four-year college face a stigma to community college attendance that CAP staff seek to combat by guiding students through the community college application process and by: “remembering that even though it’s two-year, it’s still college. And to be excited for them and say, ‘It’s great! You’re going to college!’ So not to make it any less than any of the others” (Katie, Program Coordinator). Staff also plan ahead with students on transfer plans.

The drop-in program not only captures diversity in terms of student preparedness to apply for college; it also captures diversity in terms of student race, class, gender, first-generation college-

²⁹Bloom, J. (2008). The pedagogy of college access programs: A critical analysis. (ASHE/Lumina Policy Briefs and Critical Essays No. 5). Ames: Iowa State University, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

³⁰ The Executive Office of the President. 2014. “Increasing College Opportunities for Low-Income Students: Promising Models and a Call to Action.”

³¹ According to a meta-analysis of college access programs conducted by Patricia Gandara for the National Center on Education Statistics, the most effective programs serving underrepresented youth focused on support to attend less-selective four-year colleges and two-year colleges rather than highly selective colleges. Gandara, Patricia. 2001. Paving the Way to Postsecondary Education: K-12 Intervention Programs for Underrepresented Youth. Report of the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative Working Group on Access to Postsecondary Education. NCES, U.S. Dept of Education. NCES, U.S. Dept of Education.

going status, citizenship status, and other lines of difference that are known to be significant for post-secondary outcomes. Students from diverse backgrounds may face a range of scheduling conflicts that make it difficult to commit to college access programs. These conflicts can range from athletic practice to paid work to unpaid caregiving in the home. Boys are also generally far less likely to participate in college access programs than girls.³² However, CAP students closely mirror the diverse demographics of their schools (see Tables A&B). This is because CAP's drop-in model circumvents common barriers to participation and because CAP actively collaborates with partners to create a broader culture of college-going interest and inquiry that brings students who have few other college resources in to the after-school program.

CAP staff prepare to meet the broad range of students they confront in the drop-in program outside of the school sites through research and training. CAP only hires Program Coordinators with a bachelor's degree or higher who show strong writing and research skills.³³ Program Coordinators are trained in transcript evaluation, in the three major online applications for California students (CSUMentor, UC Application, and the Common Application);³⁴ in financial aid procedures for citizen, non-citizen, and undocumented students; in SAT and ACT registration; on how to match students to colleges based on qualifications and interest; and in other basic topics related to the college application and matriculation process. More importantly, however, Program Coordinators are taught how to research new questions that may arise of the course of the semester and are asked to seek out new information for the organization.

This adaptive approach enables the second benefit of the drop-in program: the strong relationships that develop between staff and students. The culture of CAP intentionally creates an environment of openness so that students feel comfortable asking questions and exploring a variety of options. According to Program Director Sarah: *"I think it helps [to form relationships] when they see that we have the answers a lot of the time. It's not something where we're like, 'Um, I'm not sure.' Even if we don't know, we know where to go get the answer from. So they're like, 'Oh, CAP knows it.' So they feel comfortable coming back again and knowing that we're going to be a reliable resource for them to use."*

CAP students clearly agree with Sarah's conclusion that CAP's reliability produces good relationships. An analysis of the 2015 end-of-year student survey shows that "help" was the most common word in responses to the question: "Is there anything you would like us to know about your experience at CAP this year?" These responses included: *"It was great to know that you're getting **help** because college apps and financial aid issues were so stressful;" "It was great to know that the CAP teachers were just ready to **help**;" and "I am so happy that I had the opportunity to get the **help** that I need but also that the CAP members took their time and **helped** me out through the whole process."*

³²Gandara also found that only about a third of participants across these programs are male.

³³ Over CAP's history, most of its Program Coordinators have held a Master's degree in a related field. Program Coordinators begin at 20 hours per week but can step up to full time positions after a year of service depending on CAP's programming needs.

³⁴ For California State Universities, the University of California campuses, and many private colleges, respectively.

Common wisdom in college access programming suggests that students are more likely to connect with adults who are similar to them in terms of demographic characteristics. But given the truly diverse setting of Pasadena public schools, CAP recruits and supports racial-ethnically and class diverse program staff but does not attempt to “match” student and staff by race, class background, or gender. Instead, as an organization, CAP fosters relationships where students develop trust with staff by accomplishing tasks together and feel that staff are deeply invested in their personal post-secondary success. This form of relationship-building led to the following comments from CAP students :

“CAP is sort of like your big sister who has already applied and gone to college and is now back home, giving you the tools and advice you need to apply” (Courtney, First-generation African American, class of 2013).

“A lot of programs will help you, but with CAP, you get to form a one-on-one relationship with the people that help you” (Miriam, First-generation, undocumented Latina, class of 2013).

“I love how personal CAP is with each student. Students are comfortable asking questions they may not know about college because realistically they’ve never really gave it much thought” (Shaun, First-generation African American, class of 2009).

It may seem surprising that students who stopped in to a classroom where multiple students worked on college applications under a single Program Coordinator, on some occasions assisted by a volunteer or other staff, named close relationships with adults as a major benefit of CAP. But it is *because of*, not in spite of, the drop-in format that these relationships grew strong. The drop-in format allows students rather than adults to control the nature of the relationship and determine the pace of rapport-building. It also allows students to participate alongside their peers in an environment of mutual support and to watch their peers receive similar help. Students thus feel the support they get from CAP staff is *freely offered and accessible* rather than obligatory. This led to the following exchange between program staff Katie and Sarah:

Katie: The bond is that we’re here every day, we’re here for them. We’re here because we believe in you and we believe you can go to college

Sarah: I really like the encouragement portion. I think that helps. They get told ‘No’ so often in their lives every day. We are the ones that are like, ‘Yes! You can go to college! It is a possibility! I’m going to show you how to do it. Here are all the steps that you need to know.’ I think that really encourages a bond. And it’s just nice to be a positive influence or a positive supporter in their life.

Through CAP’s comprehensive community partnerships and its opt-in model of programming, students are able to experience positive support for their desire to attend college. Throughout the United States, too many students of color, low-income students, and other traditionally underserved students still receive the message that they are not capable of attending college. Through a concerted effort at cultural messaging and practical advisement, CAP and its partners hope to make Pasadena a place where *all* students can take pride in their personal path to postsecondary success.

Areas for Future Growth

This paper identified College Access Plan's success in supporting diverse students in a single community to attend college in general and four-year colleges in particular. It related those successes to the organization's model of service provision through community collaboration and opt-in programming, and related that model to research calling for the development of "college-going culture" in schools serving under-represented students.

However, the research also revealed some areas for future growth:

Not captured in this program evaluation is parent engagement. Though CAP has always hosted parent workshops at school sites, visited Parent Teacher Student Association meetings, and collaborated with community based organizations to increase parent engagement, attendance and follow-up are consistent challenges, particularly in a population where parents and guardians may work multiple jobs or may be absent in the home. CAP will enhance its parent engagement effort in 2015-2016 by working directly with Washington Middle School to target parents at the middle school level on a consistent and collaborative basis, identifying the times and locations that are most amenable to parent schedules and needs.

At the high school programs level, CAP currently serves about a third of students from PUSD's comprehensive high schools. This means that many students, both those who are A-G eligible and those who are not, potentially remain underserved. CAP should work with its partners to provide increasingly flexible program options to ensure that more students are completing applications to 2-year and 4-year colleges through CAP or other avenues to reduce the non-enrollment rate of PUSD graduates. Additionally, the number of PUSD students attending highly selective colleges is low. CAP should work with its partners to both increase PUSD students' academic preparation for these schools and to identify students eligible for these schools.

Furthermore, this program evaluation does not capture students in non-comprehensive high schools. In an effort to support these high-need students, CAP must work to create partnerships to serve this community. CAP will make progress toward this goal in 2015-2016 by expanding its programs to provide targeted counseling for students enrolled in California Independent Study and in Rose City Continuation School in addition to one PUSD-affiliated charter school, Learning Works, which serves students who have dropped out.

In order to further its goal to serve all students, particularly those who are underrepresented in post-secondary programs, CAP needs to develop targeted initiatives to support two vulnerable populations overrepresented in PUSD: language-minority students and foster children. CAP should reach out to its community, City, and PUSD partners to develop innovative programming to help these groups of students achieve access to higher education. Additionally, though CAP's proportion of males is high relative to other college access organizations, it is still low relative to the district. CAP should work with its partners to target recruitment of male students in particular.

Conclusion

Though the proportion of first-generation, racial-ethnic minority, and low-income students graduating four-year college is increasing, these student populations are still at a distinct disadvantage in comparison to their continuing-generation, white, and middle-to-high income peers. Many school personnel work valiantly to connect under-served students to post-secondary pathways and college opportunities, but sociologists show that these students often feel marginalized from formal school structures and from relationships with faculty and staff due to more systemic forms of exclusion.³⁵ Though these students may have interest in attending college and in planning for career success, they often lack the information and institutional connections to realize their own initiative.³⁶

Rather than ameliorate this problem by *imposing* relationships on students and service structures on school communities, College Access Plan fosters organic opportunities to connect students to information, resources, and supportive relationships that create “pivotal moments” on the journey to post-secondary success through community collaboration and opt-in programming. CAP’s community collaboration is an ongoing and dynamic project to create a community where the organization is only one component in a larger web of college support. CAP consciously contributes to a college-going culture where students are valued in the context of their schools and communities and where students’ interests and desires lead to a post-secondary pathway. Within this culture, students “opt in” to the relationships and spaces where *they* can take the lead in asking for the kinds of help they need – even if they aren’t always sure how to formulate their questions.

³⁵ Stanton-Salazar, Ricardo, Lisa Chavez, and Robert Tai. 2001. “The Help-Seeking Orientations of Latino and Non-Latino Urban High School Students: A Critical Sociological Investigation.” *Social Psychology of Education* 5(1) 49-82.

³⁶ Bloom, Janice. 2007. “(Mis)Reading Social Class in the Journey Towards College: Youth Development in Urban America.” *Teachers College Record* 109(2):343-368.

Appendix A – Program Evaluation Methodology

Data Sources

Through a Memorandum of Agreement, PUSD provided demographic and academic data on all students for the class of 2014. These data were then cleaned to include only graduates in the evaluation. Student names and birthdates were then submitted to National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), which provided data on each student's enrollment in college one year after high school graduation. These data were then matched to the remaining PUSD data. CAP records were also used to determine student attendance and I Heart College enrollment.

Student Privacy

CAP takes care to follow FERPA guidelines when handling student data. Thus, though student names and birthdates are used to request data from NSC, no student identifying information is used in any data reporting, and all data files with identifying information are kept on a secure hard drive. Following the Memorandum of Agreement, CAP shares all findings with PUSD.

Missing Data

CAP's data on college enrollment come from NSC, which does not provide perfect returns; some students who come back as "no return" are in fact enrolled in an institution of higher education.³⁷ Some students opt out of reporting to NSC under FERPA. The number of students opting out was high, especially at Pasadena City College. Fortunately, NSC provides the number of students missing through opt-out by school. To avoid any problems in the analysis based on missing data from opt-outs, the author separated students into batches based on CAP attendance and A-G eligibility, removed all other individual-level data, and used the returned opt-out data to impute the missing statistics for a complete comparison.

A source of missing data that could not be minimized was lack of institutional coverage. In California, where the vast majority of students attend college, public colleges have a coverage rate of 99.7%, private colleges have a coverage rate of 92%, and for-profit colleges have a coverage rate of 58.6% under NSC.³⁸ The for-profit coverage rate is clearly unacceptable for program evaluation. However, the author was able to use a simple approach to solve this methodological problem. Because for-profit colleges have low completion rates and high student debt and because these schools do not provide a pathway to a bachelor's degree,³⁹ CAP actively dissuades its students from applying to and entering for-profit colleges. Thus, the author treated "no college" and "for-profit" college as the same negative outcome for the purposes of program evaluation. This choice was further justified by the extremely low enrollment rate of 2014 graduates in for-profit colleges.

³⁷ Dynarski, Susan M., Steven W. Hemelt, and Joshua M. Hyman. 2013. *The Missing Manual: Using National Student Clearinghouse Data to Track Postsecondary Outcomes*. http://www-personal.umich.edu/~jmhyman/dynarski_hemelt_hyman_missing_manual.pdf

³⁸ National Student Clearinghouse. 2013. *Enrollment Coverage Workbook*. <http://nscresearchcenter.org/workingwithourdata/>

³⁹ Deming, David, Claudia Goldin, and Lawrence Katz. 2013. "For-Profit Colleges." *The Future of Children* 23(1): 137-163.